

**Developing a More Facilitating
Environment for Women's
Political Participation in Nauru**

**A Report on a study commissioned by the
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat**

By

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7. Parliament of Nauru

Executive Summary

Women have played a marginal role in Nauru's Parliamentary history. There are currently no women Members of Parliament, and there has only ever been one female MP. Nor are measures in place which aim to redress this situation, despite growing acknowledgement that broad political reform is crucial, given the country's history of governance-related difficulties, dissipation of financial revenues and the impending exhaustion of phosphate exports. This study investigates the barriers to women's participation in Parliament. It is intended to explore ways of generating a more facilitating environment for women's participation in the political arena. How can women come to play a more significant role in policy formulation and decision making? What reforms might ensure that women come to be seen, heard and recognised?

The research conducted to enable completion of this study focuses on the operation and conduct of Nauru's voting system, asking whether electoral reforms might enhance the position of women. Nauru has an internationally unusual electoral system; voters cast a preferential ballot in multi-member constituencies. Each voter is required to record as many preferences as there are candidates. All preferences are then immediately tallied. A first preference is worth '1', a second preference '0.5', a third preference '0.33', a fourth preference '0.25' and so on. Seven constituencies return two members to Parliament, and one constituency returns four members. Clearly, usage of multi-member constituencies, which is elsewhere in the world often identified as beneficial to women's political participation, has not assisted the position on Nauru. A further reaching investigation is required, both of structural-institutional obstacles to women's participation and of scope for concerted action by women's groups and civil society organisations to challenge male dominance over the political arena.

The research underlying this study was based on interviews, and discussions among focus groups, and was aimed at identifying obstacles to women's participation in politics. Many of these barriers were found to be bound up with prevalent attitudes, negative perceptions about women's potential contribution or conservative views regarding women's position in Nauruan society. Often, as in other parts of the Pacific, weak sex balance in Parliament was identified with 'tradition'. Such attitudes persist, in part, because few women have been able to break the mould by emerging as recognised national leaders. Nevertheless, women do play an important role in Nauruan society, both inside and outside formal employment. Women perform strongly in the professions, in education and in the civil service. In this sense, there is something of a mismatch between women's position in public life and their negligible involvement in national politics. As Nauru turns towards a greater recognition of the need for wholesale economic reform and transformation of entrenched political mismanagement, this report suggests that the time is ripe to consider creating a more enabling environment for women's involvement in politics.

The report also considers formal barriers to women's participation. It looks at the country's Constitution, land laws, and at the distribution of revenues arising from phosphate exports. It looks at constraints inhibiting women putting themselves forward as candidates for election, and in particular at the 'platforms' where citizens gather to hear prospective candidates appeal for support from electorates. It examines the practice of transferring registrations from one constituency to another in pursuit of electoral advantage. It considers whether reserved seats for women might provide a workable option in Nauru, or whether enhanced women's participation might better be left either as an issue to be promoted by women's organisations themselves or for a time when suitable candidates emerge on the national stage.

Although the record of women in Parliament is disappointing, the question inevitably remains as to why so few women candidates put themselves forward for election and why women themselves have

proved unable to overcome social stigmas against women MPs. Women's preferences as shown in voting patterns show little support for those women candidates who do stand for election. Women, like men, often support the view that the public domain is essentially a male forum, a view often also encouraged by the churches. The cultural, religious beliefs and social norms within our society are often gender biased. To shift Nauru towards more efficient, accountable and equitable styles of governance, a nationwide commitment to promoting greater participation by women in Parliament is required.

Recommendations

- Build political will in addressing issues of women's political representation.
- The introduction of reserved seats to fast-track women's representation in Parliament.
- Electoral reforms.
- Enacting legal quotas.
- Special measures for enhancing women's representation.
- Support in promoting increased participation of women in politics.
- Increased resourcing through gender budgeting for the implementation of measures to advance women's political representation.
- The adoption, review and/or implementation of campaign financing provisions or legislation in support of women's political representation.
- Review of legislative and or policy environment to assist political campaigns and voter education, advocacy on national issues.
- Providing capacity building to Parliamentarians and Parliaments to provide enabling environment to address gender equality and equity issues.
- Promote the adoption of structural changes within Parliament to advance gender equality and equity.

1. Introduction

Since Nauru gained independence there has only been one female in Parliament. Only a handful of women have ever put themselves forward as candidates. The objective of this study is to investigate the reasons for such low female participation in elections, and such low levels of representation in the national Parliament of Nauru. The report also explores strategies for creating a more facilitating environment for greater participation of women in elections, Parliament and cabinet. It aims to identify key social barriers to women's participation, including features of the Electoral Act, Constitution and other relevant legislation, and how these might be overcome. But the objective is not solely to focus on structural or institutional barriers to greater women's participation. Prevailing attitudes, and political culture, play a critical role in ensuring not simply low numbers of females elected to Parliament, but also a virtual absence of women even contesting elections.

Due to the disappointing and slow progress of women representatives in Parliament in Nauru and other Pacific Island Countries, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) commissioned this study as part of its activities within its current Women in Politics (WIP) Programme. At the Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders' Retreat held in Auckland in April 2004, leaders highlighted the need to "...address the low participation of women in all levels of decision-making processes and structures..." Under the heading of "women and gender" the Eminent Persons Group also stated that "there is a view within the region that Pacific institutions and processes are not as gender sensitive as they should be. Given the changing roles and responsibilities of men and women, and the increasingly recognised role that women play in society, the Forum needs to acknowledge and encourage the participation of women in decision-making at all levels".

The PIFS commissioned a region-wide research project looking at obstacles to the election of women to Parliaments. The terms of reference were to:

1. Organise wide national consultation with multi-stakeholders on their views of gender equality within the electoral system.
2. Identify the current state of the Constitution, electoral legislation and processes in relation to gender and decision-making.
3. Identify gaps and loopholes in the current electoral system to address gender and decision-making.
4. Identify key social barriers to women's representation in Parliament and consult with national political parties, National Women's Machinery, National Councils for Women, religious bodies, law reform bodies, Parliament and the Elections office and other key stakeholders to obtain diverse range of views on the subject.

The study on advancing women's participation in the political arena was carried out by Alamanda Roland Lauti in collaboration with regional researcher Jon Fraenkel (PIAS-DG, USP).

2. Research Methodology

The information for this report was gathered through face-to-face interviews, open and closed questionnaires, focus group discussions and through literature-based research. A total of 71 individuals comprising 39 female and 32 male from different sectors of the community participated in this study. The study also aimed at creating a sex balance so that both views were heard.

An open forum consultation was also conducted, with representatives of government organisations, non-government organisations, community leaders, youths, church leaders, private and public sectors invited to attend the workshop. A questionnaire was circulated, so that participants would be able to think about the questions and issues before the national workshop. The workshop was held on the 13th January 2006 at the University of the South Pacific, Nauru Campus, during a difficult period of petrol shortages and economic downturn. Sixty individuals from various sectors were invited. Thirty-three participants turned up, composed of 9 men and 24 women. Owing to the absence of some potential participants, further interviews were subsequently conducted to ensure opinions were sought from most of the targeted stakeholders.

During the national consultation the participants were asked to organise themselves into five groups and to select a chairperson to facilitate the discussion. The group response was aided by the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected after the group presented results. Participants unable to attend were asked to return the questionnaire. Attempts were also made to collect the questionnaire from invited people.

Prominent people were invited to the focus group discussion on the 4th January 2006. This included the first woman Member of Parliament and the Director of Women's Affairs. Again, questionnaires were attached to the invitation.

A structured open and closed questionnaire was used to interview Members of Parliament. Due to busy schedules and the festive season, a total of only eight members of Parliament responded to the questionnaire.

A structured open and closed questionnaire was used to aid a face-to-face interview with the Minister for Women's Affairs as well as the Secretary for Women's Affairs (see appendix 3 & 5). This information was useful to gather information on CEDAW and the current progress of CEDAW in Nauru.

A face to face interview was also conducted with the first woman Parliamentarian in Nauru (See Box 2).

