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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.

Barbara-Anne Stenson

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

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

This study explores the possibilities for women's political empowerment in the Pacific beyond representation in national parliament. Women in the Pacific Region have the lowest representation in national parliament globally (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013). The proportion of seats held by women in national parliament is a key Millennium Development Goal (MDG) indicator of gender equality and women's empowerment (United Nations Development Programme, 2012b). The Pacific Region is unlikely to achieve this goal by 2015 despite Pacific Island leaders committing to empower women politically (Young, 8 September 2011).

There is little literature which focuses specifically on women's political empowerment from within the Gender and Development (GAD) discourse. A small number of recent publications have analysed research on parliamentary quotas and how this impacts on women's empowerment (Tadros, 2011; Waring, 2011). These publications have recommended that further research be undertaken into broadening the understanding of women's political empowerment beyond the narrow focus of the MDG indicator. This study aims to contribute to filling this gap through research which encapsulates Cook Islands women's and men's knowledge, wisdom and experience of political empowerment within Cook Islands civil society.

My motivation for selecting the Cook Islands as the research site and my positionality in relation to undertaking research in the Cook Islands are given below. The intention of including my positionality and motivation in Chapter One is to be open and transparent about my position in relation to this study

from the outset. The concept of positionality as a development research principle is explained in more detail in Chapter Six.

POSITIONALITY AND MOTIVATION

I have both a personal, as well as an academic, motivation for choosing the Pacific Island country of the Cook Islands to conduct my field research. My personal motivation is that my parents and I moved from New Zealand where I was born, to Rarotonga, the main island of the Cook Islands, when I was seven years old. My father worked for an offshore banking corporation and later owned his own business. My brother was born shortly after arriving in Rarotonga, and my mother later worked as a secondary school teacher. I attended both local primary and secondary schools on Rarotonga. My mother remarried a Cook Islander and I have two brothers with Cook Islands heritage. My family lived in the Cook Islands for 16 years until my father passed away in 2001, and then my step-father passed away in 2002. Living outside my parents' passport country for the formative years of my life put me in the sociological category of a 'Third Culture Kid (TCK)' (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009, p. 3). Research has shown that children have different experiences from adults living in foreign countries (Useem, January 1993). Children absorb the host country's culture, mixing it with their parents' culture, to form a "third culture" (Pollack & Van Reken, 1999, p. 19). Third Culture Kids are known for their ability to live and work cross-culturally (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009, p. 111). With this in mind, and with a large network of friends and family on Rarotonga, and where English is one of the main languages spoken, the Cook Islands was the most obvious choice for my fieldwork in the Pacific.

To introduce myself, I am a 33 year old, Pakeha New Zealand Christian female with a strong interest in the prevention of gender-based violence. I

graduated with an undergraduate degree in Law and Politics from the University of Canterbury and have worked for New Zealand Ministry of Social Development in various roles. One of these roles was West Coast Regional Family Violence Response Co-ordinator, working in response to, and prevention of, family violence and child abuse. I have also worked as a youth worker for a small non-government organisation supporting young women and men affected by physical, psychological and sexual violence.

I completed my post-graduate diploma in Development Studies, which included a course on Gender and Development, extramurally through Massey University in 2011. My first choice for a research topic was around family violence in the Pacific. However, as a first time researcher, I felt the need to err on the side of caution when selecting such a sensitive issue to study. In my search for an alternative research topic I was surprised to learn that Pacific women have the lowest representation in national parliaments globally. I was even more puzzled when I discovered that the Cook Islands had only one woman in parliament. Growing up in Rarotonga I remember many prominent women in the community, including traditional paramount chiefs; managers of sport's codes, including athletics, netball and sailing; legal professionals; and the many owners of locally-run businesses. Girls excelled at school and were most often the top achievers. One male meeting participant in this study also reflected on the fact that women, following the arrival of the missionaries in the early 1800s, do hold prominent leadership roles in Cook Islands society:

“I think today [the low representation of women in parliament] isn't to do with gender, for us Cook Islanders from 1840s we've accepted that our women are leaders.”

Despite this, however, there was a sense growing up that my *Papa'a* (foreigner) upbringing was somewhat in contrast to Rarotongan society

which has strong traditional gender roles. The popular Western feminist mantra of “girls can do anything” was drummed into me from a young age and I often put it to the test. During high school I launched a petition, which every girl in the school signed, demanding that we be allowed to wear shorts on multi-day. However, through my studies in Gender and Development at Massey I have been challenged to question the universal application of my Western feminist ideals and this is something I have had to continually reflect upon during the research process.

This study thus seeks to go beyond mainstream development assumptions of women’s political empowerment to better understand how women and men in a Pacific Island society conceptualise women’s political empowerment and to explore the different ways in which women experience political empowerment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study is:

To gain a broader understanding of women’s political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament.

Under this aim, two research objectives were identified:

Objective 1: To gain an understanding of the conceptualisation of women’s political empowerment within Cook Islands civil society.

Objective 2: To explore the ways in which women in Cook Islands society exercise political power.

In carrying out these objectives, this thesis considers theoretical and methodological structures to frame the research. These theoretical and methodological structures are explained in the first part of the thesis. The second part of the thesis presents and analyses the empirical data.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is made up of seven chapters:

Chapter 1: has introduced the study by giving the rationale for the research, including the context, theoretical justification, and contribution it seeks to make. It has also introduced the researcher's positionality and motivation behind the study and stated the main research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2: lays the theoretical foundation for the research by reviewing the literature relating to the central aim of the research. The chapter explores the 'empowerment approach' to women's development, along with key concepts to understanding this approach. It also looks at the debates over the meaning of women's empowerment in development and how different development approaches have used the concept of women's empowerment in theory and practice.

Chapter 3: explores the political dimension of women's empowerment and how this is currently measured in development practice. To widen the scope of this research beyond women's political empowerment in formal political decision-making, this chapter adopts a hopeful post-development approach in investigating what constitutes 'political'.

Chapter 4: provides contextual overview for the study. This chapter covers the physical, social, historical, economic and political context of the Cook Islands, and outlines the situation for women within Cook Islands society.

Chapter 5: explains the methodological framework for the study, including the philosophical standpoint, development research principles and ethical considerations. Fieldwork experiences are described, including the application of a mixed methods approach, the selection of participants and arranging of meeting observations. Finally, data analysis and the limitations of the research findings are discussed.

Chapter 6: shows the findings for the study in relation to the research objectives. This chapter explores the way in which women's political empowerment is conceptualised by women and men in Cook Islands civil society as formal political empowerment, and examines the perspectives on why women are not better represented in national parliament. This chapter then looks at the strategies women utilise to exercise political power from within civil society, as well as the factors which constrain women from exercising political power.

Chapter 7: discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical literature. This chapter argues for a shift from a mainstream 'instrumentalist' approach to women's political empowerment, to a more 'transformative' approach, which challenges inequitable structures, rather than integrating women into them. This chapter concludes the thesis by reflecting on the theoretical and methodological structures employed in the thesis, as well as conveying the study's core contributions to, and recommendations, for future research.

CHAPTER 2: EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the theoretical literature relating to the central aim of the research which is to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament. By drawing on key concepts and approaches to women's empowerment from within development studies, this chapter lays the foundation for the study from which the key research objectives will be explored.

This chapter introduces the 'empowerment approach' to women's development from the Gender and Development (GAD) discourse, which is the theoretical underpinning of this study. It starts with a brief overview of GAD before exploring Caroline Moser's 'empowerment approach'. Moser's 'empowerment approach' draws from the ideas and actions of Third World¹

¹ While it is acknowledged that the term 'Third World' has become less popular in recent years this thesis uses it to describe countries that were not aligned to the capitalist 'first world' or communist 'second world' during the 1950s (Dodds, 2008, p. 4). These countries were predominantly colonies or former colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and although the countries within these geographical regions are vastly different, they do share similar social, economic and political experiences (Hadjor, 1993, p. 10). It is this grouping of countries which is referred to by the use of the term within this thesis. It is also of note that the use of the term 'Third World' is supported by prominent women academics within these regions, including development theorists' Sen and Grown who view the term as "a positive self-affirmation" (1987, p. 97).

women theorists and activists. Although articulated over 20 years ago, it still retains its relevance, illustrated by more recent GAD literature (see Batliwala, 2007; Datta & Kornberg, 2002; Mosedale, 2005). Moser's key concepts of 'practical and strategic gender needs' and the 'triple role of women' are presented as tools of analysis for understanding the policy effectiveness of approaches to women's development.

This chapter then explores the debates surrounding the meaning of women's empowerment and how different approaches to development have incorporated women's empowerment in theory and practice. These approaches are viewed in terms of their compatibility with GAD and their potential to contribute to understanding women's empowerment within GAD. In an endeavour to gain a broader understanding of women's empowerment, this thesis investigates a hopeful post-development approach, which promises to 'open up' new possibilities for women's empowerment through 'expanding the realm of credible experience.'

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

A GAD approach to women's development focuses on gender rather than women. GAD views women and men as social groups whose gender roles and relations have been constructed by society, and are therefore able to be changed (Moser, 1989, p. 1800; Parpart, 1993, p. 450; Rathgeber, 1990, p. 494; White, 2000, p. 37). Gender relations are identified as power relations, and GAD promotes strategies to not only empower women but also to improve gender relations and transform gender roles (Cornwall, 1997, p. 8; Jacquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 18 and 28; Parpart, 1993, p. 450).

GAD emerged in the 1980s as a response to the critiques of Women in Development (WID) from Third World women writers and post-colonial

feminists. WID is concerned with integrating women into development, mainly through women's productive role, previously overlooked by development practitioners (Boserup, 1970; Jacquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 24). WID does not challenge structural inequalities (Parpart, 1993, p. 449) and assumes gender relations will change as women become more fully involved in development (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 492). The WID approach is criticised as universalising Western feminists' experiences and stereotyping Third World women as 'victims' (McEwan, 2001; Mohanty, 1988, p. 99). Many Third World women object to men being seen as the primary source of oppression as there is no single source of oppression (McEwan, 2001, p. 98). In fact many Western women benefit from Third World women's economic marginalisation as women's labour is the key to cheap manufactured goods imported from developing countries (Jacquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 17).

Furthermore in many cultures women often feel solidarity with men, struggling with men over racism and class inequalities (McEwan, 2001, p. 98). GAD recognises that challenging inequitable structures by redistributing power more equally within society will mean a loss of power by elites, which will affect some women as well as men (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 495). While this approach has developed as an academic discourse, the willingness of advocates of GAD to consider fundamental changes to power relations within society means that it has been difficult for large development agencies to implement in practice (Parpart, 1993, p. 450).

GAD has not been without criticism. Masculinities and Development (MAD) writers have accused GAD theorists of continuing to stereotype men as the 'problem' when it comes to women's disadvantaged position (Clever, 2002, p. 7; Cornwall, 2000, p. 10 and 18; Hearn & Kimmel, 2006, p. 53; Levy, Taher, & Vouhé, 2000, p. 87). MAD seeks to deconstruct men as the 'problem' and include them in strategies to overcome gender inequalities. Research has shown that empowering women when men are losing jobs and status can

create male resentment, resulting in them blocking, sabotaging or taking over women's projects (Chant & Gutmann, 2002, p. 275; Cleaver, 2002, p. 4; Cornwall, 1997, p. 8; Silberschmidt, 2001, p. 665 and 669). Further studies have shown that projects which address this concern by supporting men to retain their male identities and self-esteem, have improved gender relations and transformed gender roles in a much more fundamental way (Chant & Gutmann, 2002, p. 270; Cleaver, 2002, p. 20; Cornwall, 2000, p. 19; Harris, 2006, p. 55; Jacqueline & Staudt, 2006, p. 32; Levy, et al., 2000, p. 86). Men are recognised as being essential to an 'empowerment approach' to women's development, as men have an integral role to play in improving gender relations and transforming gender roles which are vital for facilitating women's empowerment. This is explained in more detail later in this section.

MOSER'S EMPOWERMENT APPROACH

Caroline Moser, a prominent GAD writer, describes an 'empowerment approach', as the leading policy approach to women's development. The origins of the 'empowerment approach' to women's development are best associated with Third World women writers and grassroots organisations (Batliwala, 2007, p. 557 and 559; Kabeer, 1994, p. 223; Mosedale, 2005, p. 247; Moser, 1989, p. 1815). This approach does not regard feminism as a Western concept, but as having its roots firmly in the history of Third World women's struggles (Batliwala, 2007, p. 558; Mosedale, 2005, p. 245; Moser, 1989, p. 1815). The empowerment approach recognises that inequalities between men and women are reinforced within the family structure, but also highlights that women experience subjugation differently corresponding to their race, ethnicity, class, geographical location, and their standing in the global economic order (Mosedale, 2005, p. 244; Moser, 1989, p. 1815). These sources of oppression limit women's potential to exercise power. However, an empowerment approach seeks to redefine power rather than focusing on power which dominates others.

While the central idea of the ‘empowerment approach’ is about women increasing their power, this approach looks beyond common understandings of power as “power over” or the domination and control of others, as this implies that a gain for women in power means a loss for men (Mosedale, 2005, p. 249; Moser, 1989, p. 1815; Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 2; Rowlands, 1997, p. 13). The ‘empowerment approach’ seeks to expand women’s power in a number of ways, and is best described by Rowlands in her book *Questioning Empowerment: Working with women in Honduras* (1997). Rowlands identifies other uses of power being: ‘power to’, enlarging what is achievable for one person without confining others, for example becoming literate; ‘power with’, organising and participating in collective action to achieve a group’s vision; and ‘power within’, the self-belief to make changes which can improve one’s circumstances.

Nalia Kabeer (1999b, p. 2) suggests the implications of power are about choice, “empowerment...refers to the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.” Kabeer describes ‘strategic’ choices as those which have a far greater impact on people’s lives, such as whether or not to marry or to have children, than choices such as what kind of fruit to have for lunch (Kabeer, 1999a, p. 3). With this broader understanding, power no longer needs to be seen as a “zero-sum game” (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 2). An ‘empowerment approach’ acknowledges that women’s awareness of power must first be raised for it to positively impact on their lives.

Consciousness-raising

Consciousness-raising is seen as an important first step towards women’s empowerment (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559; Kabeer, 1999a, p. 7; Moser, 1989, p. 465; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 465). Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire’s

concept of ‘conscientisation’ had a strong influence on the women’s movement during the 1970s (Batliwala, 2007, p. 558). Conscientisation, as described in Freire’s well-cited book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), involves: “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). Women’s movements took on Freire’s ideas by creating new spaces for women to gather and talk about their personal experiences of oppression, while also discussing the social, political and economic structures and institutions which create and sustain their marginalisation (Batliwala, 2007, p. 560). This enables women to become conscious of their own subordination, while collective solidarity or “power with” allows them to build self-confidence or “power within”, resulting in the “power to” confront and transform the societal structures that oppress them (Batliwala, 2007, pp. 559-560; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 465). Women’s organisations have been essential to raising consciousness of women and are integral to the empowerment approach.

Women’s organisations are recognised as being key to women’s empowerment (Batliwala, 2007, p. 560; Datta & Kornberg, 2002, p. 5; Moser, 1989, p. 1815; R. Scheyvens, 1998, p. 27; Sen & Grown, 1987, p. 58). Women’s groups represent collective power or “power with” that can be used to drive social and political change. However, Scheyvens (1998, p. 27) notes there has been some criticism of women’s organisations. Firstly, they segregate women from men. Datta and Kornberg (2002, p. 5), however, sees separate women’s groups as important in providing a secure space for women to talk about their concerns and develop the confidence, or “power within”, to bring about changes in their own lives as well as uniting with other women in working towards a more just society.

Secondly, there is criticism that some women’s organisations are entirely focused on welfare assistance, while others exclude women of different social

standing or are opposed to social change and staunchly defend the existing state of affairs. Despite this, Kabeer (1999a, p. 45) believes women's groups are vital for finding solutions to perceived problems within their shared circumstances, as opposed to relying on individuals to figure out what needs to happen to bring about social and political change. The gender division of labour is one societal structure that an 'empowerment approach' seeks to encourage transformative change.

The gender division of labour is a reflection of gender relations, which are seen as power relations, and are at the centre of a GAD 'empowerment approach'. The gender division of labour refers to how different roles in the family and society are divided-up between women and men. Some deem these roles as 'natural' and unchanging. GAD, however, treats them as socially constructed and context-specific (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 8). Within the family structure men are often associated with the role of economic provider, whereas women are best associated with caring for children and domestic duties (Moser, 1989, p. 1800). This is not necessarily how it plays out in practice, however roles that are designated to women are often less valued compared to those assigned to men (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 8; Waring, 1988, p. 14).

Women's economically productive roles often go unnoticed and women are encouraged to take on voluntary roles within the community as an extension of their caring role within the family (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). This creates a heavy work burden for women carrying what Moser (1989, p. 1801) refers to as the 'triple role of women', discussed later in this section. An 'empowerment approach' acknowledges that for women to be truly empowered, work must be shared more fairly between genders (Sen & Grown, 1987). This requires co-operation from men, as Datta and Kornberg (2002, p. 3) write that only once men accept women as equal partners will there be a

change in gender relations and roles, bringing a fresh new vitality to social, economic and political structures and institutions.

Men and empowerment

It is essential that men are involved in facilitating women's empowerment through improving gender relations and transforming gender roles for there to be lasting changes in both the family and society. In addition, the 'empowerment approach' does acknowledge that it is not only women in lower socio-economic classes that have limited access to resources, but that men in a similar position are almost as powerless (Moser, 1989, p. 1815). Men, in relation to their economically productive role, often carry the expectation of being the 'breadwinner' in the family. This can cause excessive stress when jobs and resources are scarce (Connell, 2005, p. 1809; Silberschmidt, 2001, p. 657).

Batiwala (1994, p. 131) sees that men stand to gain as well as lose from women's empowerment:

“Women's empowerment means the loss of the privileged position that patriarchy allotted to men...however...women's empowerment also liberates and empowers men, both in material and psychological terms...they find that they have lost not merely traditional privileges, but also traditional burdens.”

Sharing the role of nurturer within the family was highlighted by Third World women activists in their vision of a more equitable and just world.

Moser's empowerment approach supports women in developing countries to define the society they want rather than be “integrated” into societal structures (Moser, 1989, p. 1815). Development Alternatives with Women for

a New Era (DAWN), a transnational women's organisation set up in 1985 prior to the United Nations World Conference of Women in Nairobi, sets out their vision as follows:

“We want a world where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterise human relationships. In such a world women's reproductive role will be redefined: childcare will be shared by men, women and society as a whole...only by sharpening the links between equality, development and peace, can we show that the “basic rights” of the poor and the transformations of the institutions that subordinate women are inextricably linked. They can be achieved together through the self-empowerment of women” (1987, p73-75 in Moser, 1989, p. 1815).

Moser uses this vision in her analysis of the policy effectiveness of the ‘empowerment approach’ using the key concepts of ‘practical and strategic gender needs’ and the ‘triple role of women’ which are explained in detail below.

PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC GENDER NEEDS

Practical gender needs (PGNs) and strategic gender needs (SGNs) were first conceptualised by Maxine Molyneux in 1985 and later adapted by Moser (1989, p. 1802). The distinction between PGNs and SGNs is imperative to Moser's analysis of different policy approaches to women's development and are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs

Practical Gender Needs	Strategic Gender Needs
Immediate needs which arise from the conditions women and their families live in and are vital for survival.	Long term needs identified from an analysis of women’s disadvantaged position.
Include adequate shelter, access to food, health care, safe water and sanitation, and income.	Include changes to the gender division of labour, ownership and control of resources, decision-making, and confronting domestic and other sexual violence.
Short term as they do not challenge gender inequalities, even though may arise from these.	Seek to transform women’s position in relation to men. More likely to encounter resistance than PGNs.

Source: Author drawing on Moser (1989); Molyneux (1985)

PGNs are often taken to be “women’s needs” in development programmes due to the gender division of labour (Moser, 1989, p. 1803). Programmes that concentrate on the basic needs of a community can misinterpret this as meeting “women’s needs” as it is often women who identify these needs, thereby both parties become complicit in the perpetuation of the gender division of labour (Moser, 1989, p. 1803). DAWN’s vision identifies SGNs in sharing the gender division of labour more fairly and in the desire to transform the structures and institutions in society which marginalise women (Moser, 1989, p. 1816). Although other policy approaches to women’s development also identify SGNs, the important difference with the ‘empowerment approach’ is that these are often identified through the struggle of Third World women’s organisations (Moser, 1989, p. 1803).

The empowerment approach tries to “avoid direct confrontation” (Moser, 1989, p. 1816) by using what Scheyvens (1998) refers to as “subtle strategies”. Scheyvens’ research reveals that women’s church groups in the Solomon Islands provides an example of an ‘empowerment approach’ to women’s development. PGNs were used as a way to achieve SGNs in a non-threatening way by bringing women together to discuss issues and work out solutions together which are relevant to their “cultural, political and economic context” (R. Scheyvens, 1998, p. 235). Kandiyoti (1988, p. 274) also writes about how women use different strategies in accordance to specific cultural constraints to enhance their security and increase their life opportunities. Kandiyoti terms this “patriarchal bargain”, and points out that, women, where there are no “empowering alternatives”, will circumvent long-term changes to women’s position if their short-term practical interests become threatened (1988, p. 274 and 282). This highlights the importance of taking a GAD ‘empowerment approach’ to women’s development which supports women’s context-specific strategies for change, rather than being directed by policy approaches which seek to ‘integrate’ women into inequitable structures, with little or no input from women into the design of the policy programme.

TRIPLE ROLE OF WOMEN

The second key concept in Moser’s analysis of policy approaches to women’s development is the ‘triple role of women’ which is *reproductive work*, *productive work* and *community managing work* (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). *Reproductive work* is centred on the responsibility of caring for children and household duties. Men also contribute in this role, but most often it is seen as ‘natural’ for women to undertake this work (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 8). Women are also involved in *productive work*, many working in agriculture, or in the informal sector (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). In most societies men are assumed to be the main provider of household income,

therefore *productive work* is taken to be men's primary role (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). This even happens when men are out of work and women are providing the sole income for the family (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). *Community managing work* is an extension of women's household duties, to ensure not only their families' well-being, but also the well-being of their communities.

Women's *community managing* role often involves filling gaps left by inadequate state services, such as providing water or healthcare (Kabeer, 1994, p. 276; Moser, 1989, p. 1801). Women also advocate on behalf of their communities for better infrastructure and services (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). By willingly subscribing to this gender-attributed role, Moser sees that women are complicit in their own oppression by perpetuating the gender division of labour (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). Men also have a community role, but due to the division between the public sphere of men, and the private sphere of women, explored in more detail further in Chapter Three, this is carried out differently (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). Moser calls this a *community leadership* role, whereby men are more likely to be involved in formal political decision-making. In organisations where men and women work together, women are often found volunteering, while men receive payment (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Pollard, 2006, p. 5 and 226).

It is argued that only *productive work* is visible as 'work' due to the monetary value assigned to it (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Waring, 1988, p. 14). *Reproductive* and *community managing work* are not valued as highly. This has major implications for women as most of their work is hidden to policy makers assessing the needs of a community (Brickell, 2011, p. 1368; Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Waring, 1988, p. 14). In contrast, the majority of men's work is valued, either in monetary terms in their *productive work*, or through prestige and power in their *community leadership* role (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). It is essential that policy makers recognise the different roles of women and men, and that women may be over-subscribed in their capacity

due to their 'triple role' of *reproductive, productive* and *community managing work*.

The 'empowerment approach' raises consciousness of the 'triple role of women' and supports women to overcome their subordination through the collective action of women's organisations (Moser, 1989, p. 1816). Women's organisations are important in both the 'welfare approach' and the 'empowerment approach' to women's development, however there are important differences between these approaches. The 'welfare approach' mainly focuses on the *reproductive role* of women, and the delivery of top-down services through women's organisations. The 'empowerment approach', while acknowledging the need to support the basic needs of women and communities, also seeks to tackle the root causes of women's disadvantaged position through addressing women's SGNs.

