



FACT SHEET COOK ISLANDS

GENDER RESPONSIVENESS DEVELOPMENT FOR FOOD SECURITY

KEY FACTS

- ◆ The Population of the Cook Islands is 48 percent female.
- ◆ There are 19 percent more males than females in the Northern Groups Islands.
- ◆ The average age at marriage is 32 years for males and 31 years for females respectively.
- ◆ Female life expectancy remains higher than males.
- ◆ In Rarotonga the highest income earners are males.
- ◆ The proportion of economically active females declines after age 35.
- ◆ Local women are successful entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Males and females have equal rights to land tenure.
- ◆ Women are best perpetrators of culture, custom and religious beliefs and practices.
- ◆ Women are active members of local organizations in the community.
- ◆ Women are increasingly active in wage work, but most home responsibilities continue to rest with them resulting in added workload.

General Profile

Country

The self-governing territory of the Cook Islands consists of 15 islands and atolls that are spread over 2 million sq. km of the South Pacific Ocean.

The Cook Islands is defined by distance over the sea linking small populations and it presents a hindrance to the development of an efficient transportation and communication system.

The islands formed by volcanic activity and coral growth, are geographically divided into two groups, the Northern and Southern Groups. The two groups of islands making up the country portray marked differences in their social, cultural and economic activities. The Northern Group Islands remain relatively isolated from the Southern Group Islands.

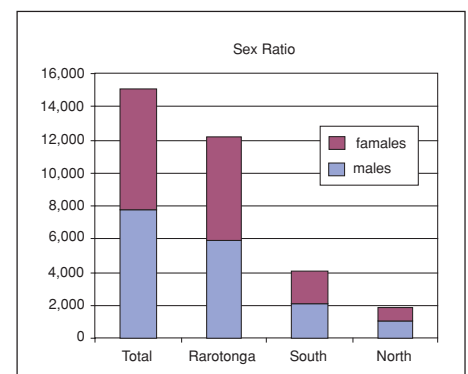
Rarotonga, the main island of activity, is the largest and most populous island (over 50 percent of the population) and also the administrative centre of government and commerce. The economy is driven by tourism and tourist dependent enterprises, and some agriculture, mostly home garden based.



Gender differentiated demographic profile

The total population of the Cook Islands as enumerated in December 2001, stood at 18,027 people: 9,300 men and 8,727 women.

The distribution of the total population varied considerably by region. A 68 percent (12,188) lived in Rarotonga, 22 percent (4,013) lived in the Southern Group Islands and 10 percent (1,826) in the Northern Group Islands. While the total population of Rarotonga increased by 963 persons, that of outer islands decreased by more than 2,000 people.



Source: Census 2001.

The resident population consisted of 7,763 males and 7,254 females in 2001, resulting in a sex ratio of 107, which means that there were 107 men for 100 women.

The populations of the outer islands had a larger population in the age group of 0-14 and thus are younger than in Rarotonga. This means there is a higher demand on women to care for children in the Outer Islands.

The average number of children ever born to all women (average parity) was 2.9 per women. This increases with the age of women. About 26 percent of women had their children when they were still teenagers.

Socio-economic profile of women in the Cook Islands

Historical background

Women traditionally played specific roles within family and community life. They were confined to domesticity, and to a certain extent continue in these roles today. Their primary responsibilities included child rearing, home management, food production and a wide variety of community activities. Within the extended family system, women attended to numerous tasks as dictated by family and community requirements.

Cook Islands women are arguably the best perpetuators of culture, customs and religious beliefs and practices. Women more than men have had a tendency to follow every rule by the book, as taught by their mothers all the way down the line from the missionary era. The subtle elements of discrimination therefore passed on from one generation to the next are through the conscious and/or unconscious teaching of mothers.

With these teachings are included the continued stereotype conditioning of the acceptable male and female roles learnt and practiced by each succeeding generation of Cook Islands Maori people.

Current situation

Women in the Cook Islands continue to carry the work load for multiple tasks comprising production of food, domestic work, family care giving, health care, social agents, community and kinship social obligations and commercial and religious responsibilities.