3. Background Information

The Republic of Nauru is located on the equator, and consists only of a single island covering eight square miles. Named 'Pleasant island' by European explorers in 1798, the island fell under German control in 1888. With the onset of World War I, Nauru became a British League of Nations mandated territory administered by Australia. It was occupied by Japan during the Pacific War, when many Nauruans were transported to Truk (in FSM) and many Nauruan women were pressed into prostitution (Garrett 1996 111-119). Nauru thereafter became a United Nations Trust territory, again under Australia. Rich phosphate deposits were discovered on the island in the late 19th century, and extensively exploited by the British Phosphate Company from 1920 until independence in 1968. Those deposits are now close to exhaustion, leaving a desolate 'moonscape' of white stone pinnacles in the centre of the island. Some small recovery of deposits from areas already mined brings a limited flow of income. Phosphate proved the mainstay of the Nauruan economy throughout the 20th century, and poor management of phosphate revenues generated deepening financial crisis in the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium. From 1967, the Nauru government took control over the British Phosphate Company, which was renamed the Nauru Phosphate Corporation. In the mid-1970s, Nauru was widely reckoned the richest *per capita* country in the world. But a succession of poor investments, an exceptionally comprehensive welfare system, lack of

taxes and widespread corruption have led the country to the point that many question its future viability, and wonder whether the Nauruan population might, in future, need to move to some new home (Connell 2006; see also ABC 2004).

The pre-contact Nauru population was small, around 1,000, and—like other Pacific peoples—Nauruans faced severe population decline owing to the spread of infectious diseases after contact with Europeans. With the phosphate boom it grew up to around 10,065 in September 2002, including 2,493 non-Nauruans many of whom had been brought to work in the phosphate industry. Nauru's total indigenous population in 2002 was 7,572 with 3,807 men and 3,765 women (Gadabu et al, 2002:10). The voting age in Nauru is 20, so only a restricted number of these citizens were entitled to vote. In the 20-65 age group (i.e., those entitled to register to vote), there were 1,702 men compared to 1,758 women. Table 1 shows the total Nauru population of 16 years and upwards in 2002, including both indigenous and non-indigenous, which is divided between 2,051 men and 2,133 women. Historically, Nauru has had rapid population growth-rates, and during the heyday of phosphate earnings, governments pursued pro-natalist policies, encouraging women to have seven children each, although this approach met with objections from women who considered five children a more reasonable number (Connell 1983: 9).

Table 1: Nauruan population 16 years and over by age and sex

Age group	Total Population 16+		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	4,276	2,099	2,177
16-19	724	349	375
20-24	818	425	393
25-29	588	308	280
30-34	470	245	225
35-39	460	221	239
40-44	394	175	219
45-49	302	136	166
50-54	190	80	110
55-59	76	39	37
60-64	59	29	30
65+	103	44	59
NS	92	48	44

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, adapted from table 4.1, p26.

Note: NS = not stated.

Although often regarded as a 'matrilineal' society, Viviani suggests that property is in fact inherited in a mixed way:

This system was an interesting mixture of matrilineal and patrilineal principles, for in a matrilineal society it is usual for a man to leave his goods to his sister's son, whereas on

Nauru, if a widower died, all his goods, except male occupational implements such as canoes and spears, were left to his daughters. The homestead also went to the daughters while coconut and pandanus lands were held jointly by all the children. If a wife was left she had authority over the property while she lived or until she remarried. Girls retained all their property rights on marriage and parents could disinherit their children. These rules were not always rigidly applied and variations often occurred (Viviani 1970: 9).

In today's Nauru society, property is divided equally among the children. Phosphate and coconut land is held jointly by all children and other income such as savings are divided equally among the children regardless of sex.

Indigenous Nauruans belong to 12 tribes namely Deiboe, Eamidara, Eamwidumwit, Eamwit, Eano, Emangum, Emea, Eoaru, Irutsi, Iruwa, Iwi, and Ranibok. Traditionally, the tribes were very significant as they controlled and organised most aspects of Nauruan life. Today, however, their importance has dwindled. It is only during cultural events that tribal roles are displayed. The tribes of Irutsi (two males) and Iwi (two males, one female) will most likely be extinct in the near future. The influenza epidemic of the 1920s and World War II hit some of the Nauru tribes hard, and population declined. Where no women remain or where those that remain are childless, matrilineal tribes are likely to become extinct.

The country's first president, Hammer DeRoburt, led the country from 1968 to 1976. Traditional male leaders, most of whom were formerly councillors from the Nauru Local Government Council, were elected to the new Parliament, and they dominated the country's politics for the next 20 years (Kun, Togomae & Kun 2004: 15). The oppositional proclivities of the Nauru Party, which emerged in the 1970s, were neutered after they were co-opted into President DeRoburt's cabinet. Formed in 1987, the Democratic Party of Nauru proved another grouping opposed to President DeRoburt. After DeRoburt's defeat in 1989, Bernard Dowiyogo served for six terms, with several breaks, until he was replaced by Rene Harris March 2001. From then onwards, the once phosphate-rich territory experienced mounting financial crisis and repeated regime change. In 2002 alone, for example, there were seven changes in the presidency. In 2003, Rene Harris was narrowly defeated by Ludwig Scotty at the polls, and after a further series of regime changes, Scotty's "visionary" team were able to secure a landslide victory at fresh elections held in 2004.

Women play a marginal role in Nauru's Parliament. As we have seen, there are currently no women MPs, and there has only ever been one female MP. Nor are measures in place which aim to redress this situation, despite growing acknowledgement that broad political reform is crucial, given the country's history of governance-related difficulties, dissipation of financial revenues and the impending exhaustion of phosphate

Box 1—Queen Eigamoiya

“The Nauruan civil war was finally ended in 1888. History has it that Eigamoiya, the Queen of Nauru, and the head of the Eamwit tribe, one of the most powerful tribes, stopped the war just before the German warship, *Eber*, arrived. She stood magnificently in front of both sides, waving a piece of fabric, and immediately all firing of bullets from both sides ceased. The elders have always maintained that the essence, the great magical powers of a *temoniba* (chiefly rank), must never be underestimated but proudly respected. The queen's name is always remembered with respect by all Nauruans since she was able to stop the war among tribes, which had decimated most of the Nauruan people. A Nauru passenger ship was named after the great Queen, MV Eigamoiya.” (Excerpt from *Presentation of Nauru: Past Revisited*).

Box 2 - Nauru Women picket a Government-sponsored flight to London for the stage play, Leonardo Da Vinci, May 27 1993

On that day we women of Nauru made a stand. That morning we voiced our dissatisfaction at the government's continued misuse of our people's money on poor investments in particular, Duke Minks stage play called "Leonardo da Vinci," ... We, women, picketed the flight taking the VIPs to Melbourne thence to London to attend the inaugural opening of our government-financed play. This is our unforgettable story of we women who organised and took part in an effort to stop the plane from taking off from Nauru Airport.

It was about 7 a.m. The roads came alive with the roaring of cars and buses carrying people to work. The airport began to fill as passengers travelling to Fiji checked in. Everyone went on with their business never suspecting what lay ahead. The men in blue uniforms (police) grew in number as their big van dropped another load off. "Someone has betrayed us," I said. "Those blue-skinned men knew our strategy. That is why they are assembling here in designated places." Several of the men in blue surveyed our cars. "What are these stupid women doing here at this early hour when they should all be at home with their husbands and getting their kids ready for schools," they commented among themselves but loud enough for us to hear. We eyed each other and smirked. There they go again, we thought. Reminding us of our house-wifely duties and that they are the Lords and Masters. "This is a Matrilineal society," I wanted to shout. It is the women who bear the children. We will continue the clans and expand the twelve tribes of Nauru. ...

