



Tuvalu National Beijing +30 Review Report 2024



Government of Tuvalu

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Table of Contents

FOREWORD	6
INTRODUCTION	7
SECTION ONE: HIGHLIGHTS	8
Core Elements of the Country-Level Review Process.....	8
Progress, Challenges, and Setbacks in Implementation.....	8
Lessons Learned	10
Priority Actions to Accelerate the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	11
SECTION TWO: PRIORITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS	12
Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks	12
Top Five Priorities Over the Past 5 Years	15
Promotion of the Rights of Marginalised Women and Girls	17
BPfA Implementation in the Context of Crisis	17
Priorities For Accelerating Progress for Women and Girls in The Next 5 Years	19
SECTION THREE: PROGRESS ACROSS THE 12 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN	20
Inclusive Development, Shared Prosperity, and Decent Work	20
Gender Equality in the World of Work	20
Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute Unpaid Care and Domestic Work.....	22
Reduction of the Gender Digital Divide.....	22
Impacts of Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Environment.....	23
Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services	23
Poverty Eradication	23
Social Protection.....	24
Health Outcomes for Women and Girls.....	25
Government -government partnerships in public health	26
Education Outcomes and Skills for Women and Girls	27
Closing of Gender Gaps in Economic Recovery from COVID-	28
Freedom from Violence, Stigma, and Stereotypes	31
Prioritization of Forms of Gender Based Violence	31
Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence	31
Strategies to Prevent Gender-Based Violence	32
Actions to Prevent and Respond to Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence	33
Resources to women’s organisations working to prevent and respond to GBV	33
Actions to Address Portrayal of Women and Girls in the Media.....	34
Actions to address Violence Against Marginalized Women and Girls	34
Participation, Accountability, and Gender-Responsive Institutions	35
Actions to Promote Women’s Participation in Public Life and Decision Making.....	35
Women’s Participation in Decisions Making in the Media and ICT	35
National Women’s Machinery	35
Mechanism and Tools to Mainstream Gender Across Sectors	36
National Human Rights Institution	37
Peaceful and Inclusive Societies	38
Actions to end Discrimination Against and Violation of Rights of the Girls Child, Including Adolescent Girls	38

Environmental Conservation, Protection and Rehabilitation	39
Photo credit: Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation	39
Integration of Gender Perspectives and Concerns in Environmental Policies	39
Integration of Gender Perspectives in Disaster Risk Reduction and Environmental and Climate Resilience Policies and Programs	40
SECTION FOUR: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES	42
National Strategy for Gender Equality	42
Mechanisms for Stakeholders Participation in the Implementation and Monitoring of the BPfA and 2030 Agenda	42
Stakeholders Contribution to the Preparation of the Present National Report	43
Country's Action Plan and Timeline for Implementing Recommendations Committee on CEDAW ..	43
SECTION FIVE: DATA AND STATISTICS.....	44
Progress Areas on Gender Statistics	44
Country's Priorities for Strengthening National Gender Statistics in the Past 5 Years	44
Gender Indicators Prioritized for Monitoring Progress on the SDG	44
Data Routinely Disaggregated by Major Survey	45
SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS.....	46
Lessons Learned	46
Ongoing and Future Challenges	47
Priority Actions to Accelerate Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	49
Next Steps	50
Appendix 1. Works Cited.....	51
Appendix II. Contributors	52

List of Abbreviations

APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
EKT	Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
FFEKT	Fakapotopotoga Fafine, Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
GAD	Gender Affairs Department
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
PALM	Pacific Australian Labour Mobility scheme
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
TCAP	Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project
TF-GBV	Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence
TNPF	Tuvalu National Provident Fund
TRCS	Tuvalu Red Cross Society
TAPQE	Tuvalu Australia Partnership for Quality Education
TASTTI	Tuvalu Atoll Science Technology Training Institute
TNCW	Tuvalu National Council of Women
TuFHA	Tuvalu Family Health Association
TuLEP	Tuvalu Learning Project
TVET	Technical and Vocation Education and Training
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment

FOREWORD



I am pleased to share the Tuvalu Review of the Beijing +30 report, which reflects the significant progress we have made over the past five years toward achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. This report is not only a record of our achievements but also a testimony to the resilience, dedication, and commitment of those who have worked tirelessly to bring about real and meaningful change in Tuvalu.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the many organizations that have contributed to advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls across Tuvalu. This includes all government

departments, who have incorporated gender-sensitive practices into their policies and actions, and civil society organizations, whose contributions have been especially impactful. Civil society has been at the forefront of this work, advocating for gender equality, supporting survivors of violence, promoting women's leadership, and reaching the most vulnerable members of our society. Their efforts have been invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for their commitment.

I would also like to acknowledge all individuals who contributed their time, expertise, and insights in the production of this report. Their dedication has ensured that the document reflects both the progress made and the challenges still to be addressed, providing a foundation for further actions in gender equality. Special thanks go to the Government of Australia for their technical assistance in the report's development. Their support has enabled us to present a comprehensive review that strengthens our resolve to continue building a society where gender equality is fundamental to all aspects of life.

As we look forward, let us reaffirm our commitment to continue progressing gender equality and empowering women and girls. Together, we can build a resilient Tuvalu where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the nation's future.

Fakafetai lasi,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. Teo'.

Honourable Feleti Penitala Teo,
OBE MP; Prime Minister of Tuvalu
March 2025

INTRODUCTION

Located in the Pacific Ocean, Tuvalu consists of nine islands – three reef islands and six atolls - with a total land area of 26 square kilometres. The population of approximately 11,000 people is dispersed across these islands, with the capital island of Funafuti being the most populous where over 6,000 people live. Tuvalu's geography presents unique challenges, including limited natural resources, a reliance on maritime transport, and vulnerability to environmental changes.

As a small island developing state, Tuvalu faces significant development challenges, compounded by the existential threats posed by climate change. Rising sea levels, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and coastal erosion threaten the very existence of Tuvalu, impacting livelihoods, food security, infrastructure, and its cultural heritage.

Despite not recording any deaths from COVID-19, the pandemic significantly disrupted life in Tuvalu. The government implemented strict measures, including border closures and quarantine protocols, which affected the economy, particularly tourism and remittances. The disruption of supply chains led to shortages of essential goods, while the health system was strained to enhance preparedness and response capabilities. The pandemic underscored the fragility of Tuvalu's economy and the critical need for resilient healthcare and social systems.

Key gender issues in Tuvalu include persistent gender-based violence, limited economic opportunities for women, and their underrepresentation in decision-making processes. The government is committed to addressing these challenges through comprehensive gender policies. The Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu - National Gender Equity Policy, launched in 2024, outlines priorities such as women's economic empowerment, participation in public life, elimination of gender-based violence, and gender mainstreaming across all sectors.

The process of producing this report involved a thorough literature review and policy analysis, workshops with key stakeholders, and data analysis by the Gender Affairs Department. The report was further refined through a validation workshop conducted by the CEDAW National Coordination Committee, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate representation of the current state of gender equality in Tuvalu.

This report provides an in-depth review of Tuvalu's progress over the past five years in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. It is structured into several sections: an executive summary, an analysis of achievements and challenges, detailed discussions on key priorities, and specific actions taken across various critical areas. The report concludes with an outline of future priorities and the necessary support needed to continue advancing gender equality in Tuvalu.

SECTION ONE: HIGHLIGHTS

Tuvalu's review process for the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)+30 took place in April and May 2024 through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement, including workshops with senior government officials, representatives from the public and private sectors, and civil society organizations. The process was led by the Gender Affairs Department (GAD) under the Office of the Prime Minister and included validation workshops with the CEDAW National Coordination Committee (NCC) to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness. Altogether, 64 people participated in the process.

Core Elements of the Country-Level Review Process

The review process was driven by an inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach, involving government officials, the private sector, civil society organizations. This collaborative effort ensured a comprehensive evaluation of gender equality initiatives, drawing on diverse perspectives and experiences.

Progress, Challenges, and Setbacks in Implementation



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Progress

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has implemented measures, in partnership with civil society organisations and communities that supported the advancement of gender equality and empower women. Key achievements include:

COVID-19 Response: The government successfully protected the population from the global pandemic through early interventions, including a robust vaccination campaign that resulted in over 90% of the population being vaccinated, and no deaths recorded from COVID-19. This achievement is significant for a small island nation where a widespread outbreak could have been catastrophic, particularly for women who traditionally care for the sick at home.

Sustaining Girls' Education: Despite challenges such as limited communication infrastructure and maritime transport disruptions, Tuvalu maintained the continuity of education during the pandemic. Girls continued to perform well academically, with lower dropout rates compared to boys, demonstrating the country's commitment to girls' education.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Initiatives like the establishment of safe spaces for women victims of violence and the yearly implementation of the 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence have been critical. These efforts have fostered increased dialogue on domestic violence and a growing demand for comprehensive services for victims. Civil society organisations continued to work in this area, raising awareness, advocating for better services, and developing counselling services.

Economic Empowerment: Programs such as the Development Bank of Tuvalu's loan products for women and youth entrepreneurs and the establishment of the Tau Maketi market have significantly expanded women's access to financial resources. Local initiatives, like the Nukufetau Trust Fund, have directly benefited over 500 women, showcasing the impact of grassroots actions on women's economic empowerment.

National Gender Equity Policy: The updated Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu - National Gender Equity Policy, endorsed in 2024, marks a renewed commitment by the government to gender equality. This comprehensive policy outlines

priorities such as women's economic empowerment, participation in public life, elimination of gender-based violence, and gender mainstreaming across government policies and programs.

Challenges and Setbacks

Despite these achievements, Tuvalu faces significant challenges in its journey towards gender equality:

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): IPV remains a major issue, exacerbated by deep-rooted cultural norms and insufficient support infrastructure. Efforts to raise awareness and provide support have been hampered by the lack of comprehensive services and trained personnel, as well as reduced government funding for emergency financial support to victims.

Economic and Social Constraints: Limited employment opportunities for women and restrictive social norms continue to hinder women's economic participation and financial independence. Broader economic challenges, such as climate change and external economic shocks, further impede progress.

Lack of Social Protection: The absence of financial support programs for individuals facing hardship, coupled with a severe housing crisis in the capital of Funafuti, remains a critical issue. Overcrowded housing conditions and the high cost of living add to the economic pressures faced by women and their families.

Data Collection and Analysis: The lack of robust gender statistics hinders effective

policymaking and program implementation. Limited capacity for data collection and analysis, especially in remote areas, complicates efforts to identify needs and measure progress.

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms: The absence of systematic monitoring and reporting mechanisms challenges the effective implementation of gender-related policies and accountability for government commitments to gender equality.

Harmful Social Norms: Traditional governance structures and social norms that exclude women from leadership positions pose significant barriers to achieving gender parity.



Photo credit: Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation

In summary, Tuvalu has made significant progress in areas such as COVID-19 protection, girls' education, gender-based violence, economic empowerment, and policy development. However, challenges like persistent IPV, economic and social constraints, gaps in data collection, and harmful social norms continue to impede further progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Lessons Learned

Community engagement is essential

Community engagement and partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) are crucial for advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls.

In Tuvalu, any policy or law must undergo thorough consultation with communities on each island and receive their approval before the government can officially endorse it. This inclusive approach ensures that the voices of all community members are heard, and that policies are reflective of the diverse needs and contexts within the country. This process not only strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies but also fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility among the people of Tuvalu. These examples demonstrate the transformative impact of community engagement and CSO partnerships in promoting gender equality and enhancing the well-being of women and girls.

Effective policies required robust sex disaggregated data

Accurate data is essential for identifying gaps and measuring progress in gender equality. However, there is a significant deficiency in access to basic sex-disaggregated data across various sectors, making it challenging to measure progress and compile the current report. Addressing these data gaps is crucial for developing informed policies and strategies that effectively promote gender equality. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020 provided invaluable data to help understand the gender perspective of different dimensions of children's well-being and domestic violence. This information not only served to raise awareness among the population and institutions but also led to the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) task force. This illustrates the profound impact that comprehensive gender statistics can have on policy and societal change.

Partnerships with civil society multiply impacts

Strong partnerships between the government, civil society organizations, and international partners have been instrumental in advancing gender equality. These collaborations amplify the voices of women and girls, ensuring their needs and perspectives are integrated into policy and practice and it had expanded the reach and impact of gender-focused initiatives. For instance, CSOs have worked hand in hand with the government to improve health services, particularly in maternal and child health, by providing education, resources, and support to vulnerable populations. During disaster recovery efforts, such as during droughts, CSOs have played a pivotal role in mobilizing resources and delivering essential services, ensuring that women and girls receive the necessary support to rebuild their lives. The partnership was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where CSOs collaborated with the government to disseminate information, distribute hygiene kits, and provide mental health support, addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls. Additionally, during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, CSOs and government agencies have worked together to raise awareness, organize community events, and advocate for policies that protect and empower women and girls.

Development partners' support make a difference

Development partners play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Their contributions extend beyond financial support, encompassing the provision of guiding principles that shape gender equality strategies. These principles are instrumental in integrating gender perspectives into the design and execution of development programs. The collaboration with development partners ensures that gender equality is not merely an ancillary goal but a core component of all developmental initiatives. This partnership fosters a holistic approach, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of programs aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equity.

Priority Actions to Accelerate the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Strengthening Gender Statistics

Tuvalu aims to enhance its capacity for gender analysis by producing comprehensive gender profiles and conducting training on gender analysis for sectoral and island-specific profiling. This effort is crucial for developing effective policies that address gender disparities.

Reducing NCDs and Enhancing Healthcare Services

A key priority is to improve access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health and mental health services. Reducing non-communication diseases is also essential to substantially improve women's health, but also to reduce unpaid care work delivered by women and girls which also affect their health and limit their opportunities for employment.

Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship

Providing access to credit, business training, and market opportunities is vital for promoting women's economic security and their resilience to environmental and socioeconomic shocks. It involves finding new economic opportunities for women through the development of the blue and green economies and investing in the cultural industries.

Developing mechanism to protect women and girls from hardship

Identifying measures to support women living in hardship, including social protection measures, and addressing the housing crisis and the high cost of living.

Increasing Women's Participation in Decision-Making

Removing barriers to political participation and creating supportive environments for women leaders are critical steps. Leadership training programs and mentorship opportunities will empower women to take on decision-making roles.

Mainstreaming Gender Equity

Integrating gender perspectives into all areas of policy and practice involves developing guidelines, building capacities, and establishing mechanisms to support gender equity. This approach ensures that all government actions consider and address the unique needs of women and girls, especially in initiatives aiming at building communities' resilience to climate change.