'Practical and strategic gender needs' and the 'triple role of women' are key concepts to analysing the effectiveness of policy approaches to women's development. Programmes with the goal of women's empowerment have become popular with development organisations over the last two decades. It is essential that these programmes prioritise women's strategic gender needs so as to address the structural causes of inequality, and also take into account women's triple roles, so as to not increase women's burdens and further disempower them.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment has become a popular term within development practice (Batliwala, 2007, p. 557; Mosedale, 2005, p. 243; Oxaal & Baden,

1997, p. 1). The term is now commonly used among a wide range of development actors, including large multilateral and bilateral development agencies, international NGOs and grassroots organisations, to describe a range of approaches to addressing women's disadvantaged position (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559). This has created confusion over the meaning of the concept and generated a lot of criticism from GAD theorists who feel it is being used as development rhetoric as it is no longer being applied in a transformative way (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall & Brock, 2005). Scheyvens (2009, p. 470) points out the importance of understanding the approach being taken to empowerment, which could be an alternative development approach, neoliberal approach, post-development approach or, as this review focuses on, a gender and development approach. Table 2.2 gives a broad overview of how each of these theoretical perspectives pursues the development goal of women's empowerment in practice.

Table 2.2 – Different theoretical approaches to women’s empowerment

	Gender and Development	Alternative Development	Neoliberal
Importance of empowerment	Central to approach	Sits alongside participatory approaches	Sits alongside economic liberalisation
Empowerment in practice	Promotes consciousness-raising and collective action	Promotes consciousness-raising and collective action	Promotes individual entrepreneurial self-reliance
Goals of empowerment	Transformative	Transformative	Instrumentalist
Structural approach	Challenges inequitable structures at family, community, national and international level	Challenges inequitable structures at family and community level	Maintains status quo; integrates women into formal structures
Focus of empowerment	Social, political, psychological, economic	Social, political, psychological, economic	Economic focus
Strategic direction of empowerment	Women’s organisations develop vision with context-specific solutions for overcoming subordination based on popular education approach	Grassroots women’s organisations develop own solutions for overcoming their subordination through participatory approaches	National and international government/non-government organisations implement across the board strategies such as micro-enterprise loans and electoral quotas for women
Criticisms	May equate gender with women and exclude men’s gender needs; an academic discourse which large mainstream development organisations may find difficult putting into practice.	Focuses on household/ community level, while neglecting implications of inequitable national/ international structures	Instrumentalist; promotes self-reliance to justify women’s delivery of state services increasing their workload; seen as development rhetoric

Source: Author drawing on Moser (1989); Cornwall (2000); Parpart (1993), Friedmann (1992); Scheyvens (2000) and (2009); Batiwala (2007).

An alternative development approach to women's empowerment, discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, has many similarities to the GAD approach, however, a neoliberal approach indicates a major philosophical shift. A neoliberal approach does not seek to transform existing inequitable structures, but attempts to integrate women into these structures, for example, creating reserved seats for women in national parliament (Batliwala, 2007, pp. 561-562). A neoliberal approach has a narrow instrumental focus, promoting individual entrepreneurial self-reliance (Batliwala, 2007, pp. 561-562; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 466). This has been used as a justification for cutting back state services thereby overburdening women by increasing their community managing role (Batliwala, 2007, p. 558; Chant & Gutmann, 2002, p. 275; Flew et al., 1999, p. 393; Goetz, 2009, p. 30; Jacquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 27; Kabeer, 1999a, p. 13; Marchand, 2009, p. 925; Moser, 1989, p. 1813; Parpart, 1993, p. 451; Razavi & Miller, 1995, p. 24; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 466). The neoliberal approach to women's empowerment is most common among large development organisations and bilateral donors (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559; Moser, 1989, p. 1813).

Despite the popularisation of empowerment, a number of theorists, including Cornwall and Brock (2005), Kabeer (2005), Mosedale (2005) and Batiwala (2007), argue that an 'empowerment approach' continues to remain an important concept within GAD theory and practice. Batiwala (2007, p. 564) is optimistic that a:

“new discourse will emerge by listening to poor women and their movements, listening to their values, principles, articulations, and actions, and by trying to hear how they frame their search for justice.”

However, until then, GAD theorists Batiwala (2007, p. 564), Cornwall and Brock (2005, p. 1056) feel it is imperative that the original transformative meaning of women's empowerment, associated for decades with the struggle

for equality, rights and social justice, is reclaimed by Third World women. The emergence of a hopeful post-development approach to development may be one possible avenue for moving the transformative goal of empowerment forward, and is explored in more detail below.

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

While an empowerment approach is not central to a post-development approach a post-development approach may offer a new dimension to the 'empowerment approach' while still keeping to its original transformative goals. Many early post-development theorists focused on critiquing development theory and practice rather than on solutions (R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 467). However, a more recent hopeful post-development approach, which is solution-focused, is emerging (R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 467). Hopeful post-development theorists' Gibson-Graham (2005) offer a way forward for approaches to women's empowerment through research which looks beyond the formal economy for solutions to development problems. Using the concept to 'enlarge the field of credible experience' (Santos, 2004, p. 239) these researchers revealed productive and opportunity-rich alternative economies created by those largely excluded from mainstream economic structures (Gibson-Graham, 2005). A hopeful post-development approach to women's empowerment is useful for exploring the central aim of this research, which is to broaden the understanding of women's political empowerment beyond national parliament. 'Enlarging the field of credible experience' is a valuable concept to draw upon when looking for possibilities for women's political empowerment outside of formal political structures.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter laid out the theoretical foundation of the study by outlining women's empowerment within the GAD discourse, and by drawing on key concepts for the analysis of policy effectiveness of approaches to women's development. The GAD approach to women's empowerment is transformative, drawing on strategies which arise through women's struggles and through the collective action of women's organisations, which work together to challenge the structures which cause and maintain inequality at the family, community, national and global level. This view is in contrast to the instrumentalist neoliberal perspective of women's empowerment, which attempts to integrate women into existing structures and has become popular among many large development agencies and donors.

A hopeful post-development approach may bring fresh possibilities for women's empowerment through 'enlarging the field of credible experience'. This is discussed in the next Chapter which focuses specifically on women's political empowerment which is the main focus of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: THE 'POLITICAL DIMENSION'

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the political dimension of women's empowerment, which is the primary focus of this thesis. There is little GAD literature focusing specifically on women's political empowerment, therefore this chapter draws from other approaches and disciplines to construct a theoretical platform for the study. Firstly, it explains political empowerment from an alternative development perspective, which focuses mainly on community development. Secondly, it examines the debates on whether 'the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament' is an appropriate measurement of women's political empowerment within the mainstream development discourse. Lastly, it explores what constitutes as 'political' beyond formal institutionalised decision-making so as to 'enlarge the field of credible experience' by taking a hopeful post-development approach to explore women's political empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT AS MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Empowerment is considered to be multidimensional by alternative development theorist John Friedmann (1992). Friedmann focuses his analysis on the household where he describes empowerment as being an intersection of social, political and psychological components. Friedmann (1992, p. 33) describes 'social power' as having access to information, knowledge, skills, financial resources and social organisations; 'political

power' as access to the processes of decision-making which affect one's own future, this can be on an individual level or through collective action which amplifies one's voice in political assemblies; and 'psychological power' as an individual's sense of self-worth which can come from gains in social and political power or can further social and political power.

Scheyvens (2000) applies Friedmann's multidimensional model of empowerment to women's empowerment in ecotourism ventures in the Third World. Scheyvens (2000, p. 236) points out that many ecotourism projects promote only the economic advantages, neglecting to take into account the social, political or psychological empowerment or disempowerment that may take place within the community. Scheyvens (2002, p. 60) adapts Friedmann's multidimensional approach to empowerment into a useful framework with four dimensions (economic, social, psychological, and political). This conceptual framework is used to identify whether a community has been empowered and/or disempowered by a tourism development project. This framework is useful for development practitioners in analysing ways in which the community may already be empowered and also the ways in which their project is having a positive impact in the community. It can also uncover the ways in which the community is experiencing disempowerment, which may be a consequence of the development project. This alternative development framework is a useful conceptual tool for exploring women's political empowerment beyond formal political structures and is investigated in more detail later in this chapter.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Political empowerment is described by Scheyvens (2000, p. 242), in relation to community ecotourism projects, as follows:

“[The community’s] voices and their concerns should guide the development of any ecotourism project from the feasibility stage through to its implementation. They should also be involved in monitoring and evaluating the project over time. Diverse interest groups within a community, including women and youth, need to have representation on community and broader decision-making bodies.”

A specific concern for women’s political empowerment within ecotourism projects is identified as community decision making bodies being over-represented by men, especially when travelling away to meetings is a necessity (Joeke *et al.*, 1996 and Moore, 1996, p. 29 in Scheyvens, 2000, p. 242). Women are often constrained from leaving their home and community as this takes them away from their work and they may be accused of adultery. However, Scheyvens (2000) cites an example of Palawan women in the Philippines overcoming gender biases in decision-making bodies by playing a key role in organising and managing a project to compensate for fishing no longer being a viable livelihood option for their community. The women utilised legal and political structures to make their project successful (Mayo-Anda *et al.*, 1999 in Scheyvens, 2000, p. 243). Although in this particular project gender roles were reinforced by men operating the tour boats and women being administrators, women became engaged in community meetings and the management of resources (R. Scheyvens, 2000, p. 244). Women actively lobbied the local decision-making body for funding, speaking on behalf of their community, and also brought attention to illegal fishing (Mayo-Anda *et al.*, 1999 in Scheyvens, 2000, p. 244).

This alternative development approach to women’s political empowerment focuses on the importance of women’s voices being heard in local community level decision-making. The following section takes a closer look at a more mainstream development approach to women’s political empowerment

which primarily focuses on women's proportional representation in national decision-making forums.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AS A MEASURE OF EMPOWERMENT

Women are underrepresented in national decision-making worldwide. One of the key indicators for the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Three on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality is the 'proportion of seats held by women in national parliament' (United Nations Development Programme, 2012b). The following table shows the percentages of women parliamentarians by world region. The Pacific Region stands out as having the lowest representation in national parliament globally.

Table 3.1 – Women in National Parliaments Regional Averages

	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	42.0%	-	-
Americas	23.9%	25.0%	24.1%
Europe - OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	23.7%	21.5%	23.2%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	21.9%	21.5%	21.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.9%	17.5%	20.5%
Asia	18.4%	14.1%	18.0%
Arab States	15.7%	6.8%	13.8%
Pacific	12.7%	36.0%	15.3%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2013)

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) adopted by the United Nations Development Programme in 1995 is a broad measure of the gender gap that exists within countries (Ismail, Rasdi, & Jamal, 2011, p. 381; United Nations

Development Programme, 2012a). It uses quantitative data available on women and men's education, political and workforce participation. The GEM also uses the 'proportion of seats held by women in national parliament' to measure gender inequalities in formal political decision making. Very few countries with the exception of Rwanda and Sweden have managed to come close to closing the gender gap in formal political representation (United Nations Development Programme, 2011).

The low representation by women has serious consequences for the distribution of societal resources and decision-making. This is particularly concerning for policy decisions relating to women's interests which are often deemed to be 'private' issues, such as the state's response to family violence, which disproportionately affects women; legislative employment protection for maternity leave; and reproductive health funding and services (Staudt, 2011, pp. 166-167). The low representation of women in national parliaments is of global concern, with numerous studies undertaken on the reasons for gender inequality in national decision-making. The sections below give an overview of some of the reasons for this worldwide phenomenon.

The Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) (1999), uses United Nation's Country Reports and regional studies by its networks to summarise the obstacles women face in being elected to national parliament as: cultural stereotypes, institutional barriers, the gender division of labour which places a heavy burden on women, electoral systems, high expectations of women parliamentarians, women not being seen as 'natural' leaders, a lack of 'critical mass' of women in politics and lack of decision-making at the household level. Kabeer (2005, p. 21) adds religious opposition and the environment within political parties to the list of obstacles. A study on the low levels of political participation by Arab women found obstacles to be cultural and religious stereotypes, lack of confidence and political training, poor use of the media by women candidates, legal discrimination, poor access to education

and healthcare and lack of financial resources for political campaigns (Al Maaitah, Al Maatiah, Olimat, & Gharaeibeh, 2011).

Waylen (1996), Staudt (2011), Thompson and Armato (2012) point to men and masculinity being identified with the public sphere, and women and femininity identified with the private sphere, as the primary reason for women's low representation in national parliaments worldwide. Men were the first to vote and stand for election in Western democracies. This was at a time when men spoke on behalf of women. This patriarchal culture has seeped into formal decision-making institutions, making it difficult for women to participate. The 'hegemonic masculine' image of men as having authority and as leaders was later transported across the world through colonisation (Staudt, 2011, p. 165; Waylen, 1996, p. 53). Women struggled alongside men for national independence from colonial rule; however this has not resulted in political equality in the Western democratic style governments adopted by most former colonies (Moser, 1989, p. 1816; Staudt, 2011, p. 171; Waylen, 1996, p. 121). It is important to note that the hegemonic masculine image does not benefit all men; and only a small number of elite men get the full benefit of this in the formal political realm (Connell, 2005, p. 1808).

As the above sections illustrate, there is a multitude of reasons for women's low representation in national parliaments globally, making it a difficult development issue to address in the relatively short timeframe available for achieving the MDGs. The deadline for the achievement of the MDGs is 2015. It is unlikely that many developing or developed countries will achieve MDG Goal Three, based on the proportion of women holding seats in their national parliaments.

International response to gender inequality in national parliaments

Women's underrepresentation in national governments was highlighted at the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) which arose from the conference, and was agreed to by 189 member states, has key objectives which include: (1) "take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making", and (2) "increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership" (UN Women, 2012). Opportunities to improve women's representation are well-documented. Leadership training and confidence building is a common strategy (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011a, p. 7). However, this strategy has been challenged by GAD theorist Sara Longwe (2000, p. 24) as victim-blaming rather than calling attention to the discrimination against women in public life.

A critical mass of 30 per cent of women in parliament is thought to be needed to make a difference in women's decision-making and be the tipping point for political equality (Childs & Krook, 2008, p. 275; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011b, p. 1). Quotas, voluntary and legislative, top the list for fast tracking women's political participation and for creating a critical mass (Banos, 2009, p. 19; Dahlerup, 2008, p. 297; Fraenkel, 2006, p. 59; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011a, p. 5; Kabeer, 2005, p. 21; Krook, 2006, p. 303; Tadros, 2011, p. 1). This is also the most criticised approach as quotas may reduce the transformative goal of political empowerment (Batliwala, 2007, p. 561) by creating a 'glass-ceiling effect' where the number of women stay capped at the quota amount (Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, 1999, p. 4; Ismail, et al., 2011, p. 388) or are merely tokenistic with women representatives having very little political clout (Batliwala, 2007, p. 562; Kabeer, 2005, p. 561).

Contesting global measures of women's political empowerment

The GEM is a useful indicator of gender inequalities within a country. However, Kabeer (1999a, p. 6) writes that these statistics, which indicate political, education and employment inequalities, need to be further unpacked to determine the root causes of these inequalities. Kabeer gives an example of women in Bangladesh having more seats in parliament compared to women in Pakistan. This Kabeer points out is most likely a reflection of the gender quotas available to women in Bangladesh, than an indication of these women being more politically empowered than their neighbours in Pakistan. The indicator of the percentage of women in national parliament does not differentiate between those women who have acquired those seats through a quota system and those elected by the general public. However, those voted in by the constituency are thought to be more likely to be representative of the public and more effective politicians (Kabeer, 1999a, p. 6). The GEM does have its use for showing differences across nations and across time, and for focusing international attention on gender inequality. However, it does not give a clear picture of how these percentages came about, so it gives no direction on how to tackle this inequality (Kabeer, 1999a, p. 6). With the increased use of quotas or reserved seats for women, this indicator is increasingly being called into question, as research has found that these seats are at times tokenistic, therefore the numbers do not necessarily reflect women's political empowerment.

Recent qualitative research using in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry and ethnographic methods into women's representation in national parliaments has shown that the numbers of women in parliament does not give an accurate indication of women's political empowerment. Tadros (2011) and Waring (2011) in their policy papers for UKaid and AusAID give examples from multi-country case studies which challenge the narrow conceptualisation of women's political empowerment as holding seats in national parliament. Rwanda is celebrated as a success story of post-conflict

restoration of democracy which includes quotas for women. In 2008 the lower house in Parliament reached 56.3 per cent women. However, the government is seen as becoming increasingly authoritarian with women being unable to influence the policy process despite the large numbers of women in government (Waring, 2011, p. 7). Iraq has also adopted gender quotas of 25 per cent as part of the international community's push for democracy in the war-torn country. However, since the fall of the authoritarian regime, many women feel disempowered as they are afraid to even leave their houses due to sectarian violence.

It has been suggested that these quotas are “instrumentalist” rather than transforming as they are part of a drive for democracy rather than the empowerment of women (Waring, 2011, p. 8). In Costa Rica quotas have seen many elite women gain power. These women are deemed to be ‘anti-feminist’ and have backtracked on many important issues relating to reproductive and sexual health. This is what sociologist Klatch (1987) calls the “paradoxical outcome” of opening up formal politics to women being the increased participation of women who are proponents of conservative, anti-feminist ideas (in Thompson and Armato, 2012, p. 249). This could also relate to what feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe suggest as “when a women is let in by men who control the political elite it is precisely because that women has learned the lessons of masculinised political behaviour well enough not to threaten male political privilege” (1990, pp. 6-7). Tadros (2011, p. 6) suggests that rather than focusing on increasing the number of women, it may be wiser to support political candidates with progressive gender policies, whether they be men or women.

Beyond numbers proportionately represented

Ghana has a low national political representation of nine per cent women, with a women's ministry that stretches over all other ministries. This

ministry-wide approach has been imperative for the significant legislation and policy changes relating to domestic violence and trafficking, and for the gender sensitisation of the national budget (Waring, 2011, p. 8). Women were interviewed about their experiences in the 2006 elections. It was discovered that these women did not have a political career plan, nor did they consider themselves leaders (Tadros, 2011, p. 10). These women built their political platform through working with their communities as health workers, educators, volunteers and NGO representatives.

This shows that although women's representation in formal politics is important, there are other 'political' spaces for women to become politically engaged with the potential of transforming social and political structures (Tadros, 2011, p. 10). Tadros (2011) concludes that we need to widen discussions over what women's political empowerment means, what political leadership entails, and to step off the narrow path of proportional representation in formal political institutions to discover new pathways to women's political empowerment. The aim of the next section is to take a wider look at what constitutes as 'political' as one path to broadening the concept of women's political empowerment beyond proportional representation in national parliament.

EXPANDING THE POLITICAL REALM

This section takes a broader look at politics to see how women are engaged politically other than as representatives in national parliament. The section draws a distinction between formal, institutionalised decision-making, and informal politics in civil society. By identifying ways in which women, who have been largely excluded from formal structures, exercise political power, a broader understanding of women's political empowerment can occur. This can be viewed through a hopeful post-development lens of 'expanding the

realm of credible experience' for women's political power. Viewing political structures through this lens has the potential for uncovering a multitude of opportunity-rich possibilities for transformative change, created by women themselves, through their own political actions, agendas and struggles.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL POLITICAL SPHERES

Formal politics is often what is visibly seen as politics. This is the realm where chosen representatives participate in decision-making at local, regional, national and international levels (Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 236). Formal politics are important as the decisions made in this arena can have a significant impact on people's lives. This arena is dominated by what Thompson and Armato refer to as "hegemonic masculinity", reinforced by both women and men, which is evident in voting patterns (2012, p. 259; Wallace, 2011, p. 505). The exclusion of women from fully engaging in formal politics has not rendered them politically inactive and Thompson and Armato encourage us to look beyond the institutionalised forms of government to see women as active political agents (2012, p. 235 and 255).

Informal politics are often neglected when considering what constitutes as 'political'. Neglecting to consider informal politics has ramifications for women involved in the informal political realm, as they are not often seen as politically engaged or as political leaders. Formal Westminster style political structures have neglected the cultural context of developing societies by not encompassing informal political leadership, which is often the domain of women (Pollard, 2006, p. 216). Alice Pollard (2006) explores gender and leadership in her PhD research in the Solomon Islands to find out if women, who are typically excluded from formal politics, are recognised as political leaders in other arenas. Pollard looks at culture, the church and parliament in her analysis. Pollard found women dominate leadership in the informal sphere at the community level, which is largely voluntary, while men

dominate in the formal sphere at the national level, which is compensated. Pollard argues that women and men display leadership attributes differently and that women's attributes "of strength, respect, willingness, patience, serving, caring, loving, wisdom giving, people-centeredness and relationships" should be recognised beyond the household and community level and complement men's attributes of "strength, knowledge, decision-making and firmness" at the national decision-making level (Pollard, 2006, pp. 5, 222-223 and 226).

Civil society as a 'space' for informal politics

The space where informal politics takes place is most often referred to as civil society. The definition of what constitutes civil society is contested in the social sciences. However, most go with Hegel's broad definition in *Philosophy of Right* 1821 (in Ottaway, 2011, p. 183), incorporating organisations that sit in the space between the family and state institutions, while excluding profit-making enterprises (Hadenius & Ugglå, 1996, p. 1621; Howell, 2007, p. 420; Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). Civil society is created and maintained by people having the freedom to come together for a common purpose (Howell, 2007, p. 425; Malena & Heinrich, 2005 p. 342), and provides people with avenues to connect, as a group, or as individuals, with the state, the market and the family (Underhill-Sem, 2008, p. 8). Much goes on in civil society, including volunteering, attending community meetings, joining social movements, and going to club meetings relating to a hobby (Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239).

Civil society is promoted alongside democracy in many developing nations. A vibrant, healthy civil society is argued to protect against the potential abuses of an overly powerful state and economic institutions (Ottaway, 2011, p. 183; Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). Developing civil society is seen as promoting government by the people for the people (Ottaway, 2011, p. 198);

and is important for those who are marginalised in society (Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 409; Malena & Heinrich, 2005 p. 342). Activity within civil society organisations has been vital for lobbying for legislative and policy changes that protect women's rights and support their social and economic development within formal structures and has enabled women to develop their ability to act politically (Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 409). Staudt (2011, p. 176) writes:

“It is NGOs that give life and energy to democracies and the women (and men) who are elected and appointed to office. They push for goals like equal employment opportunities, non-sexist education, better health care, loans for micro-business, and laws to prevent violence against women”

However, Underhill-Sem (2008, p. 9) in a report for the Pacific Cooperation Foundation, points out that this type of advocacy work in the Pacific is a recent phenomenon, and that many civil society organisations work in collaboration with the state.

Civil society often receives funding from international donors, and with women as a funding category, it is important to identify what opportunities this presents for giving a stronger voice to women in influencing formal political decision-making (Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 408 and 410; Ottaway, 2011, p. 195). Marina Ottaway (2011, p. 195), a political analyst, writes how the relationship between civil society and the state can be co-operative. Women's organisations are often seen by government as non-threatening and are able to work alongside government to implement reforms on specific policy issues. For example, in Uganda and Egypt, women's groups assisted with drafting legislation reforms on women's land rights and divorce law.

Many women's NGOs globally are registered with the United Nations, giving women speaking rights at United Nations Conferences. This can be a way of influencing their governments to adopt and put into action international conventions on women's rights (Staudt, 2011, p. 176). Heather Wallace (2011, p. 508) in *Paddling the Canoe on One Side: Women in decision-making in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands* talks about the growing number of women's NGOs which are giving women leadership roles and who are having an influence on formal politics through lobbying government for legislation and policy changes for gender equality (Wallace, 2011, p. 507). However, Wallace also notes, the National Council of Women, the umbrella group for women's NGOs, depends on government funding so must be careful 'not to bite the hand that feeds it' (2011, p. 508). Caution must also be taken when engaging with civil society as organisations may only represent the voices of a few, rather than the voice of 'women' or the 'community' (Ottaway, 2011, p. 192). However, in acknowledging this, Underhill-Sem (2008, p. 10) still considers civil society as an important channel to "voice collective concerns that are otherwise silenced."

Women's political activism

Women's activism can expand our understanding of what counts as 'political'. Women are often involved in protest movements, demanding the government to remedy social grievances (Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). Important social and political changes have occurred through women's protest movements. A well-known example is the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. Nobel Peace Prize recipient Wangari Maathai led an influential political movement which began with women's concerns over the malnutrition of their children, which was linked to environmental degradation, and became a movement promoting women's empowerment globally (Michaelson, 1994). During the 'Arab Spring', Egyptians demonstrated in protest to overthrow their authoritarian government. Women were crucial to the revolution and

were seen organising and protesting alongside men (Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 234). These examples show women can be politically active even when they are excluded from formal participation. However, it is important to note that not all women's political activities are concerned with social justice and equality. In Argentina in the 1970s, when mothers were protesting about the disappearance of their sons at the hands of the authoritarian regime in the movement Mayo de Plaza, there were also women that opposed these women by supporting the military (Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 249).