A few of our young girls stood at the side of the road with placards. The written message on them swayed in the air as people could read them clearly: "Don't party on our inheritance! Party at your own expense!" "Politicians are getting richer and fatter. The people getting poorer, our children skinnier!" "Where are our millions?" "In Duke Mink's pocket?" They sang and danced, making sure they were seen by everyone.... Our group moved in closer towards the tarmac. It was time, the moment we were waiting for. There were thirty of us. My knees wobbled. My heart pounded faster. Butterflies in my stomach fluttered. I wanted to turn around and run. I realised I was scared. Like a coward, I sneaked amidst the other women and hid. A couple of young girls giggled as they pushed and tugged at me out of the circle. An elderly woman in a wheel-chair shouted crossly: "We mean business here, so be serious." She was the bravest of all. We clung closely together, more frightened than ever as we marched forward toward the plane.

The Director of Police commanded us to stay within the marked boundary where several policemen stood. Others were busy directing the traffic on the road that ran along the airport. Thousands of people everywhere filled the surroundings of the airport. Some cloistered on the roof top, many were outside crammed in every available space. There were even some on the top of the rock pinnacles in the bush area of the airport looking down at us. We stood under the shade of a narrow rectangular landing of the building that stretched out onto the road. One of the women spoke to the people about our concerns and asked them for every support. A prayer, a plea for the government to answer our cries of worries that the future—our children's future—was at risk. Shaky voices crowded, tears flowed as we sang songs that expressed our love for our homeland. We cried, and our husbands, our families and

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other bystanders cried as they looked on. Even the policemen who were our brothers, nephews, uncles, husbands and grandchildren to many of us cried as they pleaded with us to go home. ...

We moved towards the tarmac. The police blocked us off. We fought, pushed hard and pulled the hair of the policemen who stood in rows to keep us off. Old women, young mothers with their wailing babies straddling their sides, pushed and pushed. Some of us in a frenzy ran to the sides to avoid the men in uniform. Everyone ran crazily here and there as we tried to break free through the barricade of police lines. Shouts and frustrated screams filled the air. We forced the line with all our power but they were too strong. Suddenly, we were free. We ran wildly onto the tarmac and plonked our tired bodies onto the cement in front of the big airplane. Several others raced toward the stairway and clung to it. A couple reached the wheels and held on tightly. The Captain looked down at us from the cockpit. I am sure he felt sorry for us but what could he do? This was not his battle, it was ours, the Nauruans. People everywhere running wildly with the poor policemen chasing madly after them. They were so many of us that we filled the whole area even the road. The police had stopped the traffic. The traffic line stressed from one end to the other and around the airstrip. A lot of people had abandoned their cars and had joined us.

The Director of Police begged our leaders to control our group. Someone handed me a red hailer. I grabbed it and called the group together. A couple of men brought some Air Nauru umbrellas for shade. The sun was certainly not very kind to us at all that day. We sat for three hours under the burning sun. I yelled in the red hailer all sorts of things about the ministers going off to London with several thousand of dollars as per diem to keep them alive while our children, widows and widowers were living only on a pittance. I cursed and cursed in my hailer. I said all sorts of things under the sun that I knew was wrong. I can't even remember some things I said. The ministers were no where in sight but we knew that they were across the road peeping through the windows at the spectacle we were playing out on the tarmac.

The Director of Police and someone in the Aviation Department approached our fearless leader and asked her what we wanted. She relayed the question to us. We demanded that the passengers to London be off-loaded. I accompanied them into the ticketing office to cross their names off the passenger list. The Director of Police assured us that the Leonardo da Vinci guests would not be flying out. Later, we let the ordinary passengers onto the plane. After the stairway was let up and the side door of Air Nauru closed, we dispersed. I felt sorry for the passengers. One was my closest friend, and some relatives of many of us. We had to do what we wanted. It was our day of victory in the history of Nauru.

—*Excerpt from Ms Maria Gaiyabu, 'Women finding their place in the "Sea of Islands": The Case of Nauru,' paper presented at a conference at the University of Hawaii, 18-20 April 1997 (quoted with permission of the author).*

exports. Traditional and cultural barriers, as well as stereotyping, impact negatively on women. Political decision making is highly male dominated.

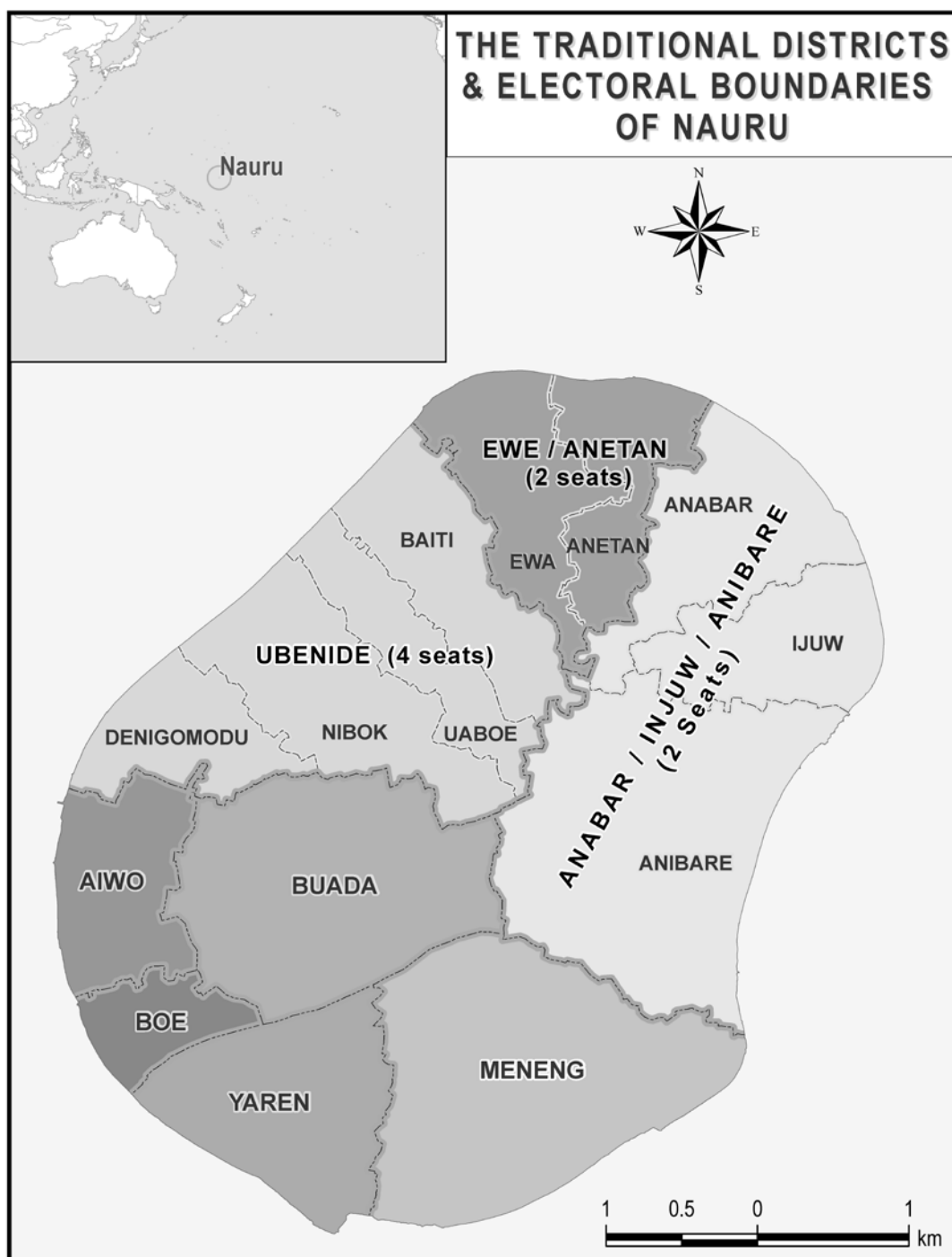
Although the main inhibitors of women's progress are often seen as traditional or cultural barriers, historical research suggests that women have not always played such the marginal role in public life as they experience today. The literature from the time of the German Administration in Nauru from 1888-1914 suggests that women played an important role in the traditional Nauruan society. Indeed, labour was mostly done by women, including even heavy labour such as the loading and unloading of ships.¹ Nauru's chiefly system was also not always an exclusively male preserve. During the last quarter of the 19th Century, the island had 14 chiefs, including two females, who shared political power between them. The roles of the chiefs were as heads of families, who led the tribes by virtue of presiding over the family hierarchy and as large landowners, rather than by the rules of a sovereign dynasty. Succession is determined by primogeniture without regard to sex. If a Nauruan man has children by several wives, they would all inherit from him equally, but a woman's inheritance could pass only to her own descendants. This meant that marriage partners did not own property in common (Fabricus 1992:271). Nauru had a queen in the 1840s, Eigamoiya, the head of the Eamwit tribe, who famously stopped the civil war by standing between opposing armies, waving a flag of peace (Petit-Skinner XX:23—see box). People believed in a female deity, *Eijebong* (Packett 1971:7).