As economic opportunities expanded, women began to work outside the home for wages to help meet family needs, but most of the home responsibilities continue to rest with women, thus adding to their work load.

In order to assist the financial needs of the family unit, local women have become highly successful entrepreneurs



working in a variety of self-developed initiatives.

Economic activities/enterprises in the formal sector currently taken up by women either by themselves or in partnership are:

- Production of garments for local and tourism markets
- Tour operations
- Production of local jewellery using local materials
- Handicrafts work
- Operating restaurants, hotels and motels
- Managing dairy
- Pearl farming
- Market gardening
- Operating family trading stores
- Food retailing and catering



Women's significant involvement in agriculture is demonstrated in their active role as market gardeners to meet local consumer demand and to serve the tourism industry.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture reports, women's role in agricultural activities has changed from that of traditional domestic input to small commercial producers in the last 20 or so years.

Many women today, however, still continue as unpaid workers for family and community endeavors in what are termed family obligations which include handicraft making, tending livestock, subsistence fishing, fish processing, copra making and pearl farming.

The externally supported home garden programme targeting women was received well in the Outer Islands. But progress waned due to lack of financial support.

The home garden activities declined due to various reasons such as lack of technical support, seed inputs and pest infestation.

Gender differentiated economic activity and labor force participation

Agricultural activity

Almost two-thirds of all households were involved in agricultural activities, although mainly for their own use (subsistence). This was just over half (54.2 percent) of the Rarotonga households and more than 85 percent in the Outer Islands.



Commercial agricultural activity was undertaken by a 3.6 percent of all households, rare in the Cook Islands.

Many households owned many animals while others did not own any. Most common livestock owned is chicken, followed by pig and goat. To a small extent cattle and ducks were raised.

Fishing activity

Almost 64 percent of all households were involved in fishing activities, although mainly for their own use (subsistence). This is just half (52.6 percent) of the Rarotonga households, compared to 81 and 93 percent in the Southern and Northern Group Islands respectively.

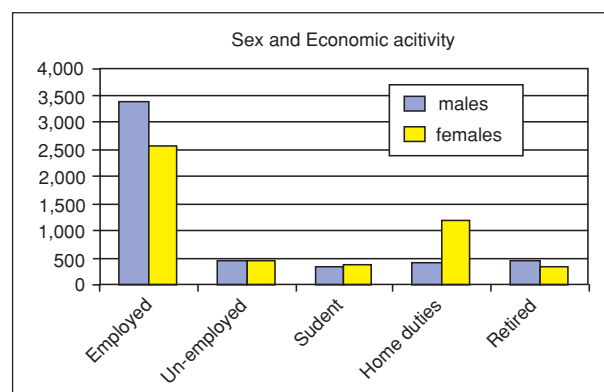
Commercial fishing activity was with 1.8 percent of all households very rare in the Cook Islands. Of these households that were fishing, most fished both inside and outside the reef. However, fishing inside the reef was preferred fishing location for Rarotonga households.

Labor force participation

In the Cook Islands, out of a total of 9,882 residents 15 years and older, 69 percent (6,820) were economically active and part of the labor force.

The majority of employed persons were males (3,386). The female employed population was 2,542. There were almost equal numbers of unemployed males and females.

Male labor force indicators were more positive than female labor force indicators. While both the labor force participation rate and the employment — population ratio were higher for males than for females throughout the regions of the Cook Islands, the unemployment rates were higher for females. In the Northern Group, the unemployment rate for females was almost 42 percent. Slightly more than half (52 percent) of all male teenagers aged 15-19 were economically active, this compares to 39 percent of female teenagers. While the proportion of economically active males remained high at well above 90 percent throughout most of their adult life (20-50 years of age), the proportion of economically active females gradually declined after age 35.



Source: 2001 census.

The majority of the non-paid labor was with 61 percent females, who made up three-quarters of all persons engaged in full time home duties.

Gender differentiated educational attainment

Education in the Cook Islands is free and compulsory from age 5 to 15 years. This has ensured access to primary (grades 1-6) and secondary (forms 1-7) level of education for all. This policy has encouraged female enrollment in school and thus the education attainment of the female population.