Constraining factors of civil society

Civil society can both restrain and advance people's lives. Barbara Einhorn and Charlie Sever (2005) argue that civil society has become a "trap" for women as few move into the arena of formal politics (in Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 409). Howell (2007, p. 424) warns that women must be on the watch for when civil society jargon is used to validate initiatives which on the surface look empowering, such as more control over the delivery of social services, when in actual fact this is a justification to cut state spending and allow women to carry the burden of caring not only for their own family but also for the community.

Women in many societies are very active in civil society as it ties in with their community managing role (Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 497; Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Pollard, 2006, p. 10; Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). Jude Howell (2007), a researcher in international development and civil society, explains how civil society needs to be explored in more depth from a gender perspective within different contexts. Howell writes how we understand the private and the public sphere as socially constructed spaces affects how we view civil society as a site of theoretical analysis. Issues of power and oppression within the space of civil society need to be identified, challenging

the assumption that civil society is a neutral site where noble work takes place, and to take notice of the “interconnectedness, fluidity, and permeability of spheres” (Howell, 2007, p. 418 and 423).

Civil society depends on the unpaid work of the household, so that members are able to give their time and skills to meeting its demands. Given that in most societies it is women who take the main responsibility for these household activities, participation in civil society becomes a gendered activity (Howell, 2007, p. 426). Asima Siahaan, in her PhD thesis, (2004, p. 228) describes “chili sauce politics” in Northern Sumatra, where women share recipes for chili sauce that lasts for several days. These recipes are used as a strategy for fulfilling their role in the household, saving time, and keeping their husbands on side, so that they can attend women’s collective meetings, which often involve staying away from home overnight. This is an example of what Kandiyoti refers to as “patriarchal bargain” (1988, p. 274) and what Scheyvens’ (1998, p. 237) terms “subtle strategies”, in that women will deploy different methods to circumvent resistance to the changes they wish to see happen in their lives and in the wider community, while still retaining their economic and emotional security within the family.

Women’s political empowerment in civil society

The sections above reveal that civil society offers a wide space for women to exercise political power in numerous ways. However, the above discussion also shows that this space is not gender neutral and can also constrain women by drawing on their unpaid labour in both the home and to meeting the needs of the wider community. The framework below, adapted from Scheyvens (2002) framework for assessing empowerment in communities involved in ecotourism projects, summarises the empowering and disempowering factors for women exercising political power in civil society.

Table 3.2 Framework for assessing extent of women’s political empowerment in civil society

Signs of empowerment	Signs of disempowerment
<p>Civil society group membership is open.</p> <p>Meeting times and venues are accessible to all genders, races, ethnic groups and socio-economic classes.</p> <p>Women and men are given equal opportunity to speak and be listened to at meetings. Women and men contribute equally to decision making processes. Women and men are represented equally in leadership positions.</p> <p>Civil society groups are free from persecution and are able to voice their views on state actions and decision making.</p> <p>Civil society groups are seen as an important and necessary function of a democratic society.</p> <p>Civil society groups concerns are listened to, and are actively consulted with, by local and national government officials when making policy and legislative decisions.</p>	<p>Civil society groups discriminate against membership based on gender, race or class.</p> <p>Meetings times and venues are inaccessible for women.</p> <p>Women are not given equal speaking rights with men. Women are not involved with the decision making process of the group. Women are not represented in leadership positions.</p> <p>The interests of civil society groups are ignored by government officials when making policy and legislative decisions.</p> <p>Civil society groups are prohibited. Women are discouraged or restricted from joining or participating in civil society groups.</p> <p>Women’s voluntary participation in civil society is used to fill gaps in the delivery of state services. Women have very little input into the design of these programmes to deliver state services.</p>

Adapted from: Scheyvens, R. (2002, p. 60). *Tourism for Development: Empowering Communities*. Harlow: Prentice-Hall.

The above framework is utilised in Chapter Seven to analyse the findings from the field research which explores ways in which women in the context of Cook Islands civil society exercise political power. This analysis of the key objectives of the study will assist in meeting the central aim of the research, which is to broaden the understanding of women's political empowerment beyond national parliament.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND BRIEF DISCUSSION

There is currently little writing on women's political empowerment from within the GAD discourse. This thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the possibilities for women's political empowerment beyond the narrow measurement of the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. This study draws upon both an alternative development approach and a hopeful post-development approach in broadening the understanding of women's political empowerment within the GAD discourse. An empowerment approach within GAD supports women to articulate their own vision of political empowerment, rather than being integrated into formal political institutions constructed from a Western patriarchal standing. This allows a shift in focus from formal political equality with men to spaces where women are politically active and are thus creating this vision. The research for this thesis centres on women in Cook Islands civil society to explore the possibilities for women's political empowerment within informal structures.

Women's political empowerment is context-specific. The following chapter thus provides an overview of history, social and physical geography, and economic and political conditions unique to the Cook Islands to provide an

understanding of the environment to which the women central to this thesis are connected.

CHAPTER 4: COOK ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two and Chapter Three laid out the theoretical foundation for the research. This chapter paints the backdrop to which the study is set by providing a general contextual overview of the Cook Islands, so as to situate the research findings, detailed in Chapter Six. As discussed in Chapter Two, when taking an ‘empowerment approach’ to women’s development it is essential that women who have been disempowered have a central voice in creating the ‘vision’ of a more inclusive society. This ‘vision’ is imperative to informing development initiatives aimed at rectifying women’s disadvantaged position. It is therefore essential to the analysis of the research findings to have an understanding of Cook Islands women’s specific circumstances, including the physical, social, historical, economic and political context in which their knowledge and experience are embedded. This chapter focuses, first, on the physical and social locality of the Cook Islands. An historical account of the nation is given, before discussing political structures, both formal and informal as well as development indicators. Secondly, the chapter explores literature on women in the Cook Islands relating specifically to their position within society.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL LOCALITY

The Cook Islands is an island nation in the South Pacific located between Samoa and French Polynesia. There are 15 islands in the Cook Islands divided into *Pa Enea Tokerau* (northern group) and *Pa Enea Tonga* (southern group) (see Figure 4.1). The islands of *Pa Enea Tokerau* are mostly coral atolls, whereas the islands of *Pa Enea Tonga* are mostly volcanic

islands (Jonassen, 2009, p. 35). Travel between islands is time consuming and costly, however air travel has made movements between many of the islands much more accessible (Kuchler & Eimke, 2010, p. 2). Rarotonga, in the *Pa Enua Tonga*, is the main island hosting both the capital Avarua, and the majority of the nation's population. The remaining islands are referred to as the 'outer islands', and have less infrastructure development than on Rarotonga. At the 2011 census the Cook Islands had a population of 17,794, with 13,095 on Rarotonga (Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, 2011, p. 4). Cook Islands Maori, or 'Rarotongan', and English are the official languages of the Cook Islands; both are widely spoken on Rarotonga.

Figure 4.1 Map of the Cook Islands



Source: CIA The World FactBook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cw.html>

The Cook Islands have tropical weather, summer being hotter and more humid, with increased rainfall (Cook Islands Government, 2013). This is also the season when the islands are most vulnerable to cyclones. The coral atolls

are most susceptible to cyclones and sea level rises, and climate change adaptation work, with funding from international donors, is currently underway (Cook Islands Government, 2012, p. 10). The volcanic soils of many islands are fertile for growing crops for the export and local markets, and there is an abundance of ocean life in the two million square kilometre exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Cook Islands Government, 2013). Rarotonga and Aitutaki are encircled by coral reefs, large lagoons and sandy beaches making them prime real estate for tourist resorts. Tourism is the main economic driver of the Cook Islands, followed by black pearls, fishing, agriculture and offshore banking (Asian Development Bank, 2008, pp. 3-4). Subsistence gardening and fishing sustain most of the population on the outer islands (Cook Islands Government, 2013). This is becoming less common on Rarotonga with the availability of imported food.

Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens due to the political arrangement of being governed in free association with New Zealand. This allows Cook Islanders to live and work in both New Zealand and Australia. There are more Cook Islanders living overseas than in the Cook Islands, with approximately 50,000 currently residing in New Zealand (Hooker & Varcoe, 1999, p. 93; Kuchler & Eimke, 2010, p. 3). Peak migration occurred in 1995 due to major economic reforms which reduced public sector employment substantially (Jonassen, 2009, p. 39; Kuchler & Eimke, 2010, p. 3).

Hooker and Varcoe (1999, pp. 91-99) in their Chapter on Cook Islands Migration in *Strategies for Sustainable Development: Experiences from the Pacific* discuss their research on migration in the Cook Islands. Hooker's (1994) study found that many Cook Islanders who travel overseas in search of higher education and employment opportunities return home eventually, with skills and expertise that they utilise in the local labour market. The roles returning Cook Islanders fill, in both government and the private sector, are often positions which can influence the political and social development of

their country. Varcoe's (1993) study found that women, who have equal participation rates with men in receiving overseas scholarships, find themselves living and studying in countries where women are politically active and who are more willing to uphold their legal rights. Varcoe's study showed how these experiences mould these women who return to the Cook Islands with values that may influence the direction of their society towards one that is more gender equitable. Varcoe's study shows that many of those who advocate for women's rights in the Cook Islands have studied and lived overseas. This was also found to be the case in my research involving Cook Islands women in civil society, with the majority of female participants having studied or worked in New Zealand, Australia or other larger Pacific Island nations.

Land is communally owned in the Cook Islands, based on ancestry, and is also cited as a reason for Cook Islanders returning home so as to stake their claim and secure a resource base on their home island (Hooker & Varcoe, 1999, p. 96). Families remain strong in the Cook Islands with most people identifying themselves by their tribe or village affiliation (Jonassen, 2009, p. 36). The Cook Islands is a Christian country, with over 90 per cent of the population identifying themselves as Christian (Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, 2011, p. 12). Most Cook Islanders belong to the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), with Catholic, Pentecostal, Mormons and Baha'is also represented (Jonassen, 2009, p. 41). The church has been an important part of village life since arrival of Christianity to the Cook Islands which is outlined below.

HISTORY

The islands were first inhabited by sea voyaging peoples who crossed the Pacific in large canoes (Jonassen, 2009, p. 36). Cook Islanders are closely

related to the people of French Polynesia and to the New Zealand Maori (Cook Islands Government, 2013; Kuchler & Eimke, 2010, p. 2). European contact began in 1595 when the island of Pukapuka was sighted, but it was the arrival of the missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS), to the islands of Aitutaki in 1821 and Rarotonga in 1823, that had the largest transformative impact on Cook Islands society (Gilson, 1980, p. 4 and 20; Jonassen, 2009, p. 37). Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the Cook Islands were governed by tribes which were sometimes involved in warfare (Jonassen, 2009, p. 37; Short, Crocombe, & Herimann, 1998, p. 17). The missionaries eventually persuaded the people to lay down their weapons, burn their idols and move into villages close to the church (Gilson, 1980, p. 21 and 26). The status of Cook Islands women began to change significantly as women became full participating members of the church, at times being accepted for membership before their husbands, which caused some marital strife (Gilson, 1980, p. 35).

The missionaries worked closely with the *Ariki* (paramount chiefs) which gave this role a higher status than previously afforded (Gilson, 1980, p. 34; Short, et al., 1998, p. 17). Prior to the arrival of the missionaries this hereditary title went to the eldest born son, however in 1845 one of the *Ariki* titles went to a woman (Gilson, 1980, p. 36). This title continues to be handed down today and most tribes now allow women to hold the title, with the majority of the six titles on Rarotonga now held by women. Tribal affiliation continues to be an important aspect of Cook Islands society. During my fieldwork I was privileged to attend the opening of the new headquarters of the *Are Ariki* (House of Hereditary Chiefs) in which I was asked to dress in the colours of my Cook Islands brothers' tribe of *Puaikura* (Journal entry, 6 July 2012).

In 1888 the Cook Islands became a British Protectorate to prevent the colonial expansion of the French (Kuchler & Eimke, 2010, p. 3; Short, et al.,

1998, p. 17). In 1901 New Zealand took over, and in 1965 the Cook Islands people gained independence, in free association with New Zealand, and adopted a Westminster-style parliament (Jonassen, 2009, pp. 37-39).

POLITICS

GOVERNMENT

The Cook Islands, although governed in free association with New Zealand, is responsible for its own internal affairs, and has become increasingly responsible for foreign affairs, however it can still call on New Zealand to represent it internationally and also for its defence needs (Jonassen, 2009, p. 39; Short, et al., 1998, p. 19). The Cook Islands is has a 24-seat parliament with a prime minister (Jonassen, 2009, p. 39). The *Are Ariki* (House of Hereditary Chiefs) advises government on tradition, but has no official power and little influence on policy (Jonassen, 2009, p. 40; Naunaa, 2001, p. 178; Short, et al., 1998, p. 60).

There are two main parties, the Cook Islands Party (CIP), who are currently in government, and the Democratic Party. These parties are elected by a First Past the Post (FPP) system. The Cook Islands currently has three women members of parliament (MPs), which has risen from one in July 2012 (Cook Islands News, 4 July 2012, 13 February 2013). All of these women are part of the Democratic Party which is currently in opposition. The position of Speaker of the House is now also held by a woman (Cook Islands Herald, 21 March 2012). Most MPs are elected based on their contribution to the community and church, as well as by tribal and family links (Jonassen, 2009, p. 41). With significant reductions in population size due to emigration there have been discussions and debate over the number of MPs per head of

population and the high costs associated with maintaining this relatively high number of representatives (Short, et al., 1998, p. 22).

CIVIL SOCIETY

The Cook Islands has a large and vibrant civil society. As noted by Crocombe (1990, p. 1) and observed during my field research, Cook Islanders are generally members of up to five or more civil society organisations ranging from girl guides to rugby clubs. Many groups are centred in sport or church, while others are involved in the delivery of social services, such as care for those with a disability and the elderly. Most civil society organisations are Rarotonga-based, with some national organisations delivering services to, and advocating for the interests of, the outer islands. The majority of staff within civil society organisations are voluntary and unpaid (Crocombe, 1990, p. 51).

Many Cook Islanders are employed by the government, and due to the small population size of the Cook Islands, many also volunteer within civil society. There is a large degree of tolerance for civil society organisation work to be undertaken during working hours, as government is often reliant on civil society for the success of important occasions and celebrations, such as the main national event of the week-long Constitution Celebrations (Crocombe, 1990, p. 52). Spending time on civil society work, especially if government employees have surplus time, is seen by employers as preferential to other activities, as this work is recognised as having a public benefit.

Women's NGOs in Cook Islands civil society have played a valuable role in advocating for women, delivering training, and undertaking research. The Cook Islands National Council of Women, established in 1981, is one of the main advocates for raising awareness of women's issues and for promoting women's policy interests (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 11;

Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 27). Punanga Tauturu, a women's counselling NGO, is focused on advocating for women in the area of family violence. This organisation has also played a significant role in working with the Cook Islands government to develop and implement legislation and policy protecting women's rights at a national level (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 12). Other professional organisations that represent Cook Islands women include the Business and Professional Women's Association, and several women's associations affiliated with the major churches. The work of women in Cook Islands civil society helps support women's empowerment and gender equality (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 15).

DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The Cook Islands has the highest Human Development Index (HDI) in the Pacific Region, with most Cook Islanders enjoying a relatively high standard of living, with access to health, education and welfare services (Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. 1). The Cook Islands is on track to achieving the majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 (Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 26). School education is based largely on the New Zealand curriculum, with attendance being free, generally accessible, and compulsory for the entire population, including school-aged children on the outer islands. The life expectancy for Cook Islands women is 74.3 years and 68 years for men. However, there has been a significant increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs), due to changes linked to diet and lifestyle (Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. 1).

Some of the major challenges the Cook Islands have are: providing services to a widely dispersed population; inequalities of work and education opportunities, with the vast majority of economic activity concentrated in

Rarotonga, and most candidates seeking higher education required to travel abroad; isolation from large international markets; limited diversity within the economy; high outward migration; and damage caused from the intensification of extreme weather (Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. 3). The Cook Islands government is dependent on aid which mostly comes from New Zealand and Australia and is delivered jointly through programmes (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013).

The Cook Islands has ratified and endorsed many key international conventions and agreements, including those on securing women's rights and promoting gender equality. This includes the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals (Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 26). As a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand, the Cook Islands government has the responsibility to report on these treaties and agreements, however it has been noted that this has been sporadic (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 16).

WOMEN IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Cook Islands women continue to make improvements in their status, secure their rights, achieve high levels of education, participate in large numbers in formal employment, and have gained access to high level positions within the public sector. However, gender inequality does exist and continues to be an important development issue for the Cook Islands (Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. 13; Cook Islands Government, 2011, p. 14).

Cook Islands women score highly within the Pacific Region on the Gender Development Index (GDI) and by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)

(Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. 13; Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 26). Compared with Cook Islands boys, girls have higher secondary school enrolment, with equal primary school enrolments. However, a recent stocktake, commissioned by the Secretariat of the Pacific on Gender Mainstreaming in the Cook Islands, summarises key gender issues as: family and sexual violence towards women, lower wages for women in comparison to men, no statutory parental leave provisions, and low representation by women in formal decision making (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 7). The lack of data collected on gender was also commented on in the report, as this makes it difficult for policy analysts to identify specific gender inequalities, and for the government to target these in strategic planning and reporting (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 15).

The lack of gender mainstreaming in the Cook Islands was heavily criticised in the stocktake, as was the performance of the Gender and Development Division (GADD), located within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The stocktake report shows widespread misunderstanding among government officials about gender equality, with many associating gender with women. This lack of understanding is blamed on a general lack of awareness of government responsibilities to international agreements, and to pervasive cultural attitudes of clearly defined roles for men and women (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 19). GADD's effectiveness to implement policies and strategic plans on improving gender equality, and its role in supporting gender mainstreaming, was deemed to be severely limited due to its low operational budget, lack of technical capacity, and it not being strategically located within government ministries. Women's NGOs expressed that strengthening GADD through increased budget allocation and staff capacity, would assist greatly in strengthening their partnership with government for the achievement of gender equality goals (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 15).

Although Cook Islands women have comparatively high levels of education and hold senior management roles within government ministries, it is highly unlikely that the Cook Islands will meet MDG Three on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment by 2015, with women still poorly represented in national parliament (Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 26). Among the reasons for women's low participation in formal politics are: entrenched cultural attitudes that only men make competent leaders and decision-makers; time constraints due to the multiple roles women perform; lack of financial resources to fund political campaigns; and limited political and social connections vital for networking (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 8). Recommendations given to the Cook Islands from the UN committee reviewing country ratification of CEDAW, is for the Cook Islands to adopt temporary special measures (TSMs), so as to increase the number of women in national parliament via a quota system (Wright-Koteka & Wichman, 2010, p. 26).

Women living in the outer islands have even less opportunity to participate in formal and local decision-making than women on Rarotonga, due to their remoteness and relative isolation, as well as being restricted even further by gender roles (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012, p. 8). These women have limited access to public services, employment and education opportunities. Women on the outer islands depend on natural resources for their livelihoods making them highly vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather conditions and climate change. Having limited access to decision-making severely restricts these women's capacity to influence strategies for managing resource use, and for planning for disaster management and climate change adaptation. The Cook Islands National Council of Women is currently working with the Commonwealth Local Governance organisation to mentor and encourage more women in the outer islands to participate in local governance bodies, with the long-term goal of increasing women's participation in decision-making at a national level (Commonwealth Local

Government Forum, 2012; Commonwealth Local Government Forum Pacific, 2011).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has set the scene for the fieldwork on Rarotonga. The Cook Islands is geographically dispersed over 15 islands, with most of the population residing on Rarotonga. Delivering essential services to the outer islands is difficult, with most organisations based on Rarotonga, and with transport both time consuming and costly. The Cook Islands are governed in free association with New Zealand. This arrangement gives Cook Islanders New Zealand citizenship. The majority of Cook Islanders now live in New Zealand with peak migration occurring in 1995 due to structural adjustment which reduced public sector employment significantly. Cook Islanders have a relatively high standard of living within the Pacific Region and are on track to achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals. However, Cook Islands women are underrepresented in national parliament so it is unlikely that Millennium Development Goal Three on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment will be met. The Cook Islands has a large and vibrant civil society, with many diverse women's organisations representing women's interests throughout the geographically dispersed islands. Through the knowledge and experience of these women in Cook Islands civil society, this thesis explores the possibilities of expanding the understanding of women's political empowerment beyond national parliament by exploring the ways in which women exercise political power informally. The next chapter outlines the methodological approach for this research and shares experiences from the fieldwork, before presenting the findings from this study in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological approach to the fieldwork undertaken for the study. The methodological approach includes the philosophical standpoint, research principles, ethical considerations, and methods used to collect the field data (Walter, 2010, p. 13). It is imperative that the methodological approach is conveyed as this impacts upon the way researchers collect data, interpret, and analyse their findings. It is important when selecting a methodological approach that it fits with the stated aim of the research (O'Leary, 2010, p. 7), which in this case is to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond the numbers represented in national parliament. This chapter begins by clarifying the philosophical standpoint of the researcher. Secondly, it describes the development research principles used to guide the fieldwork. Thirdly, it explains which methods were chosen to collect the data and how these were put into practice. Finally, this chapter conveys the process in which the data collected was analysed and then identifies some of the limitations of the study.

PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT

This study best fits under the research philosophy of social constructionism. This philosophical approach incorporates theories of knowing about a social world which is being continually constructed by people through their participation in, and interpretation of, their perceived social reality (Bryman, 2008, p. 19; Flick, 2004, p. 90; O'Leary, 2010, p. 6). Gender and

Development (GAD), outlined in Chapter Two, is the leading development studies theory underpinning this study, and this theory considers gender to be a social construct. Taking a philosophical standpoint relevant to the GAD approach was therefore deemed appropriate for this research, which seeks to understand the objectives of the research as interpreted and constructed realities of the field participants within their lived context. Although social constructionism does come under a post-positivist research approach, which can be described as “participative, collaborative, inductive, idiographic, and exploratory” (O’Leary, 2010, p. 7), this study does not reject a positivist or scientific approach to social research as being equally valid (Bryman, 2008, p. 592; Kelle & Erzberger, 2004, p. 172). The aim of the methodological approach taken in this study is to remain as fluid as possible, allowing space for creativity in the research process in which to adopt methods which best suit the context and the objectives of the research, rather than being constrained by those associated with either a positivist or post-positivist approach (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 75; O’Leary, 2010, p. 7).

Taking a more fluid approach to research methodology is useful in undertaking cross-cultural research which can involve considering different epistemologies, or ways of knowing (Bryman, 2008, p. 13; O’Leary, 2010, p. 5). Pacific Island research epistemologies are explored in the next section under the development research principles of mutual respect and empowerment, which were used to guide the fieldwork. Positionality and reflexivity are also important principles in development research, and are discussed in more detail below along with the ethical considerations for this study.

DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

As part of the methodological design, key research principles were selected to guide the fieldwork. It is acknowledged that researching the social world brings with it many important considerations. As development researchers, special attention must be given to the considerations that arise from research which is most often conducted cross-culturally (Nast, 1994, p. 54; R. Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 2). Cross-cultural development research undertaken by Western academics has received much scrutiny in recent decades (R. Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 2; Smith, 2004, p. 4). This is largely due to research being perceived as a form of exploitation or colonisation of indigenous people and their knowledge (Kobayashi, 1994, p. 76; Smith, 1999, p. 55). While it is important to acknowledge this criticism and mitigate any potential for abuse of local people, it is also essential to recognise that research conducted cross-culturally is not always exploitative, as highlighted by Scheyvens and Storey in *Development Fieldwork – A Practical Guide* (2003, p. 6). Cross-cultural research is indicated by these authors, to have the potential to develop mutual understanding between cultures, which may assist in finding solutions to development issues that cannot be solved within communities or by nations in isolation. Participants involved in development research may also feel more comfortable sharing information with someone who does not share their culture. It is also considered important to acknowledge that participants are not passive and can withhold information or withdraw their participation.

The following principles are seen as essential to managing the complex power relations relating to development research, and were selected as important guidelines for this study.

POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

Positionality refers to the “value-judgements” researchers bring to their research, even when using an ‘objectivist’ positivist or scientific approach (Murray & Overton, 2003, p. 23; O’Leary, 2010, p. 28). However, these subjectivities come under more intense scrutiny when undertaking research from a post-positivist perspective, which acknowledges that the researcher cannot entirely separate oneself from the research (Murray & Overton, 2003, p. 23). Reflexivity is a critical self-awareness of the implications of one’s positionality throughout the research process (Akerly & True, 2010, p. 2; Nast, 1994, p. 59; Walter, 2010, p. 409). I deemed it important to reflect on my positionality and include in Chapter One that I have close historical and family ties with the fieldwork site, so as to be as transparent as possible from the outset of this thesis.