4. The Current Electoral System

The current electoral system used in Nauru is a unique preferential system. Voters cast a preferential ballot in multi-member constituencies. Each voter is required to record as many preferences as there are candidates. Instead of then eliminating the lowest polling candidates and redistributing the votes (as with the 'alternative vote' in Australia's lower house, Fiji and, since 2002, Papua New Guinea), all preferences are immediately tallied. A first preference is worth '1', a second preference '0.5', a third preference '0.33', a fourth preference '0.25' and so on. Hence, in a constituency with three candidates, if one candidate obtains 10 first, 10 second and 10 third preferences, his or her vote tally will be 18.333 [i.e., $(10 \times 1) + (10 \times 0.5) + (10 \times 0.333)$]. Nauru is unique in the world in counting its elections to three decimal places. The system, which was devised by an Irishman, Desmond Dowdell, the Secretary for Justice in 1971, works reasonably well. Some have protested that Nauru's voting system is too complex for such a small country (Hughes 2004). Yet small size does not necessarily rule out usage of complex systems. It is in the larger, mass democracies, where complex voting laws may become unwieldy and difficult to manage effectively. Nauru's counting system is nowadays computerised, and eight members of staff are employed in the Computer Bureau (*Naoero Bulletin*, 03/04 Special issue, 22nd October 2004)². There are few invalid (or informal) votes, and over the decades Nauruans have become accustomed to ranking candidates in order of preference. Nevertheless, there are some odd features. For example, the system unusually allots preferential votes to candidates who come last! There are also curious rules for constituency registration and for by-elections, and we consider the impact of these on women's representation below.

5. Problems with the Electoral System

Most importantly, despite having multi-member constituencies, women's representation—as we have seen—remains low. Currently, Nauru has seven constituencies which return two members to Parliament,



Source: PIAS-DG maps database

and one constituency which returns four members. Clearly, usage of multi-member constituencies, which is elsewhere often identified as beneficial to women's political participation, has not assisted gender equality on Nauru.

Secondly, by-elections are conducted according to a more orthodox alternative vote system, leading some specialists to identify serious difficulties arising from simultaneous usage of two distinct electoral systems. As Mr Freddie Cain, Clerk to the Nauru Parliament, pointed out at the 5th Forum Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference in Samoa, 2005:

In a by-election the...regulation stipulates that a candidate is declared a winner only if he/she obtains absolute majority. The process means that a candidate who has secured first preference votes and obtained equal-to-all exceeds the absolute majority of first preference votes, is declared the winner. When no candidate has received an absolute majority of first preference votes, the candidate who has secured the least preference votes is excluded and each of the ballot papers is then distributed to candidates next in order of preference and so on until one candidate has received an absolute majority of the votes. If on any count, two or more candidates have received an equal number of votes and one of them is to be excluded, the Returning officer decides by draw of Lot the candidate to be excluded” (Cain 2005).

According to Mr. Cain,

the problem with our current system arises from the use of two different methods of electing candidates. The concern with the current process stems from the use of two different criteria for declaring a winner or winners in a General election or by-election. The problem lies where a general election just took place and within a period of 6 months a by-election then takes place where voters transfer from one constituency to another. The electoral registration officer will pass transfers for Cabinet approval (Cain 2005: p151).

Thirdly, as Mr Cain indicates, the practice of transferring large numbers of voter registrations between constituencies at by-elections to secure electoral advantage raises some important questions about fairness of electoral processes. He suggested that the Electoral Commission should scrutinise transfers to avoid gerrymandering. Many of the respondents interviewed in the course of this research concurred, also suggesting that the system is currently unfair and abused. As the Secretary for Women’s Affairs urged, where voter registration changes, there should be a clear need shown, i.e. either due to marriages or in respect of some connection with the target constituency. Stronger checks are needed to against abuses of the system. Other respondents suggested that vote transfers should be handled by a body independent of government connected to the Electoral Commission. It was also recommended that, for transfers to take place, the Electoral Commission must scrutinise and adhere by the terms set out in the Electoral Act in meeting and authorising transfers. As stated by Clerk of Parliament, “it’s an anomaly that needs to be reviewed and addressed urgently...it is up to each country to decide what is best for each Parliament to be well and truly represented.” (2005:151).

The potential for manipulation of the voter registration system is greatest at by-elections, when smaller constituencies can be swamped by large numbers of voters flocking to back a family candidate. One defeated female candidate interviewed reported that her defeat had largely occurred due to family members flocking into the constituency to elect her male rival. Many of these incoming voters do not participate in community activities or lack genuine local interests. There have been cases when governments did nothing to halt such strategic re-registration of voters because it served their interests not to do so. As recognised by the Minister for Women’s Affairs, the transfer of voter registrations between constituencies during by-elections often involves ‘cheating’. When a general election arrives, these voters frequently transfer back to their original constituency, despite this being illegal under the Electoral Act.

Respondents identified numerous problems with the current practice of transferring vote registrations between constituencies (the views expressed are summarised below);

- As it stands, the transfer of vote registrations between constituencies is not fair. Transfers of registrations are acceptable where voters have a genuine link with the target constituency, for example through marriage. Better checks should be introduced, enforcing the electoral provisions. There are many cases where registration transfers between constituencies are abused. There have also been block transfers, which the government of the day chose to ignore because it was in their political interest to do so. Rules should be tightened so that one requires three months residence in a constituency before a citizen is eligible to vote in that constituency.
- The constituency registration procedures are not transparent and women candidates are particularly likely to suffer from strategic block registrations. Family registrations are often transferred to vote for favoured male candidates.
- People who transfer constituencies may have minimal links with the target constituency, and/or may be unaware of community happenings, although there are special cases where women could follow a spouse in the area which they are voting. It is akin to buying votes, or like a form of gerrymandering. There are special cases where a person should legitimately be allowed to transfer, for example through marriage.
- Not fair because it allows flock of people gerrymandering from ones constituency, which they never resided in, and then decide to transfer. Manipulation of numbers can be easily done.
- Vote transfers may be acceptable in a general election, but the practice is particularly open to abuse for by-elections.
- The electoral authorities are not abiding by the provisions of the Electoral act in vetting applications to transfer constituencies.
- Government ministers sometimes use constituency re-registration to their own advantage (such registration changes have to be approved by minimum of two cabinet Ministers).

The current Electoral Act neither encourages nor discourages woman from participating in the political arena: “Any citizen of Nauru, irrespective of sex, who has attained the age of twenty years, is eligible to be elected as a member of Parliament” (Mehra 1991: 19). There is no formal discrimination; the Constitution and other Acts give equal rights to men and women³. However, respondents were not always aware of the contents of the Constitution of Nauru, Electoral Acts and other Acts. Perceptions of what is legal and illegal may differ from actual formal statute; informal interpretations are passed through word of mouth, a method of communication eased by the smallness of Nauru. Many respondents suggested that copies of relevant legislation be made available to the public and the community at large.

6. The Sex Composition of Parliament

Table 2 draws on data compiled from Declarations of Elections in the Government Gazettes showing the number of male and female candidates, and members of Parliament, from 1968 up to the most recent election in 2004.