The dimension of female educational attainment changes when it comes to trade, vocational/professional qualifications. A vast majority of the resident population did not have a trade, vocational or professional qualification, which was 75.1 percent of males and 81.4 percent of females. Generally, males were more likely to have a qualification than females.

While 10.5 percent of males had a trade or business certificate, only 3.7 percent of females had one. Females were more likely to have a teacher's qualification or be a member of a professional society than males.

The highest percentage of people with a qualification was in the age group 55-59 years.

The proportion of people in the Outer Islands with no qualifications was much higher than in Rarotonga, and the proportion of males and females with qualification were significantly higher in Rarotonga than in the Outer Islands.

Gender differentiated access to assets

Income: The highest income earners are males.

Land rights and land tenure

The two main categories of land in Cook Islands are Customary and Freehold. Customary land follows Maori custom and freehold land is investigated land for which titles have been ascertained and the land vested in the person named. Rights acquired are subject to rights held by others that claim title to the land. Alienating customary land is prohibited. Land rights could be obtained by succession, sole occupation, joint occupation and lease/sublease. Both males and females have equal rights to land and tenure but men have a slight advantage over women in land holdings under various arrangements.

Food security: Gender roles

Women and men in the Cook Islands have always participated in food production. In the case of the traditional food crops such as the cultivation of taro and yams, men have been mainly responsible for land preparation and planting. The rest of the family, including women and children, participate in maintaining the plants and help in harvesting as well as cleaning the tubers. Women usually go out to the taro fields to gather stalks for cooking. Women and older girls are responsible for cooking.

Livestock

Traditionally and up to the present, pigs, goats, and chickens are all free range. As such they require little daily care beyond throwing kitchen scraps their way or cracking coconuts for the pigs to eat and chickens to peck at later. Where pigs, goats, cattle and a horse are tethered, there is the extra task of moving them from one place to another and ensuring that they have water to drink.

This livestock management also allowed for all members of the household, women, men, girls and boys, to participate in all aspects of management except for the making of the fences which is generally considered a job for men and boys.

Today, men generally do the slaughtering while women and men help cook for ceremonies. Daily meals are often a women/girl children's job. This does not mean men do not cook.

Food production

When plantation farming is profitable, men and women's roles with tuber crops is usually adopted with men taking the lead in cultivation of the plantation as well as decision-making roles while the rest of the family takes on the supporting role, all engaging in the maintenance of the plantation crops-mainly oranges, bananas, pineapples, pawpaw. Men generally wield the machete during heavy clearing of vines and shrubs.

With smaller home gardens including the tending of a few fruit trees, women and men alternately work the gardens at whatever stage it is. It is not uncommon to hear members of the family say that a garden belongs to one member in the household or the other, because each member played a part in planting, caring, watering and harvesting for home consumption or market sale. Most home gardens, including the taro, kumara and maniotia fields, are subsistence in production capacities.

Food processing

In the area of food processing, the opportunities for women are slightly better than for men simply because food preparation and storing are traditionally women's area of responsibility. Though, there is little food processing the traditional know-how being lost or not remembered today. Food processing is considered a domestic task and therefore falls under women. The opportunities in this area are many.

Programme emphasis

Gender Responsive Development programmes in the Cook Islands need to address food security priorities in the following areas:

- Endorse national gender policy.
- Develop inter-agency collaboration strategies to improve assistance and sustainability in food security.
- Build capacity for:
 - gender responsive planning amongst stakeholders,
 - Women to improve awareness and networking.
- Mainstream gender analysis and gender planning across government, non-government, the private sector and people's organizations/groups policies, programmes, processes and delivery of services relevant to food security, especially in the Outer Islands.
- Set-up gender responsive data bases on which to build food security policies, strategies and commitments.
- Promote gender responsive and women inclusive food security planning, implementation and involve government agencies, the private sector and civil society.
- Develop projects that generate an income for vulnerable Outer Island families.
- Resourcing the organizations and stakeholders that will provide training, follow up and nurture the projects to ensure sustainability.

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