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TOO MANY HATS

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT WITHIN COOK ISLANDS CIVIL SOCIETY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy in International Development
at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand.

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2013

This thesis is dedicated to my father

Peter Mark Stenson

(1958-2001)

Thank you for teaching me brave determination in all that I face.

E kau, e tuatini nga tua ngaru.

E ngaru popoki. E ngaru pārua. E akamāro'iro'i.

Swim there are many waves. Waves that overlap.

Waves that double. Be Brave.

(Tarapu, 1994, p. 43)

Abstract

This thesis explores the possibilities for women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament. Women's perspectives and contributions to policy decision making are seen as a key factor in a nation's development and women's representation in national parliament is a key indicator of the Millennium Development Goal Three on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. However, this thesis argues that there are other forms of political empowerment beyond numbers in national parliament that should be considered

Pacific women have the lowest representation in national parliaments globally. The international community is encouraging Pacific countries to increase the number of women in national parliaments by introducing gender quotas. However, there has been little investigation into women's political voices in Pacific societies outside of national parliament. This thesis thus investigates how women's political empowerment is understood within Cook Islands civil society and explores the various ways in which women in Cook Islands civil society exercise political power. A gender and development empowerment approach formed the theoretical basis for this research. Moser's (1989) ideas on the triple role of women and practical and strategic gender needs were used as tools of analysis.

Fieldwork took place over four weeks in the Cook Islands in mid-2012. Development research principles, as well as Pacific methodologies, guided the fieldwork which utilised a mixed methods approach. The findings of this study show that despite women being underrepresented in national parliament women do exercise political power within Cook Islands civil society. Women often use strategies to exercise political power indirectly, through context-specific and culturally acceptable ways so as to maintain important social and political relationships. Women work collaboratively with government and many contribute to policy development and implementation. Despite this however, women are being stretched in their

roles within the community by neoliberal donor and government policies and programmes. The main implications of the findings, and the conclusion of the thesis, is that development policy and practice must take into consideration women's multiple roles and recognise that advocacy work within civil society is an important strategic gender need. Civil society advocacy should be supported by donor programmes to encourage women to be politically involved in their country's development.

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Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Government Overseas Aid Programme
GAD	Gender and Development
GADD	Gender and Development Department
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GDI	Gender Development Index
HDI	Human Development Index
MP	Member of Parliament
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NWC	National Council of Women
NZAID	New Zealand Aid Programme
PGN	Practical Gender Need
SGN	Strategic Gender Need
TCK	Third Culture Kid
WID	Women and Development
UKAid	United Kingdom Aid Programme, Department for International Development
UN	United Nations
UNCEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women