Table 2 shows that only a single woman has ever been successful in securing election to Parliament, and only a handful have ever stood as candidates. Over 1968-2004, 860 male candidates have put themselves forward for election, and only 31 female candidates (this, of course, double counts men and women who stood multiple times). Of those women who did stand for Parliament, 25 were single and only six were married. Women of single status were more likely to stand for election than married women, suggesting a link between domestic responsibilities and child-raising and absence from the political arena. As a result, Nauru's 18-member Parliament has been exclusively occupied by males over the past 38 years since independence, with only one exception. Ms Ruby Dediya was elected in 1986, and returned 1987, 1989 and 1995. Her story is told in Box 1.

Table 2: Statistical Profile of Male and Female Candidates in Nauru General Elections 1968-2004

Year	No. of Male Candidates	No. of Female Candidates	Of which: Single	Of which: Married	Male Members of Parliament	Female Members of Parliament
1968	55	1	1	0	18	0
1971	48	0	-	-	18	0
1973	40	0	-	-	18	0
1976	43	0	-	-	18	0
1977	50	0	0	-	18	0
1980	39	1	1	0	18	0
1983	42	3	3	0	18	0
1986	43	1	1	0	17	1
1987	45	3	3	0	17	1
1989	40	2	2	0	17	1
1992	67	3	3	0	18	0
1995	61	4	3	1	17	1
1997	67	4	3	1	18	0
2000	69	3	2	1	18	0
2003	80	4	2	2	18	0
2004	71	2	1	1	18	0
Total	860	31	25	6	284	1

Source: Republic of Nauru Government Gazettes

Under the pre-1968 Nauru Provincial Council, only a single woman—Mrs Agnes Harris—was ever elected. The first female candidate to stand for Nauru's post-1968 Parliament was Liebon Sunshine Keke in 1968, at the first post-independence elections. Liebon Sunshine Keke was mocked by her family for standing in the general election and experienced considerable difficulties, owing to prejudices about the unacceptability of women as candidates. She stood against her brother Ludwig Dowong Keke in the

Box 3—The Platforms - their Impact on Women’s Representation

On the campaign trail, candidates regularly participate in ‘platforms’, where they speak to an audience of constituents, and field questions from that audience. Women regularly attend the platforms. Platforms are most important during women’s effort to secure seats in Parliament. They provide an opportunity for candidates to inform voters why they are standing, usually stating their qualifications and the difference they would make if in parliament. One must be able to communicate well with the voters and to capture attention. A woman has to strongly market herself at this time and be prepared to answer questions, even if faced with abuse.

The platforms are usually male-dominated affairs, and may have a detrimental impact on women’s chances of securing office. One ultimately unsuccessful woman candidate respondent to our survey related her experience of the platforms, in a constituency where her brother was also standing. One man in the audience spoke out, saying “women belong in the kitchen and should not represent us in Parliament.” She replied “it is not the men who face day to day problems unlike women and children and I am not here to represent men like you. I stand here because I wish to represent women and children in parliament.” The woman candidate explained that her main reason for standing was to represent women and children. She felt that women’ and children’s issues were not adequately addressed in Parliament, owing to the dominance of males and male agendas. Violence directed against women in the home is an issue which is particularly poorly dealt with by parliament, often on the grounds that these are ‘domestic problems’ which are outside the remit of parliament. The woman candidate respondent felt that women should know their rights and available support should be provided either through human rights education or through the legal system.

constituency of Yaren. She was unsuccessful but her brother successfully secured one of the seats. From 1971-1977 there were no female candidates. A total of five female candidates participated in general elections held from 1980 to 1986. The first woman elected to Nauru’s Parliament was Ms Ruby Dediya, elected in 1986. She held her seat throughout the period from 1986-1992, but lost her seat in the 1992 general election. In 1995 she was again re-elected to Parliament. Although there has been an increase in female candidacy from 1995, the overall success rate has been disappointing. The majority of single women participating as candidates were higher compared to married status.

7. The Process of Standing as a Candidate

A nomination form has to be completed and submitted to the Office of the Registrar to secure a nomination as a candidate for general elections. Nominated candidates are required to sign the nomination form to show their acceptance of nomination. The nomination form also needs to include at least two signatures of nominators. Nominations have to be registered in the electoral roll of the target constituency.

Finance is normally through personal funding, but the financial demands of election campaigning are not large in Nauru, in part due to the small size of electorates. Supporters are normally volunteers, rather than paid employees. In some previous elections, candidates gave their supporters gifts, such as a motor vehicle or cash as token of appreciation. During Election Day members and their supporters do not stand outside the polling booths.

8. Women's Influence in Politics

It is sometimes said that women play a major part in politics, even if they are not formally involved as candidates or as MPs. For example, in Samoa and Papua New Guinea, although women may not participate directly/personally in the electoral process, they exert considerable behind-the-scenes influence with regard to who is elected. In Nauru, women, particularly mothers, influence their children, husbands and the extended families as regards the choice of candidate. During the 2004 election, women were heavily involved in campaigning for the Visionaries with their motto "Vote For Change". Posters were seen throughout the island as part of their campaigning strategy. Women are sometimes known for their "wagging tongues", which could either directly/indirectly play a major role in candidates either securing or losing the election. This could impact on women's efforts to secure office.

In the following two sections, we ask how far Nauru's low level of women's representation in Parliament is due to differences in educational qualifications, or different experiences in the formal labour market, or whether other factors are, in fact, responsible for political inequality.

9. Gender Imbalances in Education

During the phosphate-rich years, Nauru's educational system was poorly developed. There was a high truancy rate among students, and little effort was made to use the education system to prepare Nauruans for a future in employment (Kent 1981, cited in Connell 2006: 51). Table 3 indicates that, in 2002, similar shares of males and females were in full or part-time school attendance.

Table 3: School attendance of the Nauruan population 5 years and over, 2002

Sex and Status of School	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	6,553	100	3,280	100	3,273	100
Yes, full-time	2,146	32.7	1,094	33.4	1,052	32.1
Yes, part-time	26	0.4	14	0.4	12	0.4
Left school	4,194	64.0	2,080	63.4	2,114	64.6
Never been to	87	1.3	47	1.4	40	1.2
Not Stated/ Not applicable	100	1.5	45	1.4	55	1.7

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, table 3.1, p19.

Note: this question was only administered to the Nauruan population

Table 4 indicates that, although similar numbers from both sexes attended government-owned primary schools, somewhat larger numbers of males attended non-government primary schools than females. At secondary level, there were more women than men in both government and non-government schools. There was no great difference at the tertiary level, although few Nauruans were receiving education at this level in 2002.

Table 4: Full- and part-time school attendance by type of institution, 2002

Type of education institution	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	2,172	100	1,108	100	1,064	100
Pre-school	379	17.4	189	17.1	190	17.9
Primary, govt.	932	42.9	484	43.7	448	42.1
Primary, non-govt	297	13.7	167	15.1	130	12.2
Secondary, govt.	397	18.3	189	17.1	208	19.5
Secondary, non-govt.	140	6.4	64	5.8	76	7.1
Tertiary	6	0.3	3	0.3	3	0.3
Other institution	17	0.8	10	0.9	7	0.7
Not stated/applicable	4	0.2	2	0.2	2	0.2

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, table 3.2, p26.

School attendance is a major problem on Nauru. Table 5 indicates that attendance ratios are low for both sexes (59.1 per cent for males and 58.6 per cent for females). According to the 2002 census, a considerably lower number of females attended primary school (5-9 years of age) than males, although female attendance at secondary school (10-19 years) was slightly above that of males.

Table 5: School attendance ratios of 5-19 year old Nauruan population, by age and sex

Type of school	Population 5-19			Attending School			School Attendance Ratio (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total (5-19)	3,001	1,530	1,471	1,766	904	862	58.8	59.1	58.6
Primary (5-9)	1,079	567	512	651	352	299	60.3	62.1	58.4
Secondary (10-19)	1,922	963	959	1,115	552	563	58.0	57.3	58.7

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, table 3.3, p20.