Insider / outsider considerations

Insider/outside issues are often a focus of cross-cultural research. As a Third Culture Kid (TCK), insider/outside awareness is normative, as one must learn to live as both a cultural ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ within their ‘host culture’ as well as their ‘home culture’. Growing-up as a TCK it is never possible to fully integrate into one’s ‘host country’ and most have difficulty feeling they ever belong within their ‘home country’ (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009, p. 19). Development researchers returning to their ‘home country’ to undertake research also report feelings of being both an ‘outsider’ and an ‘insider’ due to class and education differences with their participants (R. Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 4). One study participant viewed my position positively: “You would really understand because you have lived in both worlds”, referring to my understanding of the cultural differences between Cook Islanders and *Papa’a* (foreigners).

Returning to Rarotonga after a ten year absence, it was often reflected in my field journal that I felt as if I was on a constant sliding scale between ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’. There were times when I felt shunned for being a *Papa’a* (foreigner) and at other times embraced as ‘family’, gaining many privileges which would not have been afforded to other researchers. These swings often happened with the same participant, during the same meeting, after gaining mutual respect through participating in cultural protocol, or after a shared history or family connection was established.

Insider/outsider awareness is especially important to consider for researchers from Western countries conducting research in a formerly colonised country (O’Leary, 2010, p. 28; R. Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 3). There has been much critique on how research of Third World peoples by ‘outside’ Western researchers may reinforce and maintain many of the inequitable relations brought under colonialism (Smith, 1999). As a New Zealand Pakeha woman undertaking field research with indigenous women and men within a former British and New Zealand colony, it was important for me to be aware of any power dynamics present during the fieldwork and to mitigate any potentiality for abuse. However, with many participants conveying their concern for me as a first time researcher and female student on my own, and with many expressing their sympathy towards me in the passing of my father and step-father, I did not feel that I was perceived as having ‘power over’ the participants. Further examples of participants exercising their power in the researcher/participant relationship included participants rearranging interviews, cancelling interviews due to other commitments, and one potential participant who had agreed to be interviewed did not return my emails or phone messages.

In a response to criticisms of research being a form of neo-colonialism, Western researchers are increasingly incorporating an awareness of indigenous ‘ways of knowing’ within their methodologies in an effort to

“decolonise research” (Nabobo-Baba, 2004, p. 26; 2008, p. 142). This study uses key principles from Pacific methodologies, outlined in the section below, to better understand participants on their own terms and to create a more empowering research experience for participants based on mutual respect.

MUTUAL RESPECT AND EMPOWERMENT

In response to criticisms of development researchers, and as a way of mitigating the potential exploitation of participants, many researchers have adopted ‘non-traditional’ research approaches. Nast (1994, p. 58 in Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 5) suggests using methodologies “that promote mutual respect and identification of commonalities and differences between researcher and researched in non-authoritative ways... [that] allow for “others” to be heard and empowered.” Gaining mutual respect was seen as vital in this study for building relationships within a cross-cultural environment, as was ensuring the research process was empowering for participants, especially as this was a central theme of the study (R. Scheyvens, Nowak, & Scheyvens, 2003, p. 139). The focus of my field research was therefore on participation rather than ‘extracting’ data (Kobayashi, 1994, p. 76; R. Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000, pp. 127-128).

During the research process the research was explained to participants and the importance of their ‘voices’ being heard within my study was emphasised. I followed cultural protocols as closely as possible, including greetings, and respect for participant’s views, even when diverse from my own, which was paramount to building trust and rapport. I explained to participants that I wanted my research to be meaningful to them, and I asked them how the findings could be of benefit to them. Most of the participants expressed their interest in receiving a copy of my final research report for their organisation and one key informant stated outright “if you see any weakness in our society let us know”. I communicated to participants that I would provide them with

a copy of the summary of my research findings and a full copy of my thesis would be available for them to access online via the Massey Library website.

To help gain mutual respect and to empower participants, principles from Pacific research methodologies, including the Cook Islands *Tivaevae* model, were drawn upon.

Pacific methodologies

Pacific research methodologies have become more widely drawn upon as a way of “decolonising” the research process and a way of “reprivileging” Pacific knowledge to empower Pacific people (Farrelly, 2009, p. 369; Nabobo-Baba, 2004, p. 18 and 26; 2008, p. 142; Smith, 2004, p. 5; Vaioleti, 2006, p. 22). As this study was being conducted within a Pacific Island context, Pacific research methodologies were taken into consideration so as to conduct research in a more respectful, empowering and culturally appropriate manner.

Talanoa has become one of the more popular Pacific research methodologies. The Tongan word *tala* relates to telling stories or dialogue, and *noa* means openly or “without concealment” (Halapua, 2000, p. 1). The main principles of *Talanoa* are respect, reciprocity, openness, and informal and circular dialogue (Robinson & Robinson, 2005, p. 15 and 18; Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). Having knowledge of the principles of *Talanoa* and that Pacific peoples have an oral tradition meant that as a researcher I was more aware of the cyclical narrative of my participants. By allowing my participants time to speak without cutting them short I was able to collect the rich data that evolved from allowing participants to conclude their story-like answers.

The *Tivaevae* research framework developed by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2000) is indigenous to the Cook Islands and uses the imagery of producing

a Cook Islands *tivaevae* (embroidered artwork) as a culturally appropriate model for conducting research (Airini & Rubie-Davies, 2011, p. 120). The *tivaevae* is a large sheet of material with pieces of cloth of different colours and patterns, representative of the Cook Islands environment, sewn together to tell a story. The *Tivaevae* model has at its core five key principles: collaboration, respect, reciprocity, relationships, and shared vision.

When applying the *Tivaevae* model to this study, I found it a useful exercise to imagine my thesis as a large blank canvas and data collection as the process of creating and weaving together participants' knowledge and experiences into a shared vision or story. Collaboration brought together the "different interpretive realities" of the participants and researcher. This was important in acknowledging that many of the Cook Islands women interviewed had different ways of exercising political power than my limited Western feminist understandings. Respecting these different ways in accordance with Cook Islands women's knowledge and culture values was fundamental to building trust and rapport with participants. Reciprocity was an important value which I observed by always bring food or drink to share during the interviews or structured observations. Relationships are integral to Cook Islanders and having shared connections was important, as was attending church services, Sunday lunches, night markets, fundraisers, a birthday dinner, an unveiling, and potluck dinners.

During my fieldwork I was invited to attend the national launch of the Local Government Strategy at the National Council of Women, aimed at encouraging more women to stand for local body elections in the outer islands. At this launch I was privileged to witness the newly appointed Speaker of the House of Parliament, Nicki Rattle, and recently knighted paramount chief Dame Mama Karika being presented with *tivaevae* (Journal entry, 2 July, 2012). These *tivaevae*, pictured below, were given to these

women as a sign of respect for, and an acknowledgment of, their cultural knowledge and wisdom.

Photo 5.1: Cook Islands Women Leaders Receive *Tivaevae*



Source: (Cook Island News, 1 August 2012)

Principles from both *Talanoa* and *Tivaevae* were drawn upon to help shape the research methodology for this thesis. There is a debate over whether these methodologies are unique to the Pacific (Sanga, 2004, p. 41), and it is also important to recognise that Pacific countries are diverse, so as not to lump their different epistemologies under one framework (McFall-McCaffery, 2010, p. 2). However, the principles of these methodologies were deemed to be useful when applied in the field.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are important to take into account prior to leaving for the field (R. Scheyvens, et al., 2003, p. 139). It is imperative that development research is conducted in a responsible, ethical and culturally

appropriate manner. Minimising harm to participants is essential, and researchers must abide by this at all times by showing utmost respect and being sensitive to participants' age, gender, culture, and religion, and ensuring that confidentiality and privacy is upheld (O'Leary, 2010, p. 41).

Before leaving for the field I attended an 'in-house' ethics meeting with my two supervisors and the head of Development Studies. This was important to discuss any ethical concerns before applying for approval for the research from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. It was deemed that the research was 'low-risk' and could proceed through the 'low-risk notification process'. Approval from the Massey Human Ethics Committee was received prior to undertaking the research.

I gained consent from the Cook Islands government to conduct research on Rarotonga by following the Cook Islands regulations for foreign researchers. This involved applying for a Cook Islands Research Permit (Appendix Four) on arrival to Rarotonga. I did this by visiting the Office of the Prime Minister on several occasions. First to find out the requirements needed to make an application; then to provide details of my planned research, my curriculum vitae, letter of endorsement from my supervisor, and to pay the required permit fee. Lastly I made a couple of visits to ensure my application was progressing. The process took five working days to complete and I was given names of Cook Islands women and their contact details that I was told could assist me with my research.

Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent from participants, in a culturally appropriate manner, about whether they wished to participate in the study was an important ethical consideration to take into account prior to the fieldwork (Bryman, 2008, p. 694; Fife, 2005, p. 11; O'Leary, 2010, p. 41; Walter, 2010,

p. 483). An invitation to participate (Appendix One), a consent form (Appendix Two) and an information sheet (Appendix Three) were prepared in advance and translated into Cook Islands Maori on arrival at the field site. English is one of the main official languages spoken on Rarotonga and was the language used to conduct the interviews. The process of informed consent was explained at the beginning of each interview and participants were asked again at the end of the interview whether they agreed with giving this consent. If in agreement, participants were then asked to give their consent in writing.

MIXED METHODS APPROACH

This study uses a mixed methods approach to research. Although there is some debate about the exact definition of a mixed methods approach, it most commonly refers to using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to collect data (Bryman, 2008, p. 603). The benefit of using this eclectic approach to research design is the flexibility it allows in taking from each what is good (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 3). One major criticism of a mixed methods approach is that it sometimes favours quantitative methods that produce numerical data for statistical analysis, over qualitative methods that draw on interpretations and meanings attributed to the social world (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 15). However, when considering a mixed methods approach, it is important to consider the philosophical standpoint of the researcher, the guiding research principles, and the study's main aim. It is also worth noting that one of the major benefits of using a combination of different methods is triangulation, which allows findings to be cross-checked for the purposes of validity and reliability (Bryman, 2008, p. 379; Foster, 2006, p. 89; Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 26; Kelle & Erzberger, 2004, p. 174).

In relation to this study, while numerical data is deemed useful for showing inequalities in gender as discussed in Chapter Three, the main aim is to go beyond statistical data. Therefore, there is an emphasis on qualitative data in order to better understand the quantitative data collected, so as to meet the stated research aim (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 64). This emphasis on qualitative data collection also fits with the post-positivist social constructionist standpoint and with Pacific research methodological principles, which emphasise qualitative methods involving dialogue.

STRUCTURED OBSERVATION

Structured observation involves directly observing and recording participants using a prepared observation checklist. It is also known as non-participant observation or systematic observation and is somewhat underutilised in social science research (Bryman, 2008, p. 257; Graham, 2008, p. 9). The observation schedule is central to the method and includes predetermined categories indicating what the observer should look for and how these observations should be recorded. The observer is separate from the group. The main benefit is that behaviour is directly recorded, as opposed to a survey method where participants record their own behaviour, which may not always be completely accurate (Graham, 2008, p. 1 and 18). Systematic recording is imperative so that each observation category can be treated as a variable and compared across the sample. Creating a clear and relatively simple observation schedule is important, as complex systems can be unworkable and confusing for the observer to manage. This method is usually used in conjunction with other methods in the research design (Bryman, 2008, p. 257 and 260).

A structured observation schedule was prepared, in consultation with my supervisors, prior to leaving for the field, with the awareness that this may needed to be tweaked after my first observation. This method was intended

to be used along with semi-structured interviews, so as to reflect on, and interpret, the behaviour recorded for both the researcher and interviewees.

This method was chosen as a way of removing some of my own bias from the research and to provide a framework for conducting the fieldwork. My intention was to observe women and men in civil society meetings, recording by gender the number of attendees, seating positions, the frequency with which, and duration for which, they addressed the meeting, the numbers of questions they asked and their performance of formal and informal meeting roles. The location, venue, time of day and how it was advertised would also be recorded. These observations would then be followed-up with two or three meeting participants during semi-structured interviews. It was important for observations to be followed up with qualitative methods, as although quantitative data may indicate gender inequalities, the central aim of this thesis is to explore beyond numbers to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment.

Factors such as age, race, class, and ethnicity are also important when exploring women's political empowerment from a gender and development perspective, however it was acknowledged that these would be too difficult to observe accurately. As the sole researcher it was important not to overload the schedule with too many variants making recording unmanageable. Therefore this method would only disseminate observations by gender.

Selecting meetings to observe

I selected public meetings to attend and observe through a combination of purposeful selection methods and through snowballing techniques (Bryman, 2008, p. 415 and 699). The first meeting I purposively selected to observe was a parents and teachers association (PTA) meeting advertised in the daily newspaper on the first week of my arrival to the field. On receiving my Cook Islands Research Permit from the Office of the Prime Minister, I approached

the school office in person and spoke with the deputy principal. Unfortunately due to the sensitive nature of the particular meeting the deputy principal did not feel it would be appropriate. He was very apologetic and suggested I approach the organisers of a civil society community consultation meeting, giving me contact names of who he was related to and permission to use his name as my contact person. This meeting had also been advertised in the *Cook Islands News* and was next on my list to approach. I phoned the contact person listed in the advertisement and received her permission to attend the meeting that evening. At the time I did not realise that she knew who I was by my surname and gave me consent to attend immediately.

I attended and observed six civil society group meetings during my four weeks of fieldwork. These included a national civil society community consultation, a civil society funding meeting, a youth organisation's monthly meeting, and three annual general meetings (AGMs) of organisations concerned with the environment, welfare and a business and professional women's network. Three of these meetings I was invited to attend by a family friend involved in civil society, another invite to a meeting came from an interview participant, and I made contact with two organisations who had listed their meetings in the newspaper to seek permission to attend.

Structured observation in practice

On arrival to the first meeting at a large church hall, I placed a locally baked fruit loaf on one of the fully laden food tables and went in to introduce myself to the chairperson. The chairperson, a woman, had worked with my dad so I received a very warm welcome. I gave the chairperson an information sheet and explained my research and that my structured observation would be confidential and would not record what people were saying or identify the organisation or any individual in my research. The chairperson gave her informed consent and agreed to explain this to participants during the

meeting. She offered for me to sit at her table but I asked if I could sit with the meeting attendees as I felt I would be less conspicuous, even though I was the only *Papa'a* in attendance.

The meeting was conducted in Cook Islands Maori, which for structured observation poses no problems, and I found this was less distracting for making observations. The chairperson when introducing me, apologised for this, which I indicated to her was not an issue. However, when a member of the executive spoke he told me that he did not apologise and stated that: "*Papa'a* should learn the language" (Journal entry, 20 June, 2012). I nodded in agreement which surprised him, and later explained to him that one of my biggest regrets was not learning Cook Islands Maori. This frequently came up in discussions with interview participants who asked if I could speak Cook Islands Maori. Many were sympathetic to this, telling me that it would be difficult to learn on Rarotonga and the best place to learn would be at a New Zealand University or on one of the outer islands.

During the meeting I used my structured observation schedule to draw and record how the room was set up and where women and men were seated. I recorded the duration women and men spoke for using a stop watch. At first I tried to record to the nearest second, but then changed this to the nearest minute, as people often interjected and asked questions. Because of this I also chose to only record the main speaker and to count the number of times other participants, or secondary speakers, entered into the discussion or asked a question, rather than the duration of each of these interruptions.

The meeting was followed by a large *kai* (feast) in which I continued to observe non-formal meeting roles, such as preparing, serving and clearing away the food. Being the only *Papa'a* and eating the local delicacies with my hands, which is culturally appropriate, I began to feel mutual respect forming between myself and the meeting participants.

Before leaving the meeting I approached three meeting participants, two women and one man, all of who agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview. I gave them an information sheet and explained briefly about my research and what would be involved in the interview. They each gave me their contact details and asked for me to contact them to arrange a time. After the meeting, as this was my first structured observation, I made some slight adjustments to my structured observation template so as to more easily and logically record my observations.

I followed this approach for each meeting I attended. First gaining permission to attend, gaining informed consent from the chairperson and giving them an information sheet and explaining my research. The chairperson would explain this to attendees during the meeting, or ask me to stand and explain it myself. I positioned myself amongst the participants where I could easily observe the meeting. At the end of the first four meetings, I approached two or three participants to arrange semi-structured interviews to follow-up my observations. As there were only women present during my last two structured observations, and due to my full interviewing schedule, I chose to speak informally to a few participants after the meeting about my observations. These conversations were recorded in my field journal, explained in more detail below.

I always brought *koha* (gifts) in the form of food, as generosity and reciprocity are important values in Cook Islands culture. I expressed my gratitude which is a key value through thanking the chairperson and meeting participants for allowing me to attend. At all of these meetings there was someone who knew my family. This was important as family and relationships are paramount in the Cook Islands, reflected in the *Tivaevae* model. Because of this I felt I was less intrusive as I was not considered an 'outsider'.

The importance of family connections and a shared history became most apparent during one of the AGM meetings advertised in the newspaper. I initially had difficulty making contact, and after leaving a couple of messages both over the phone and in the organisation's office in person, I managed to reach the organiser. The woman on the end of the phone was not particularly engaging but gave me permission to attend. On arrival she sat me to one side and the other participants gave me a wide berth. Near the end of the meeting I was asked to introduce myself. When I explained my family background I literally saw the penny drop and after the meeting she and another women approached me to say that they remembered me when I was a child and that they had both worked with my dad. The organiser cleared her busy schedule for an interview and drove me home after the meeting. On leaving the island she arranged especially to come and say goodbye and presented me with a beautiful handmade *kikau* broom from one of the outer islands. The sliding scale from outsider to an insider was starkly obvious.

Reflections on structured observations

Structured observations were both a useful research method for data collection and also helped: to frame the research; assisted with the selection of participants for interviews; and enabled rapport to be built with participants prior to interviewing, which is a key factor to conducting good interviews (Akerly & True, 2010, p. 169). Observing women and men express their political 'voice' deepened my understanding of how women exercised political power in practice.

Collecting easily quantifiable data helped remove some bias by incorporating findings into my research that I may not have focused on as a female Pakeha researcher. Following up these observations provided a mutual learning experience. Participants were asked to reflect on observed meeting protocol during semi-structured interviews, which they were not consciously aware of,

while at the same time my assumptions over observing perceived gender roles were challenged.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews are less formal than structured interviews and allow for more open and flexible dialogue between the researcher and participant (Akerly & True, 2010, p. 168; Bryman, 2008, p. 438). A question schedule is generally prepared beforehand, however this relates to more general themes for discussion, and does not need to be rigorously observed (Walter, 2010, p. 301). The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that it allows for participants' own ideas about the research topic to emerge and be followed up with further questions and discussion (Bryman, 2008, p. 438; O'Leary, 2010, p. 195). As the aim of this research was to go beyond numbers, more in-depth data collection and analysis was required, making semi-structured interviewing an appropriate qualitative method. Cook Islanders, like other Pacific Island people, have an oral cultural tradition, and are gifted story tellers with the ability to weave together rich narratives which could be best-captured using this research technique. Awareness of Pacific research methodologies was invaluable for my interviewing. I was conscious not to interrupt participants' flow of story-telling. I took note when interviewing a New Zealander married to a Cook Islander that this participant's answers were kept short, and drawing out rich data required an alternative technique involving more frequent open ended questions to maintain a consistent dialogue. This is an example of the importance of flexibility in the research process as I was able to adapt my data collection technique to meet the needs of the participant (Journal entry, 3 July, 2012).

A question schedule and prompts were designed before entering the field. This reflected the main aim and objectives of the research and was read by my supervisors and colleagues for applicability and suitability for the study

purposes. The schedule was made available to participants at the beginning of each interview for feedback, and I explained to them that it was a guide so as to encourage participants to have a more active role in directing the conversation. At the end of each interview I asked my participants if there was anything else they would like to share. Often fruitful data would flow from the dialogue which followed. All of the participants gave their informed consent for the interviews to be digitally recorded. This can be viewed as intrusion or as an obstacle to open discussion as participants may feel self-conscious being recorded. However, it also allows for the researcher to focus more intently on the conversation, and better capture data for enhanced understanding during analysis (O'Leary, 2010, p. 203).

Selecting interview participants

Participants were asked to take part in interviews using a combination of snowballing and purposive sampling. My intention was to interview between 12 and 16 participants, including meeting participants to follow-up my structured observations and two key informants, selected for their prominent position, and therefore perceptive knowledge of civil society (Bryman, 2008, p. 409). Before leaving for the field I made contact with family friends on Rarotonga, who put me in email communication with a woman involved in Cook Islands political reformation. She offered to assist in arranging my initial interviews with key informants. Tragically, a couple of days before I was leaving for the field her young son passed away suddenly, so she could understandably not be involved in assisting with the research process.

On arrival to Rarotonga I received a list from my family friends of over 50 women and their contact details, which I felt very grateful for, but also a little overwhelmed and unsure of who to contact first. I chose to begin my field research by attending civil society meetings to structurally observe. From these meetings I used purposive sampling to systematically select

participants who were involved in civil society (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). After each structured observation, I approached several meeting attendees to ask them to participate in a 40-minute semi-structured interview. Key informants were contacted in person or by phone, including a third key informant from the national civil society umbrella organisation. The two women heads of government ministries were recommended by several interviewees, as was the newly elected woman member of parliament. Although these were not my originally intended participants, I felt my research should be participant driven where possible, so I invited these women to have their voices included within the study using the snowballing sampling technique of networking (Bryman, 2008, p. 699).

Semi-structured interviews in practice

Interviews were scheduled at times and places convenient to the participants. I worked around people's work, family, community, church and international travel commitments. Much rescheduling went on due to family funerals, a state funeral, and attendance at international NGO workshops. The interviews were conducted during work, lunch and afternoon breaks, while preparing for funerals, cooking Sunday lunch, and during a tea-break at a local government workshop. They were held at a government office, NGO rooms, a private house, community hostel, restaurant and café, and at a spare room at the local TV station. I provided fruit juice for participants or offered to buy them a coffee or juice at the restaurant and café to show reciprocity and appreciation of the time taken from their busy schedules to participate in my research.

The aim of the research was explained to participants at the beginning of each interview and an information sheet given to them to read. The interview process was explained and also how long the interview was expected to take. Confidentiality was assured and permission sought to use the digital recorder.

At the end of each interview, the interview participants were asked if they were still willing to give their consent and if there was anything they had said that they did not want included in the study. I then asked each of them to sign a consent form which gave them the option of having their transcript returned to them. Only one participant opted for this and the interview transcript was emailed to them. All of the participants agreed to be digitally recorded and none of them asked for anything to be omitted from the research.

Table 5.1 shows participants who were invited and agreed to be interviewed, and those who were interviewed. Due to the time limit for fieldwork some of the interviews could not be rescheduled and one male meeting participant did not return my phone calls or email correspondence. By the end of the fieldwork period, I felt I had reached saturation with 12 interviews and no new themes emerging from the data collected.

Table 5.1: Semi-structured interviews

	Invited	Participated
	Meeting participants	
Meeting 1	2 (W)+ 1 (M)	1 (W)
Meeting 2	1 (W) + 1 (M)	1 (W) + 1 (M)
Meeting 3	2 (W) + 1 (M)	1 (W) + 1 (M)
Meeting 4	1 (W) + 1 (M)	1 (W) + 1 (M)
Meeting 5	(Informal group discussion)	
Meeting 6	(Informal group discussion)	
	Key Informants	
	3 (W)	3 (W)
	HOMs	
	2 (W)	2 (W)
	MP	
	1 (W)	0 (W)
Total	16 12 (W) 4 (M)	12 9(W) 3 (M)

Key: W = women; M = men; HOMs = heads of government ministries

Reflections on semi-structured interviewing

Most participants had very busy schedules and I learned not to schedule interviews too close together as even though the interview would be for an hour, participants would often want to chat afterwards. It was during these times when the digital recorder was switched off that valuable information would flow. These conversations, along with informal dialogue over preparing food and washing dishes, and in church pews or over coffee, was recorded in my field journal.

FIELD JOURNAL

Journaling involves recording daily observations, activities, informal conversations and reflections while on the field site (Boulton & Hammersley, 2006, p. 249; Bryman, 2008, p. 417). Extensive notes were taken daily throughout the fieldwork, enabling me to make reflections on the research throughout the process.