Strengthening Partnerships with Civil Society

Collaborating closely with civil society organizations enhances the reach and effectiveness of gender-focused initiatives. These partnerships are vital for leveraging resources, expertise, and community engagement, ensuring a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality. The priority is also to further build CSOs' capacity in terms of skills and resources, to increase impacts and their capacity to leverage resources further. This also apply to grassroot women's organisations.

Establishing Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms and Tools

Working across the government and with the civil society to develop and implement a robust monitoring and reporting mechanism and build capacity in this area to monitor progress in implementing the gender equality commitment, including CEDAW and the BPfA, identify gaps and take prompt measures to address issues, while holding institutions accountable.

SECTION TWO: PRIORITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

Over the past five years, significant actions have been implemented in Tuvalu towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, despite numerous challenges and setbacks. The country's efforts span across various areas, addressing critical issues such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, sustaining girls' education, breaking the silence on gender-based violence, and advancing economic empowerment initiatives. Notable achievements include the successful protection of the population from COVID-19 impacts, continuing progress of girls' education, and the endorsement of the National Gender Equity Policy. However, persistent challenges such as intimate partner violence, economic and social constraints, the lack of social protection, and harmful social norms continue to hinder progress. Additionally, gaps in data collection, analysis, and monitoring mechanisms present significant obstacles in effectively addressing gender equality issues and ensuring accountability. This section delves into these achievements, challenges, and setbacks, providing a comprehensive overview of Tuvalu's journey towards gender equality over the past five years.

Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks

Achievements

Tuvalu has made significant progress in advancing gender equality and empowering women in the past five years. This section highlights the most important achievements during this period, including the government's successful response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the sustained focus on girls' education, efforts to combat gender-based violence, initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment, and the endorsement of the updated National Gender Equity Policy. These accomplishments reflect Tuvalu's commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society, demonstrating resilience and determination in addressing both new and ongoing issues affecting women and girls.

Protecting the Population from the Global COVID-19 Impacts

The past five years were marked by the global COVID-19 pandemic and its severe economic repercussions. In Tuvalu, the government implemented comprehensive measures to limit the spread of the virus. Early in the pandemic, a State of Emergency was declared, borders were closed, and quarantine and isolation protocols were imposed for returning Tuvaluans. A robust vaccination campaign was launched, public education efforts were intensified, the healthcare system was strengthened, and water and sanitation infrastructure were improved. As a result, over 90% of the population was vaccinated, and Tuvalu recorded no deaths from COVID-19. This achievement is particularly significant in a Small Island Developing State, where a widespread outbreak could have been catastrophic. The impact on women is

especially noteworthy, as they traditionally bear the responsibility of caring for the sick at home.

Sustaining Girls' Education and Access to Quality Education

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tuvalu prioritized the protection and continuation of children's education. Despite the island nation's dispersed population across nine islands, limited communication infrastructure, and maritime transport disruptions, significant efforts were made to ensure that education continued. Girls, in particular, continued to perform well in school, and their dropout rates remained lower than those of boys. This success underscores Tuvalu's commitment to sustaining girls' education even amidst challenging circumstances.

Breaking the Silence on Gender-Based Violence

The global COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged droughts, and uncertainties stemming from the food and fuel crisis have heightened the vulnerability of women and girls to domestic violence. The 2019 Women and Youth Forum initiated discussions on this issue, leading women to call for support services for the first time. In response, the government established two units to provide safe spaces for women victims of violence and their children. Additionally, a partnership with civil society organizations led to the launch of the first Tuvalu 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence in 2020. Since then, there has been a growing dialogue about domestic violence, resulting in increased demand for comprehensive services for victims.

This led to the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Task Force to coordinate efforts among institutions providing first responses to victims and develop their capacity to offer comprehensive support.

Economic Empowerment Initiatives

Women's economic empowerment is essential for achieving gender equality and fostering resilient communities. Initiatives such as the Development Bank of Tuvalu's loan products for women and youth entrepreneurs, and the establishment of the monthly Tau Maketi market, have significantly expanded women's access to financial resources and platforms for income generation. Additionally, local initiatives have made substantial impacts in supporting women's entrepreneurship. For example, the Nukufetau Trust Fund has directly benefited over 500 women, while women from Nui residing in Funafuti have organized the sale of handicraft products made by those living in Nui. These examples illustrate that local collective actions can have a profound and direct impact on women's economic empowerment,

Challenges and Setbacks

Despite notable achievements, Tuvalu faces significant challenges in its journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Persistent issues such as intimate partner violence (IPV) remain major obstacles, exacerbated by deep-rooted cultural norms and limited support infrastructure. Economic and social constraints, including limited employment opportunities for women and a lack of social protection, hinder their economic participation and financial independence. Additionally, the absence of robust data collection and monitoring mechanisms impedes the effective implementation of gender-related policies. Harmful social norms and the limited representation of women traditional governance mechanisms further complicate efforts to achieve gender parity. This section explores these persistent challenges and setbacks, highlighting the areas where continued efforts and strategic interventions are critically needed.

Persistent Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and limited capacity to support the victims

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a major issue in Tuvalu, affecting women's safety and well-being. Efforts have been made to raise awareness, provide support to survivors, and improve reporting mechanisms. However, deep-rooted cultural norms and insufficient support infrastructure have posed significant obstacles. The lack of comprehensive services

highlighting the need for increased support at the grassroots level.

Endorsement of Tuvalu National Gender Equity Policy

A significant achievement in the past five years has been the review of the 2014 National Gender Policy, culminating in the updated 2024 version known as the Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu - National Gender Equity Policy and subsequent endorsement by the Government in 2024. This updated policy demonstrates a renewed commitment by the government to gender equality and women's empowerment. It outlines clear priorities, including women's economic empowerment, their participation in public life and decision-making, the elimination of gender-based violence, and gender mainstreaming across all government policies, programs, and services. The Policy serves as a comprehensive guideline for the entire government, accompanied by a plan of action with already mobilized resources for its implementation.

and trained personnel has further limited the effectiveness of these efforts.

In addition, first responder institutions such as the police force, medical system, social services, and judiciary lack the capacity to provide specialized services and do not have established protocols to effectively support victims and handle perpetrators. The Gender Affairs Department continues to manage the Domestic Violence Funds, which aim to provide emergency financial support to victims and enhance services. However, government funding for this initiative was significantly reduced from AUD 50,000 to AUD 10,000 in 2020.

Economic and Social Constraints

Limited employment opportunities for women and prevailing social norms that restrict women's economic participation are ongoing challenges. These constraints hinder women's ability to achieve financial independence and fully contribute to the economy. Programs aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion have been implemented, but broader economic challenges, such as climate change and external economic shocks, have often hampered these efforts. The small size of the local market, high costs of living, and the impact of climate change on traditional livelihoods like agriculture and fishing pose significant barriers.

Lack of Social Protection for Women and Girls Experiencing Hardship

The lack of social protection for people experiencing hardship continue to be an important challenge. No financial support or other forms of assistance exist to provide financial aid to people with low incomes or to help alleviate poverty and improve their living conditions. To add to that, the housing crisis in the capital island of Funafuti remain huge. In diverse forums, women highlighted the issue of overcrowded houses and the financial and environmental pressure generated by it. The island of Funafuti is 2,4 square kilometres with a population of approximately 6,320 people, which make the population density of Funafuti 2,633 people per square kilometres.

The absence of social protection for individuals facing hardship remains a significant challenge. There are no financial support programs or other forms of assistance available to provide aid to those with low incomes, to help alleviate poverty, or to improve their living conditions. Compounding this issue is the severe housing crisis on the capital island of Funafuti. In various forums, women have highlighted the problems of overcrowded housing and the financial and environmental pressures it creates. Funafuti spans only 2.4 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 6,320 people, resulting in a high population density of about 2,633 people per square kilometre.

Data Collection and Analysis

Robust gender statistics are essential for effective policymaking and program implementation. Without accurate data, it is challenging to identify needs, measure progress, and allocate resources efficiently. The lack of comprehensive national gender statistics

has hindered the development of targeted interventions. Limited capacity and resources for data collection and analysis, along with the complexity of gathering data in remote areas, have further complicated these efforts.

Lack of Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

The lack of monitoring and reporting mechanism presented a real challenge in producing the current report and for the preparation of Tuvalu's report to CEDAW committee. Data are not routinely produced on services users and programs participants, and there is a lack of archives, including in within the National Women's Machineryes. This is not an issue only pertaining to gender equality related work. It also results in a lack of mechanism in holding institutions accountable to implement government's commitments to gender equality.

Harmful social norms

Harmful social norms remain a significant challenge in Tuvalu, particularly in the realm of leadership positions within traditional governance bodies, which are exclusively occupied by older men who make decisions for the community. It is especially true in the outer islands, where local governments are more impactful in the day to day lives of women and men. Traditional leaders are also influence by pastors who hold a strong influence and act as gate keepers to maintain men's prerogatives. There are worries that if power relationships change in families and communities, including gender power relations, Tuvaluans will lose their cultural identity.

In conclusion, while Tuvalu has made significant strides in protecting its population from COVID-19, sustaining girls' education, addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's economic empowerment, and updating the National Gender Policy, challenges such as persistent IPV, economic and social constraints, and gaps in data collection and analysis continue to impede progress. These achievements and setbacks highlight the complex landscape of gender equality and women's empowerment in Tuvalu.

Top Five Priorities Over the Past 5 Years

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has focused on few key priorities that had an impact in improving the lives of women and girls. These efforts have been instrumental in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls across the nation. The following narrative outlines the top five priorities, the rationale behind them, the actions taken, and the outcomes achieved.

Access to Quality Health Services

Access to health services, including reproductive and mental health care, has been a top priority for Tuvalu. This focus is fundamental for the well-being and empowerment of women and girls. By addressing health issues, particularly those unique to women, Tuvalu aims to promote gender equality and improve overall health outcomes.

To achieve this, Tuvalu has increased the number of healthcare facilities, especially in the outer islands, ensuring broader access to medical services. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government implemented rigorous public health measures, such as early border closures and high vaccination rates, resulting in no COVID-19 deaths. Reproductive health services have been enhanced with widespread availability of HPV vaccines for girls and PAP smear screenings.

However, challenges remain, including misconceptions about contraception, which the government continues to address through education and outreach.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant threat to Tuvalu's limited healthcare system. Early on, with support from the World Health Organization, the government strengthened protocols and implemented measures to prevent outbreaks. A massive vaccination campaign, supported by the Government of Australia, resulted in 90% of the population being immunized.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) remain the leading cause of death in Tuvalu. Statistics reveal that 62.5% of the population is affected by obesity, 35% use tobacco, 18.7% binge drink, and 42.2% suffer from hypertension among adults aged 28-69 years. Approximately 64% of Tuvaluans had 3 to 5 NCD risk factors at the time of the survey (Ministry of Health, Tuvalu, 2017). The Global Nutrition Report of 2021 showed a high prevalence of obesity, with 59.9% of adult females and 51.5% of adult males affected (Country Nutrition Profiles, Tuvalu, 2021). Despite these challenges, the healthcare system lacks the equipment and expertise to manage severe cases. To

compensate the Government supports an average over 150 patients per year in receiving professional care abroad, through the Tuvalu Overseas Referral Medical Scheme, which representing about 42% of the Ministry of Health's budget (Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Awareness on Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is a significant barrier to gender equality, impacting women's physical and mental health, economic opportunities, and overall well-being. Addressing GBV has been a priority for Tuvalu to create a safe and supportive environment for women and girls. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019-2020 revealed that 44% of women in Tuvalu have experienced intimate partner violence, yet only a third of the victims seek help.

To combat this, Tuvalu has coordinated the annual 16 Days of Activism Campaign since 2020, involving media outreach, public events, and educational programs to raise awareness about GBV. In 2021, a Traditional Leaders' Forum was convened to engage traditional leaders in discussions about domestic violence and human rights, fostering community-level support for GBV prevention. These initiatives have reached thousands of people, breaking the silence around GBV and promoting gender equality and human rights. Additionally, the GBV Task Force, established in 2023, coordinates efforts among government institutions, civil society organizations, and law enforcement to provide comprehensive support to GBV survivors.

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Economic independence is crucial for women's empowerment and overall gender equality. With the increasing cost of living in Tuvalu, supporting women to increase their financial security has become even more urgent. Providing women with financial resources and opportunities enables them to contribute fully to the economy and improve their livelihoods.

The Development Bank of Tuvalu has introduced new loan products to support women and youth entrepreneurs, focusing on ecotourism and climate-smart agriculture. The



Photo credit: Sokotia Kulene

Tau Maketi Market, established in March 2021, provides a platform for women entrepreneurs to sell their products, generating significant income. Data indicates that approximately 93% of vendors at the Tau Maketi are women, with each vendor generating an average of \$1,225 per market day. This initiative has significantly contributed to the economic empowerment of women in Tuvalu.

National Gender Equity Policy

A comprehensive policy framework is essential for guiding actions and ensuring sustained progress towards gender equality. The establishment and implementation of the 2014 National Gender Policy and its revision have been critical in this regard.

Launched in May 2024, the Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu Policy outlines strategies to address disparities, promote inclusive policies, and foster collaboration among stakeholders. The

policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It includes specific actions and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation and accountability. This policy framework has provided a structured approach to advancing gender equality and addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls in Tuvalu.

In summary, over the past five years, Tuvalu has made significant strides in enhancing access to quality health services, protecting the population from pandemics and NCDs, raising awareness on GBV, empowering women economically, and establishing a comprehensive policy framework for gender equality. These priorities reflect Tuvalu's commitment to creating an inclusive society where women and girls can thrive.

Promotion of the Rights of Marginalised Women and Girls

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has undertaken few initiatives to promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls. These efforts have focused on addressing specific challenges encounter by women and girls with disabilities, those living in remote and rural areas, and young women. The following narrative provides detailed accounts of three measures taken.

Disability-Inclusive Policies and Support Measures

In 2018, Tuvalu made a significant commitment to the rights of women and girls with disabilities by developing and implementing the Tuvalu National Policy for Persons with Disability. In addition to recognizing that women with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, often within their own families, the Policy also acknowledge that predominant caregiving role women play. The Policy proposes actions for raising awareness and empowerment women, elders, youth and children with disabilities; promoting and mainstreaming their rights and development concerns; provide training, support and care for the wellbeing of caregivers, and facilitate acquisition of assistive devices. In the absence of a monitoring and reporting system, it is not clear to which extend the Policy actions have been implemented so far and its impacts in improving the lives of women and girls with disabilities. Nevertheless, the Government, through the Social Welfare Department, continue to provide financial support to persons with disabilities through a specific social transfer scheme. In 2024, 113 men and 112 women with disabilities benefit from the scheme (Social Welfare). This scheme ensures they receive the necessary resources to lead dignified and independent lives. Additionally, the government has supported the Persons with Disability Organisation – FusiAlofa - which runs a school,

raises awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, and promotes the delivery of services to enable them to live with dignity.