Table 6 disaggregates by sex participation in Nauru's education system by the highest level of education received. It indicates that, of those who enter education, boys tend to leave school earlier than girls (compare the difference at primary level, and at the first two years of secondary school, shown in table 6). As students move into their third year of secondary school, this relationship is reversed; from then onwards, the higher number of those who reach secondary school forms 3, 4, 5, and 6 are males. This reflects some increase in domestic responsibilities faced by girls from 13 years of age upwards. Young girls frequently become engaged in baby-sitting, cooking and other household jobs while their parents work, or they are withdrawn from school owing to education-related costs. Nevertheless, considering the overall spread between the highest levels achieved by girls and boys, it is clear that of those who attended school, females—on average—had higher levels of education than males. At tertiary level, this relationship was again inverted;

more males receive a tertiary qualification than females (72 as compared to 64 in 2002). How this reflects on qualifications for election to Parliament is uncertain, since some MPs still do not have tertiary qualifications and educational performance is not a clear indicator of likely success at the polls. Nevertheless, in earlier years, the majority were educated overseas, mainly in New Zealand and Australia. Many of the younger MPs, now in office, had fathers that were also politicians. It is clear that educational performance cannot explain the difference between numbers of men and women elected to Parliament.

Table 6: Highest Level of Education Completed, by Gender Group, 2002*

Highest education level	Total		Male		Female		Sex Ratio
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Total	4,194	100	2,080	100	2,114	100	98
Primary 1	13	0.3	8	0.4	5	0.2	160
Primary 2	20	0.5	12	0.6	8	0.4	150
Primary 3	9	0.2	7	0.3	2	0.1	350
Primary 4	26	0.6	19	0.9	7	0.3	271
Primary 5	33	0.8	21	1.0	12	0.6	175
Primary 6	105	2.5	63	3.0	42	2.0	150
Secondary 1	190	4.5	102	4.9	88	4.2	116
Secondary 2	323	7.7	168	8.1	155	7.3	108
Secondary 3	572	13.6	272	13.1	300	14.2	91
Secondary 4	1,498	35.7	709	34.1	789	37.3	90
Secondary 5	783	18.7	385	18.5	398	18.8	97
Secondary 6	347	8.3	158	7.6	189	8.9	84
Tertiary	136	3.2	72	3.5	64	3.0	113
NS	139	3.3	84	4.0	55	2.6	153

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, table 3.5, p22.

Notes: * - population refers to Nauruans over 5 years of age who have left school. NS = not stated or not applicable.

The number of government sponsored students overseas from 1995-2005 shows the predominance of females gaining scholarships compared to males. There are currently 52 female students on the government sponsored scholarship scheme compared to 28 male students. In 2005, Form 2 secondary students sat the scholarship examination. Results showed that 13 females compared to four male s secured a scholarship to study in Fiji (Department of Education, 2005).

Differences in educational qualifications clearly play little role in explaining why so few women are elected to Parliament. Although important differences exist and pressures on women to emphasise their domestic roles are apparent, women perform at least as well, if not better, than men in education. If the level of education were to be the decisive indicator of qualification for election to Parliament, women could legitimately command somewhere close to 50 per cent of positions in Parliament.

10. Gender Imbalances in Economic Activity

The composition of Nauru's workforce has been strongly influenced by the experience of the phosphate years, and the country's reliance on migrant labour to work in the mines.

Little information exists on employment under colonial rule, but there is some suggestion that female employment rose during the later colonial years. In 1955, Australian reports suggest that only 21 Nauruan females were employed, although this had risen to 149 by 1968 (Connell 1983: 4). Many of the small retail outlets are today owned by Chinese, and, in the past, many Nauruans chose to be unemployed. Even teachers and nurses were often brought from outside. Today, men are more sizeably represented in the labour force than women. Labour force participation rates are males 85.2 per cent and females 68.5 per cent (Table 7), indicating that—after schooling—many women acquire domestic roles in Nauruan society, rather than assuming positions in the formal workforce. Austerity measures in the late 1990s, including a shake-out of government employment, left a third of all adult men and half of adult women seeking work unemployed and there was an associated fall in household incomes (Connell 2006: 57).

Table 7: Nauruan labour force participation rates by age and sex, Nauru, 2002

Age group	Labour Force Participation Rates		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	76.7	85.2	68.5
16-19	67.8	74.8	61.3
20-24	84.0	92.2	75.1
25-29	86.2	93.5	78.2
30-34	84.3	94.3	73.3
35-39	86.3	94.6	78.7
40-44	84.0	90.9	78.5
45-49	78.5	86.8	71.7
50-54	68.9	81.3	60.0
55-59	63.2	71.8	54.1
60-64	35.6	51.7	20.0
65+	17.5	31.8	6.8
NS	17.4	18.8	15.9

Source: Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, table 4.1, p26.

Notes: NS = not stated or not applicable

Assessing the respective position of women in formal employment is a complex matter; the distribution of employment itself reflects the sex balance of political power, rather than following status in terms of educational qualification as outlined in the previous chapter of this report. Furthermore, the Government of Nauru is easily the country's largest employer, so it is plausible that male dominance in the political

sphere also has its impact on the sex distribution of employment in the country. Audoa, for example notes the presence of:

political interference where political leaders use government positions as payoff for services rendered elsewhere—these political appointees often do not have the expertise to hold such positions. The public service is non-performance based which encourages seniority based promotion where members of the public service are promoted due to their long service, not on their qualification, expertise and performance; Education and training are rarely recognised where anyone can fill a position that has been vacated by a trained and qualified officer and is clearly earmarked for trained offices; Territorial attitudes of Public Servants where public servants often discourage the advancement of better trained officers, because they feel threatened by these experts or qualified officers (Audoa, 1997:2).

The Nauru National Sustainable Development Strategy states, “An inherited state of endemic corruption, nepotism and poor record of accountability coupled with recent political instability with frequent changes of government has led to a very poor state of governance. The central feature of past economic performance has been a culture of extravagance and waste along with poor fiscal and financial management of government departments and state owned corporations.” (NSDS, 2005:3)

Of those in the labour force, as Table 8 indicates, females predominate in clerical and professional occupations, whereas males form the bulk of plant and machine operators, craftsmen and tradesmen. The table shows that, although males predominate among ‘legislators and senior officials’, women are well represented among the more skill-based sectors elsewhere in the Nauruan economy.

Table 8: Nauruans in Paid Employment by Occupation and Sex, 2002

	Number		Per centages	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Legislators & Senior Officials	10	51	16.4	83.6
Professionals	146	57	71.9	28.1
Technicians	61	119	33.9	66.1
Clerks	382	104	78.6	21.4
Service Workers	162	256	38.8	61.2
Agriculture & Fishery	3	15	16.7	83.3
Craft & Trades	29	384	7.0	93.0
Plant & Machine Operators	14	160	8.0	92.0
Unskilled Sales & Service	164	273	37.5	62.5
Not Stated	57	34	62.6	37.4
Totals	1,028	1,453	41.4	58.6

Source; Republic of Nauru; 2002 Nauru Census, Main report, Nauru Bureau of Statistics, Department of Finance, adapted from table 4.7, p30.

The predominance of males in professions such as crafts and trades, plant and machine operators, technicians, legislators and senior officials owes its origin to the fact that industrial jobs are widely considered to be male careers. The Nauru Trade School primarily existed to cater for students wishing to pursue careers in crafts and trades, or as technicians or plant and machine operators. Hardly any women attended. There is also a predominance of males in unskilled sales and service (road workers etc). These are jobs which do not require high levels of educational attainment, and male predominance here plausibly draws upon many of those boys, aged 12-14, who left school early (see Table 3). The Nauru Trade School was burned down in 2000, and has not yet re-opened.

Particularly notable is the predominance of women in professional jobs and as clerks. This may be connected with the point, noted above, that a higher number of girls than boys remain in school during the secondary school years (Table 8). As we saw above, women predominated in receiving their highest level of qualification at secondary level (Table 6). Those employed as professionals include teachers, executive secretaries, nurses, etc.—all positions that require some considerable level of educational qualification. Positions as ‘clerks’ or secretaries presumably at least require some level of literacy, implying qualifications beyond primary school education. In civil service employment, those at the higher secretarial and executive levels are politically appointed by cabinet. The positions are not advertised. Hence, male predominance in Parliament and government also has an influence over the sex balance in civil service employment.