Journaling reflections

Many of my reflections were on my positionality. I felt emotionally connected to my fieldwork site and was interested in political, social and environmental issues beyond my research topic. I feel that this was reflected during my interviews with participants, and because of my genuine concern for the wellbeing of the Cook Islands people, my participants were more open towards me in sharing information. Acknowledging my positionality was important as it would have been difficult to be completely removed and objective from the participants, and I feel this would have been unfavourable to both the participants and the research.

My first reflection on beginning this research was my lack of self-awareness of my own political power, yet I was soon to be interviewing Cook Island women about the meaning that this had for them. Exploring this within my own cultural context, I kept a journal prior to going to the 'field', on my own experiences of approaching political power. I chose to exercise my political 'voice' by writing and presenting an oral submission to a New Zealand parliamentary select committee and by joining a political party. I found this incredibly liberating, especially having worked in the public sector for six years. I also found it time consuming attending party meetings and confrontational being questioned by seasoned politicians during the select committee hearing. It was noted that there was only one woman MP out of

the twelve members on the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee that I attended. However, I felt the male chairperson was encouraging and I felt listened to by both sides of the political spectrum. Fortunately I had the time available to attend the select committee hearing and I also had the financial means to get to Wellington where it was held. I received a lot of support and encouragement from friends and family. This experience allowed me to better understand political empowerment and the different forms of power described by Rowlands, outlined in Chapter Two. This experience proved useful in my semi-structured interviewing, as I felt better equipped to contribute to the discussion with my participants. However, it was important to note on reflection that this experience of exercising political power was somewhat different from that experienced by the women in my field research.

DATA ANALYSIS

The process by which the empirical data was analysed differed according to whether it was a quantitative or qualitative data set. The data collected during the structured observations was organised into table format and aspects of the quantitative data was selected to be calculated using percentages and compared with the same variables within meetings as well as across meetings where women and men were present. Key findings from this quantitative data set are presented using statistical graphs in Chapter Six. The qualitative data set was managed differently, with major themes emerging from the data by listening to the digital recordings of interviews during the fieldwork to get a sense of what information was being collected, and through the process of transcribing on arrival back from the field (Schmidt, 2004, p. 254). These themes were colour coded and systematically identified in the qualitative data produced. This included the insights and activities captured in the field journal (Bryman, 2008, p. 233). Using a mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data collection

techniques, and a range of research participants, allowed for triangulation of the data, thus supporting both reliability and validity of the data collected (Bryman, 2008, p. 379; Foster, 2006, p. 89; Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 26; Kelle & Erzberger, 2004, p. 174).

Analysing data collected is essential to the research process, and is where the researcher chooses carefully what is presented in the study. While remaining as objective as possible is important, one must be aware of one's own bias, and that results are being interpreted in accordance with the conceptual frame of the study, thus allowing for an understanding of what the findings indicate in terms of the specific research aim and objectives (Walter, p. 484). The findings in Chapter Six are presented with this in mind by endeavouring to provide space for participants' voices to 'speak' within the context in which they were expressed. As participants were interviewed in English, which is a second language to many Cook Islanders, some direct quotes used in Chapter Six were either edited or have words inserted using parenthesis to clarify meaning.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As this was only a small study within the context of the Cook Islands, it is recognised that there are many limitations to the research (Walter, 2010, p. 382). This study primarily focused on civil society, where women were most likely to be exercising their political voice as the aim was to learn directly from women's experiences involved informally in politics. There are many more aspects of Cook Islands society which are important for gaining a broader understanding of women's political empowerment. These include investigating gender relations within the household, the church, indigenous decision making structures and national parliament. This research was limited to the socio-political context of the Cook Islands, however there may

be lessons learned or insights gained that have relevance to other locations, especially within the Pacific Region, where women have the lowest representation in national parliament worldwide.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodological approach undertaken in this study, including experiences from the 'field' and techniques for data analysis. The methodological approach adopted in this study, although drawing heavily from a social constructionist post-positivist approach, remained flexible in its selection of data collection methods. The mixed methods utilised in this study of structured observation, semi-structured interviewing and journaling were selected in line with the key objectives and aim of the study. The development research principles, influenced by Pacific methodologies, and including ethical considerations, guided the field research, and were essential in conducting the study in a culturally appropriate and critically reflexive manner. This chapter concluded with procedures for the data analysis.

This chapter sets the scene for the presentation of the findings in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research findings from six structured observations of civil society meetings and 12 semi-structured interviews with three female key informants, two female heads of government ministries, and four female and three male civil society meeting participants. Insights from journal observations and informal conversations recorded during the four weeks of fieldwork on Rarotonga are also provided. The findings of the research are presented in line with the key objectives of the study, which were:

1. To gain an understanding of the conceptualisation of women's political empowerment within Cook Islands civil society; and
2. To explore the ways in which women in Cook Islands civil society exercise political power.

The research findings linked to the first objective focus mainly on participants' understanding of women's political empowerment as being formal political representation. This was discussed at length in the interviews, including the factors which constrain Cook Islands women from achieving political empowerment through national politics. Findings related to the second research objective are then presented, beginning with the structured observations and follow-up interviews, and then organised by the major themes, selected through a process of qualitative data analysis described in Chapter Five. These themes interlink, but are arranged as follows. Firstly, many women use 'subtle strategies' when advocating for political and social change. Secondly, women in civil society may work simultaneously, for and with, government to bring about this change. Thirdly,

women often juggle a multitude of roles in their approach to contributing to and influencing Cook Islands society.

WOMEN'S FORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The first objective of the study was to gain an understanding of the meaning of women's political empowerment within the context of Cook Islands civil society. Half of the interview participants were asked "what does women's political empowerment mean to you?" The other half also talked about political empowerment, without this question to prompt them, as this had been explained in the information sheet as being the central focus of the research. Most participants concentrated their response on women's elected representation in national parliament. Women's low formal political representation was concerning to many participants. One male meeting participant conveyed that:

"All Cook Islanders have political aspirations. It means that becoming a MP [member of parliament] of your district, all of a sudden, [you're] the head of the table."

He went on to explain that prior to parliamentary democracy, leadership within Cook Islands society was decided along bloodlines, and that democracy had opened up opportunities for leadership among all people, which was something Cook Islanders relished. Only one participant, a female head of a government ministry, mentioned possibilities for women's political empowerment outside of national parliament:

"I think being a woman in parliament, that's great [but that's] not necessarily going to get the change that you want. Not necessarily going to mean that you hear woman's voices... [It might be more effective] having more women in other areas... such as heads of

[government] ministries and other senior government roles... There are other ways.”

The majority of the remaining participants, when asked, agreed that women could contribute to political decision making from outside national parliament. However, most were of a similar mindset that national parliament was the ideal space for women to achieve political empowerment within Cook Islands society. One female meeting participant admitted that she may have been swayed in her views by workshops on gender:

“I think it is a little bit of both, I wouldn't mind seeing more women in parliament, maybe I've been influenced with the workshops about gender balance, so could be a bit biased with these visions of gender equality. Quite fair when you think about it, because I grew up in an environment where it was men, men, men, our cultural traditions has to be a man, only men can do this, only men can do that, only men can be the decision makers.”

Findings relating to participant's concerns over a lack of gender awareness in national policy development, and women's policy interests not being taken into due consideration, are presented below.

Gendered policy interests

A few of the participants remarked on the need for a higher representation of women in formal decision making, both at a local and national level, so as to support gender-awareness in all policy development. “Women have a different way of thinking from men, on what [their policy] interests are,” stated one female meeting participant. These interests included community and social issues as well as infrastructure development such as building

airports, wharves and roads to support economic livelihoods. A couple of participants commented on women on the island of Mauke having not been consulted in the building of new roads. These roads had by-passed an area, difficult to traverse on foot, where women collected leaves from *maire* bushes, which is a lucrative export commodity. A couple of interview participants also expressed concern about the differing impacts of climate change and natural disasters on men and women. They felt women were not being adequately consulted on strategies for climate change adaptation and disaster management, which as mentioned in Chapter Four are key concerns for the Cook Islands and are important funding categories for international donors.

During my fieldwork I attended a session on trade development at the Mayoral Forum. This forum had gathered all 10 Island Council mayors, one of whom was a woman. The discussion focused on exporting goods from the outer islands to the local produce and crafts market in Rarotonga. Most of the men, including the male facilitators, were primarily interested in the export of fresh agricultural produce. The woman mayor, however, took the opportunity to turn the discussion to exporting women's crafts, which are sought after by both tourists and locals on Rarotonga (Journal entry, 3 July 2012). I reflected on this session with a male meeting participant who was involved in organising the forum. He agreed that women needed to be represented in larger numbers so as to have their interests heard and taken seriously. He expressed concern that if it was not for the one woman mayor, women's economic livelihood interests would not have been put forward for discussion.

Women's policy interests

A few of the interview participants indicated that women's interests were not being given adequate consideration in national political decision making. One key informant spoke about women's issues not being taken seriously by

male politicians: “When the issue of women’s [policy interests] are brought up [it is] met with laughter.” Another participant also indicated that women’s interests were not being taken into adequate consideration by her statement that “it’s not just woman's issues that aren’t getting the space in parliament but all social issues.” This criticism was also directed towards the current sole woman MP, by one female meeting participant, who questioned the MP’s commitment to addressing issues disproportionately affecting women, especially family violence. Nearly half of the participants in the study mentioned domestic violence as an important issue affecting women in Cook Islands society.

The male former MP talked about how his portfolio, while in parliament, was to represent the Women’s Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. When asked to reflect upon whether he performed this public duty well, he replied: “with woman's interests I don't believe so, but there are aspects of their interests that I am in a position to really go all out to support them.” Several participants mentioned that significantly increasing the numbers of women holding seats in parliament would change the dynamics in the predominantly male parliament, allowing women’s interests to be expressed more freely in national decision making. The female former MP reflecting on her term in parliament stated: “If there had been more of us [women in parliament], things would have been good. Things would have moved forward more steadily.”

Critical mass

The need for a critical mass of women parliamentarians was seen by several participants, including two former members of parliament, one female and one male, and a female head of a government ministry as necessary in strengthening women’s political voice and for moving women’s policy

interests forward. Challenging social attitudes towards women's leadership was another reason given by a female meeting participant:

“So people can come away from that mentality that has to be only men; that only men can decide, because even today, even with gender equality, people still underestimate women.”

A key informant talked about parliament as being a “boys’ club” and that women did not feel they belonged. Parliament was also described as “a political beast” by a female head of a government ministry, with “unwritten rules” that if women played by they would have a better chance of being elected. The former female MP spoke about the difficulties she faced during her time in parliament as there were only two other women serving as MPs at the time. Her first parliamentary duty was to make the male MPs “a cup of tea”. Another participant relayed her experience as a journalist interviewing another newly elected woman MP. “What is it like being amongst all men in Parliament?” she asked. “Ah, you know, I just make them a cup of tea, I make them a cup of tea and you know just help out.”

Temporary special measures

Support for temporary special measures (TSMs), or an electoral quota system for women, as a way to increase women's representation in national parliament, has had a mixed response from Cook Islanders, which was commented on by some of the participants. One key informant, an active proponent of TSMs, relayed a conversation she had had with male MPs where she had raised the idea of gender quotas:

“What if there were 23 women in Parliament and only one man? How many men would you like? I want 50%. The men look at you and horror, 23 women in Parliament. No!”

This key informant also spoke of her difficulty in getting some women to support the adoption of TSMs:

“Strong women aren't seeing [gender] inequality [in society] because they are already in positions of power. They say ‘why should we do TSMs? I worked hard to get where I am, why are we giving them [women] the easy way?’”

A couple of participants also voiced their criticism of TSMs, that women should be achieving “on merit” and a male meeting participant saw that TSMs would “defeat the whole purpose of democracy.” This meeting participant did, however, express his support of women running for parliament through the general election, as did the two other male meeting participants.

Men supporting women

The three male meeting participants did not see women’s low parliamentary representation as a gender issue and voiced their support for women entering into formal politics, “[women’s low representation in parliament] is nothing to do with men blocking them... We support our women... If women are driven to go ahead and lead they will get into politics.” Another male participant voiced his support as:

“The men encourage, I for one encourage women. My sister contested, she was the first one to contest for a parliamentary seat. I voted for her but she didn’t get a seat and I said ‘okay you had your turn, now it's my turn’. Women voted for me.”

One talked about how support for women's formal political leadership was reflected in Cook Islands women being accepted as traditional leaders since the early 1800s. As outlined in Chapter Four, the arrival of the missionaries prompted a shift for women in chiefly families to inherit titles previously reserved for the oldest male:

“I think today [the low representation of women in parliament] isn't to do with gender, for us Cook Islanders from 1840s we've accepted that our women are leaders.”

A couple of the female research participants also mentioned that the current all-male government was showing signs of support for women's leadership within formal politics. One female head of a government ministry mentioned that:

“This government has shown there is value for women to be in decision-making positions, not just parliament but in general... But they really do look at merit, so they are really trying to push women of merit, not just women, and I think that's fine.”

This was evident during my fieldwork when six out of the 10 appointments made for heads of government ministries, were women, including two new female heads of government ministries for the Ministry of Health and Office of the Prime Minister (Cook Islands News, 27 June 2012). A woman speaker of the house of parliament, who had been recently appointed, also took up her new position (Cook Islands Herald, 21 March 2012). While the men interviewed voiced their support for women to enter politics, women were often criticised for not supporting other women's political aspirations, thereby resulting in women's low representation in national parliament.

Some women not supporting women

From day one of my fieldwork, a common response from people I spoke to about my research was that women's low representation in national parliament was due to "women not voting for women" (Journal entry, 18 June, 2012). This was discussed with some of the participants during the interviews. One male meeting participant mentioned that women were "maintaining the status quo" by not voting for other women. Several female participants talked about women not encouraging each other or "not allowing each other to get up there" and that "women are their own worst enemy." One key informant when asked whether women supported women's formal political aspirations responded: "That's a cliché. Women support women. But if I don't like you, I'm not going to support you." During my interviews it became evident that Cook Islands women were not one united group, and that there were many differences among women which kept them divided on a political front.

Women's diversity

Women's differing viewpoints and interests can be linked to experiences of political party allegiance, class, race, education, work opportunities, age and geographical location. The Cook Islands is geographically dispersed over 15 islands which are spread over two million square kilometres of ocean. This wide geographical distribution of people adds to the diversity among women as each island or group of islands has its own cultural nuances. The following quotes are provided to illustrate these divergent life experiences and characteristics which create diversity among women.

During the field research a woman stood in a parliamentary bi-election for a constituency seat on Rarotonga (Cook Islands News, 4 July 2012). As outlined in Chapter Four the current government is run by the Cook Islands Party (CIP), while the Democratic Party (Demos) sits in opposition. It

became apparent that women were not always united on the political spectrum, with one female meeting participant stating, “I don’t like who she is standing for, the Demos.” While another interviewee, reflecting on the general election, stated that: “We have always been CIP, [I] will vote that way.” Running for parliamentary seats is costly and involves strategic political manoeuvring; therefore it is often restricted to those from wealthy or politically elite families.

Family wealth and connections were seen as important factors by one female participant when running for formal politics. This participant perceived this as a barrier to her standing for election: “I wasn’t brought up in a high standard of living. [I have] no family status.” Women involved in high level leadership positions were also seen as elite by one female participant as they “only go to the golf club or the rich man's club.” This difference in socio-economic positioning, along with higher education and overseas work experience, was perceived by a few women as a divisive factor as it gave some women a competitive edge over others in obtaining leadership roles. However, these ‘elite’ women were at times shunned as cultural outsiders, as their perspectives, shaped through their overseas experiences, were sometimes seen as a threat to cultural values and norms.

Migration to New Zealand, Australia and other larger Pacific islands for education and employment opportunities is common for many Cook Islanders, as discussed in Chapter Four. Although many of the participants interviewed had lived overseas, one female meeting participant who had not, commented on one woman leader’s approach to decision-making as lacking cultural awareness: “[She has] been overseas a long time then comes back here.” The perception of overseas experience as bringing change that was not always appreciated was apparent to a couple of participants who had grown-up in New Zealand. One stated that she was “still considered newly back and foreign in my thinking” and another when referring to her NGO that people

“look at us as all just a bunch of either *Papa’a*, or half-caste, or Cook Islanders that grew up in New Zealand.” It is often young women who are afforded these education and work opportunities, which may be responsible for pushing the generation gap between women wider.

A generation gap between women was alluded to by a few of the participants. One participant had been told “my hands haven’t been in the taro patch long enough,” in that she did not have the wisdom that comes from experience. Younger women were mentioned by one participant in relation to women’s political leadership as being “more accepting of the changes than in comparison to the ones that are older.” However, one key informant had a differing opinion when it came to younger women supporting campaigns for gender equality:

“More professional young women, 20-35, don't think there is a problem. Lots of them have gone to university. [They have] got great jobs. So what's the problem? [It is difficult] getting them to realise there are underlying issues.”

In my final interview with a key informant I asked her to reflect on her role as a national women’s leader in bringing Cook Islands women together as a diverse group. She responded with a statement that captured the need to celebrate and support women’s differences, including their geographical location:

“Uniting them in their representation, uniting them in their diversities, ensuring they never forget that, although there are some common things [such as] education, health, there are still some important things that they must keep as island woman... whether they're from Penrhyn, Mangaia or Rarotonga”.

The above quotes illustrate that women are not a homogenous group; therefore they may have diverse policy interests according to their socio-economic status, age, race, ethnicity, geographical location and political beliefs. Despite these differences, however, women do share some commonalities in relation to cultural expectations of gender roles which are detailed below.

Cultural leadership roles

Men's gender role, as head of the household in Cook Islands society, was reported by several participants as being a cultural factor in the underrepresentation of women in formal political decision-making. One female head of a government ministry stated, "there is still a subconscious [view] that men have more authority" and a female meeting participant stated that Cook Islanders "have always had that mentality that men, men, men, are the head of the household." Another key informant stated "when it comes to voting, men are the head of the household" and that women are "not as empowered in the home as they would be in public." A few of the female participants talked about how gender leadership roles were a part of Cook Islanders' upbringing. One key informant articulated:

"Because that's how women have been brought up. Men do the chanting...welcoming people onto the *marae* [traditional meeting place] or wherever. The men stand up. The men become deacons in church. Sit in the pulpit. Always men."

Gender leadership roles were seen as being more prevalent on the outer islands. One key informant shared her experience of administering a development project on one of the Northern Group islands: "Having a woman boss was a barrier for them. [The men] struggled to take that on-board,

taking instruction from a woman.” This participant went on to explain that there were no women employed on the island which made working with a woman in paid employment a new experience for many of her employees. Men are often also seen as the economic provider in Cook Islands culture, where women are associated with caring roles within the home and community.

Division of labour

Prescribed gender roles are prevalent in the division of labour in the Cook Islands: “[It is] part of our culture, women have to cook and clean up the house before the guests...men just do the grace.” This was mentioned as an impediment to women running for parliament:

“I have an aunt in Manihiki who ran in the last election. [She] found it difficult because she had to go to the other island to do her lobbying and then come home and cook for her husband, clean the house all that kind of stuff. Where if he was standing for election she would be doing all that stuff and cooking for his supporters.”

The former woman MP reiterated a similar experience in that she was late being sworn into parliament on her first day because the button holes on her suit had not been cut. She had ironed her suit, fed her children breakfast and taken them to school. These tasks she said would have been done for the men in parliament by their wives, and although her husband was financially supportive, it would be asking too much to expect assistance in areas considered to be her responsibility as a woman (Journal entry, 1 July 2012). Another key informant, a strong supporter of gender equality in formal politics, talked about her personal struggle with gender roles within the household:

“How do you compromise your feminist views without stepping over your own cultural values? At home I am doing the dishes. I go back to my traditional [role]”.

The above findings are examples of Kandiyoti's (1988) 'patriarchal bargain', described in Chapter Two, in that these highlight the importance for these women in retaining gender relations within the family for economic and emotional security, even when directly challenging inequitable structures outside the household. Despite these cultural roles for men and women several participants did feel that shifts were happening that allowed women to have a stronger voice and increased their opportunities outside of caring roles and domestic duties within the home.

Shifting roles

Like culture, gender roles, are not static, and this was evident through several comments made by participants. One key informant shared her experience growing up, questioning gender roles:

“[I had a] traditional mum that said ‘girls in the home, boys out there’ but somehow some way I wasn’t traditional in my thinking, I would always query ‘why do I have to clean the house and they get to go to the taro patch and feed the pigs, I want to go there’.”

Two female meeting participants both talked about being encouraged as children to “speak out.” On reflection one said she had “never really felt held back by being a woman. I do speak my mind” and the other, “we have more space to be ourselves and to realise our potential than in comparison to our mothers and our mother’s mothers.” Another had witnessed changes in the division of household labour as women became more involved in paid

employment: “In some homes [housework is] starting to be shared because the woman is still at work and the man still works.”

The three male meeting participants also reported changes in gender leadership roles:

“I don’t think it's about woman you can't do that, only men do that... [I] go to meetings and women will be stronger [than men], more vocal [than men], making the same decisions as men, some are leading the charge.”

Another male participant spoke about his childhood in relation to women’s leadership: “It depends on your upbringing. My mum was the boss...Many of my bosses have been women. [I] support them one hundred per cent.” A male meeting participant, a Pentecostal pastor, reflected on the changes he had witnessed recently in the church:

“In the church circle traditionally only men preach the Word of God, but that trend has changed. In the Assembly of God denomination we in the Cook Islands now have two ordained female pastors. That's a big change. So tradition is gradually being improved to be more conducive to the environment we are in now.”

During my fieldwork I attended an Assembly of God church service where I observed a local woman pastor lead the service and a visiting woman pastor from New Zealand deliver the sermon (Journal entry, 24 August 2012). A female key informant also spoke about this shift starting to occur in the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), especially on the outer islands where populations were on the decline due to outward migration. She did point out, however, that there were still issues for women’s leadership within the church:

“The churches are changing... Some islands have female deacons ... [but] women don't preach from the pulpit... Asked ‘why don't you preach from the pulpit?’ It is because women get their periods... [that is] still perceived as a disgusting thing for a woman to have... In some islands in the north, Penrhyn. Women aren't allowed to talk in church.”

As noted in Chapter Four, the Cook Islands, is a predominantly Christian country. Women’s changing leadership role within the church may serve to encourage a shift in cultural attitudes around women’s leadership and serve to encourage more women to stand and be supported in becoming national political leaders.

While much of the focus of discussion during interviews was on women’s political empowerment via formal politics, the second research objective was to explore ways in which women are exercising political power through informal channels. The second part of this chapter therefore presents the findings in relation to women’s political activities in civil society.

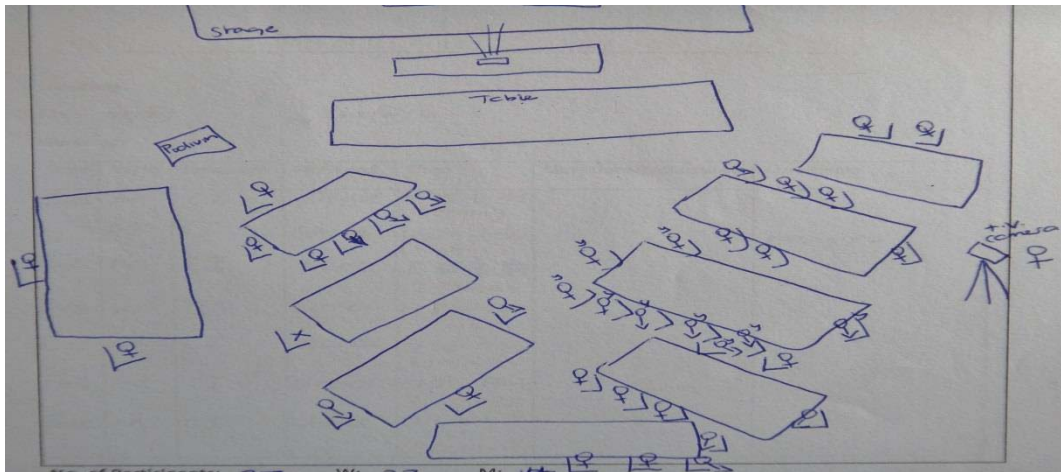
WOMEN EXERCISING POLITICAL POWER IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society, as examined in Chapter Three, is considered in the literature to be the arena in which informal political decision making takes place. Cook Islands civil society provided the context for the fieldwork, in which to explore the ways in which women exercise political power outside of national parliament. Six structured observations of civil society meetings took place, followed by seven semi-structured interviews with meeting participants to unpack these observations.