Integration of gender perspective in Islands Strategic Plans

Addressing the needs of women and girls in remote and rural areas has been another critical focus for Tuvalu in the past 5 years. Local government (Kaupules) integrated gender-specific components and budgets into Island Strategic Plans to ensure that women's needs are directly addressed in local planning and development processes.

These development plans now include specific budgets aimed at improving healthcare, education, and economic opportunities for women. Programs supporting income-generating activities, such as handicrafts and small-scale agriculture, have been implemented to empower women economically.

These measures have provided significant benefits to women in remote and rural areas. Improved access to essential services and economic opportunities has empowered them to take active roles in their communities. The involvement of local communities in the planning processes has been crucial, ensuring that the initiatives are relevant and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by these women.

BPfA Implementation in the Context of Crisis

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has faced a series of overlapping crises that have significantly impacted the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). These crises include the COVID-19 pandemic, recurring droughts, food and water security challenges, and the ongoing climate crisis. Each of these crises has affected critical areas of concern, necessitating targeted measures to prevent the reversal of progress and ensure gender-responsive responses.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the economic activities of women in Tuvalu. Border closures and the state of emergency disrupted the local economy, particularly impacting women-led businesses in the hospitality and handicraft sectors. Many women experienced

significant income losses due to reduced sales opportunities.

To mitigate these impacts, the government introduced the Tau Maketi, a monthly market established in March 2021. This market provided a platform for local entrepreneurs, especially women, to sell their products. With around 30 vendors—93% of whom are

women—participating each month, the Tau Maketi became a vital income source. Each vendor earned an average of AUD 1,225 per market day. This initiative not only supported women's economic empowerment during the pandemic but also highlighted the entrepreneurial capacities of women in Tuvalu.

Droughts and water security

Recurring and prolonged droughts in Tuvalu – like the 9-month long drought in 2022, have exacerbated the burden of unpaid care work on women. The scarcity of water has increased the time and effort required for water collection, significantly impacting women's overall health and well-being as women are the ones providing care for the sick in the family.

To address these challenges, the government, in collaboration with civil society organizations, implemented water distribution initiatives and provided water tanks to affected households. Additionally, awareness campaigns on water conservation and management were conducted to support sustainable practices within communities.

Food Crisis

The high cost of imported food, compounded by global supply chain disruptions, has led to food security challenges in Tuvalu. This crisis disproportionately affected women, who are primarily responsible for ensuring their families' nutrition and well-being.

In response, the government, in collaboration with civil society organisations, introduced food security initiatives to promote local food production and reduce dependency on imported goods. Programs supporting home gardening and local farming were implemented, providing women with the tools and knowledge to grow their own food. These initiatives have helped improve food security and offered women an opportunity to contribute directly to their households' nutritional needs.

Climate Crisis

The ongoing climate crisis poses a severe threat to Tuvalu's long-term sustainability, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events

threatening the livelihoods and safety of its population. Women, who may be differently vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, face increased risks and challenges.



Photo credit: Gender Affairs Department

To address these long-term challenges, the government has supported labour migration schemes to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for affected communities. These schemes aim to create pathways for Tuvaluans to work abroad, reducing the pressure on local resources and providing financial support to families back home through remittances. Additionally, the government has integrated gender perspectives into all climate resilience policies and programs to ensure that women are actively involved in decision-making processes related to climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Tuvalu's response to the confluence of crises over the past five years highlights the importance of gender-responsive measures in mitigating the adverse impacts on women and girls. Through initiatives like the Tau Maketi, water distribution programs, food security efforts, and labour migration schemes, the government has taken concrete steps to prevent setbacks in the progress made under the BPfA. These actions underscore Tuvalu's commitment to advancing gender equality and ensuring that women and girls remain central to the nation's development and resilience strategies.

Priorities For Accelerating Progress for Women and Girls in The Next 5 Years

Tuvalu's National Gender Equity Policy outlines key priorities to accelerate progress for women and girls in the next 5 years. A critical focus will be on community mobilization to prevent SGBV and transform harmful gender norms through awareness campaigns and community-based programs. The government will mainstream gender equity across all legislation and services, with particular emphasis on climate change resilience, healthcare, women's participation in the blue and green economy, and digital technology. Building on past lessons, robust data collection and community involvement will drive these initiatives, ensuring that policies are informed by accurate, gender-disaggregated data.

Over the next five years, Tuvalu's priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls as stated in the National Gender Equity Policy include:

1. Ensuring that government policies, programs and services benefit women and men equally and guarantee the full realization of their human rights and cultural aspirations, without any form of discrimination based on gender.
2. Advancing women's leadership and participation in decision-making at all levels.
3. Creating equal opportunities for women to be economically empowered and financially secure.
4. Eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and provide the best services to support and protect the victims.

A critical component will be the mobilization of communities to **prevent SGBV** and transform harmful gender norms. This will involve community-based programs and awareness campaigns aimed at fostering a culture of respect and equality.

Gender equity and equality will be mainstreamed across all government legislation, policies, programs, and services, ensuring that all actions taken by the government consider and address the unique needs and contributions of women and girls. The focus in this area will be in climate change resilience and disaster response, health and care – including unpaid care, increasing women's participation in the blue and green economy and promoting cultural industries, and increasing women and girls' participation in and benefit from the digital technology.

The government plans to build on lessons learned from past successes and setbacks. Previous initiatives have highlighted the importance of robust data collection and community involvement in driving gender equality. By prioritizing **gender statistics**, the government will ensure that policies and programs are informed by accurate, gender-disaggregated data. This data will be crucial in identifying gaps and measuring progress.

Enhancing **healthcare services** will involve targeted interventions to address the specific health needs of women and girls, including reproductive and mental health services. Efforts to combat NCDs will focus on prevention and management, with particular attention to the unique challenges faced by women.

Addressing SGBV will require a multi-faceted approach, combining improved services for victims with preventive measures. The government, in collaboration with civil society organisations, will enhance support services, including safe houses and counselling, while also implementing educational programs to change societal attitudes towards gender-based violence.

Supporting women's **entrepreneurship** will include providing access to credit, training in business management, and creating market opportunities. These efforts will help women build sustainable livelihoods and achieve financial independence.

Increasing women's **participation in decision-making** will involve removing barriers to political participation and creating supportive environments for women leaders. Initiatives will include leadership training programs, mentorship opportunities, and reforms to ensure equal representation in government bodies.

Mainstreaming gender equity across government actions will require a concerted effort to integrate gender perspectives into all areas of policy and practice. This will involve developing guidelines and building capacities, developing gender statistical profiles, establishing mechanisms to support the integration of gender equity perspectives in all government actions, and monitoring and reporting in progress to support accountability. It also involves reviewing existing law that induce discrimination against women and girls, and adopting measures to support the compliance with CEDAW of all new legislation.

Strengthening partnerships with civil society organizations will enhance the reach and effectiveness of gender-focused initiatives. Collaborations will enable the sharing of resources and expertise, ensuring that efforts to promote gender equality are comprehensive and inclusive. This also entail strengthening capacities of CSOs and grassroot levels women's groups.

By addressing these priorities through a coordinated and inclusive approach, Tuvalu aims to create a more equitable and just society for all its citizens. The government is committed to making significant strides in gender equality, ensuring that women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential and contribute to the nation's development.

SECTION THREE: PROGRESS ACROSS THE 12 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Inclusive Development, Shared Prosperity, and Decent Work

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has made significant progress across the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the actions taken by Tuvalu to address these critical areas of concern, highlighting both achievements and ongoing challenges in the journey towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Gender Equality in the World of Work

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has taken steps to advance gender equality in the world of work, particularly focusing on empowering women in informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2017, Tuvalu's labour force participation rate stood at 68%, with women making up 40% of this figure compared to 59% for men (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2017). The primary sources of household income were wages and salaries, land leases, and notably, handicrafts, which generated more income than remittances and non-subsistence businesses combined (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2015). Handicraft production, primarily undertaken by women, plays a vital role in the economy but remains within the informal sector, limiting opportunities for investment and growth.

Tuvalu Labour Migration Policy 2015 recognized the opportunities for women to work overseas. However, labour migration remains dominated by men, probably due to the nature of the labour market demands in New Zealand and Australia. In 2023, the 184 were men and 20 women were recruited through the Pacific Australian Labour Mobility scheme (PALM) and 145 men and 18 women through the New Zealand recognized Seasonal Employment Scheme (Department of Labour). In total women represented 23% of the total migrant workers. Women migrant workers were recruited to work in the care sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on Tuvalu's economy, particularly affecting women. A rapid assessment conducted by the Gender Affairs Department in 2020 highlighted that women experienced greater income losses than men due to their reliance on hospitality and handicraft sales, which were severely disrupted by the state of emergency and border closures (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department, 2020). In response to these challenges, few initiatives were launched aimed at supporting women and youth in the workforce.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of borders resulted in a significant loss of income for many women entrepreneurs in Funafuti. A rapid assessment conducted by the Gender Affairs Department on March 20, 2021, highlighted the severe socio-economic impacts of border closures, which were implemented to protect the population from the virus. Women whose incomes relied on selling handicraft products to Tuvaluans traveling abroad and foreign visitors faced substantial challenges as they could no longer reach their customer base.

Another significant initiative was the establishment of the Tau Maketi in March 2021, a monthly market designed to provide a sales outlet for local products during the COVID-19 pandemic. This market was an important response to the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic, especially for women whose incomes depended on selling handicrafts to travellers and visitors. The Tau Maketi has since become a vital platform for women

entrepreneurs, with around 30 vendors—93% of whom are women—participating each month. On average, each vendor generates \$1,225 per market day, contributing significantly to local incomes and demonstrating women's entrepreneurial capabilities. This initiative has proven so successful that other islands have started organizing their own monthly markets.

During this period, the Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW) continued building women's capacity to produce handicrafts and was closely involved in marketing those. The organisation received a yearly allowance of AUD 25,000 from the government to this end. Over 100 women have participated in and benefited from TNCW activities. However, the handicraft centres the organisation used to run has yet to be rebuilt. The centre was demolished when the airport facilities were expanded in 2017, with the promise that it will be rebuilt. The Centre was playing a central role for marketing and selling handicraft produced by women and supported the financial security of thousands of women.

During the past five years, there have also been very interesting actions initiated by grassroot women's groups. One notable initiative is the Nukufetau Women Trust Fund, which was distributed in 2023 and has benefited more than 500 women. Initiated in 2013, The Nukufetau Trust Fund operates on a model where women contribute \$50 annually to a trust account at the National Bank of Tuvalu for 10 years. In 2023, the fund matured, and each woman received 75% of their contributions back for personal use, including business ventures. With more than 500 women participating, the initiative has now been extended for an additional five years, continuing to support women's economic empowerment in the community. This fund has empowered women by enabling them to start and expand their own businesses, fostering economic independence and empowerment. By providing financial resources directly to women, the initiative has supported various entrepreneurial activities, enhancing their participation in the local economy and contributing to their overall empowerment. Another initiative is the one led by women from Nui Island residing in Funafuti who have organized the sale of handicraft products made by those living in Nui, providing an outlet for women from his outer island who do not have access to market, to sell their products and generate substantial incomes. In Vaitupu the Weaving and Taa making training have provided valuable skills and income-generating opportunities for over 50 women.

The Culture Department has also launched initiatives to support local product producers. In

2023, the department allocated funds to the local councils (Kaupules) to purchase local products, which are then sold in Funafuti and beyond. Women in Vaitupu have particularly benefited from this initiative, organizing weaving trainings and producing items such as toddy and weaving materials like laufale, kie, and laukie. This initiative not only promotes traditional crafts but also provides women with a sustainable source of income. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, many women continued their small-scale trading businesses, meeting the ongoing demand for local products. These efforts underscore the importance of community-based initiatives in advancing gender equality and economic empowerment for women in Tuvalu.

In June 2023, the Development Bank of Tuvalu introduced a new loan product of \$50,000 designed to assist women and youth entrepreneurs who face difficulties accessing financing. This initiative focuses on promoting ecotourism and climate-smart agriculture, aiming to foster financial inclusion, economic empowerment, and job creation. Besides providing loans from \$200 to \$10,000, the Development Bank also offers training in business management, e-commerce, and disaster preparedness. The first training session was held in Funafuti in May 2024, attended by 23 participants. DBT will extend these sessions to the outer islands to reach women and youth in remote areas.

The recent initiative in June 2024, by the Tourism Department, titled "Crafting Our Future: Where Tradition Meets Trend," engaged 42 young women in a comprehensive 5-day workshop aimed at enhancing handicraft production and creating new income opportunities for young women. The workshop sought to explore traditional handicraft techniques, facilitate skill development, build community, and provide access to financial assistance from the Development Bank of Tuvalu (DBT). Participants were introduced to a variety of traditional handicraft methods, understood the cultural significance of these crafts, and completed their own projects, showcasing their newly acquired skills and cultural inspirations. The program included diverse sessions such as an introduction to traditional handicrafts, hands-on training with modern materials, business creation pathways, and packaging and labelling with a Tuvaluan touch. Participants also learned how to utilize social media for business promotion. The initiative, implemented in collaboration with the Departments of Culture, Business and Investment, and the Development Bank of

Tuvalu, aligns with the Tuvalu Sustainable Tourism Policy (TSTP).

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist. Women's unpaid care work continues to limit their economic participation and with a high rate of non-communicable diseases, this obstacle will remain unless public care services improved, NCDs significantly decrease, and a more balanced distribution of unpaid care work is being done in the homes. Employment opportunities remain constrained in Tuvalu, with the government being the primary employer, especially for women in the education and health sectors. The small local market restricts the development of profitable businesses, and prevailing social norms often prioritize family

Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute Unpaid Care and Domestic Work

In Tuvalu, women and girls carry the responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work, both within their households and the wider community. This significant contribution, though vital to the functioning of society, remains unquantified and underrecognized. Currently, no formal study has been conducted to measure and understand the extent of unpaid care work, resulting in a lack of data to inform policies and programs effectively. There is neither recognition that those responsibilities limit women's capacity to earn an income and can have detrimental effects on their lives.