Although women may be less well represented in paid employment than men, we have found that they are better represented in some of the higher-qualified positions, at least outside industry (which has itself been subject to the forms of political interference noted by Audoa in the passage cited above). This confirms the findings in the previous section, as regards levels of educational attainment. Although women may be more likely to assume roles as child-bearers of home-makers, men in fact predominate in less skilled occupations. However, if one interprets the employment data, there can be little doubt that women’s virtual absence from Nauru’s Parliament does not reflect their performance either in education or in formal sector employment.

11. Women’s Experience of the Current Economic Crisis

The current hardship due to the economic crisis is strongly felt by women. The Nauru National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) states:

The flat rate pay scale of \$140 per fortnight for all government employees from Ministers down, brought about by the need for austerity, is a clear disincentive to productivity and attendance and morale is low. Ethical practices are severely challenged in the present climate and the incidence of abuses of the voucher system to increase cash payments is notable. The Government currently lacks sufficient statistical data to assess whether current income levels are providing a reasonable standard of living for most Nauruans. The Government has committed itself and has achieved the reliable payment of public service incomes. (NSDS 2005:13)

During the day, women regularly sit in front of the government office all day to see either the Minister for Finance or the President. It is very rare to see men waiting in this way. These women often wait all day from 9am and continue to sit around until late afternoon sometimes without seeing either the Minister or President. Again, they return the next day or the day after because they are either employed/unemployed and need extra funds to support the family. With the rise in cost of living and the flat rate pay scale of

\$140 per fortnight, some women go from house to house to ask for extra funds and food to support their family. Hunger is increasingly a problem and it is the women who usually bear the brunt of family hardship. The Nauru NSDS, entitled *Millennium Development Goals and Targets to Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger* points out that “hunger is an increasing problem, but there are no statistics to support this”:

Nauru currently does not have statistics of people’s level of income. While Nauru has a close system of extended family where income is transferred among family members the low general wage of \$140 per fortnight often spread among multiple families means it is likely there are some Nauruans with incomes of less than \$1 per day. (NSDS 2005:21).

Women and children are seen on the reef during the hottest part of the day collecting seashells, small fish and any edible seafood. According to one woman interviewed, both her and her husband together generate an income of only \$280 a fortnight. Such levels of income leave people in difficulties due to the rising cost of living. The woman interviewed also said, “as a woman I feel the hardship as my husband is not doing enough to help and it is up to me to run around and do everything from seeing the Minister for my pending salary for our sons school fees in Fiji.” She mentioned that \$100 is sent to her son and she is left with \$180 to survive on.

Another of the women interviewed works for the government. Her husband is unemployed. She lives in an extended family and has adopted a grandchild. She said that although she is working she cannot afford basic women’s needs. Sometimes she applies for either sick or special leave from work since there is no food in the house. She feels that as a woman it is part of her duty to look for food to support the family. She had just returned from the reef when I interviewed her. She said she collected a few seashells and small reef fish, which was enough for a meal. She further commented that with the high rise in cost of living she is struggling to feed the family.

12. Constraints on Women’s Involvement in Elections & Parliament

Low levels of women’s participation in Parliaments and government are far from unique to Nauru. In many parts of the world, “there is a school of thought that men are more likely to participate in political activity than women because of a “gender gap” caused by a combination of socialisation and situation, where women are more likely to be constrained by a role confining them to home.” (Coopers and Lybrand, 1994:12).

Women on Nauru are generally active in participating in campaign activities, communal activities, personalised contacts such as approaching Members of Parliament, airing of hardships, participation in protests and are vocal in many ways. However, the absence of women in Parliament is disappointing. Part of the reason for this is conservatism on the part of women themselves; Elizabeth Amram, suggests that “in spite of these small yet very significant changes, the woman still finds some difficulties to discard some of the social taboos which in this day are becoming out-dated as they impair her ability to participate fully in social, political, and economic roles of today’s community”. Amram, however, recognises that part of the reason for this is an attachment to the home; “it is pleasing to say, however, that while many women are adapting to the changes of today they are still conscious of their responsibilities at home to their husbands and their children.” (Amram, 1997:3).

Box 4—The First Woman in Parliament—Ruby’s Story

Ruby Dediya was Nauru’s first and only MP elected to parliament. She was born on Nauru in 1949, and brought up in a family that regularly debated at home, although even her own mother discouraged her from speaking against her brothers. She was educated in Victoria, Australia where she attended high school in Sale, Gippsland at the Church of England Grammar School. At high school she participated in public speaking and drama and also joined the Interact Club, a Junior Rotary Club. After high school she trained as a nurse at the Epworth Hospital in Richmond, Victoria. She attended the University in Christchurch, New Zealand where she graduated as a midwife.

Ruby secured one of the Anetan/Ewa seats in 1986 and held this until 1992. She regained the seat in 1995, and held this until the next election in 1997. Ruby first stood unsuccessfully for election in 1983, after being approached to do so by a group of women, both from within and outside the constituency. Through their extended families, the women organised approaches to household after household, requesting backing for Ruby on the grounds that she was educated, strong and capable of addressing women and children’s issues in parliament. Ruby faced criticism and ridicule from the sitting member, who insisted that only Ruby’s brother should take up politics. Frustrated at facing such abuse in 1983, Ruby decided to stand again in 1986, this time successfully. But even victory proved upsetting, when her aunt cried in sympathy with Ruby’s defeated male adversary. The aunt never came to congratulate her, asserting that it should rather be a man representing the constituency in parliament.

When Ruby, now an MP, first went to the member’s room, the door was closed in her face. When parliamentary staff were not around, male MPs would often ask her to ‘make the coffee’. But Ruby was elected to represent her constituency, not to make coffee. So she put her foot down and refused. At first she was inexperienced, and did not know how to follow Standing Orders. But she gradually built up her experience. During her period in Parliament, Ruby at different times became Minister for Health, Speaker of Parliament, Minister for Finance, and Acting President. She did not believe in dishing out money or personal favors to constituents, but instead would bring them copies of the Government Gazettes, and sit down with them going through the job vacancies and assisting the completion of their application forms.

Ruby believes women have difficulty with becoming involved in politics. Despite formal equality, women regularly face problems at home. “Politics can take control of people’s lives,” she says, ‘if it is a woman the stress will double. A woman has to be very strong willed and prepared to learn, for there is a lot to learn about being a Member of Parliament.” She acknowledges that her path to politics was eased by being single, rather than married. “If you have a husband, your roles double, whereas for males their clothes are pressed and food is prepared for them.” ‘If a woman is married she must have the full support of her husband. ‘She would need to balance her political activities and home activities, especially when she has children. Without her husband’s support, it could drive her crazy and will burn both ends of the candle.” She thinks that having reserved seats for women, perhaps one seat for men and one for women in each constituency, might offer a way forward. She believes that “God picked the rib of Adam so that men and women could work together in politics.”

Source—Interview with Ruby Dediya.

The respondents' perception as regards why so few women present themselves as candidates centred on women's lack of confidence and the perception of Parliament as an exclusively male preserve. The following collects together respondents' views on this issue:

- Women were not encouraged to present themselves as candidates.
- Women feel they are not capable of the responsibilities as compared with men.
- Women feel a sense of inferiority in the eyes of the women voters.
- The community still adopts the old fashion attitude that female is somehow inferior.
- Capable women are not showing what they can achieve.
- The environment in Nauru is not conducive to encouraging women to stand for elections due to the social attitudes and negative stereotyping of women.
- Traditional attitudes regarding roles of women in a male-dominant society.
- Women are not empowered in anything that they do not know about.
- Lack of exposure and barriers exist where there are set traditions and cultures.
- Lack of will/support/drive by public, community, women's groups, and family.
- Sensitivity to ridicule and marriage concerns.
- Greater competition between women among government employees.
- In the political arena, women lack the confidence and courage even though in the community women are seen or recognised as leaders.
- Women are not aware of what goes on in Parliament.