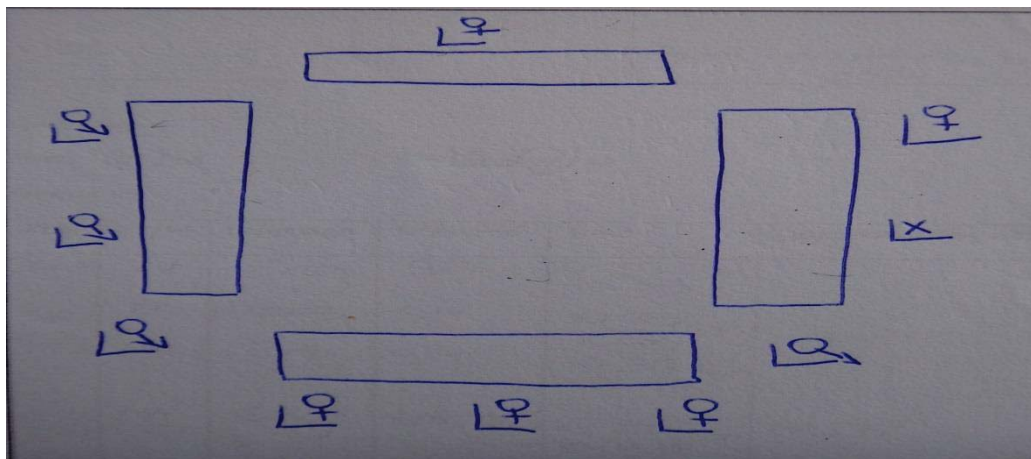
GENDERED 'VOICES' IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Each civil society meeting observed during the fieldwork involved a different organisation, and was conducted in English, Cook Islands Maori or a combination of both languages. The meetings included a community consultation by the national civil society 'umbrella' group, a monthly meeting organised by the national youth committee, a meeting for NGO funding recipients, and three annual general meetings (AGMs), for an environmental NGO, welfare NGO, and business women's network. Figure 6.1 shows the sketches made of the seating arrangements of each meeting according to gender.

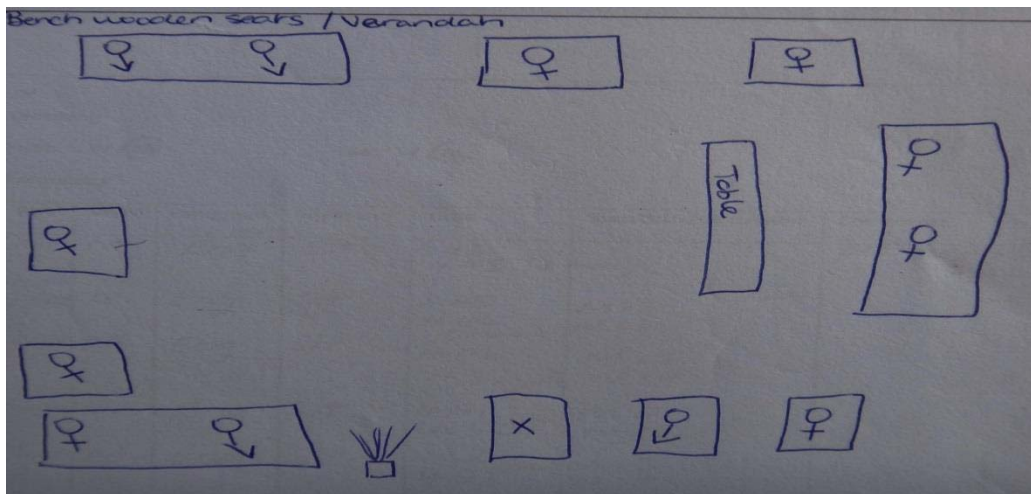
Figure 6.1 Sketches of observed seating arrangements by gender



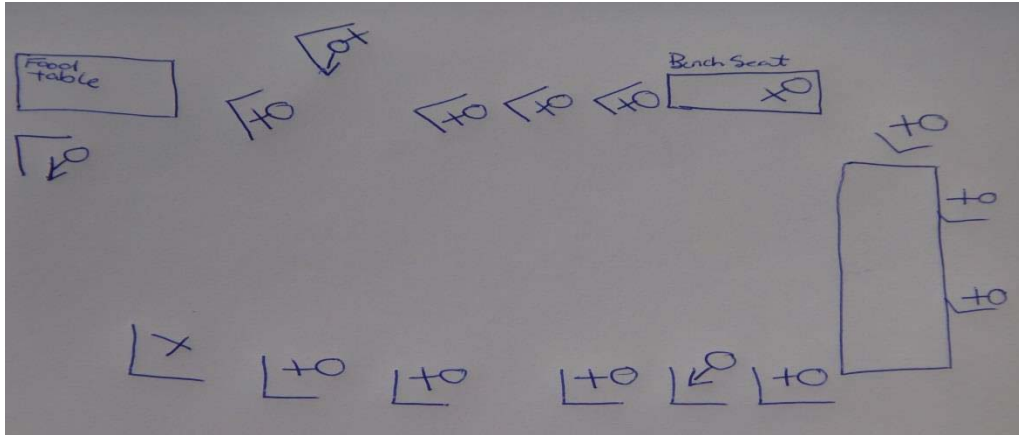
Meeting One



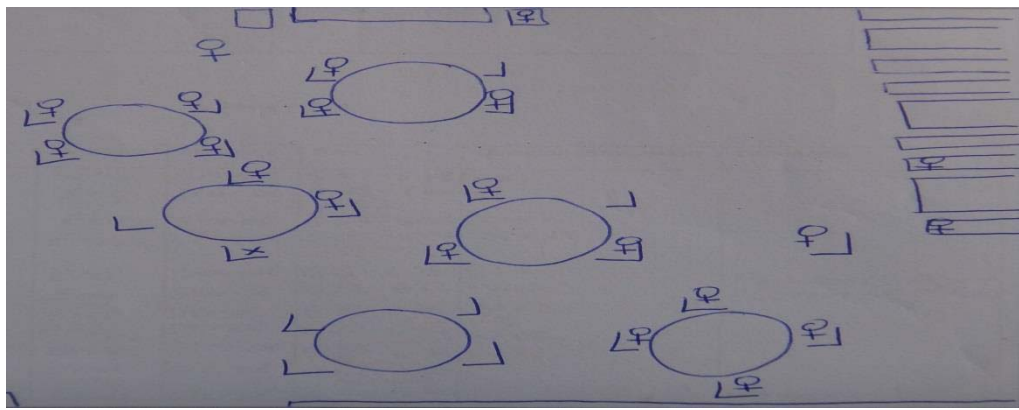
Meeting Two



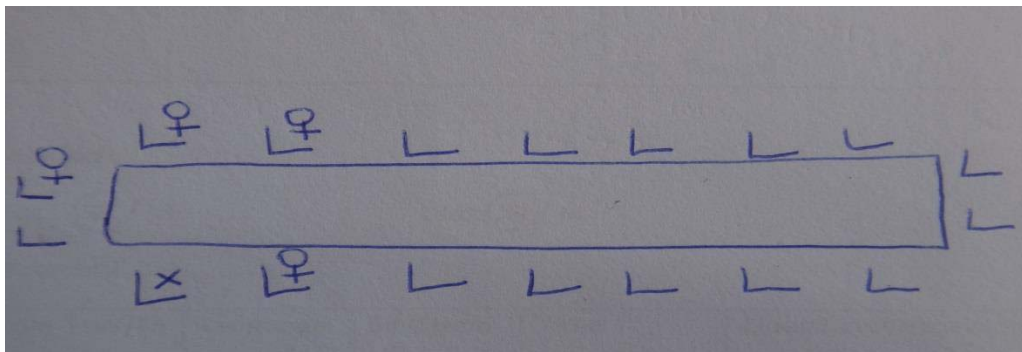
Meeting Three



Meeting Four



Meeting Five



Meeting Six

Key: ♀ = female; ♂ = male; ♀♂ = *tutuvaïne*³; x = observer

³ In Cook Islands society a man who openly exhibits female characteristics, including their appearance and mannerisms, is referred to as a *tutuvaïne*, or *laelae* (Alexeyeff, 2009, p. 116).

The meetings were held at various locations including a church hall, a government department, a paramount chief's residence, a NGO office, a restaurant, and the National Council of Women headquarters. Each meeting was set up with one of two main seating arrangements. The first arrangement, seen in meetings one and five had groups of participants at separate tables facing the chairperson or main speaker who was standing. The second arrangement identified in meetings two, three, four and six had participants seated facing each other, including the chairperson and main speaker who was also seated.

The second meeting arrangement had more contributions to discussion and questions raised during the meeting by secondary speakers (meeting attendees who were not addressing the meeting or leading the discussions), than the first seating arrangement, indicating that the second seating arrangement may have been more conducive to open and collaborative discussion between participants. There were no obvious patterns of where women and men sat in the meetings, although groups of one gender could be seen to form small clusters in three out of the four mixed gender meetings.

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the recorded gendered observations which included the purpose of the meeting, the venue, number of attendees, meeting roles, the length of time each main speaker talked for, the number of questions asked or contributions made to the general discussion by secondary speakers, and language spoken.

Table 6.1 Civil society meetings structured observations

Meeting	1	2	3	4	5	6
Organisation	National Civil Society	Government / NGOs	Environment	Welfare	Business	Youth
Purpose	Community Consultation	Funding Meeting	AGM	AGM	AGM	Monthly Meeting
Venue	Church Hall	Government Office	Paramount Chief's Residence	NGO Office	Restaurant	National Council of Women
Formal meeting roles	President/ Chair - W Treasurer - W Executive Officer - M	Chair /Facilitator - W NGO Reps W (4)/ M (4)	President/ Chair - M Vice-President - M Secretary/ Treasurer - W	President - W Treasurer - W Executive Director- W	President - W Treasurer - W Secretary - W	President- W Vice-President - W Secretary - W Executive Officer - W
Informal meeting roles	Prayer - M Host - W Food - W	Prayer - M Host - W Food - W	Prayer - M Food - W	Prayer - M Host - W Food - T	Prayer - W Host - W	Prayer - W Host - W
Attendees	Total 37 W 23 (62%) M 14 (38%)	Total 9 W 5 (56%) M 4 (44%)	Total 12 W 8 (67%) M 4 (33%)	Total 15 W 12 (80%) M 2 (13%) T 1 (7%)	Total 21 W 21 (100%)	Total 4 W 4 (100%)
Total duration spoken by main speaker	W 60 min (57%) M 45.5 min (43%)	W 73 min (71%) M 30 min (29%)	W 33 min (52%) M 30 min (48%)	W 57.5 min (67%) M 28 min (33%) T 0 min (0%)	W 49.5 min (100%)	W 29 min (100%)
Numbers of contributing statements or questions made by secondary speakers	W 6 (55%) M 5 (45%)	W 54 (78%) M 15 (22%)	W 85 (49%) M 89 (51%)	W 58 (81%) M 14 (19%) T 0 (0%)	W 36 (100%)	W 85 (100%)
Speaking – First (F) / Last (L)	M (F)/W (L)	W (F)/W (L)	M (F)/M (L)	M (F)/M (L)	W (F)/W (L)	W (F)/W (L)
Language	Cook Islands Maori	English	English	Cook Islands Maori / English	English	English

Key: W= women; M = men; T = *tutuvaiane*

Meeting attendees

At four of the six meetings there were both female and male attendees, with one *tutuvaîne* (man who openly exhibits female characteristics) in attendance at meeting four. The business women's network AGM was open only to women, and the monthly youth meeting, although having equal number of men and women on their committee, had only women in attendance. The youth meeting was held at the National Council of Women. When asked if this could have been a factor for the absence of men, the president of the committee replied that she did not believe so. She went on to say that the men did not usually speak during meetings, but would often take responsibility for tasks relating to activities organised by the committee (Journal entry, 9 July, 2012).

Women outnumbered men at the mixed gender meetings. When one female meeting participant was asked why she thought this was, she replied: "[It is] mostly the woman that drive the NGOs...men are more reserved, into sports, rugby...their own things." She also explained, "that's why we picked the representatives of the *vaka* (districts) to be men. It would be too one-sided if it was all women." A male meeting participant reasoned that it was because, "women are more passionate about social issues." According to Moser (1989), discussed in Chapter Two, women are often prescribed caring roles both within the home and the community, which could explain why this participant believed women were more passionate about social issues than men.

Meeting roles

The majority of the formal meeting roles were undertaken by women. Only one meeting had a male chairperson who was also the organisation's president. At all four meetings with mixed gender, a man was asked to say the prayer. When participants were asked why it was a man who led the

prayer, a female participant explained that it was generally someone with status within the church: “[It is] preferably a man, first option...Because a deacon is normally a man. It is rare to have a woman. She is a supporter of the man.” Another female meeting participant admitted she had not noticed who said the prayer, and a male meeting participant who had delivered the prayer explained that when he is chairing he will often give the role to a woman. However, he was cautious in doing so as some people would say: “I can’t,” meaning they were not confident in taking on this role, which could be due to a lack of experience.

Women hosted and/or prepared the food at all of the meetings, except for one meeting where a *tutuvaine* prepared the food. When one female meeting participant was asked why she had prepared the food for the meeting, she replied that it was because she worked at the government department where the meeting was located, and that the man who had held her job previously had also been expected to perform this role. Another female meeting participant explained: “Even at functions, woman do the food and everything, men just do the grace.”

Speaking

At three out of the four mixed gender meetings a man addressed the meeting first, and at two out of the four meetings a man spoke last. In total women spoke for a longer duration than men, and only at the meeting where a man chaired, did men contribute more to the discussion than women. A personal observation was that men and women communicated in different ways. In general it was noted that men took turns to speak without interruption, while women tended to interject while the person was speaking so as to contribute to the discussion (Journal entry, 21 June 2012). One female meeting participant when asked to comment on this, said: “[I’ve] seen it quite a lot. Every time there is a guy talking we will just talk over him and drown him

out.” Another female participant who was also the meeting chairperson, was asked whether men raised men’s issues. She replied, “Not really. [The meetings are] dominated by women. I think it's always been that way. I think we do all the hard work. [Men] don’t seem to care.” When asked “do you think men’s issues are being neglected?” She replied “Yes I think so. There will be issues for men in the future” and men will “become a burden for women if they are unwell.” When a male meeting participant was asked about men and women’s communication styles, he said it was “because of their natural nature... But there are principles of leadership that both have to comply with.” Another female meeting participant also commented on the differences in women and men’s leadership styles:

“Women have their own way of being managers, get more emotional. Men can make decisions without emotions. [I] prefer woman and men to work together.”

Despite women’s voices dominating the meetings, when compared to the ratio of women to men attendees, men spoke longer and more frequently than women in three out of the four mixed gender meetings when compared to their number represented. This is displayed by percentage in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Gender observations of the number of attendees, total speaking duration of main speakers, and numbers of contributions to discussion made by secondary speakers in civil society meetings

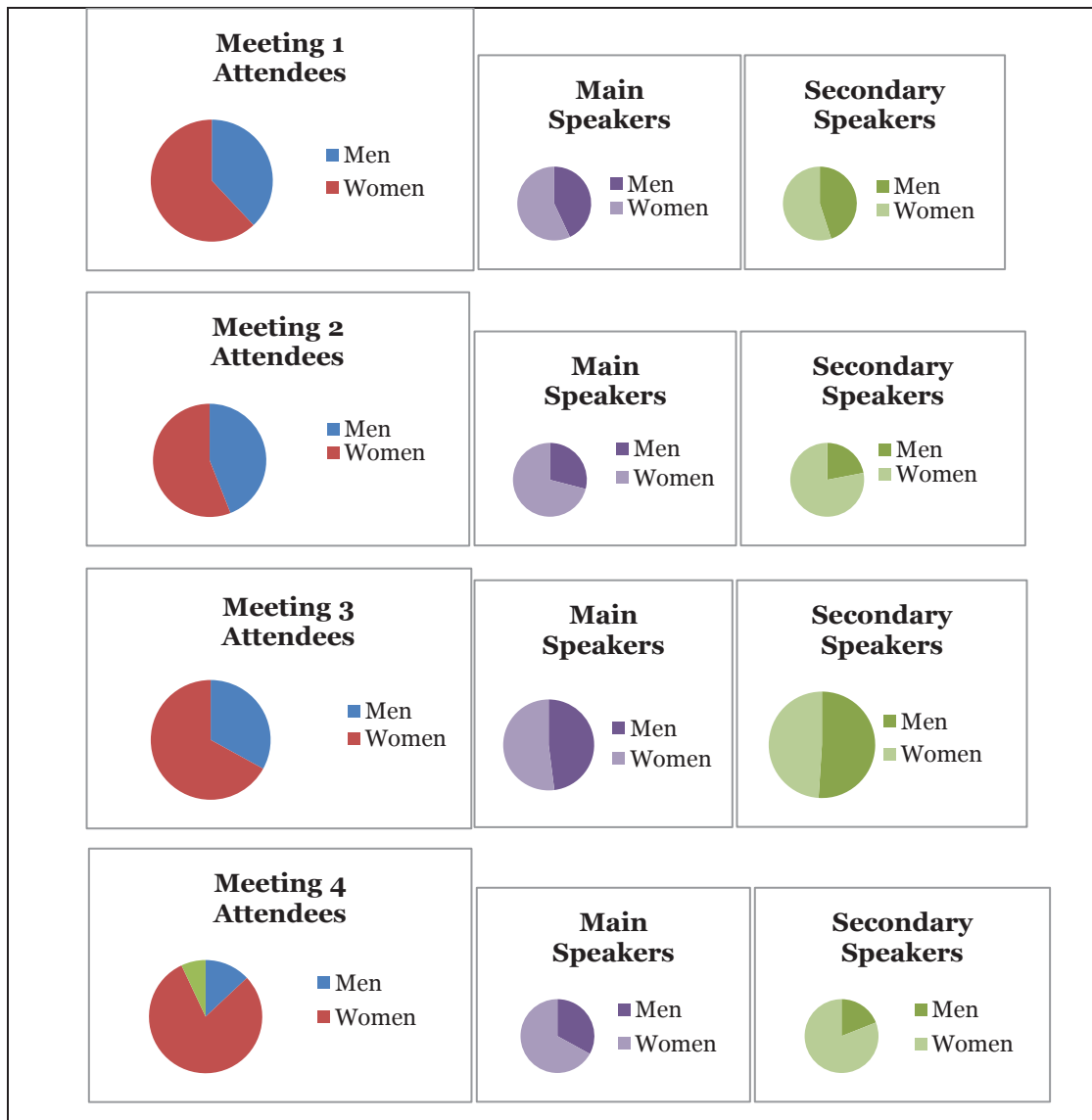


Figure 6.2 shows that notwithstanding men’s lower representation at civil society meetings, men’s voices were heard disproportionately more in relation to their representation than women’s voices, in three out of the four mixed gender meetings. There could be a number of reasons for this finding, including, that due to cultural and traditional norms of male leadership and

decision-making, men have acquired more experience and skill at public speaking and are therefore more confident at putting forward their views; or that because of these cultural and traditional norms men's voices are seen as having more authority and are therefore allocated a higher value than women's voices; or that due to the lower number of men present at meetings they are encouraged to give their views as it is recognised that a diversity of gender perspectives is important in decision-making.

'SUBTLE STRATEGIES'

As discussed in Chapter Two, Scheyvens' (1998, p. 235) research on women's church groups in the Solomon Islands found how these women avoided direct confrontation with those in authority by using 'subtle strategies' to bring about change in ways that were culturally relevant and non-threatening. This concept was reflected in many of the participants' responses to the question: "How do women exercise political power outside of national parliament?" Many used language that denotes that women's political power is understated. "Subtly they are..." replied one key informant when describing how many Cook Islands women held senior leadership positions in government ministries and were also the government's legal advisors from the Crown Law Office. When discussing her own work in promoting women's political leadership on the outer islands, she explained how it was important to "disguise the advocacy work" so as to not create a backlash from those who felt threatened by changes to traditional male leadership roles.

Participants were also asked: "What are your experiences with lobbying government on behalf of your organisation?" One key informant declared "I pick my battles" in that she was careful about which policy issues to challenge the government on and that it was important to "persuade rather than to threaten" the government, by working through the issues in a carefully thought-out manner. A female meeting participant expressed that it was the

NGOs “role to inform government” as opposed to lobby, and that their organisation had “a subtle sort of influence” by gathering research on important issues for the government. Several female participants spoke about working in “partnership” with government, with one remarking that her organisation tries to “complement their [the government’s] work” by collaborating on joint projects.

Being humble in the way women approached political power was seen as an important cultural value: “Here if you’re a woman and you’re humble and you respect people in the community, man or woman will respect you back.” Another participant explained the “island way” as being important in advocating for social and political change, which is “softer, a lot more humble... It is in our culture, church upbringing, and traditional way.” In utilising ‘subtle strategies’ participants were better able to build and maintain crucial relationships, which could be drawn on when campaigning for important social and political change within Cook Islands society.

Relationships

Many participants saw that building and maintaining relationships with and within government ministries and with MPs was a key priority for having NGO policy interests considered at a national level, as well as for obtaining political and financial support. One head of a government ministry reported that “NGOs are quite strong in the advocacy role” and that her ministry had a good working relationship with women’s NGOs who contributed a lot to policy and legislation development. Her ministry encouraged NGOs to be part of and contribute to their National Gender Strategic Plan. The head of a government ministry reported that her role was also one of “advocacy” within government, presenting both her ministry’s and NGOs’ views to ministers and other government departments. She talked about getting women’s interests recognised across ministries: “We have to work on personal

relationships, to get people on board to agree with that [women's policy interests]." This participant openly expressed her appreciation of the newly appointed female chief of staff within the Office of the Prime Minister: "She has been a great champion in support of women's policy. She will make sure that these issues are championed in the Cabinet".

Ministers of parliament were also deemed to be approachable by a couple of key informants. "People get surprised, when you say I can call the Minister." One participant also said that it was possible to be "working with both [political] parties" in getting their organisation's views heard within parliament. During my fieldwork I attended a roundtable dinner organised by the national civil society organisation which the Minister of Finance and Social Development attended (Journal entry, 27 June 2012). One of the key informants explained to me how at the end of the evening she made a request of the Minister:

"I told the Minister we need a head office...The nature of the culture [is that I] can talk one-on-one with the Minister. [They are] not stuck in a beehive in Wellington. In a small community it's networking, it's who you know that opens doors."

An alternative approach used by NGOs to get the attention of MPs was to develop a media strategy around their key policy interests.

Media

A few of the participants mentioned the importance of understanding the role of the media in exercising political power. Creating public awareness of women's policy interests, through regular articles in the daily newspaper and through televised news coverage, served as a way of applying pressure to MPs

to take these issues into consideration in national policy and legislation development.

One key informant stated that: “Politicians are actually taking note of what is happening in the media” and that “maintaining it in the media at all times was the best way to keep it [the policy interests] alive.” This was deemed especially important when key legislation protecting women’s interests was before parliament. This process was seen by the key informant as agonisingly slow and a lot of energy was put in by women’s organisations to keep this legislation from falling behind in the list of government priorities. One key informant spoke about her organisation’s consultative status at the United Nations (UN) and how this was part of her organisation’s media strategy for promoting the protection of women’s rights. To encourage the government to pass legislation in accordance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the key informant published the recommendations made to the Cook Islands government by the UN Committee overseeing CEDAW:

“Cook Islanders love international recognition. I use it as much as I can...I reported in the local paper the feedback from the UN on the implementation of CEDAW. Several [MPs] were horrified that I had done this. ‘Why did you say that? We haven't done this, this and this’. ‘So when you do [implement the recommended changes to legislation] I will say good on [you] government’.”

One meeting participant did however warn that even though she could go directly to the media it was important to “be careful because it’s a small island.” She explained that exposing the government’s shortfalls was not always the best course of action in a small community where relationships were close-knit, as these were the same relationships that the NGO was often reliant on for financial and operational support. Relationships are important

in all human societies, however, in a micro-island state, this importance may be considered magnified due to the smaller degrees of separation. The sometimes non-existent degree of separation between those volunteering in civil society and those working for government is explored in more detail in the section below.