In terms of existing measures, Tuvalu has long established maternity leave policies to support working parents. Mothers are entitled to three months of maternity leave, providing them with the necessary time to care for their newborns and recover from childbirth. Another measure adopted that have some impacts for transforming gender norms related to care, is the policy that fathers are also entitled to up to 10 days of paternity leave 'to support mothers in caring for the new baby'. In case of adoption of babies up to 12 months, mothers are entitled to 30 days adoption leave and fathers 10 days paternity leave. (Government of Tuvalu, 2016). This Policy supports fathers' involvement in the care of newborn/adopted babies, somehow promoting men's involvement in caring for children.

Reduction of the Gender Digital Divide

Over the past five years, efforts were made to enhance digital literacy and connectivity for all its citizens, including for rural populations, which surely contribute to reduce the gender

responsibilities for women over economic engagement. Additionally, the adverse impacts of climate change, such as droughts and cyclones, directly affect the resources needed for handicraft production and other economic activities.

Tuvalu remains dedicated to advancing gender equality in the world of work. The government recognizes the need for ongoing efforts to expand employment opportunities, support informal sector activities, and enhance women's access to financial resources. Through continuous monitoring and adaptive strategies, Tuvalu aims to ensure sustained progress in gender equality, ultimately creating a more inclusive and resilient economy for all.

digital divide. Despite the inherent challenges of being a small island developing state with a limited consumer base and high internet costs, Tuvalu has made progress in improving access to digital tools and the internet.

According to the Tuvalu Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, 41% of women used a computer at least once a week, with a higher usage rate of 46.6% in urban areas compared to 31.5% in rural areas. Additionally, 52% of women used a mobile phone at least once a week, and 65.6% use the internet at least once a week, with urban usage significantly higher than rural usage. In comparison, men's digital engagement shows higher usage rates overall, with 37.7% using a computer, 71.8% using a mobile phone, and 72.8% using the internet weekly.

As of January 2022, Tuvalu had 5,915 internet users, reflecting an internet penetration rate of 49.3%. This marked an increase of 66 users (1.1%) from the previous year. Despite these gains, 50.7% of the population remained offline at the beginning of 2022. (KEPIOS, 2022) The state-owned Tuvalu Telecommunications Corporation (TTC) plays a pivotal role in improving connectivity. TTC operates satellite internet services, although with limited capacity. Recognizing the need for better connectivity, the World Bank approved a US\$29 million grant in January 2019 for the Tuvalu Telecommunications and ICT Development Project. This project aims to boost internet connectivity across Tuvalu, including the outer islands, and support investments in an international optical fibre submarine cable to provide faster and lower-cost internet bandwidth (Tanei, 2022).

To further address the digital divide, Tuvalu has integrated digital literacy and skills training into

school and higher education curricula. These programs focus on the effective and safe use of ICTs and media and information literacy. The government reported in its 2022 Voluntary National Review to the UN that all schools in Tuvalu now have internet access, meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target for school infrastructure (Government of Tuvalu, 2022).

Civil society organizations and the private sector are also actively involved in promoting digital literacy. The women-led organization, Fatu Lei, has conducted a week-long training for youth – seven girls and five boys on coding.

The Development Bank of Tuvalu has started providing training on e-commerce to help women and youth access markets, thereby supporting their economic empowerment through digital means.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. The cost of internet access in Tuvalu is high due to the limited consumer base and the high costs associated with satellite internet services. However, TTC is committed to finding alternative solutions to mitigate these costs and

improve connectivity across the country, especially in rural and remote areas.

Impacts of Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Environment

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has navigated a complex macroeconomic and fiscal landscape while striving to implement the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). As a small island developing state (SIDS), Tuvalu's economy is inherently vulnerable to external shocks, climate change, and global economic fluctuations. Despite these challenges, the government continues investing in health, education and local development which represented the highest percentages of government expenditures, respectively 15%, 16% and 14% of the government budget in 2023. Those public services are not only critical for women and girls, but health and education sectors are also the main employers for women (Ministry of Finance, 2023). No austerity measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector has been implemented during this period.

Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services

Poverty Eradication

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has made efforts to address the risks of poverty among women and girls, though it lacks a comprehensive strategy specifically targeting this issue. Instead, a series of initiatives have provided support, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing economic challenges.

During the pandemic, various short-term measures were implemented to alleviate the economic burden on women and their families, including a temporary emergency financial aid.

Recognizing the persistent high cost of living as a significant challenge, the new government, which took office in 2024, has expressed its intention to undertake a comprehensive review of the taxation regime, price control regulations, freight costs, and the costs of basic commodities, fuel, and services. This commitment signals a commitment to addressing the economic factors that contribute to hardship in Tuvalu.

Efforts to support women's entrepreneurship, access to markets, and business development activities have also been noteworthy. The monthly market, Tau Maketi, provides a

platform for women to sell their products and access new markets. Additionally, the Development Bank of Tuvalu established a Women and Youth Loan Scheme to facilitate access to financial resources, enabling women to start and expand their businesses.

Several local initiatives, including in the outer islands (remote and rural areas) have been implemented in the past five years to lift women's resilience and protect them from hardship. Women's groups from Nukulaelae and Nanumea led gardening initiative. In Vaitupu, women's groups worked together in initiatives for home improvement, home gardening, provision of kitchenware, and clean environment.

The Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW) has played a pivotal role in these efforts. In 2022, TNCW collaborated with the Fuligafou Youth Association to deliver skills and handicraft training to young members. This initiative, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), saw participation from about 20 women, equipping them with valuable skills to enhance their economic opportunities.

Additionally, efforts to improve access to basic services such as power, water, education, transport, and telecommunications continue. Enhancing these services remains a priority, as better infrastructure and service provision are crucial for reducing vulnerability and improving the quality of life for women and girls.

Social Protection

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has maintained social protection for women and girls through various initiatives and programs.

In the past five years, Tuvalu has maintained access to social protection for the overall population, including women and girls, as evidenced by various initiatives and programs implemented during this period. These efforts are underscored by the findings of the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 and 2021, which provides valuable insights into the reach and impact of these measures. The MICS report revealed that 49% of households surveyed had received external economic support from a social transfer or benefits scheme. Data show minimal disparity in accessing social transfer and benefits between female-headed households (51.9%) and male-headed households (48.2%). Additionally, households in urban areas were slightly more aware and likely to utilize these supports, with 51% compared to 46% in rural areas. Notably, recipients of assistance comprised 40% of the bottom wealth index groups and 60% of the top, indicating a broad distribution of support across different economic strata. Among the social transfers and benefits available in Tuvalu, several key programs stand out for their impact on women and girls:

- **Tuvalu Overseas Referral Medical Scheme:** This scheme facilitates medical transfers for individuals requiring specialized care not available within the country, ensuring that women and girls have access to essential health services. Over the past 5 years 446 women and 374 women benefited from the overseas referrals (Public Health Department, 2024).
- **Tuvalu Senior Citizen Support Scheme:** Overall, 18.2% of households utilized this scheme – 23.6% of female-headed households, compared to 17% of male-headed households (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021). This scheme for people aged 70 years and over are benefiting 141 men and 243 women in 2024 (Social Welfare Department, 2024).

- **Financial Support Scheme for Persons with Disabilities:** This scheme provides crucial assistance to persons with disabilities, ensuring that women and girls with disabilities receive the support they need to lead dignified lives. In 2024, 113 men and 112 women with disabilities benefit from this scheme (Social Welfare Department, 2024).
- **Retirement Pension:** This benefit supports older women who have contributed to the workforce, ensuring they have financial security in their retirement years. In 2024, 306 men and 404 women are receiving this benefit (Social Welfare Department, 2024)
- **School Tuition and Related Support:** Education-related support has been a critical area of intervention, with 16.3% of households receiving this assistance. Female-headed households benefited significantly more from this support, with 23% utilizing it compared to 15% of male-headed households (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

The Tuvalu National Provident Fund (TNPF) plays a pivotal role in enhancing economic security and social welfare for the people of Tuvalu. Established to provide financial security for its members during retirement, the TNPF has grown to encompass a range of initiatives that contribute significantly to the economic stability and development of the nation. The Fund's primary objective is to offer a reliable savings mechanism that ensures members can accumulate funds throughout their working lives, providing a financial cushion for retirement, unemployment, or other significant life events. In addition, the Fund has introduced various programs aimed at promoting financial literacy, encouraging savings, and supporting income-generating activities. One notable initiative is the provision of low-interest loans to members for housing, education, and small business ventures. These loans have enabled many individuals and families to improve their living conditions, access higher education, and establish or expand their businesses, thereby contributing to broader economic growth and poverty alleviation. The TNPF has also been actively involved in community development projects, partnering with local organizations and government bodies to support initiatives that enhance the quality of life for Tuvaluans. For example, the Fund has invested in infrastructure projects that improve access to essential services and promote sustainable development. By aligning its investment strategies with the country's development

goals, the TNPF not only secures financial returns for its members but also contributes to the overall socio-economic progress of Tuvalu.

The government provided a COVID-19 relief allowance to support families during the pandemic. Each household received a cash transfer of AUD 300 per month issued for a period of three months. This assistance was aimed at ensuring that families could meet their basic needs during the challenging period brought on by the pandemic. These measures were part of a broader package to sustain the well-being of Tuvaluans, reflecting the government's commitment to social protection during unprecedented times.

By ensuring equitable access to these programs, Tuvalu is working towards fostering an inclusive environment where women and girls can thrive. This commitment is crucial for sustaining progress and ensuring that the benefits of these programs reach the most vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, so that no one is left behind.

Health Outcomes for Women and Girls

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has faced significant health challenges that impacted directly and indirectly on women and girls, including a high rate of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to enhance healthcare facilities have focused on increasing access, especially in remote areas, and improving the quality of medical services. Additionally, partnerships with civil society organizations have been crucial in promoting sexual and reproductive health, preventing epidemic diseases, and raising awareness about healthy lifestyles.

NCDs, particularly cardiovascular diseases, are a major health issue in Tuvalu, accounting for 84.8% of all mortality. The obesity rate is alarming among adults aged 18–69 years, with rates of 55% of male population and 71% of female population (Government of Tuvalu, 2022). Cardiovascular diseases alone contribute to 44% of total deaths, with cancers, respiratory diseases, and diabetes also being significant contributors.

Modern contraception methods are available, and family planning information is provided. However, there are misconceptions about the impact of contraception on fertility, and some women face resistance from their husbands

regarding family planning use (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

Droughts in Tuvalu have exacerbated waterborne diseases like typhoid, increasing the burden of unpaid care work on women. This situation also impacts their overall health and wellbeing.

Mental health issues, although not traditionally perceived as significant, are increasingly being recognized. Awareness campaigns and psychosocial support services, particularly in Funafuti, aim to address mental health needs and reduce stigma.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Tuvalu implemented a series of rigorous and proactive measures that successfully prevented any deaths from the virus. Early in the pandemic, Tuvalu closed its borders to non-residents and enforced mandatory quarantine for returning residents, effectively preventing the introduction and spread of COVID-19. This early action was complemented by extensive public health campaigns aimed at educating the population about hygiene, social distancing, and the importance of mask-wearing. The government also upgraded medical facilities, ensuring healthcare providers were equipped to handle potential cases and that testing capabilities were robust. These efforts were crucial in maintaining control over the virus and preventing community transmission.

Furthermore, Tuvalu achieved a high vaccination rate, with approximately 90% of the population receiving COVID-19 vaccines. This high level of immunization was a critical factor in preventing severe cases and deaths. The government worked closely with international organizations such as the World Health Organization to secure vaccines, medical supplies, and technical support. Community engagement and the involvement of local leaders played a significant role in ensuring compliance with public health measures. By combining early and decisive action with comprehensive public health strategies and high vaccination coverage, Tuvalu managed to protect its population effectively, setting a notable example in pandemic management.

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has made significant strides in improving its healthcare facilities, with a particular focus on expanding access and enhancing the quality of medical services. One of the key areas of progress has been the increase in the number of clinics across the country, especially in the outer islands. These upgrades have included the establishment of new medical centres and the

enhancement of existing ones, ensuring that even the most remote communities have access to essential healthcare services. The government has prioritized the provision of up-to-date medical equipment and the training of healthcare workers to better address the health needs of the population. This expansion has been vital in improving the overall healthcare infrastructure, allowing for more comprehensive and timely medical care. Additionally, Tuvalu has focused on specific health programs to address prevalent health issues and improve health outcomes. For instance, vaccination programs have been a major area of investment, with extensive efforts to immunize the population against diseases such as typhoid and HPV. The introduction of HPV vaccines for girls aged eight and the availability of PAP smear screenings across the country have significantly bolstered women's health services. Mental health, previously a neglected area, has also seen improvements with increased awareness campaigns and the provision of psychosocial support, particularly in the capital, Funafuti.



Photo credit: Sokotia Kulene

Government -government partnerships in public health

Partnerships between the government and civil society organisations is a strength to promote public health. In Tuvalu the Department of Health works closely with non-governmental organisations to this end in promoting sexual and reproductive health, preventing epidemic and water-borne diseases and raising awareness about healthy lifestyles. In the past five years, the partnership with the Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA) and the Tuvalu Red Cross Society was very successful.

TuFHA has played a pivotal role in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across the country. Their comprehensive approach focuses on providing essential services, education, and support to all Tuvaluans, particularly young adults and marginalized populations.

TuFHA provides educational sessions that include Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE). These sessions are designed to equip individuals, especially young adults, with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. The focus on CSE helps to promote safe practices, reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and empower individuals to take control of their sexual health.

TuFHA's approach includes targeted efforts to reach young adults and underserved, marginalized groups. Collaborations with organizations such as Akanda Alliance, an LGBTQI association, and Fusi alofa, a Disability Association, have been instrumental in extending these critical services to diverse and often vulnerable communities. By fostering these partnerships, TuFHA ensures that SRHR education and support are inclusive and respectful of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or physical abilities. The clinic run by TuFHA provides family planning counselling, SGBV counselling, HIV/AIDs screening, and cervical cancer screening. The organisation also run a mobile clinic that do house outreach in both Funafuti and the outer islands. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to free spaces in the hospital in case of an outbreak, TuFHA's facilities were used to provide mother and child health services and post-natal care.

The Tuvalu Red Cross Society has also played a crucial role in improving health outcomes for women and girls through extensive community engagement efforts. The Red Cross has collaborated closely with the Public Health Unit to raise awareness and provide vital information on preventative health measures. This included conducting house-to-house outreach to disseminate information on typhoid, dengue, and COVID-19, distributing informational, educational, and communication (IEC) materials in public places, workplaces, shops, and households. Additionally, the Red Cross distributed RAT kits, masks, and gloves to enhance community protection against COVID-19. To address public concerns and provide real-time responses, the Tuvalu Red Cross also established a community feedback mechanism and conducted a perception survey. This initiative aimed to understand the challenges behind the significant drop-in vaccination rates for booster doses and to develop effective communication strategies for public awareness.

