



COOK ISLANDS NATIONAL FEMINIST FORUM

Cook Islands National Feminist Forum Outcome Statement

The inaugural Cook Islands National Feminist Forum, Edgewater Resort 29th - 30th November 2022, brought together 74 Women of the Cook Islands. Our diversities include; women, girls, lesbians, bisexual, trans diverse people, gender non-conforming identities, ethnically diverse women and girls, indigenous women, women with disabilities, widows, women living in rural and remote areas, young women, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles, women from faith-based communities, women in creative industries and women in the informal sector and women ally's and others.¹ As Feminists of the Cook Islands we make the following statements:

1. We seek to achieve economic empowerment for all women, to create a safe environment that fosters creativity entrepreneurship and success and to remove barriers that would impede a woman's ability to work earn and contribute in the economic space. We recognize that to achieve this we must:

- Work towards closing the Gender pay gap.
- Improve mechanisms for reporting and managing sexual harassment, discrimination and intimidation in the work place.
- Improve mechanisms to use census data to identify clearer statistics on women in employment, entrepreneurship, education by location and use these statistics to help plan targeted interventions.
- Providing targeted interventions such as; subsidized daycare, freight subsidies for business women in the Pa Enea, Grants and entrepreneur schemes for women in business and business loan subsidies.
- Improve access to employment and entrepreneurship for Women living with disabilities.
- Increase access to employment and entrepreneurship upskilling opportunities for women.
- Put regulations in place to prevent copycat businesses and loss of intellectual property.
- Explore technological advances that would allow women entrepreneurs to expand their reach/market on a national and global level, freight support etc.

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¹ From here on when we mention 'women and girls' we refer to specific identities and needs of lesbians, bisexual, trans people, intersex people, and other non-heteronormative identities, Francophone women, diaspora women, indigenous women, women living in occupied and colonized territories, migrant women and girls, women with disabilities, and women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, sex workers, living with HIV aids, women living in rural and remote places, young women, the girl child, single mothers, women with albinism, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, and creative industries

2. We urge decision makers to recognize that a focus on areas of Mental Health, Reproductive Health, Disability and Gender based violence are essential in providing safety and security for women and ensuring the health and well-being of our country. We recognize that to achieve this we must:

- Improve access to female oriented health care and create safe, needs based spaces for women, free of stigma and discrimination.
- Invest in women's clinics, counselling and mental health care providers and prioritize women specific health care needs.
- Increase accesses to pap smear and breast screening services and improve provision of results/diagnosis
- Strengthen the existing mechanisms for Gender Based Violence response, ensure personnel are fully trained in delivering services to survivors that are free of discrimination, bias and victim blaming.
- Improve victim support for GBV victims during and after GBV incidences and improve support for offenders aiming to reduce reoffending.
- Ensure all services are safe, supportive and Confidential and provide avenues for redress when confidentiality is violated.
- Improve disability access to all health services and encourage disability access to the town area and public services.

3. We emphasize the important role education plays in the success of our people and how improving access to further training and education and the revitalization of Cook Islands Culture and Language play a large part in setting the path towards Gender Equality. We recognize that to achieve this we must:

- Create clearer pathways to tertiary and trade education
- Invest in technology that will assist with access to higher education for all
- Increase scholarship options for mothers, women and girls.
- Provide incentives, subsidies and avenues for women who are seeking further education later in life.
- Create more opportunity for gaining experience post graduation for example:
 - Subsidizing internships in industries not covered by government agencies
 - Mentorship programs for graduates
- Invest in cultural education at primary, secondary and tertiary level while supporting and encouraging inclusive use of language.
- Invest in documentation and preservation of cultural artefacts, legends and information, and provide subsidies for creating programs/media etc. that teach and preserve Cook Islands stories/culture.
- Implement ministry wide policies that make the following mandatory
 - Cook Islands Māori translation of all official directions, documents etc.
 - Cultural sensitivity training for all incoming personnel

4. We firmly believe that empowering women to take up leadership roles, at all levels, is beneficial for not only women and girls but for the country as a whole. We encourage decision makers to recognize that female representation is imperative in decision making processes, government spaces and leadership positions. We recognize that to achieve this we must:

- Implement Civic education within schools, to ensure an understanding of our political system.
- Create voter education programs to encourage civic engagement
- Create pathways to meaningful political involvement for women and girls
- Put in place mentorship programs for women who show interest in leadership
- Increase access to opportunities for Women to attend and participate in leadership programs including but not limited to Mock Parliaments, upskilling and leadership training, exchange programs, mentorship and more.
- Put in place Temporary Special Measures that provide opportunity for women to hold Island council positions, cabinet positions and candidacy in elections.

The Forum stands in unity and solidarity to strongly encourage our nation to address the issues raised in this statement and consider the requests of this forum.