WORKING IN 'PARTNERSHIP'

Many Cook Islanders who volunteer in civil society are also employed by the government as noted in Chapter Four. Rather than seeing this as a conflict of interest, some participants saw this as a way for their NGO to work in 'partnership' with government, sharing resources and ideas for the benefit of the country. The first meeting participant I interviewed was in the boardroom of the government department in which she worked. When asked about her job she responded: "My full-time job is both my NGO hat as well as my daytime job, which is the Ministry." She deemed employment within the public sector as beneficial for her NGO:

"Fortunately we are all in a government role, so we all have computers and e-mails. If there is a council member outside [of government] it would have made it difficult to liaise with them."

Another meeting participant explained how she printed resources for her civil society organisation at her government department job. She did not feel this as breaching her duty as a public servant as it was "not for my benefit but for the benefit of society." However, she did reveal some tension with this: "Some managers don't see it that way... some that are involved in civil society organisations they understand, they let you."

Both female heads of government ministries who were interviewed accepted the fact that some of their employees were involved in NGO work due to

Rarotonga's small population. However, both agreed that this needed to be considered carefully. One head of a government ministry asserted that: "Sometimes they have to be reminded that this is the one [job] that pays the bills." The observation of this tension between volunteering for civil society and being a government employee was described by one female meeting participant: "Sometimes I feel they are in an awkward position because they may know some things but they have to be loyal to their employer." She went on to talk about her experience of volunteering for an NGO and working for a government department: "I knew stuff that the NGO needed to know. I had split loyalties, which was really hard; I was relieved when I left." However, she did see the advantages of "having both perspectives." A male meeting participant who volunteers for an NGO and is employed by government boards, said: "I get stuck in the middle", but he noted that his NGO and the government boards are "collaborating more now."

During my fieldwork, especially when arranging interview times, it quickly became apparent that women in civil society were committed to performing a multitude of roles which included paid employment within government or the NGO sector, voluntary community and church work, childcare, and domestic responsibilities. Research findings which relate to Moser's (1989) concept of the "triple role of women," covered in Chapter Two, are given in the section below, including how the government and aid donors may be a constraining factor on women's political power through the utilisation of women's 'community managing' role to deliver state services.

"WOMEN ARE THE BACKBONE OF THE COUNTRY"

Cook Islands women were referred to as the "backbone of the country" by several participants. This was in reference to the many hours of service women dedicate to community work. One female participant explained that the reason women undertake the bulk of community work is because of the

lack of government funding for social services. At the civil society roundtable dinner the Minister of Finance and Social Development delivered the national budget to the NGOs. The Minister spoke about “stretching the dollar” in relation to civil society delivering public services. Every dollar spent in civil society, he explained, was the equivalent to three dollars spent in government to achieve the same outcome, as much of the work undertaken by NGOs is through low paid or voluntary labour (Journal entry, 27 June 2012).

When one of the key informants was asked to comment on this, she stated “we can see value in strengthening our government. They are the policy decision-makers and we implement it [the services].” This can be seen as an example of what Moser (1989) refers to as women’s complicity in perpetuating the gender division of labour, discussed in Chapter Two. By supporting this government policy this female participant could be seen as undervaluing women’s work through the expectation that women would deliver public services cheaply or unremunerated as part of their ‘community managing’ role.

Bilateral aid donors are also currently funding services to be delivered through NGOs which are often reliant on women’s low-paid or unpaid labour. One female head of a government ministry talked about how aid donors were currently focusing on funding NGOs to deliver social services and the potential impact that this may have on NGO advocacy work:

“NZAID’s view is the value is in the services delivered not the advocacy. If you want to improve a family’s life in the small rural remote outer islands then we don’t want someone on Rarotonga advocating for them saying you need to go and help, we need that money used to go and help those people. That’s a major shift.”

NGO advocacy, as highlighted in the sections above, is an important way for women in civil society to exercise political power through promoting women's policy interests through public awareness raising and by encouraging national decision-makers to take these interests into consideration. Exercising political power in this way can be seen as women meeting a 'strategic gender need' as they challenge structural inequalities and promote social change through political action. As explained in Chapter Two, it is important for donors to be gender aware when implementing development programmes, by recognising and supporting women's 'strategic gender needs', rather than focusing solely on meeting 'practical gender needs' (Moser, 1989, p. 1803).

'Practical gender needs' are often equated with women's interests. This can worsen gender inequalities by confining women to caring roles within society, and lead to overburdening women with the expectation placed on them to deliver 'practical gender needs' to the wider community. This expectation can restrict the potential for long-term solutions to development issues by maintaining the current inequitable structures, which exacerbate poverty through lack of opportunities for marginalised people or groups, including women.

In one male meeting participant's opinion, aid donor funds were "much better to be delivered through civil society" due to past mismanagement by government. This was also mentioned by a female meeting participant, "there is a lot of aid funding from donors...so there is a push for more NGOs to be recognised by government [so as to be eligible to receive donor funding]." However, this participant also stated that "the government wants to take whatever is allocated to the NGOs into government." Another participant also mentioned how the government had utilised her NGO to secure funds to deliver what she referred to as a "political influence project".

This project was in-line with her organisation's aims but had been largely managed and promoted by government officials and ministers.

With increased government and donor support for NGOs increasing women's workloads, a couple of the key informant's mentioned how this was a constraint on women's political voice. One key informant stated:

“When politicians say “women are the backbone”, it is a cultural tool. They hold the community together. Women do, but it is lip service. [The politicians] don't ask women specifically what to do. Women are cooking, women are cleaning, women are in the back. Men are sitting discussing strategies, policies, all that stuff.”

Another key informant stated: “It's easier for women to do community work than to do the political work.” Moser (1989) describes the reason behind this as women's ‘community managing’ role being an extension of their caring role within the home. As this caring role is seen as ‘natural’ for women it is deemed “easier” for women to perform in comparison to political leadership which is often prescribed as a man's role. Challenging this prescribed leadership role, at the same time as performing their triple role, can make it difficult for women to be involved in politics.

“TOO MANY HATS”

Several of the female participant's from civil society organisations talked about the many ‘hats’ they wore. “My NGO hat as well as my...daytime job” and I'm part of the Rotoracts...so it's another hat again.” Another spoke of her “civil society hat”, “fourth hat” and her “multiple hats.” And one female participant, while plaiting *kikau* (coconut palm fronds) in preparation for a family funeral, talked about her multiple roles as wife, mother, community and church leader and volunteer, and full time government employee. She

then sighed, shook her head, and said “too many hats.” I also observed one woman during the civil society roundtable dinner mime ‘taking off her hats’ before addressing the Minister about the exclusion of church groups from NGO donor funding (Journal entry, 29 June, 2012). One female participant gave an example of the multitude of roles performed by a Cook Islands woman:

“It's hard for them [women] to balance all the demands...[One woman's] husband is a Member of Parliament...For everyone who dies in the village they are expected to take food [to the family] and go to the funeral. She is running the biggest primary school in the country. Plus she has her own family and is involved in the church as the deacon. Good God, you're burning yourself out and being pulled in so many directions, and she just smiles and says ‘that's just our culture’.”

A key informant, who I interviewed while she peeled a large pot of potatoes for Sunday lunch, made reference to Moser's ‘triple role of women’ without prompting:

“They're [women] disempowered because they have been too busy, the triple thing, they think ‘why should I waste my time I'll let my husband make the decisions’” and “a lot of women in the islands will never even think about it [entering politics] because they have got too much on their plate.”

The above quotes and observations illustrate that women in Cook Islands society perform a multitude of roles simultaneously and that this is a constraining factor on women exercising political power. It is important that government and donors are aware of women's triple role when implementing development programmes, so as to not increase their already heavy work

burden, which as indicated above, is a cultural expectation for many Cook Islands women.

Two of the male meeting participants also commented on their time usage. One said he was “pretty busy a lot of the time.” This involved volunteering for cultural societies, managing local sports teams, sitting on government boards, and administering family landholdings. However, he did not work fulltime or mention domestic work or childcare. The other male participant stated that he did not “try to take on too much at one time. Then I can perfect it.” This could indicate that although men do have cultural expectations around performing gender roles which create their own burdens, these roles do not involve the primary care work within the household, which often goes unaccounted (Waring, 1988), as discussed in Chapter Two.

A few of the women participants also talked about not taking on too much: “I used to volunteer, but this job takes up all my time.” When asking the heads of government ministries whether they volunteered in civil society, both indicated that they did not have the time to do this, with one indicating her predecessor would most likely have “played a more active role in NGO society.” These quotes may indicate a shift for some women away from wearing “too many hats” so that they can take on community and government leadership roles more easily and perform them more effectively.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings from the fieldwork in accordance with the two key objectives of the study. Conceptualising women’s political empowerment from the perspectives of those within Cook Islands civil society was the first objective. The findings revealed that most participants thought about women’s political empowerment in terms of women’s formal

political representation in national parliament, but many also agreed that there were possibilities for women to be politically empowered outside of formal politics. The reasons given for wanting a higher representation of politically empowered women in parliament was that women and men have different interests and perspectives that need to be reflected in all national policy, legislation and budget decisions; that women have interests specific to them that need to progress at a national level; and women's national leadership in parliament would further shift cultural and traditional norms of male leadership and decision-making. However, the examples given in this chapter of women being elected into parliament on their 'own merit' and then relegated to making "cups of tea", suggests parliament is not a gender neutral environment conducive to promoting women's interests, and women MPs may feel politically disempowered in this predominately male environment.

The second research objective was to explore the ways women exercise political power, despite their low representation in national parliament. The findings from structured observations and interviews indicate that women are represented in large numbers in civil society, where they provide leadership, advocate for social and political change, and deliver services for diverse interest groups. Women were found to use political power indirectly through strategies that were culturally relevant, maintained and built relationships, and did not overtly challenge societal cultural and traditional norms. However, these 'subtle strategies' were effectively deployed by women who: assisted government ministries in developing national policy and legislation on a range of issues; had the ability to engage politicians in dialogue and secure public resources; and indirectly challenge the notion of male hegemonic leadership and decision-making through their prominent positions in civil society organisations without threatening men's power and status, or losing their support. However, there were obstacles for women, including performing multiple roles; working within the tension of serving in both the public sector and the community; and operating within tight budget

constraints, while negotiating with government and aid donors over funding, which may have divergent political, social, economic and development aims from the goals of their represented interest groups.

These key findings in relation to the central aim of the research, which is to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament, are discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses how the findings relating to the key objectives of the study contribute to meeting the central aim of the research which is to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament. The objectives of the study were to: to gain an understanding of the conceptualisation of women's political empowerment within Cook Islands civil society; and to explore ways in which women in Cook Islands civil society exercise political power.

First, this chapter discusses the conceptualisation of women's political empowerment in relation to the findings presented in Chapter Six and the theoretical approaches and debates explored in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Second, it identifies the ways in which Cook Islands women, who have been largely excluded from formal political decision-making, approach political power, and how this contributes to broadening our understanding of women's political empowerment. Third, it examines this broader understanding of women's political empowerment within the framework of a transformative empowerment approach to women's development; and is analysed for policy effectiveness using the key concepts of practical gender needs (PGNs) and strategic gender needs (SGNs) and the 'triple role of women'. Lastly, it argues for a paradigm shift away from the instrumentalist mainstream development discourse, towards a more hopeful post-development discourse which encapsulates a transformative approach to women's political empowerment, full of possibilities of empowering alternatives generated by women themselves. This chapter ends with

recommendations from this study for future development research and practice, and with the final conclusions for this thesis.

CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The first research objective of this study was to gain an understanding of the conceptualisation of women's political empowerment within Cook Islands civil society. Findings in Chapter Six showed that many participants were concerned at the low number of women represented in the Cook Islands national parliament and that increasing the number of women represented would politically empower women. Participants' concerns over the low representation centred on women being left out of decision-making on national policy, legislation and budget allocations, and that women's specific policy interests were not being given due consideration. Some participants perceived women as having a different way of approaching policy development than men, and some felt women's interests were being excluded. A few female participants also mentioned that more women represented in parliament would challenge the entrenched thinking in Cook Islands culture and society that only men could be leaders or decision-makers.

One female head of a government ministry, however, did not feel that more women in national parliament would empower women politically, stating: "there are other ways". These ways included having more women appointed to senior government positions. Most other participants, when asked, also agreed that Cook Islands women could be politically empowered from outside the formal structures of national parliament.

The low representation of women in national parliaments is a global phenomenon and has been given a lot of attention by the international

development community. The Pacific Region currently has the lowest number of women represented in national parliaments worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013). Pacific Island nations have received special attention from the international community, highlighting this issue, prompting dialogue and debate (Young, 8 September 2011). This may explain why most participants were primarily focused on increasing women's parliamentary representation to empower women politically, with one participant admitting that she may have been swayed in her thinking by recent gender equality workshops. Some of the current discussion occurring in Cook Islands society around the reasons for the low representation of women and what interventions should be taken to rectify the problem, were captured in the field interviews.

Western-style parliaments were created during a period where men represented women publically (Staudt, 2011, p. 165). At this time, only men were eligible to vote and stand for parliamentary seats. This patriarchal culture is still evident today, as reflected in the findings. The Cook Islands Parliament was referred to as a "boys club" and "political beast" with "unwritten rules", during the field interviews. One female former MP shared her experience of being requested by male MPs to make them "a cup of tea" on her first day in parliament, indicating traditional cultural attitudes over men's and women's roles were pervasive in this national decision-making institution. This makes it difficult for women to be integrated into national decision-making structures, which have been adopted by many former colonies, including the Cook Islands (Waylen, 1996, p. 121).

The reasons given by participants for the low number of women in Cook Islands parliament, were: that men were perceived as leaders and decision-makers in Cook Islands culture (examples of this were cited for the household, church, traditional meeting places, and within government); the gender division of labour, with women considered too busy caring for their families

and communities to contemplate running for parliament; and lack of financial means and political connections. These reasons reflect those given in the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2012) stocktake report on gender mainstreaming in the Cook Islands outlined in Chapter Four.

The findings in Chapter Six show that both female and male participants are supportive of increasing the number of women in Cook Islands parliament, however there is no agreement among participants on whether interventions should be put in place to support this. Some participants felt there needed to be gender quotas to create a 'critical mass' in parliament, indicating that parliament was not conducive to women decision-makers. Others felt strongly that women should be elected by their constituency "on merit". Gender quotas are promoted by the international community as the 'quick fix' to increasing women's representation in national parliament so as to create a 'critical mass' (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011a, p. 5). Quotas, however, have received a lot of criticism for focusing too heavily on 'numbers' rather than on the root causes of gender political inequality (Batliwala, 2007, p. 562; Kabeer, 2005, p. 561).

Quantitative data and indicators, as used in the UN Gender Empowerment Measure and Millennium Development Goals, have been useful for highlighting gender inequalities both within a country and globally (Ismail, et al., 2011, p. 381). These indicators have raised international awareness on gender inequality in national parliaments and prompted important dialogue and debate. However, Kabeer (1999a, p. 6) stresses that these numbers need to be deconstructed so as to find solutions which address the inequality, rather than integrating women into formal political structures through quotas which may do little to challenge gender inequality.

Recent qualitative research into women's representation in national parliaments has shown that the numbers of women in parliament does not

give an accurate indication of women's political empowerment (Tadros, 2011; Waring, 2011). It has been suggested that these quotas are "instrumentalist" rather than transforming as they are in response to international pressure rather than the empowerment of women. The recommendation from these recent studies is to take a broader investigation of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament, which is the central aim of this thesis.

Although there was much focus by participants on increasing women's formal political representation to empower women politically, most participants did also see that there were ways that Cook Islands women could be, and perhaps were already, politically empowered outside of national parliament. The next section discusses this in more detail, by focusing on the second research objective for this study.

WOMEN'S APPROACHES TO POLITICAL POWER

This section discusses the second research objective which was to explore the ways in which women in Cook Islands civil society exercise political power. In adopting a hopeful post-development approach this study looks to the informal political sphere, referred to in the literature as civil society, to uncover ways in which Cook Islands women, who have been largely excluded from the formal political sphere, approach political power.

Wallace (2011, p. 508), in her article on women's decision-making in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, talks about the growing number of women's NGOs in civil society, which give women leadership roles and who are having an influence on formal politics through lobbying government for legislation and policy changes that support women's interests. The structured observations and interviews, presented in Chapter Six, reveal that Cook Islands women are

involved in many different organisations in civil society. These organisations range from women-only organisations, including a grassroots NGO, a national women's organisation and business women's network, to a youth, environment and welfare organisation. These women were found to hold key leadership positions and were active in advocating for social and political change.

Cook Islands women's political activity in civil society was described as "subtle" by some participants. Women involved in political advocacy on behalf of civil society organisations were found to be strategic in their approach, so as to avoid a backlash in challenging entrenched social attitudes. One participant spoke about having to "disguise the advocacy work" so as to include men in discussions around traditional male leadership roles. A few participants spoke about the significance in Cook Islands culture of remaining humble. This was important for gaining the respect of the wider community, and was emphasised as one of the key factors for influencing social and political reforms. One female participant accentuated the importance of adopting the "island way" in exercising political power. This was explained as being "softer, a lot more humble... It is in our culture, church upbringing, and traditional way."

The findings of this study point to Cook Islands women exercising political power indirectly so as to avoid confrontation, and maintain important social and political relationships. This approach was highlighted by Scheyvens (1998, p. 235) in her research of women's church groups in the Solomon Islands. Scheyvens found that women avoided direct confrontation with those in authority by using 'subtle strategies' to bring about change in ways that were culturally relevant and non-threatening. The findings in Chapter Six emphasise the applicability of this approach to the context of Cook Islands women exercising political power within civil society.

Collaborating with government ministers and senior leaders was a common thread running through responses from many participants. Ottaway (2011, p. 195) explains how the relationship between civil society and government can be one based on cooperation. Ottaway describes how women's organisations are often seen by governments as non-threatening and are able to work alongside governments to implement policy and legislation changes. One head of a government ministry talked about the strong relationship she felt her ministry had with women's NGOs, and that these NGOs had been major contributors in strategic planning, policy and legislation design.

Some participants talked about how Cook Islands women are now increasingly holding senior leadership positions within government ministries and are serving as the government's legal advisors in the Crown Law Office. This was seen as strategically important for promoting women's policy interests across a wide range of ministries. One head of a government ministry commented that the recent appointments of more women to senior positions would make her job easier in advocating for women's policy interests from within formal government structures.

Staudt (2011, p. 176) writes how women's NGOs can gain speaking rights at UN conferences and use this to influence their government to adopt and put into action international conventions on women's rights. This strategy was found to be used effectively by one female participant who utilised her organisation's consultative status at the UN to convince the Cook Islands government to proceed with legislation changes to secure women's rights. This participant persuaded the government to take action after publishing feedback from the UN, on legislation changes to be enacted, so as to comply with CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women).

The findings in Chapter Six reveal that Cook Islands women use the media as an important vehicle for their civil society organisations in public awareness-raising, and for prompting the government to take action on important issues. A few participants spoke about the importance of keeping a spotlight on these important issues so that they did not slip down the list of government priorities. However, it was also revealed that this is done strategically, with the main goal to “influence” their government and not appear “threatening”, so as to not get offside.

Relationships were emphasised as another key factor in advocating for social and political reform by some participants. Cook Islands women talked of the approachability of ministers within government, and one gave an example of how a minister had been forthcoming to her request to secure public resources to support her NGO’s community work. During the field interviews it was noted that some participants worked, or had worked, for the public sector while simultaneously volunteering for organisations in civil society. Although there was some tension revealed in this relationship, some participants looked on their position as complementary, sharing both knowledge and resources between the two sectors for the benefit of Cook Islands society. Underhill-Sem (2008, p. 9) mentions that advocacy is new to many Pacific Island countries, and that it is common for civil society to work alongside government. This may explain why some participants viewed their position in a positive light, rather than being concerned at the potentiality for ‘conflicts of interest’ to arise.

Exploring the ways in which Cook Islands women approach political power is important for gaining a broader understanding of women’s political empowerment. It was found that Cook Islands women often exercise political power indirectly in culturally acceptable ways. This approach to political power can go ‘undetected’, which has implications for designing effective development policies and programmes.

The next section looks at Cook Islands women's approaches to political power within the framework of Moser's transformative empowerment approach, using the key concepts of PGNs and SGNs and the 'triple role of women' to analyse this broader understanding of women's political empowerment.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AS TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Exploring research objective two of this study offered important insights for gaining a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament. Cook Islands women were found to use culturally acceptable strategies to influence societal change and avoid direct confrontation. This section situates this broader understanding of women's political empowerment within the framework of Moser's transformative empowerment approach; using the key concepts of PGNs and SGNs and the 'triple role of women' to consider policy effectiveness.

TRANSFORMATIVE EMPOWERMENT

Moser's empowerment approach, described in Chapter Two, has grassroots women's organisations as one of its main driving forces for challenging inequitable structures and institutions (Batliwala, 2007, p. 560; Datta & Kornberg, 2002, p. 5; Moser, 1989, p. 1815; R. Scheyvens, 1998, p. 27; Sen & Grown, 1987, p. 58). These women's organisations are involved in consciousness-raising, which is an important first step in the process of women's empowerment (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559; Kabeer, 1999a, p. 7; Moser, 1989, p. 465; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 465). These organisations provide the space for women to come together to discuss their experiences of oppression and to come up with solutions on ways to improve their situation (Batliwala,

2007, p. 560). Moser's empowerment approach does not treat women as a homogenous group and recognises that women are diverse and experience oppression in different ways (Mosedale, 2005, p. 244; Moser, 1989, p. 1815).

The findings presented in Chapter Six revealed that there were several women's organisations politically active in the Cook Islands. These different organisations were seen as representing the diverse perspectives of Cook Islands women, and included collectives of grassroots women, national women leaders, and business women. Examples from the field interviews show that women from these organisations are involved in consciousness-raising, encouraging Cook Islands women to claim their rights and to share equally in societal resources and decision-making.

Power is an important concept within Moser's empowerment approach. Rowlands (1997), as discussed in Chapter Two, describes power in its multiple forms, going beyond the often narrow conceptualisation of dominating power or 'power over'. Cook Islands women were found to exercise political power in "subtle" ways rather than through attempts to gain 'power over'. As noted above, Cook Islands women utilised other forms of power, such as 'power with', in their collective involvement with women's organisations; these organisations worked to bring about changes in society, indicating Cook Islands women had 'power to'; and a couple of female participants talked of their personal power, of not being afraid to "speak my mind", showing examples of Cook Islands women in civil society having 'power within'.

Moser's empowerment approach does not see men as the oppressors, and recognises that men can also be disadvantaged within formal structures. The 'empowerment approach' emphasises the importance of including men in facilitating empowerment. Examples of Cook Islands men supporting women's leadership was shown in the findings, as was women encouraging

men to take up executive roles within national civil society organisations, so as to create gender balance in representation and decision-making.

An empowerment approach acknowledges that men must be involved in negotiating changes to gender relations and roles for there to be lasting change. The gender division of labour is a reflection of gender relations and is essential to the empowerment approach which promotes the sharing of labour between men and women. Although the gender division of labour was still seen as prevalent in Cook Islands society, one female participant did speak of women and men starting to share housework, where the couple were both engaged in paid employment.

Taking a broader understanding of women's political empowerment by incorporating how Cook Islands women exercise political power in their society fits comfortably within Moser's framework of a transformative empowerment approach to women's development. Cook Islands women show that they can transform society through informal political activity, despite being largely excluded from formal political institutions. The following discussion further analyses this broader understanding of women's political empowerment using the key concepts of PGNs and SGNs and 'triple role of women'.

INFORMAL POLITICAL POWER AS A STRATEGIC GENDER NEED

Moser (1989, p. 1802) uses the key concept of PGNs and SGNs, outlined in Chapter Two, to determine the policy effectiveness of approaches to women's development. SGNs are given a high priority by Moser, as SGNs are women's long term needs arising from women's disadvantaged position, and involve challenging the inequitable structures which sustain these inequalities. It is recognised that meeting women's SGNs is likely to encounter resistance.

Moser, therefore, acknowledges women may use indirect action to meet their SGNs.

Improving gender equality in decision-making is a key SGN, as women are often disadvantaged in decision-making at all levels of society, including formal political decision-making, as well as in the household. One participant in the study gave an example of how her lack of decision-making ability in the household affected women's decision-making at a national level, as this participant was expected to vote in line with the male head of household, therefore was restricted from voting for female candidates.

This study shows how Cook Islands women meet their SGN for societal decision-making, while avoiding direct confrontation. Cook Islands women are actively involved in civil society where they advocate for women's policy interests using 'subtle strategies' which are culturally acceptable and maintain social harmony. This advocacy work, although indirect, has challenged inequitable structures through influencing both policy and legislation reform at a national level, and by securing public resources to support their work within the community.