In addition, by working closely with the Public Health Unit and the Maternal Health Clinic, the Red Cross has supported risk communication,

community engagement, and the rollout of vaccinations for COVID-19, typhoid, and routine immunizations such as the HPV vaccine for girls. These efforts are crucial in ensuring comprehensive immunization coverage and protecting the health of women and girls. Furthermore, the Red Cross has partnered with Tuvalu Family Health to raise awareness about menstrual hygiene and health in schools across Funafuti. This initiative aims to eliminate stigma and misconceptions surrounding menstrual practices, thereby promoting better menstrual health and education for girls. Through these targeted actions and collaborations, the Tuvalu Red Cross Society has significantly contributed to enhancing the health and well-being of women and girls in Tuvalu.

Another significant achievement in the past five years has been the Funafuti Menstrual Hygiene Management Survey led by TuFHA in February 2022, with the participation of 328 women and girls. Key findings revealed that many young women and girls were unprepared for menarche, lacked suitable facilities to manage their menstrual needs at home, school, or work, and had limited understanding of menstrual health and hygiene. The survey also uncovered significant barriers such as overcrowding, limited access to menstrual hygiene products, and cultural taboos that hinder open discussion about menstruation.

The survey showed that 55% of respondents first learned about menstruation from their mothers, but 21% had no prior knowledge before menarche, often leading to fear and anxiety. Privacy and safety concerns were prominent, with 40% worried about being seen while changing menstrual materials and 23% feeling threatened. Additionally, many schools and workplaces lacked adequate facilities and support for menstrual hygiene management, forcing women and girls to use makeshift methods that risk their health. The survey concluded that there is an urgent need for comprehensive MHM education and improved facilities to support the health and well-being of women and girls in Funafuti. This critical work has sparked essential discussions on a highly taboo subject, highlighting an area integral to the lives of women and girls (Dennis, 2022).

Education Outcomes and Skills for Women and Girls

Over the past five years, girls have consistently outperformed boys in enrolment and academic achievement across primary, secondary, and tertiary education. However, girls' participation in technical and vocational education and

training (TVET) remains low. Key initiatives such as the Tuvalu Learning Project (TuLeP) and the Tuvalu Australian Partnership for Quality Education (TAPQE) aim to improve the quality of education, address absenteeism, and promote gender equality. This section highlights the progress made and the ongoing challenges in ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students in Tuvalu.

According to the 2022 Annual Statistical Report by the Tuvalu Education Department, the net enrolment rate for primary education has consistently been higher for girls, with rates of 93.8% in 2020, 104% in 2021, and 101.4% in 2022, compared to boys' rates of 88%, 102%, and 99.5%, respectively. This trend continues in secondary education, where the net enrolment rate for girls was significantly higher, with 70.1% in 2020, 83.7% in 2021, and 76.7% in 2022, while boys' rates were 57.1%, 63.6%, and 54.5%, respectively. Tertiary education also shows a similar pattern, with girls maintaining higher enrolment rates than boys (Tuvalu Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2022).

Moreover, girls in Tuvalu outperform boys academically across various levels. The national Year 8 examination pass rates for girls were substantially higher, at 76% in 2020, 90% in 2021, and 94% in 2022, compared to boys' rates of 46%, 61%, and 77%, respectively. This academic disparity is further highlighted in the Tuvalu Junior Certificate and Tuvalu Senior Certificate pass rates, where girls consistently achieved higher success rates. Additionally, boys face higher repetition rates in primary education, with 8.5% in 2020, 11.2% in 2021, and 9.4% in 2022, compared to girls' repetition rates of 1.1%, 1.8%, and 1.7%, respectively (Tuvalu Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2022).

The out-of-school rate also indicates a greater issue for boys, decreasing from 28.6% in 2020 to 14.8% in 2022, while girls' rates dropped from 10% to 2.9% over the same period (Tuvalu Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2022).

However, very few girls have enrolled in TVET programs. In 2024, for instance, only 6 out of the 92 students at the Tuvalu Atoll Science Technology Training Institute (TASTTI) were girls. TASTTI is the primary institution offering technical and vocational education and training programs in Tuvalu. Although no formal study has been conducted to assess the reasons behind the low enrolment of girls, it is noteworthy that the programs offered, such as carpentry, basic construction, plumbing, basic electrical work, basic welding, and basic

mechanics, are traditionally male-dominated fields.

In the past five years, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) has been engaged in improve the quality of education, including the education environment. The Tuvalu Learning Project (TuLeP), implemented with the support of various development partners, is an example of it. This five-year initiative of \$14 million is funded by International Development Assistance grant from the World Bank. Its primary goals are to enhance children's readiness for first grade and improve students' reading skills across Tuvalu. The project includes four main components: strengthening early childhood care and education, improving literacy outcomes, conducting research and policy reviews, and bolstering institutional capacity for education management. Key research activities under the project include studies on teacher and student absenteeism, a gender gap analysis in enrolment and performance, and a time-on-task study. These studies aim to uncover the root causes of educational challenges and inform evidence-based interventions.

The expected outcomes for women's and girls' education under TuLeP are substantial. By addressing absenteeism and understanding gender disparities, the project seeks to ensure that girls receive equal educational opportunities and support, thereby improving their retention and performance in school. The gender gap analysis will provide critical insights into the factors driving disparities in the education system, enabling targeted interventions to promote gender equality. Furthermore, the project's focus on enhancing early childhood care and education, coupled with improved literacy programs, is expected to lay a strong foundation for girls' lifelong learning and development. These efforts will contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system in Tuvalu, empowering women and girls to achieve their full potential.

The Tuvalu Australian Partnership for Quality Education (TAPQE) program has a comprehensive Gender, Social Inclusion, and Climate Change Strategy that guides its work with teachers. Continuing education policies now address gender equality issues, incorporating these into literacy training through gender-balanced book selections, inclusive education training for all teachers, and a Bullying Survey of teachers and students. This survey has led to the development of a program specifically targeting gender-based bullying in schools. TAPQE Officers and Advisers have played a significant role in the Curriculum

Roadmap, rewriting draft versions of the English, Mathematics, and Science curricula to emphasize gender equity and eliminate bias. Facilitators have promoted pedagogies that ensure girls have equal and, where necessary, greater opportunities to achieve equity. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program is also under review to enhance access for girls. Additionally, TAPQE has provided gender equality and human rights training for teachers and education professionals through inclusive education workshops, which are ongoing with at least one workshop per year for teachers.

The program has also promoted safe, harassment-free, and inclusive educational environments for women and girls. A bullying survey conducted among primary and secondary teachers and students in years 7-10 revealed significant bullying, particularly of girls by boys. This led to the launch of the Tuvalu Safe Schools Initiative this year. The Alo Ki Mua police initiative, held from May 8-10, 2024, on Funafala islet, focused on career development and included sessions on environmental science, health issues like STIs, anti-bullying strategies, and job training opportunities in Australia and New Zealand. The initiative successfully engaged 20 students from years 11 and 12, with girls reporting higher instances of bullying and expressing a strong desire for such behaviour to end. The sessions, especially the anti-bullying workshop, were well-received, with students advocating for regular training to be integrated into their school programs. Key stakeholders, including the Health Department, NGOs, and various governmental departments, participated actively, ensuring comprehensive coverage of important topics. This initiative particularly benefited girls by addressing bullying, empowering them to contribute to a safer school environment, and advocating for sustained anti-bullying measures through regular awareness sessions.

An important gap remains providing accessible and adapted education for people with disabilities. Children with disabilities are often grouped together while there is a need to develop teaching methods adapted to different forms of disabilities. This can be developed by providing more scholarship opportunities for specialised teachers.

Closing of Gender Gaps in Economic Recovery from COVID-

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tuvalu implemented several measures aimed at ensuring economic recovery and addressing the exacerbated gender gaps in poverty,

employment, and social protection. These initiatives have been pivotal in mitigating the impact of the pandemic and fostering a more inclusive recovery. Partnerships with civil society organizations facilitated community mobilization and improved access to water and sanitation, particularly benefiting women and vulnerable populations. These efforts collectively promoted gender equality and contributed to a resilient economic recovery in Tuvalu.

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Encouraging Relocation and Food Security: To limit the spread of COVID-19 and enhance food security, the government encouraged residents to move back to their islands of origin or to the islets surrounding Funafuti. This strategy not only reduced the population density in Funafuti, which was crucial for controlling any potential outbreaks, but also promoted farming and fishing activities. By engaging in these traditional livelihoods, communities could increase their food security, which was particularly important given the anxiety over food supply disruptions caused by global shipping and delivery delays. Twenty families relocated to the islets of Funafala, Papaelise and Amatuku and some of them stayed there for almost a year. About 10% of the population living in Funafuti at the beginning of the pandemic relocated to their islands or the Funafuti islets for four to six months. This relocation policy was implemented for an initial period, but many individuals chose to stay longer.

Economic Support Measures: To provide immediate financial relief, the government introduced a cash allowance of AUD 300 per household for three months. This financial support was crucial in helping families meet their basic needs during the pandemic, particularly for those whose livelihoods were severely impacted. The allowances played a significant role in alleviating the economic stress experienced by households, ensuring they could continue to access essential goods and services during the state of emergency.

Supporting Local Entrepreneurship: The establishment of the monthly market, Tau Maketi, was another significant measure to

support local economies, particularly in Funafuti. A rapid assessment by the Ministry of Health in 2020 highlighted the impact of the pandemic on local businesses, revealing that 63% of women business owners and 37% of men business owners reported negative effects due to the closure of borders and flight cancellations. While 67% of the business owners had additional income from family members, 33% had no other income source. This market provided a platform for local entrepreneurs to sell their products, thereby generating income and sustaining their businesses during the pandemic. The monthly market was particularly beneficial for women, who comprised the majority of vendors, enabling them to support their families and maintain their livelihoods.

These efforts have been instrumental in promoting gender equality and fostering a more resilient economic recovery.

Partnership and mobilisation: Tuvalu has been successful in mobilising communities to prepare in case of an outbreak through effective partnership between government and civil society. The project, led by CARE Australia and Live and Learn Environmental Education Tuvalu, focused on communications, hygiene promotion, and increased access to water. It targeted 9,875 people (1,541 households), with particular attention to vulnerable households, including those led by women and people with disabilities. The project's activities included interactive sessions on COVID-19 public health measures and prevention, reaching a total of 9,706 people. One-way messaging on COVID-19 prevention reached 5,666 people through mediums such as radio, TV, and posters. These efforts were instrumental in disseminating crucial health information and promoting safe hygiene practices.

In terms of improving access to water and sanitation, the project installed handwashing facilities in schools, benefiting 3,769 students and teachers. Additionally, community-level training on water catchment and rationing practices reached 6,385 people. The project ensured that 10 public buildings, including schools, had handwashing facilities installed. These actions collectively enhanced the community's preparedness for a potential COVID-19 outbreak and supported gender equity by focusing on the needs of women and vulnerable populations. The comprehensive approach ensured that nearly the entire target population was reached, demonstrating effective and inclusive pandemic preparedness and response.



Photo credit: Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation

Freedom from Violence, Stigma, and Stereotypes

Prioritization of Forms of Gender Based Violence

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has prioritized addressing intimate partner violence (IPV) as part of its broader efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV). This focus has been driven by the alarming prevalence of IPV, which represents the most significant and pervasive form of violence against women and girls in the country.

The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in 2019-2020 provided crucial insights that underscored the need for this targeted approach. The survey revealed that 43.8% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence, with 43.5% of ever-married women in this age group reporting such violence from their current or most recent partner. Moreover, 33.9% experienced violence within the 12 months preceding the survey, highlighting the ongoing nature of this issue (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

The survey also pointed to a significant disparity in feelings of safety between men and women. While 96.7% of men felt safe walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark, only 80% of women felt the same. This sense of insecurity was even more pronounced among younger women, with only 66% of those aged 15-19 feeling safe. Similarly, the percentage of women who felt safe at home alone after dark was markedly lower than that of men, with only 59.6% of women in urban areas and 61.4% in rural areas feeling secure, compared to 92.8% and 100% of men, respectively (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

The data also revealed a high incidence of IPV perpetrated by current husbands or partners, with 80.3% of physical violence against women being attributed to these individuals. This finding is particularly concerning given the intimate and dependent nature of these relationships, which can make it more difficult for victims to seek help and escape the cycle of violence (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

Furthermore, the connection between alcohol consumption and IPV was evident, with 55% of perpetrators being sometimes drunk. This contributed to the fear experienced by 60.4% of women regarding their husbands, further complicating efforts to address and mitigate IPV (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

The barriers to seeking help were also starkly highlighted by the survey. Of the women who experienced physical or sexual violence, only 33.7% sought help to stop the violence, while 32.1% told someone but did not seek help, and 33% neither sought help nor told anyone. This indicates a significant gap in the availability and accessibility of support services, as well as potential cultural or societal stigmas that prevent women from reaching out for assistance (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

Given these findings, Tuvalu recognized the urgent need to focus on IPV to ensure the safety and well-being of its women and girls. By addressing IPV, Tuvalu aims to tackle the most prevalent and damaging form of GBV in the country, providing better protection for survivors and working towards a society where women can live free from fear and violence.

Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has undertaken significant actions to address gender-based violence (GBV), focusing particularly on developing and improving services to protect and support survivors. This priority was heightened at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when the adoption of a state of emergency brought to light the increased risks faced by women and girls at home.

During the pandemic, it became evident that there were no shelters available to host survivors in need of protection, and specialized services to support victims were lacking. Although there is a financial scheme run by the Gender Affairs Department to provide financial support to survivors, the absence of dedicated facilities and services posed a serious challenge. In response, the government established a safe house in Funafuti with two units to provide immediate refuge. Additionally, an assessment was conducted to identify the most suitable model for offering safe spaces or shelters for GBV victims, ensuring future solutions are well-informed and effective.

Another successful initiative emerged from civil society through the Fakalaafiga Network of CSOs, which focuses on preventing gender-based violence (GBV). In collaboration with Fatu Lei, the network mobilized resources to conduct a comprehensive training program in counselling. This accredited training, provided

by the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), includes over sixty hours of content and offers a diploma upon completion. It also features a specific module on counselling for victims of GBV. Currently, fifteen women are participating in this training, thereby enhancing their capacity to provide professional counselling services to those in need.

In 2023, the Women and Girls Resource Centre was established by the women-led organisation Fatu Lei (Women for Change). The Centre was created to provide a space for women and girls, in all their diversity, to participate in a variety of activities to learn, share experience, advocate and promote ways in which women's human rights are realized and promoted. The Centre was also set to offer a space for women and girls experiencing violence to get counselling.

Despite the adoption of the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act in 2014, the capacity of first responder institutions to provide a comprehensive package of services remains limited. The Police, for instance, have established a domestic violence unit yet the unit is currently managed by only one trained officer. Similarly, hospitals and clinics do not have staff trained to handle GBV cases, and the Social Welfare Department has only one social worker available to provide psychosocial support.

To address these gaps and urgently build the capacity to offer professional services to survivors, the Government established a GBV Task Force in August 2023. Coordinated by the Gender Affairs Department, this task force includes representatives from first responder institutions, as well as civil society organizations like Fatu Lei, the Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA), and the Tuvalu National Council of Women, which serves as an advisor to the task force.

A comprehensive capacity-building strategy has been developed and will be deployed from 2024 onwards. This strategy aims to enhance the capacities and mechanisms within institutions to provide rapid and professional services to protect and support GBV survivors.

Through these concerted efforts, Tuvalu is committed to ensuring that all survivors of GBV receive the protection and support they need, fostering a safer and more equitable society for all.

Strategies to Prevent Gender-Based Violence

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has taken significant steps to prevent gender-based violence (GBV), an issue that has traditionally

been a taboo topic. However, through a series of coordinated initiatives and campaigns, the country has succeeded in breaking the silence surrounding GBV.

Since 2020, the Gender Affairs Department has coordinated the 16 Days of Activism Campaign against Gender-Based Violence, implementing a comprehensive program to reach a wide audience. This campaign has employed a variety of strategies to maximize its impact.

A key aspect of the campaign has been the use of media, particularly radio messages, to disseminate information widely across the nation. A clip was produced in 2020 with the support of the Pacific Community on "staying safe during COVID-19" focussing on awareness raising on GBV. Acknowledging the importance to mobilise all segments of the population, public events such as marches and sports tournaments have been organized every year to engage the youth and the broader community. Collaboration with schools has been a crucial element, with educational programs designed to inform students about GBV and promote gender equality.

The campaign has also integrated GBV awareness messages into other public health and disability rights campaigns, ensuring a holistic approach to advocacy. One of the most significant strategies has been the coordination of events led by various actors from governmental institutions and civil society organizations. Participants in these efforts include the Public Health Department, Business Department, Judiciary, Ombudsman Office, Police, Tuvalu National Council of Women, Tuvalu Family Health Association, Fatu Lei, and the Persons with Disability Organization FusiAlofa. By combining their efforts, these entities have successfully raised awareness about the multidimensional impacts of GBV and promoted gender equality and human rights.

This multi-faceted approach has been highly effective, reaching thousands of people across different age groups and sectors. Notably, the issue of GBV was brought to discussion at a parliamentary session in 2021, marking a significant step in the national dialogue on this critical issue. The most important outcome so far has been breaking the silence around GBV. Although this increased awareness has not yet translated into a higher number of victims seeking services, there is evidence that more people are discussing the issue, and institutions are actively searching for solutions.

In 2021, amid the State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gender Affairs Department convened the Traditional Leaders'

Forum. Traditional leaders in Tuvalu hold critical roles in local governance, with their positions and views highly respected and their decisions typically implemented. Over 70 people participated in the Forum, including Traditional Leaders from seven islands, representatives of the civil society organisations and government met for three days to discuss the socioeconomic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence and human rights. This includes 40 people from the Outer islands to join the Forum online and actively participated the discussions. This was the first time such a sensitive issue was discussed with the traditional leaders.

The workshop provided a valuable opportunity to address the impacts of domestic violence and discuss measures to tackle the issue. One significant proposal was the formal establishment of a safe house, which received unanimous approval from the traditional leaders. They even requested support to establish safe spaces on their respective islands. It is worth noting that, due to the state of emergency, leaders from the outer islands could not physically attend the forum in Funafuti. However, the Gender Affairs Department facilitated their participation virtually from the capital. Despite the novelty and challenges of online participation and the sensitivity of the topics discussed, the forum was a success, with all invited traditional leaders fully attending the two-day event.

The Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT) and its women's association (FFEKT) are faith-based organizations that play a pivotal role in addressing social issues within their congregations and institutions. They collaborate closely with existing church partners, such as Uniting World and Pacific Churches to advance equality and safety in their congregations. FFEKT is actively implementing the Pacific Churches initiative, a pioneering Community of Practice (CoP). Within this initiative, Gender Equality Theology (GET) and Child Protection and Care materials, have been developed by Pacific faith leaders. These resources aim to dismantle theological foundations and biblical interpretations that limit women's leadership and legitimize violence against women and children. The materials have been translated into the Tuvaluan language and are being distributed to EKT congregations to educate members to promote women's leadership, prevent violence against women and support gender equality efforts effectively.

Actions to Prevent and Respond to Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence

Recognizing the growing prevalence and impact of online violence, the Gender Affairs Department (GAD) made TF GBV the central theme of the 2023 16 Days of Activism Campaign against Gender-Based Violence.

In preparation for the campaign, GAD conducted a rapid assessment to evaluate the exposure of young people in Tuvalu to online violence. Two groups, each consisting of 17 fifteen-year-olds (one group of boys and one of girls), participated in a two-hour discussion and filled out anonymous questionnaires. The assessment revealed that 44% of both girls and boys had experienced online violence, with no significant difference between the genders. However, a notable finding was that girls were more frequently subjected to online violence perpetrated by someone they were in a relationship with before (i.e. boyfriend). This exposure significantly influenced the way they interacted on social media, often leading them to alter their online behaviour to avoid further victimization (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department, 2023).

The findings of this assessment were presented at a workshop during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, which included representatives from the private and public sectors, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs). This workshop facilitated a broader discussion on the implications of the findings and the necessary steps to combat TF GBV.

To further support this initiative, GAD produced informational flyers aimed at educating youth and their parents on how to stay safe online. These materials provided practical advice and resources to help young people navigate the digital world safely.

Since the campaign, GAD has continued to raise awareness about TF GBV and advocate for the adoption of measures to protect individuals from online violence.

Resources to women's organisations working to prevent and respond to GBV

The central approach to support CSOs' resourcing has been for the Gender Affairs Department (GAD) to develop relationships with development partners and advocate for the need to invest in improving services to survivors. These efforts aim to secure investments in Tuvalu that support both government initiatives and civil society organizations (CSOs).

Recognizing the crucial role that CSOs play in combating GBV, GAD has actively sought to enhance their access to resources. A key component of this strategy involves providing technical assistance to these organizations, particularly in the area of proposal writing.

One notable example of this effort is the support provided to a key CSO focused on GBV prevention and response. Through targeted technical assistance, this organization was able to successfully access donor funding, thereby developing its capacity to deliver essential services and advocate for the rights of women and girls.

Actions to Address Portrayal of Women and Girls in the Media

Tuvalu has two radio stations: one focusing on current affairs such as health, education, and cultural affairs, and another faith-based channel named 'Hope'. Additionally, the national television station broadcasts news. Currently, there is no newspaper in Tuvalu.

The portrayal of women through the radio and television is positive. Women are portrayed as actively involved in families and communities' affairs and women's associations' activities are regularly reported. There is a growing discussion about domestic violence and women survivors of domestic violence.

Beyond traditional media, many government departments actively run Facebook pages to feature key programs and activities.

Because of the significant representation of women in leadership positions within the government - women comprise 58% of the Secretaries and 55% of the Deputy and Assistant Secretaries – the showcasing of department activities gives high visibility of women exercising leadership, which counterbalanced gender stereotypes, promoting a more balanced and inclusive portrayal of women.

Over the past four years, the Gender Affairs Department has been proactive in organizing roundtables in conjunction with International Women's Days. These roundtables have been broadcasted on both radio and television, showcasing women exercising leadership within their communities and engaging in discussions on critical public affairs issues, such as food and water security and the digital revolution. These initiatives have made visible the critical roles women play in addressing significant challenges and shaping the future of their communities.

These actions collectively contribute to challenging and changing traditional gender norms and biases.

Actions to address Violence Against Marginalized Women and Girls

In the past five years, few actions were implemented reach out to marginalised groups of women and girls. These actions have been integral parts of broader campaigns and focused initiatives aimed at raising awareness and providing support to vulnerable populations.

A key component of these efforts is the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. This campaign consistently includes targeted messages to raise awareness about the heightened exposure to violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities. The active participation of the Persons with Disability Organisation, FusiAlofa, has significantly increased the campaign's outreach to women and girls with disabilities and their families, ensuring their voices and concerns are highlighted.

The campaign also places a strong emphasis on young women and girls. Specific activities are conducted through school programs and sports tournaments to engage this demographic. For instance, the 2023 campaign focused on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) and included a rapid assessment of online violence experienced by both adolescent boys and girls. This assessment involved 38 adolescents, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by young people in the digital age.

Efforts to reach women and girls in the outer islands have been enhanced through various media. Interviews with Gender Affairs Department Directors and workshops are broadcasted to ensure information reach these remote areas. In 2024, these efforts will be expanded with specific activities aimed at raising awareness directly in the islands. Interactive programs will be conducted to support communities in addressing gender-based violence and providing support to survivors.

These concerted efforts reflect Tuvalu's commitment to addressing violence against marginalized groups of women and girls, ensuring they are not left behind in the fight against gender-based violence.

Participation, Accountability, and Gender-Responsive Institutions

Actions to Promote Women's Participation in Public Life and Decision Making

In the past five years, Tuvalu has undertaken few actions to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making.

A significant milestone was reached in 2022 with the election of the first two women ordained as ministers of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu (Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, EKT). Considering the EKT's prominent influence in Tuvaluan society, this achievement is particularly noteworthy. The EKT, the state church of Tuvalu, has 9,700 followers.

Leadership is traditionally being regarded as a male prerogative and only three women have been elected to Parliament in Tuvalu's history. No women were elected in the 2024 government elections, and only one woman stood as a candidate. There are currently only 7 women out of 48 members elected in local government.

However, there has been a noticeable increase in women occupying senior government positions. Women now represent 58% of the Secretaries (the highest government level function), compared to 10% in 2018, while women 53% of the magistrate in 2023 are women compared to 13% in 2020, indicating a significant progress in gender representation at the senior administrative level.

The UNDP's Practice Parliament Initiative in 2022 involved 22 women participants. This capacity-building program is designed to enhance the legislative skills and parliamentary practices of women and marginalized groups, offering hands-on experience through simulated parliamentary sessions. Despite these initiatives, the political landscape remains challenging for women, as evidenced by the outcome of the 2024 elections where no women were elected.

Women's Participation in Decisions Making in the Media and ICT

The media landscape is limited in Tuvalu, which includes only one television station and one government-run radio channel, along with a faith-based radio channel.

In the Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation, there is an equal representation of men and women,

with 15 women and 15 men working in various capacities. Women have a prominent presence, with seven women hosting radio programs and reading the news. Additionally, the producer of the radio programs is a woman, and the executive team is composed of women. Among the six members of the board, which make decisions on the programmes, four are women. In addition, the Senior Manager of Tuvalu Telecom, a State Own Business, is also a woman. Women's leadership within the media sector illustrates the importance Tuvalu is giving in promoting women's participation in media and ICT decision-making roles.

National Women's Machinery

Tuvalu's national women's machinery was first established in 1999 under Ministry of Home Affairs under the name of Women's Affairs. The Gender Affairs Department (GAD) was established in 2014 under the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2019, the department was relocated under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Gender Affairs, but it returned to the Office of the Prime Minister in 2024. The department comprises four staff members, including a director. Its primary functions are to provide advice to the government on progressing gender equality and meeting women's needs, as well as raising awareness in communities.

Over the past five years, the Gender Affairs Department has significantly contributed to national efforts, especially during the State of Emergency amid the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Director of GAD was a member of the task force, actively participating in government decisions aimed at protecting the community and mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. During this period, GAD was instrumental in establishing a safe house for victims of domestic violence and organizing the monthly market, Tau Maketi, which enabled women to sell their products and generate income. Furthermore, there has been an increased demand for GAD's technical assistance from various government departments and local governments, with the department being routinely invited to consultations for program designs. These measures have strengthened the role and impact of the Gender Affairs Department in

promoting gender equality and empowering women in Tuvalu.

Resources

Despite its critical role of awareness raising, capacity building, analysis and research, technical capacity and advisory, the Department have limited resources to fulfil its mandate. The department annual budget was AUD157,133 in 2019, which included AUD50,000 for a Domestic Funds for supporting victims. In 2020, the annual budget was cut down to AUD117,133 and the Domestic Funds was cut down to AUD10,000. Subsequently, the department budget was AUD130,450 in 2021, AUD92,900 in 2022, AUD87,384 in 2023, and AUD104,530 in 2024.

Programmes

Over the past five years, the Gender Affairs Department's predominant role has been advisory rather than programmatic. Progressing gender equality and women's human rights is viewed as a cross-sectoral issue, and GAD's advisory role spans various sectors including education, public health, climate change, disaster preparedness, island development planning, energy, ICT, labour migration, and legislative review. Through this advisory capacity, GAD ensures that gender perspectives are integrated into all areas of policy and practice, thereby fostering a supportive environment for the empowerment of women and girls across Tuvalu.

The Tuvalu National 2014 National Gender Policy and the 2024 National Gender Equity Policy clearly defined the roles of the Department. This role encompasses making informed recommendations on policies and legislation that support gender equality, monitoring and evaluating sectoral efforts, and providing comprehensive technical support for gender mainstreaming initiatives.

The department plays a pivotal role in the gender mainstreaming process, ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into all areas of policy and practice. By facilitating partnerships and collaborations, the Gender Affairs Department works closely with various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners, to promote and advance gender equality.

Additionally, the department is tasked with advising on urgent and emerging issues affecting women and girls, ensuring that these concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. This includes responding to

challenges such as gender-based violence, economic disparities, and barriers to education and healthcare services for women and girls.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, under the state of emergency declared by the government, GAD implemented various initiatives to raise awareness about COVID-19 and mobilize communities to adopt protective measures. These initiatives included raising awareness about the potential increase in domestic and family violence and calling for action to protect the most vulnerable populations. Additionally, GAD supported small initiatives to support women's roles in food security by providing farming tools and coordinating extension services through the Department of Agriculture.

Since 2020, GAD has led the 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence, a flagship initiative that has reached communities and leaders, breaking the silence on these critical issues. The campaign has highlighted not only the effects on victims but also the broader socioeconomic impacts of gender-based violence.