Funding NGO advocacy through development programmes to meet women's SGNs may be a key way for donors to support the political empowerment of women. This is of particular significance in the Pacific Region which has the lowest representation of women in formal political decision-making worldwide. However, indications from one head of government ministry was that the Cook Islands' major bilateral donor, New Zealand, was moving away from funding NGO advocacy to focusing more on service delivery.

Although service delivery may support women's PGNs, which are seen as short term needs and essential for the survival of the community, these should not be the sole consideration of development policy makers as they

may perpetuate inequalities by maintaining inequitable structures and institutions. As explained in Chapter Two, it is important for donors to be gender aware when implementing development programmes, by recognising and supporting women's 'strategic gender needs', rather than focusing solely on meeting 'practical gender needs'.

The key concept of PGNs and SGNs is a useful tool for determining the policy effectiveness of approaches to women's development. The triple role of women is also a useful concept for analysing development policy effectiveness and is looked at next.

WOMEN'S COMMUNITY MANAGING ROLE: EMPOWERING OR BURDENSOME?

The second key concept in Moser's analysis of policy approaches to women's development is the 'triple role of women', explained in Chapter Two, which is *reproductive work*, *productive work* and *community managing work* (Moser, 1989, p. 1801). *Reproductive work* is associated with caring for children and carrying out domestic duties. Women are also involved in *productive work*, which involves paid work, and is often seen as the domain of men. *Community managing work* is an extension of women's caring role, as they work to ensure not only their families' well-being, but also the well-being of their communities.

The findings presented in Chapter Six show that women are culturally expected to engage in many roles in Cook Islands society, including voluntary community and church work, paid employment, childcare, and domestic work. Women's 'triple role' is important to be aware of when designing development programmes and policies as women often feel overburdened by the magnitude of work they may feel expected to undertake.

Women's *community managing* role often involves filling a gap in community services due to the inadequacy of the government to meet essential needs, such as providing water or healthcare (Kabeer, 1994, p. 276; Moser, 1989, p. 1801). Women's advocacy work on behalf of those marginalised in their communities for improved services is also considered part of this role (Moser, 1989, p. 1801; Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 239). Several participants referred to Cook Islands women as the "backbone of the country", referring to women's dedication to serving their communities through hours of voluntary labour. One female participant explained that the reason women are so heavily involved in community work is because of the lack of government funds to deliver services. Cook Islands women, as this study has focused on, are also involved in advocacy work, which can be seen as women exercising political power through their community managing role.

As presented in the findings in Chapter Six, the Cook Islands government has implemented a strategy for reducing expenditure through the utilisation of low paid or voluntary labour in civil society to deliver public services. This is a common neoliberal approach for governments to adopt, especially when faced with cuts in funding from aid donors, and has been found to overburden women by increasing their community managing role (Batliwala, 2007, p. 558; Chant & Gutmann, 2002, p. 275; Flew, et al., 1999, p. 393; Goetz, 2009, p. 30; Jacqueline & Staudt, 2006, p. 27; Kabeer, 1999a, p. 13; Marchand, 2009, p. 925; Moser, 1989, p. 1813; Parpart, 1993, p. 451; Razavi & Miller, 1995, p. 24; R. Scheyvens, 2009, p. 466). As noted, the findings also indicate that donors are focusing their funding on civil society to deliver services, and are moving away from supporting NGO advocacy.

Increased government and donor support for delivering services through NGOs had a mixed response from a few of the participants. One key informant saw it as civil society and government working in mutual support of one another. However, by supporting this government policy, this could be

seen as undervaluing women's work with the expectation that women will deliver services cheaply or unremunerated as part of their community managing role. Moser refers to this as women's complicity in perpetuating the gender division of labour, which according to another key informant further constrains women's political voice.

It is important that government and donors are aware of women's triple role when implementing development programmes and service delivery strategies, so as to not increase women's already heavy work burden. Women's community managing role can be seen as both empowering women through meeting their SGN to exercise political power through NGO advocacy, as well as, constraining women through the expectation of serving the community through advocating for their needs and delivering essential services.

The next section explores further possibilities for empowering women politically within civil society using the conceptual framework for assessing women's political empowerment introduced in Chapter Three.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS: EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

This thesis argues for approaching women's political empowerment from a hopeful post-development approach which encapsulates a transformative approach to women's empowerment, rather than from a mainstream neoliberal instrumentalist and integrationist approach. By shifting to this approach, pathways to women's political empowerment, beyond formal institutions and structures, created by women themselves, can emerge in context-appropriate ways.

This section uses the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Three, adapted from Scheyvens' alternative development approach to community empowerment, to seek out the possibilities for women's political empowerment within civil society. Table 6.1 shows that there are signs of political empowerment for women within Cook Islands civil society, as well as signs of political disempowerment. Drawing on this conceptual framework and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, this table is followed by a discussion on the possibilities which emerge for further empowering women politically in civil society. While it is acknowledged that other factors may apply elsewhere, lessons learned from applying this conceptual framework to Cook Islands civil society may be applicable in other contexts.

Table 7.1 Framework for assessing women’s political empowerment in Cook Islands civil society

Signs of empowerment	Signs of disempowerment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women actively participate in civil society meetings; hold leadership and formal meeting roles. - Women and men work alongside each other in civil society organisations and meetings; men show support for women’s leadership. - There is also a range of women specific organisations representing women’s diversity. - Women’s political advocacy is evident in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Media strategies which seek to raise public awareness and influence policy and legislation decision-making. o Positive relationships with ministries and ministers. o Working in ‘partnership’ and collaboration with government. o UN consultative status. - Changes in the gender division of labour occurring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Sharing housework; o Women scaling back their multiple activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prescribed gender roles in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Household; o Civil society meetings. - Tension of working for both government and civil society which restricts women’s political participation. - Burden of multiple roles for women restricts political participation. - Donors and government utilising women’s voluntary or low-paid labour to deliver state services. - Donors moving away from supporting NGO advocacy. - Inappropriate meeting venues discourage men’s involvement in civil society organisations.

Adapted from: Scheyvens, R. (2002, p. 60). *Tourism for Development: Empowering Communities*. Harlow: Prentice-Hall.

WOMEN’S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society enables women, who are often marginalised from formal decision making structures, to develop their ability to act politically. The

findings from the structured observations and follow-up semi-structured interviews indicate that Cook Islands women are often the main attendees at civil society meetings, with women holding the majority of formal meeting roles. The activity within civil society is deemed imperative for lobbying for legislative and policy changes within formal structures that support women's interests (Ishkanian & Lewis, 2007, p. 409; Malena & Heinrich, 2005 p. 342). It is evident from the findings presented in Chapter Six that Cook Islands women are involved in advocating for social and political change. In Ghana, women elected to national parliament by their constituencies, were found to have built their political platform through working with their communities, as health workers, educators, volunteers and NGO representatives (Tadros, 2011, p. 10). Similarly, Cook Islands women's active participation in civil society allows them to influence societal decision-making, and may also serve as an avenue to become elected representatives in national parliament.

WOMEN'S DIVERSITY REPRESENTED

According to literature outlined in Chapter Two, representing the diverse interests of women has proven difficult for female MPs. Elite women, holding parliamentary seats, have been seen to backtrack on important issues for women; and female MPs have been accused of toeing the patriarchal line to stay on side with their male colleagues (Enloe, 1990, pp. 6-7; Waring, 2011, p. 8). The sole Cook Islands woman MP was criticised by one participant in this study, for not supporting interests important to women's wellbeing. It was revealed in the findings presented in Chapter Six that Cook Islands women are not a homogenous group, with many differing viewpoints and interests arising from their experiences. The leader of the national women's organisation spoke about the importance of celebrating and supporting women's differences, as well as uniting women in their common policy interests in areas such as health and education.

Women's organisations are one of the driving forces of a transformative empowerment approach, and are important for defining the society women want to share in (Batliwala, 2007, p. 560; Datta & Kornberg, 2002, p. 5; Moser, 1989, p. 1815; R. Scheyvens, 1998, p. 27; Sen & Grown, 1987, p. 58). Some participants in this study were from a variety of women's organisations, including a grassroots NGO, a women's national organisation and a business women's network. Women's organisations may be better placed to represent women's diverse policy interests than some female MPs, and should be considered as vital knowledge networks for government ministries to collaborate with in designing gender equitable legislation and policies.

WOMEN EXERCISE POLITICAL POWER IN MULTIPLE WAYS

The findings presented in Chapter Six reveal that Cook Islands women in civil society exercise political power in multiple ways. Advocating for women's policy interests by strategic media campaigns, fostering relationships with ministries and ministers, working in 'partnership' with their government employers, and through their international recognition at the UN.

One head of government ministry talked about Cook Islands NGOs being proactive in contributing to policy and legislation design and implementation. She felt her ministry had a good working relationship with women's NGOs. Ghana, which has a low national political representation of women, has a women's ministry that stretches over all other ministries. Research has shown that this ministry-wide approach has been imperative for the significant legislation and policy changes relating to family violence, and for the gender sensitisation of Ghana's national budget (Waring, 2011, p. 8). The findings and literature both show that government ministries and women's organisations can work cooperatively, as women's organisations are often seen as non-threatening (Ottaway, 2011, p. 195). Encouraging governments to adopt a ministry-wide approach may be a pathway for the realisation of

women's diverse policy interests to be included in all national policy and legislation decision-making, especially if there is a strong working relationship between the women's ministry and diverse women's organisations.

The findings show how government employees attempt to balance their paid work in the public sector with their voluntary work in the community. A few participants, who saw this as a 'partnership', reasoned that their position was beneficial in distributing both knowledge and resources for the greater good of Cook Islands society. However, their position may be at times disempowering with some tension in this relationship indicated in the findings. This tension may increase as managers who have gained work experience outside of the Cook Islands context, implement new management strategies, making it increasingly difficult for women working in the public sector, to share resources with, and advocate for, their civil society organisations.

Even though women do exercise political power in civil society, it is important to keep in mind that this is part of women's community managing role, and that women are often prescribed caring roles within the community as an extension of their work within the home. Government and aid donors may be a constraining factor on women's political power through the utilisation of women's community managing role to deliver state services, reducing time and resources that women could dedicate to advocacy work. Howell (2007, p. 424) warns that women should take care for when civil society is used for initiatives which may on the surface look empowering, such as more control over the delivery of services, when in actual fact this is a justification to reduce aid and government budgets, and allow women to carry the burden of caring not only for their family but also for the community. The findings revealed that Cook Islands women are constrained from political activity due to the burden of carrying multiple roles. However,

there were indications from a few female participants that some women were choosing not to undertake some roles, so as to be more effective in paid employment and community work.

MEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Although women made up the majority of attendees and members of the civil society organisations represented in this study, the structured observations and interviews revealed that men do participate in civil society organisation meetings. Different communication styles during civil society meetings were noted as a personal observation and followed up during interviews with meeting attendees. One female participant reflected that she had noticed that it could be difficult for men to join in discussions with women. Despite this, however, men's voices were heard more than the proportion of their numbers in attendance at three of the four mixed gender meetings observed.

Most meeting venues appeared to be gender neutral. One mixed gender meeting observed, however, was held at the National Council of Women headquarters. This space is generally considered a collective space for women. The chairperson did not feel that the venue was the reason for men not attending the meeting, even with men making up half of the committee. Although the venue was not seen as the reason for men not attending the meeting, it is important that mixed-gender civil society meetings are held in venues which are accessible to both men and women, as lack of access can be disempowering.

All three male meeting participants voiced their support for women's political leadership. One participant explained her preference of having women and men work together, and that her organisation had intentionally selected men for the formal executive roles on the organisation's committee, to create gender balance in decision-making. It is important that men are involved in

facilitating women's political empowerment and are not excluded from attending or participating in women-dominated areas of civil society. Civil society may be an important space to improve gender relations and for women and men to share together in decision-making and leaderships roles.

SHARING THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR

The findings presented in Chapter Six revealed that many participants perceived traditional gender roles as being an obstacle to Cook Islands women exercising political power. Men were seen as the head of the household and decision-makers. This included deciding which candidate the members of their household would vote for. Cook Islands women are seen as responsible for domestic work and child rearing, but also work outside the home in paid employment. Women's heavy workload was mentioned as an impediment to women running for parliament and can make it more difficult for women to be effective national leaders once in parliament.

Including men in facilitating women's empowerment is imperative so as to encourage the sharing of gender roles which often overburden women. It is important to be aware that women may perpetuate the gender division of labour, in what Kandiyoti (1988) describes 'patriarchal bargain'. Kandiyoti found that women can often be found maintaining the status quo in return for economic and emotional security, if there are no empowering alternatives available to them. One participant did mention that she had witnessed shifts beginning to occur in traditional roles within the household, with the sharing of housework when both men and women worked fulltime outside the home.

Structured observations indicated that gender roles were present in civil society meetings, with women preparing food and men leading the prayer at the beginning and end of each mixed gender meeting. One participant did explain that she had cleared away food in her work capacity, and that her

male predecessor would have also been expected to perform this duty. The male chairperson interviewed, also mentioned that he often gave the prayer to a woman to lead at meetings, but this depended on an individual's confidence level. A few participants agreed that the prayer would be led by someone with standing in the church, most often a male. Prayers are significant in civil society as they represent the opening and closing of meetings. The gender roles and the gender division of labour are important to address in a transformative approach to women's empowerment. Civil society may be a space to challenge some traditional assumptions over gender roles and labour, as can be seen as starting to occur from the discussion above.

Using this conceptual framework for assessing women's political empowerment in civil society is useful for creating an awareness of some of the empowering aspects, as well as constraints, that civil society can have on women's political power. It is important that governments and donors, who are seeking to empower women politically, are aware of these when implementing strategies and programmes that impact on women's community managing role within civil society. Women's community managing role brings with it many possibilities, generated by women themselves, for political empowerment. However, it can also constrain women through creating a heavy work burden as women struggle to balance the demands of meeting both their family's needs and those of the wider community.

The following provides a summary of the key recommendations arising from the discussion and suggestions for future research.

STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations for future practice, policy and research are given below.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

Civil society advocacy is a key way for women to exercise political power. Recognising advocacy as a strategic gender need is important for politically empowering Pacific Island women who have the lowest formal political representation worldwide. Advocacy provides an important avenue for women to contribute to policy and legislation decisions and to raise awareness of women's issues. It is important for aid donors to not only take into account immediate practical gender needs in their programme design, but also longer term strategic gender needs which seek to challenge inequalities within a community. Focusing exclusively on practical gender needs may exacerbate inequalities, especially if programmes draw on women's time and unpaid or low-paid labour to deliver the programme's goals.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: MINISTRY-WIDE APPROACH

Adopting a ministry-wide approach, in which the women's machinery of government stretches over all ministries, could assist in ensuring that women's interests are considered in all policy, legislation, and budget decisions. Collaboration with women's NGOs should be a high priority when adopting this approach, so as to have a diverse range of women's interests represented. This approach could allow women to exercise political power collectively, challenging inequitable institutions, rather than being integrated into institutions where entrenched cultural attitudes on women's and men's

roles are pervasive, thus disempowering women. Working across government, and with government, would allow for gender relations, and the understanding of the importance of these, to improve over time. Gaining political experience through working closely with ministers and ministries on policy, legislation and budget design may also help bridge the gap between formal and informal politics and enable women to enter parliament in a more empowering way.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research on women's political empowerment was context-specific therefore research within other contexts could be compared and contrasted to this study on women in Cook Islands civil society. The household, the church, and indigenous leadership structures were mentioned by participants in this study as gendered spaces which have implications for women's political empowerment. These could be further investigated using a hopeful post-development approach to explore further empowering alternatives for women's development beyond the mainstream integrationist and instrumentalist discourse.

Future research could also examine ways in which men support women's political empowerment. Male participants in this study voiced their support for politically empowering women, but what this support entails needs further investigation and may be an interesting avenue to explore.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This study has met the stated research aim to gain a broader understanding of women's political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament by using a wider conceptualisation of 'political' as the unit of analysis. By broadening the understanding of women's political empowerment to encapsulate the informal political realm of civil society, women were shown to be exercising political power indirectly, through context-specific and culturally acceptable ways, despite being largely excluded from formal political decision-making institutions. This has important ramifications for empowering women politically, especially within the Pacific Region, which has the lowest representation of women in formal political institutions globally, and is being directed by the international community to rectify the situation.

Women, in this study, were found to be actively engaged in civil society organisations, from which they influence social and political change through advocacy and awareness-raising. However, while civil society provides an important space for the political empowerment of women, there are also constraining factors to be aware of. It was highlighted in this study that women perform multiple roles, thus creating a heavy work burden for women, and constraining women from exercising political power both formally and informally. Women, in their community managing role, are expected to meet the needs of the community as an extension of their reproductive role within the household. Women utilise their community managing role in advocating on behalf of the community for services and infrastructure development. This role is also utilised by women to advocate for women's policy, legislation, and budget interests, often neglected in predominantly male formal decision-making institutions.

However, neoliberal approaches to development, which have a strong economic focus and use women instrumentally to deliver state services cheaply, through women's voluntary or low-paid labour, were found to exist in government and donor policies and programmes. This approach overburdens women and constrains them from acting politically both formally and informally. Moser (1989) and Waring (1988) brought attention to women's work and time being undervalued and overstretched over 20 years ago, and the findings from this study illustrate that this continues to be the case.

Women's political power is a key strategic gender need, and civil society advocacy, as indicated by this research, provides an important avenue for meeting this need. However, as mentioned in this study, a major donor is moving away from supporting NGO advocacy to concentrate on service delivery. This has major implications for women's political empowerment as women will be further constrained from exercising their political voice as they focus on meeting practical gender needs as prescribed by donor programmes. Meeting practical gender needs, while important for short term well-being, does not address gender inequalities nor challenge inequitable structures and institutions which sustain these. This may exacerbate development problems which arise from these inequalities and is evident in vulnerable groups being constrained from enacting their full rights as citizens within society.

A gender and development (GAD) approach to women's empowerment provided the theoretical lens for this research, however with little GAD literature relating specifically to women's political empowerment this study also drew from an alternative development approach and hopeful post-development approach. In doing so, this study has helped to contribute to filling this gap on women's political empowerment within the GAD literature. While this research was undertaken in the context of Cook Islands civil

society, there can be valuable lessons learned and insights gained that have relevance to other locations, especially within the Pacific Region.

This study found Moser's (1989) key concepts of 'triple role of women' and 'practical and strategic gender needs' to be useful tools for analysis, despite the fact that they might be considered 'dated'. Such concepts should be considered in informing the design of development programmes to ensure policy effectiveness in approaches to women's development. The research design incorporated a mixed methods approach to collect data and was guided by development research principles and Pacific methodologies. Adopting principles from the Cook Islands *Tivaevae* research framework allowed the research to be conducted in a more respectful, empowering and culturally appropriate manner. This framework prompted me to reflect on my limited Western feminist influenced understanding of political power, and assisted me in acknowledging the different ways women approach political power within a Pacific Island society.

Structured observations used to collect quantitative data assisted in framing the research. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the quantitative data collected and provided a shared mutual learning experience between myself and the participants. The importance of unpacking quantitative data was directly linked to the main aim of this research.

This study recognises the importance of quantitative measurements in revealing global gender political inequalities. However, to find solutions to these inequalities, the root causes must be identified within the specific context. As recent qualitative research has shown, 'quick fixes' to addressing formal political inequality by integrating women via a quota system to increase numbers in national parliaments have not necessarily empowered women politically.

This thesis argues for a shift in approach to women's political empowerment from a mainstream neoliberal instrumentalist and integrationist approach to a hopeful post-development approach which encapsulates a transformative approach to women's empowerment. By shifting to this approach, possibilities for women's political empowerment, beyond formal institutions and structures and generated by women themselves, can be unveiled. As one participant stated succinctly when asked how women could exercise political power, "there are other ways."

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Kia Orana,

Thank you for expressing an interest to participate in my research project about women's political empowerment in the Cook Islands.

My name is Barbara Stenson and I am in Rarotonga to do fieldwork for my thesis for a Master's degree in International Development which I am completing through Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

The focus of my research is on understanding Cook Island women's representation in decision-making forums outside of national parliament.

I have chosen Rarotonga for my research as I grew- up here with my parents Peter and Jacqui and my brother Daniel who was born at Rarotonga hospital. I went to school at Avatea and Titikaveka College and lived in the villages of Titikaveka, Takuvaine and Aorangi.

If you are interested in participating you are invited to spend time with me where you are welcome to ask any further questions you may have about your participation in my research. If you wish to take part in my research, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be involved in an interview lasting about 40 minutes to one hour, depending on the time you have available.

If you decide to take part in this study, you have the right to withdraw at any time and you also have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions.

To guarantee privacy I will ensure that the data is transcribed only by myself. All data will be stored securely in a safe place. Your name will be changed to ensure confidentiality. No identifying details or your name will be used in any publications or reports. All recorded interviews will be erased following analysis of data.

A summary of my research findings will be emailed or posted to participants and a full copy of my thesis will be available online via the Massey Library website.

Meitaki Maata,
Barbara Stenson

APPENDIX 2 – INFORMED CONSENT

Women’s political empowerment in the Cook Islands: A study on women’s representation in decision-making forums outside of national parliament.

I have read the information sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point during the study. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I also understand that I may decline to answer any questions during the interview, and that I may request that any comments be taken ‘off the record’. I understand that I can answer the questions and not be recorded or have notes taken at the time. I also understand that I have the right for the digital voice recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to provide information on the basis that it will be used for the purpose of completing the research project and related outputs such as conferences, seminars or articles. I understand that I will not be identified by name and that I may specify any further degrees of anonymity.

I agree to participate in the study under the conditions set out on the information sheet.

I agree / do not agree to the interview being digitally voice recorded.

Signed: _____ (signature)

Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3 – INFORMATION SHEET

Kia Orana,

Thank you for your interest in my research project about women's political empowerment in the Cook Islands.

My name is Barbara Stenson and I am in Rarotonga to do fieldwork for my thesis for a Master's degree in International Development which I am completing through Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

The focus of my research is on understanding Cook Island women's representation in decision-making forums outside of national parliament.

I have chosen Rarotonga for my research as I grew- up here with my parents Peter and Jacqui and my brother Daniel who was born at Rarotonga hospital. I went to school at Avatea and Titikaveka College and lived in the villages of Titikaveka, Takuvaine and Aorangi.

As part of my research I would like to observe women's participation by attending one of your group's meetings.

To guarantee privacy I will ensure that all data collected is stored securely in a safe place. The name of your group and meeting participant's names will be changed to ensure confidentiality. No identifying details will be used in any publications or reports. All data collected from observation or documents will be erased following analysis of data.

If your group decides to take part in this study, you have the right to withdraw at any time and your group also has the right to refuse to answer any questions.

You are welcome to meet with me to ask any further questions about your group's participation in my research.

A summary of my research findings will be emailed or posted to participants and a full copy of my thesis will be available online via the Massey Library website.

Meitaki Maata,
Barbara Stenson

APPENDIX 4 – RESEARCH PERMIT

PERMIT TO UNDERTAKE

Research in the Cook Islands

This is to certify that: Miss Barbara Stenson

Has permission from the Foundation for National Research to do a research in the Cook Islands from: 18 June 2012 to 16 July 2012

On: Rarotonga

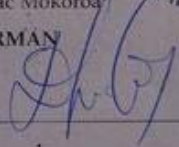
The topic of research is: Women's political empowerment in the Cook Islands from a Gender Perspective

The Cook Islands Associate Researchers are: N/A

The following special conditions apply to this research:

- Comply with MFAI requirements
- Provide a preliminary report to the Office of the Prime Minister at your earliest
- Submit 3 hard copies + 1 e-copy of your final findings to the Office of the Prime Minister by May 2013

Permit Issued on: 25 June 2012 Issued by: Mac Mokoroa
CHAIRMAN

Receipt Number: To Pay Signed: 

Reference Number: 19/12

**COOK ISLANDS
NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIT
Office of the Prime Minister
Private Bag, Rarotonga
Cook Islands**

For enquiries concerning this permit, please quote the Name of the Researcher and the Reference Number to the Chairperson, Foundation for National Research, and Office of the Prime Minister, Rarotonga, and COOK ISLANDS. Phone (682) 29 300, Fax (682) 20 856, or Email: services@pmoffice.gov.ck Website: www.pmoffice.gov.ck

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