Through its dedicated efforts, the Gender Affairs Department contributes significantly to the national agenda on gender equality, striving to create a more inclusive and equitable society in Tuvalu. The department's work is crucial in ensuring that gender considerations are central to all development initiatives, thereby fostering a supportive environment for the empowerment of women and girls across the country.

Mechanism and Tools to Mainstream Gender Across Sectors

The Gender Affairs Department in Tuvalu plays a coordination role in advancing gender equality and protecting women's rights. As the Secretariat of the CEDAW National Coordination Committee, GAD convenes quarterly meetings where key stakeholders share information and coordinate efforts to progress gender equality.

In 2023, GAD initiated the establishment of a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) task force. This task force is composed of institutions that act as first responders in cases of gender-based violence and is mandated to coordinate efforts and improve services to protect and support survivors.

An important mechanism employed by Tuvalu to mainstream gender is the directive by the Department of the Local Government to integrate a specific component, along with a

designated budget, aimed at addressing priorities identified by women within island development plans. This directive ensures that women's voices are heard, and their needs are directly addressed in the planning process. Most of these development plans now include components specifically designed to support women's income-generating activities, improve access to healthcare services, and build women's leadership.

The Judicial Reform 2021-2024 supported the selection and recruitment of magistrates based on merit. Previously, the recruitment process was managed by traditional local government bodies (Falekaupule), where decision-making was predominantly male dominated. Before the reform, only 13% of magistrates were women, while after the reform 38% of them were women and in 2023, they represent 53%.

National Human Rights Institution

The National Human Rights Institution of Tuvalu Act 2017 expanded the functions of the

Ombudsman established under the Leadership Code Act 2006, thereby establishing the National Human Rights Institution. The Act aimed to recognize, respect, protect, and fulfill the dignity of humankind as enshrined in the Constitution and international human rights law, thereby supporting the foundation of a fair, just, sustainable, and peaceful society.

Due to the recent resignation of the Chief Ombudsman, the institution has not been operating as expected, with staff turnover being a significant challenge. The Government acknowledges the necessity of fully establishing the Office and is progressively working towards this goal (Government of Tuvalu, 2023).

In addition, human rights are firmly enshrined in the nation's Constitution. The Constitution, which was revised in 2023, includes a specific provision prohibiting discrimination based on sex, underscoring Tuvalu's commitment to upholding gender equality and protecting the rights of all its citizens.

Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Actions to end Discrimination Against and Violation of Rights of the Girls Child, Including Adolescent Girls

According to the Tuvalu MICS 2019–2020, the country has seen improvements in several key areas affecting girls' well-being. Notably, the birth registration rates for girls are high, with 89.3% of female children having their births registered with civil authorities, compared to 85.4% for males. This is a crucial step in ensuring girls' access to essential services and legal protection. Additionally, the prevalence of malnutrition among girls under five is relatively low, with only 2.2% being wasted and 3.6% overweight, indicating better nutritional outcomes compared to boys (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

In terms of education, while there is a notable gender disparity in early childhood education attendance, with 69.7% of girls aged 36-59 months attending compared to 75.1% of boys, girls still show strong engagement in primary and secondary education (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

However, the adolescent birth rate remains a concern, particularly in rural areas where it stands at 55 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19, compared to 35 per 1,000 in urban areas. This disparity highlights the ongoing challenges in addressing early pregnancies among rural adolescent girls (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

Despite these positive developments, gaps remain, particularly in child discipline and child Labour practices. The MICS data indicates that 77.9% of girls aged 1-14 years experience some form of violent discipline, with 68.6% subjected to physical punishment and 61.4% to psychological aggression. This highlights the pervasive use of violent disciplinary methods that still need to be addressed (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).

Furthermore, child labour remains an issue, especially among girls aged 5-11, where 6.1% are involved in economic activities, slightly higher than their male counterparts at 5.2%. Additionally, among children aged 12-14, 37.6% of girls are engaged in economic activities, underscoring the need for continued efforts to protect girls from exploitative Labour practices (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2021).



Photo Credits : Martin Vailopa

Over the past five years, TUFHA has undertaken significant actions to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls. A key initiative has been the implementation of awareness programs focused on gender equality and gender equity. These programs aim to educate the community about the importance of treating girls and boys equally and ensuring that both genders have the same opportunities and rights. By addressing cultural and social norms that perpetuate discrimination, these awareness programs are crucial in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Additionally, Tuvalu has joined forces with other stakeholders during the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign. This collaboration amplifies the advocacy for the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls, highlighting the importance of protecting their rights and promoting their well-being.

Environmental Conservation, Protection and Rehabilitation



Photo credit: Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation

Integration of Gender Perspectives and Concerns in Environmental Policies

One of the cornerstone achievements in this regard is the formulation of the National Climate Change Policy 2021-2030, known as Te Vaka Fenua o Tuvalu. This policy explicitly incorporates gender equality and social inclusion as a guiding principle. It emphasizes the advancement of gender equality through climate actions that aim to eradicate social inequalities and address the varied vulnerabilities, capacities, and contributions of diverse groups within the society (Tuvalu Climate Change Department, 2021).

To actualize these guiding principles, the policy outlines two priority actions specifically targeting the integration of gender perspectives:

- *Developing Robust and Transparent Systems for Climate Finance:*

Tuvalu proposes to establish improved institutional procedures for project management, risk assessment, environmental and social safeguards, and gender and social inclusion. This involves creating systems that ensure equitable access to climate finance, facilitating the implementation of projects that benefit all segments of the population, particularly women and marginalized groups. The focus on transparency and robustness in managing climate finance ensures that

resources are allocated and utilized effectively, with due consideration of gender impacts.

- *Strengthening Capacity for Data Management and Application:*

The policy proposes to enhance the capacity of the government and island Kaupule (local councils) to collect, analyse, manage, store, and apply climate and technical data, alongside traditional and local knowledge. Importantly, this includes specific information on women, youths, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. By integrating gender-disaggregated data and local knowledge into environmental planning and decision-making, Tuvalu aims to ensure that the unique needs and contributions of different groups are recognized and addressed in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

The government ensure women are consulted when developing climate change and disaster risk strategies. For example, women represented 20% of the population consulted for determining the Updated National Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2022 (Department, Tuvalu Climate Change, 2022).

Launched in 2017 with support from the Green Climate Fund and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP) aims to mitigate the impacts of coastal hazards and

develop long-term adaptation strategies. The project integrates gender perspectives by ensuring that women are included in decision-making processes and benefit from enhanced resilience measures. The project includes a comprehensive gender strategy and plan of action identifying specific actions to implement across the project to support women's empowerment and gender equality.

The Tuvalu National Council of Women has been instrumental in emphasizing the role and contributions of women in environmental protection and climate change adaptation initiatives. As a member of the National Advisory Committee on Climate Change and a board member of the TCAP project, the Council ensures that women's voices and gender perspectives are incorporated into reports and decision-making processes. Additionally, the Council raises relevant gender issues concerning Island Strategic Plans, scholarships, and project planning and implementation, ensuring that these concerns are addressed and integrated into national strategies and actions.

In April 2023, CARE Australia and Live & Learn Environmental Education Tuvalu conducted an in-depth survey to assess the water and hygiene needs of populations affected by drought on the northern islands of Tuvalu, namely Nanumea, Nanumaga, and Niutao. This survey was meticulously designed to integrate a gender perspective, ensuring that the specific voices and needs of women and vulnerable groups were effectively represented.

The survey revealed a nuanced understanding of the gendered impacts of drought in Tuvalu, highlighting the differential effects on men and women. With 52% of the respondents being women, the survey ensured a balanced gender perspective (Live & Learn Tuvalu, 2023). Specific questions addressed menstrual hygiene management and the unique challenges women face during drought conditions, such as access to safe water sources and safety concerns during water collection.

One of the critical findings was that 59% of the women interviewed reported having to change their menstrual hygiene products or practices due to water scarcity, often switching from reusable to disposable products to conserve water. This shift was necessary because of the lack of water needed for washing reusable pads or cloths, a significant issue highlighted by many women (Live & Learn Tuvalu, 2023).

The gender perspective incorporated into this survey provided essential insights for designing

effective programs. The data underscored the importance of inclusive and equitable strategies that cater specifically to the needs of women, enhance their safety and access to resources, and support their vital roles in community resilience and resource management. This approach demonstrated that integrating a gender perspective is not merely an option but a crucial element in addressing the specific challenges faced by women in drought-affected areas.

Through these proposed actions, Tuvalu is not only advancing gender equality but also promoting a holistic and inclusive approach to environmental sustainability. By embedding gender perspectives into environmental policies, the country aims to implement effective and equitable climate solutions, ensuring that no one is left behind in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation.

Integration of Gender Perspectives in Disaster Risk Reduction and Environmental and Climate Resilience Policies and Programs

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has continued integrating gender perspectives into its policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience. In 2022, the Gender Affairs Department facilitated an orientation session to the local government of Funafuti for helping them to integrate a gender perspective in their disaster preparedness plan.

In the past five years, Tuvalu has taken steps in integrating gender perspectives into its policies and programs for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate preparedness. Central to these efforts is the Island Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans 2021 produced by local councils (Kaupules), which serves as a comprehensive framework for enhancing resilience and ensuring that gender considerations are mainstreamed throughout the disaster management cycle. The plans identified specific vulnerabilities of women to disasters and promote the active participation of women in developing recovery plans. The Funafuti Plan even identified the need for strengthening a GBV referral system to provide support and protection to women and girls affected by disasters. This system includes trained personnel, accessible shelters, and a clear protocol for reporting and addressing GBV incidents.



Photo credit: Gender Affairs Department

The Tuvalu Red Cross Society (TRCS) plays a crucial role in disaster risk preparedness and humanitarian work in Tuvalu. In 2024, 42% of the 239 volunteers involved in the organisation's work, 42% are women: it shows women significant contribution to disaster preparedness and humanitarian work. These women have been essential in assisting communities during droughts, tropical cyclones, and fire hazards, demonstrating their leadership and dedication to building resilience within their communities.

TRCS has also addressed the specific needs of women and girls through various initiatives. During the drought response in 2022, female volunteers played a vital role in distribution of water at community water tanks, which reflect their critical involvement in disaster response efforts.

TRCS continues to improve their capacity to deliver gender-responsive services through the implementation of the Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) policy. This policy has been crucial in planning and integrating PGI into various trainings such as Emergency Response Training, Epidemic Control for community awareness, and First Aid for carers of persons

with disabilities. Additionally, PGI principles have been incorporated into Disaster Risk Management (DRM) planning, ensuring inclusive shelter solutions and early warning and early action initiatives. Collaborative workshops and meetings, including those with the Persons with Disabilities Organisation- Fusi Alofa - have further reinforced these integrations, highlighting the importance of inclusive disaster planning.

In January 2023, an important initiative implemented by Live and Learn Tuvalu and funded by UNFPA facilitated the distribution of 500 Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) kits to women and girls aged 11 to 55 on the drought-affected northern islands of Tuvalu—Nanumea, Nanumaga, and Niutao. This distribution included 68 kits specifically designed to meet the needs of women and girls with disabilities. The primary aim was to provide sustainable support to these vulnerable populations during the challenging drought conditions.

This initiative highlighted the logistical challenges of delivering services to the outer islands, which are only accessible by maritime transport. The effort required the organization's staff to work long hours and endure taxing sea journeys. Rough sea passages also led to some kits being damaged.

The experience underscored the critical importance of collaboration with local authorities and other civil society organizations. It also highlighted the necessity for all partners to enhance their understanding of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, and to adopt approaches that empower women and girls.

SECTION FOUR: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

National Strategy for Gender Equality

In May 2024, the Government of Tuvalu launched the "Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu Policy," – National Gender Equity Policy - a national strategy aimed at advancing gender equality. This policy updates and enhances the priorities from the 2014 Gender Policy and aims to create a society where women and men, in all their diversity, are celebrated as equal partners in all aspects of life. The policy strives to protect everyone from discrimination and violence while ensuring equal access to the nation's development outcomes.

The Policy and its plan of action seek to address disparities such as the limited involvement of women in decision-making, unequal financial opportunities, and gender-based violence. The strategies include implementing inclusive policies, gender-responsive programs, appropriate resource allocation, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, alongside establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

The overarching goal of the policy is to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all women and men, enabling their full participation in Tuvalu's economic, social, political, and cultural development. The policy is rooted in Tuvaluan values and human rights principles, ensuring that all women and men enjoy their cultural heritage and fundamental human rights. It emphasizes freedom from gender-based discrimination, the importance of living with dignity, and the opportunity for all individuals to develop their full potential. The policy promotes the principle of partnership, where women and men share equal responsibility for the wellbeing of their families and communities.

The policy aims for women and men to make decisions together and equally perform leadership roles in all areas of life. It also ensures that women and men have equal opportunities to be financially secure and support their families' wellbeing, while being protected from all forms of violence.

To reach these results, the policy ensures that government policies, programs, and services benefit women and men equally and guarantee the full realization of their human rights and cultural aspirations without any form of gender-based discrimination.

The policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly targeting the goals outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Funding for these initiatives is allocated through national and local government budgets, supported by various international partnerships and organizations dedicated to gender equality.

This comprehensive policy underscores Tuvalu's commitment to fostering an equitable society where both women and men can thrive, contribute to national development, and enjoy their fundamental human rights.

Mechanisms for Stakeholders Participation in the Implementation and Monitoring of the BPfA and 2030 Agenda

In Tuvalu, the primary formal mechanism for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is the CEDAW National Coordination Committee (NCC). This committee plays a crucial role in overseeing the progress of the government's commitments to gender equality. It comprises representatives from various government departments and civil society organizations and meets quarterly to review and coordinate actions.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 - Te Kete - includes a key outcome on gender mainstreaming in the framework of the plan and for women to be engaged and benefitting from it.



Photo credit: Gender Affairs Department

Stakeholders Contribution to the Preparation of the Present National Report

For the production of the national BPfA+30 report, a workshop was organized that brought together senior government officials and representatives from the public, private, and civil society sectors. Over 40 individuals participated in this collaborative effort. The Gender Affairs Department, under the Office of the Prime Minister, led the production of the report. This process included a validation workshop with members of the CEDAW NCC to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the report's content.

Following the validation, the report will be officially launched, accompanied by a communication and dissemination campaign to raise awareness and engage the broader community. These mechanisms ensure that a wide range of stakeholders are involved in the implementation and monitoring processes, fostering a collaborative approach to achieving gender equality and sustainable development goals in Tuvalu.

Country's Action Plan and Timeline for Implementing Recommendations Committee on CEDAW

In 2023, Tuvalu submitted its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, which outlines the

country's progress and ongoing efforts in progressing human rights.

The last combined third and fourth reports to CEDAW were submitted in 2012. Due to various challenges, including staff turnover in the Gender Affairs Department, the COVID-19 pandemic, and severe droughts that have significantly impacted government operations since 2020, there have been delays in subsequent reporting. Despite these challenges, Tuvalu is planning to submit the combined fifth, sixth, and seventh reports to CEDAW in 2024.

The recent production of the Beijing Platform for Action +30 report has facilitated progress towards the completion of the CEDAW report. This process has underscored the critical need for Tuvalu to develop a clear action plan and a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. Such a system will enable the regular collection of data and information, ensuring that Tuvalu can effectively monitor and report timely on the implementation of CEDAW recommendations.

By aligning the production timelines and leveraging recent reporting efforts, Tuvalu aims to enhance its compliance with international gender equality standards and improve its mechanisms for addressing gender discrimination and inequality.

SECTION FIVE: DATA AND STATISTICS

Progress Areas on Gender Statistics

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has not made significant progress in the area of gender statistics at the national level. However, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020 produced with the technical support of UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Pacific Community (SPC), represents the most comprehensive data collection initiative in recent years.

The MICS 2019-2020 has provided critical data across several key areas, including reproductive and maternal health, child health and wellbeing, education, and violence. The data obtained has been essential in informing the development of policies aimed at improving gender equality and addressing the specific needs of women and children in Tuvalu. This survey is noteworthy for generating critical information on gender-based violence (GBV), which has been instrumental in identifying and addressing GBV issues in the country.

Country's Priorities for Strengthening National Gender Statistics in the Past 5 Years

Over the next five years, Tuvalu's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics focus on enhancing the capacity for gender analysis, producing comprehensive gender profiles, and ensuring the availability of sex-disaggregated data across all sectors. One of the key initiatives is to conduct training on gender analysis for sectoral and island-specific gender profiling. This initiative aims to build the skills necessary to understand and address gender disparities effectively.

Advocacy efforts will also be intensified to ensure the production of sex-disaggregated data across various sectors and at the Kaupule (local council) levels. This will involve working closely with local authorities to incorporate gender perspectives into their data collection and reporting processes. The goal is to establish a robust framework for capturing and analysing data that reflects the distinct experiences of men and women in different communities and help identify gender disparities to inform policy making and program design.

The production of a statistical gender profile is another critical priority. This profile will provide a comprehensive overview of gender-related statistics, highlighting key areas of inequality

and progress. The Gender Affairs Department (GAD) will play a pivotal role in this process, collaborating closely with the Central Statistics Division. This collaboration will be particularly significant during the combined Census and Household Incomes and Expenditures Surveys scheduled for 2024, and the next Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) planned for 2025. These surveys will be essential for gathering detailed and accurate data that will support gender analysis.

Through these concerted efforts, Tuvalu aims to create a robust and reliable system for gender statistics that will inform policy decisions and drive progress towards gender equality.

Gender Indicators Prioritized for Monitoring Progress on the SDG

Tuvalu has prioritized nine indicators across five SDG for monitoring progress on the SDGs (Government of Tuvalu, 2022). Those indicators are:

Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages

- Proportion of women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.
- Adolescent Birth Rate.
- Percentage of women with a live birth in the last 2 years who during the pregnancy of the most recent live birth were attended at least once by skilled health personnel, at least four times by any provider, at least eight times by any provider.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- All indicators with sex disaggregated data, including proportion of youth and adult with information and communication technology skills.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

- Data on GBV
- Child marriage
- Women in leadership

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

- Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (...)

- Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark.

Data Routinely Disaggregated by Major Survey

Which data disaggregations are routinely provided by major surveys in your country?

Over the past years, Tuvalu has made notable progress in the disaggregation of data across major surveys, enhancing our understanding of gender dynamics and informing policy decisions. Key data disaggregation efforts have focused on geographic location, income, sex, age, marital status, and education. These categories were prioritized to address specific socioeconomic disparities and to tailor interventions more effectively.

Despite these advancements, barriers persist, including limited resources, insufficient training for data collectors, and cultural sensitivities around certain topics such as disability and sexual orientation.

SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Over the past five years, Tuvalu has taken important steps to progress gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, despite facing numerous challenges. This review has showed the importance of community engagement, robust data collection, and the integration of gender perspectives across all sectors. Key actions include community mobilization, awareness campaigns, and partnerships with civil society organizations. However, persistent challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV), economic barriers, and the impacts of climate change remain critical issues that need continuous attention.

Lessons Learned

Community engagement is essential.

Community engagement and partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) are crucial for advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls.

In Tuvalu, any policy or law must undergo thorough consultation with communities on each island and receive their approval before the government can officially endorse it. This inclusive approach ensures that the voices of all community members are heard, and that policies are reflective of the diverse needs and contexts within the country. This process not only strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies but also fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility among the people of Tuvalu. These examples demonstrate the transformative impact of community engagement and CSO partnerships in promoting gender equality and enhancing the well-being of women and girls.

Effective policies required robust sex disaggregated data.

Accurate data is essential for identifying gaps and measuring progress in gender equality. However, there is a significant deficiency in access to basic sex-disaggregated data across various sectors, making it challenging to measure progress and compiled the current report. Addressing these data gaps is crucial for developing informed policies and strategies that effectively promote gender equality. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020 provided invaluable data to help understand the gender perspective of different dimensions of children's well-being and domestic violence. This information not only served to raise awareness among the population and institutions but also led to the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) task force. This illustrates the profound impact that comprehensive gender statistics can have on policy and societal change.

Partnerships with civil society multiply impacts.

Strong partnerships between the government, civil society organizations, and international partners have been instrumental in advancing gender equality. These collaborations amplify the voices of women and girls, ensuring their needs and perspectives are integrated into policy and practice and it had expanded the reach and impact of gender-focused initiatives. For instance, CSOs have worked hand in hand with the government to improve health services, particularly in maternal and child health, by providing education, resources, and support to vulnerable populations. During disaster recovery efforts, such as during droughts, CSOs have played a pivotal role in mobilizing resources and delivering essential services, ensuring that women and girls receive the necessary support to rebuild their lives. The partnership was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where CSOs collaborated with the government to disseminate information, distribute hygiene kits, and provide mental health support, addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls. Additionally, during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, CSOs and government agencies have worked together to raise awareness, organize community events, and advocate for policies that protect and empower women and girls.

Development partners' support make a difference

Development partners play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Their contributions extend beyond financial support, encompassing the provision of guiding principles that shape gender equality strategies. These principles are instrumental in integrating gender perspectives into the design and execution of development programs. The collaboration with development partners ensures that gender equality is not merely an ancillary goal but a core component

of all developmental initiatives. This partnership fosters a holistic approach, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of programs aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equity.

In Tuvalu, support of the Australian government has been critical to support key gender equality initiatives such as the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, technical assistance for gender mainstreaming, the Tau Maketi monthly market and the distribution of menstrual hygiene kits. But even more importantly, when development partners commit themselves to progress gender equality

across development initiatives, it makes a difference in how development programs are being implemented, making sure women and girls benefit equally. For example, the Government of Australia supports a major initiative in the Education sector, in Water and Sanitation, in Health – and especially during COVID-19, in Infrastructure development and in Climate Change adaptation. Likewise, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF the World Bank and the Government of Taiwan are also major development partners implementing programs in governance, climate change, local development, health, and education.

Ongoing and Future Challenges

Despite progress, several challenges persist:

The home is not a safe place for too many women and girls.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a major issue in Tuvalu, affecting women's safety and well-being. Efforts have been made to raise awareness, provide support to survivors, and improve reporting mechanisms. However, deep-rooted cultural norms and insufficient support infrastructure have posed significant obstacles. The lack of comprehensive services and trained personnel has further limited the effectiveness of these efforts.

Limited support and protection for the victims of gender-based violence.

There is a growing awareness of the existence of domestic violence and its impacts, but services from the first responders are not yet developed. Institutions such as the police force, medical system, social services, and judiciary lack the capacity to provide specialized services and do not have established protocols to effectively support victims and handle perpetrators. Some cases take over two years to be filed to court. For instance, in 2023, the court examined a total of 26 cases of domestic violence. The delay between the registration of the offence and its examination by the court varied significantly, with 2 cases being addressed within 6 months, 11 cases within 7 to 12 months, 8 cases within 13 to 18 months, 1 case within 19 to 24 months, 2 cases within 24 to 36 months, and 2 cases within 37 to 47 months. Among these, 22 cases involved physical abuse, while 23 cases involved psychological abuse. Notably, 16 complainants expressed a desire to withdraw their complaints, and 5 cases were subsequently discharged. As a result, victims do not have faith in the justice system.

The Gender Affairs Department continues to manage the Domestic Violence Funds, which aim to provide emergency financial support to victims and enhance services. However, government funding for this initiative was significantly reduced from AUD 50,000 to AUD 10,000 in 2020.

Many women and girls are vulnerable to hardship and poverty.

Limited employment opportunities and the high cost of living disproportionately affect women. Economic empowerment programs need expansion and more effective implementation.

Limited employment opportunities for women and prevailing social norms that restrict women's economic participation are ongoing challenges. These constraints hinder women's ability to achieve financial independence and fully contribute to the economy. Programs aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion have been implemented, but broader economic challenges, such as climate change and external economic shocks, have often hampered these efforts. The small size of the local market, high costs of living, and the impact of climate change on traditional livelihoods like agriculture and fishing pose significant barriers.

Moreover, the housing crisis in the capital island of Funafuti remains huge. In diverse forums, women highlighted the issue of overcrowded houses and the financial and environmental pressure generated by it. The island of Funafuti is 2.4 square kilometres with a population of approximately 6,320 people, which makes the population density of Funafuti 2,633 people per square kilometre.

The absence of social protection for individuals facing hardship remains a significant challenge. There are no financial support programs or other forms of assistance available to provide aid to those with low incomes, to help alleviate poverty, or to improve their living conditions. Compounding this issue is the severe housing crisis on the capital island of Funafuti. In various forums, women have highlighted the problems of overcrowded housing and the financial and environmental pressures it creates. Funafuti spans only 2.4 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 6,320 people, resulting in a high population density of about 2,633 people per square kilometre.

Climate Change is a major threat to the human rights of women and girls in Tuvalu.

As a small island developing state, Tuvalu is highly vulnerable to climate change, which disproportionately impacts women. Ensuring gender-responsive climate policies is crucial for building resilience. However, there is no gender analysis available on the impacts of climate change that would show how women and men are differently affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, such as on their respective activities in the island's livelihood and their use-patterns of natural resources. Therefore, it is not

clear how women and girls benefit from climate resilience initiatives, or how such initiatives contributed to reduce gender inequality.

Conflicting interests between cultural practices and human rights principles.

Harmful social norms remain a significant challenge in Tuvalu to gender equality and women empowerment, particularly in relations to leadership positions within traditional governance bodies, which are exclusively occupied by older men who make decisions for the community. It is especially true in the outer islands, where local governments are more impactful in the day to day lives of women and men. Traditional leaders are also influenced by pastors who hold a strong influence and act as gate keepers to maintain men's prerogatives. There are worries that if power relationships change in families and communities, including gender power relations, Tuvaluans will lose their cultural identity.

Some cultural practices, which are reflected in laws, still discriminate against women. For example, women's right to inherit land are limited by the Native Lands Act which favours male heirs.



Photo credit: Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation

Priority Actions to Accelerate Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Strengthening Gender Statistics:

Tuvalu aims to enhance its capacity for gender analysis by producing comprehensive gender profiles and conducting training on gender analysis for sectoral and island-specific profiling. This effort is crucial for developing effective policies that address gender disparities.

Reducing NCDs and Enhancing Healthcare Services:

A key priority is to improve access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health and mental health services. Reducing non-communication diseases is also essential to substantially improve women's health, but also to reduce unpaid care work delivered by women and girls which also affect their health and limit their opportunities for employment.

Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship:

Providing access to credit, business training, and market opportunities is vital for promoting women's economic security and their resilience to environmental and socioeconomic shocks. It involves finding new economic opportunities for women through the development of the blue and green economies and investing in the cultural industries.

Developing mechanism to protect women and girls from hardship:

Identifying measures to support women living in hardship, including social protection measures, and addressing the housing crisis and the high cost of living

Increasing Women's Participation in Decision-Making:

Removing barriers to political participation and creating supportive environments for women

leaders are critical steps. Leadership training programs and mentorship opportunities will empower women to take on decision-making roles.

Mainstreaming Gender Equity:

Integrating gender perspectives into all areas of policy and practice involves developing guidelines, building capacities, and establishing mechanisms to support gender equity. This approach ensures that all government actions consider and address the unique needs of women and girls, especially in initiatives aiming at building communities' resilience to climate change.

Strengthening Partnerships with Civil Society:

Collaborating closely with civil society organizations enhances the reach and effectiveness of gender-focused initiatives. These partnerships are vital for leveraging resources, expertise, and community engagement, ensuring a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality. The priority is also to further build CSOs' capacity in terms of skills and resources, to increase impacts and their capacity to leverage resources further. This also apply to grassroot women's organisations.

Establishing Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms and Tools:

Working across the government and with the civil society to develop and implement a robust monitoring and reporting mechanism and build capacity in this area to monitor progress in implementing the gender equality commitment, including CEDAW and the BPfA, identify gaps and take prompt measures to address issues, while holding institutions accountable.

Next Steps

In the next five years, the government will work together with civil society organisations and development partners to successfully implement the Beijing Platform for Action, progress gender equality and make a difference in the lives of Tuvaluan women and girls by:

- 1) Implementing the National Gender Equity Policy which focuses on women's economic empowerment, women's participation in decision-making, the elimination of GBV, and mainstreaming gender across government actions.
- 2) Developing a robust monitoring, learning and evaluation system to track progress and ensure accountability.
- 3) Building capacity of government officials, local authorities, and civil society organizations on gender analysis and gender-responsive programming.
- 4) Establishing mechanism for effectively mainstream gender across government actions.
- 5) Engaging communities to transform harmful gender norms, prevent gender-based violence, and progress gender equity.
- 6) Strengthening partnerships with development partners to secure technical support and resources for gender equality focused and gender responsive initiatives.

By addressing these priorities and taking coordinated actions, Tuvalu aims to create a more equitable and just society for all its citizens. The government is committed to making significant strides in gender equality, ensuring that women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential and contribute to the nation's development.



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