Apart from the constraints imposed by society, respondents emphasised that women lack confidence and perhaps even the ability to engage in politics. Such attitudes should not be lightly dismissed; younger male MPs also often lack confidence and ability, and need to build experience over time. Yet they do not face the same barriers to participation experienced by women, for whom 'inexperience' is used to justify virtual exclusion from the political arena.

The majority of respondents were in support of greater female participation in politics on Nauru, many emphasising likely positive political repercussions owing to the contribution women might bring to political debate in Parliament and policy-making. For example, one respondent suggested that "a male-dominated decision-making body may deliver different outcomes for women. Women are more aware of their own needs and issues which need to be addressed in Parliament, thus a combination of ideas from both sexes may make a difference. Women have different ability, talent and views and are more understanding and caring than men." Below are respondents' views supporting participation of women in politics in Nauru

- The combination of ideas from both sexes may make a difference.
- This would portray women in Nauru as national decision-makers and ensure a sex balance in politics.
- There are quite a number of women who are highly-educated and will know their way around.
- Women are as capable as men and they will be more concerned on matters dealing with women. Women are more tuned in to women's issues. The empowerment of women is

an important issue therefore their views must be allowed to be voiced in the arenas of politics. It has become a requirement to introduce a second attribute to the decision making process and this could be through the perspective of women in politics.

- To equalise women in empowerment and decision-making status. Women outlive men as we live a healthier life style, we know our priorities, we are more organised in decision making. Women's views are different and more genuine, focusing on families and homes.
- Women have the needed virtues to make marked impression in Parliament. They have patience, compassion, good manners, abstinence and endurance to persevere.
- Women are fundamentally sensitive to "people" issues. Women are more competent. Women are easy to approach and identify with family issues important to communities, towards building a strong nation. Women are mothers of the nation therefore are patriotically driven.
- Women are capable as men and they will be more concerned on matters dealing with women.
- Women have traits where they are more open and approachable.
- A number of educated women may have better political drive than some of the current members of Parliament.

From the interviews conducted in the course of this research, there was considerable support for greater sex balance in Parliament. Of the 71 people interviewed, 61 supported greater women's participation, while 10 were opposed to reforms aimed at enhancing women's position. Many of those favorable to greater women's participation urged this on the grounds that women would address issues raised in Parliament from a different perspective. Respondents suggested that protocols of leadership required greater balance or equality between the sexes, because women are 'easier to approach' and/or are more sensitive to 'people issues' (e.g. improving health, education, child-welfare). Support for greater involvement by women in Parliament was often linked to women's unique maternal identity and distinctive womanly attributes. Women's input in Parliament would also ensure a fair representation in addressing national needs and women's issues.

Respondents expressed the belief that women are capable of achieving solid careers in politics, and have the required professional qualifications. However, there was widespread reference to women's lack of interest in pursuing careers in politics, or lack of confidence in the political arena. The difficulty of women in participating in the male-dominated 'platforms', where candidates compete in public speaking before their electorates, was frequently mentioned. There was also a perception that voters prefer males to females as political leaders, an idea that was frequently (if questionably) linked to Nauruan custom and tradition. Some respondents suggested that women's involvement in politics was and is unpopular, that women lack the strength of character required for political engagement, and that the infighting and public criticism associated with the political arena is not a suitable arena for women. Others suggested that women are subject to negative stereotyping, or that they had had bad experiences with previous women candidates. Some argued that the smallness of the nation, and the fact that "everybody knows everybody", worked

against women being better represented in Parliament. The view that Parliament is a man's domain still prevails on Nauru. Below are respondents views of social barriers hindering women's participation in the political arena.

- Male dominance in the household because of tradition, culture and religion. Individual women candidates' attitude and also the community.
- Lack of gender-sensitive programs and supporting practices that enhance the status of women in politics in Nauru—smallness of Nauru. Women are not encouraged even though they are capable.
- Voters themselves—attitude that there is no competition against men. Attitude problem is through groups. There is an invisible barrier for women which we need to break.
- Smallness of the island where we know each other and we know weaknesses and strengths of each other. The minds of Nauruans are set according to gender roles dictated by social, economic, culture and tradition.
- Local scenario—lose face in my community as people will gossip and know my private life.
- Husbands hindering wives from political participation—need counselling service.
- For generations men have been expected to be leaders at home and are generally expected to be leaders in any other matters. Culturally women are known to be care-takers of the household etc.
- Understanding that custom is not to have women lead men. Place of woman is to look after children at home. In general, normally the head of a family is male, voters generally prefer male MPS to represent them, and females prefer male leaders. Other females prefer male candidates.
- In Nauru the perception of the people is actively stereotyped. Traditionally women's place is in the home and not in politics. Women do not encourage others because there is jealousy among women themselves, which is a key hindrance.
- As stated above, the Nauruan society prominently is of the mind that there is a role for woman and there is a role for a man in life and these two do not merge, especially in politics.
- There are personal grievances between women. Women can be more envious and jealousy in promoting their thoughts. Women may not be suitable or appeasable to others or not so enough by way of their personal movements. For example, there could be a lack of support for a woman candidate due to her conduct, background, weaknesses, strengths, behaviour, and upbringing through the years, which are taken into consideration by voters because Nauru is a compact society
- Lack of interest for women entering into the political arena. They want to but are unsure if they will get support because the political arena is always male dominated.

13. Conclusion; What is to be done about women's under-representation in Nauru's Parliament?

Women have been extraordinarily poorly represented in Nauru's Parliament since independence in 1968. Only one woman MP has ever been elected to Parliament and, as we have seen, she faced extraordinary difficulties (see box 1 on Ruby Dediya). Despite radical changes over recent years, there is currently not a single woman MP in the country's 18-member Parliament. We found no way of explaining this by reference to women's levels of educational attainment, nor by women's performance in better-qualified types of employment. Although 'custom' and 'tradition' were often cited as barriers to greater participation, we found that the notion of politics as an exclusively male preserve is in fact mainly a modern development, and one that does not serve the country well. Nevertheless, there are no *formal* barriers to women's greater participation. Few women put themselves forward as candidates at elections. Abundant evidence exists to suggest that cultural barriers (mostly of a 'modern', rather than 'traditional' nature, discourage women's participation in politics). But the question remains as to what is to be done about this, and whether the issue is for women to take advantage of existing opportunities (given formal equality between the sexes) or whether some form of affirmative action is required to enhance opportunities to participate in Parliament.

To create a fair representation of women in Parliament, it is necessary to break down current prejudices and change attitudes, which are themselves caused by a combination of socialisation and situation. We found that most respondents supported higher levels of women's participation in politics, often because more women in Parliament would entail greater national focus on issues which are more likely to be of greater concern to women than men. Others advocated greater women's participation on the grounds of 'fairness'; these were offended by the current, and long-standing, entirely male-dominated political arena.

In the context of Nauru's existing electoral system, it might be possible for those who favor greater sex balance to enhance women's representation without either constitutional or even statutory change. All constituencies are already multi-member; the country has seven two-member constituencies and one (Ubenide) four-member constituency. By convention alone, one might campaign for one woman MP for each of the two-member constituencies, and two women members for Ubenide. Alternatively, these sex distributions could be formally legislated by an amendment to the Electoral Act. Respondents were divided regarding the pros and cons of reservation of women's seats in Parliament. Quotas, either in the sense of voluntary ratios of women to men candidates on the part of political parties or constitutionally-required quotas for political parties, would be meaningless in Nauru's context, because the country does not have political parties (Anckar & Anckar 2000, p229; Kun 2004; Szajkowski 2005)

Those in favour of positive discrimination for women pointed to the clear disadvantages women face in getting elected to Parliament; negative public perceptions & stereotyping, failure to recognise performance achievements, inconsistency between women's success in assuming leading positions in the church and in Parliament. Respondents highlighted the 'invisible barrier' women face, and supported the (temporary) notion of reserved seats to 'kick start' greater women's participation in politics. In this way, existing mindsets would be changed, and voters would become familiar with greater levels of women's participation. After a brief period, formal affirmative action provisions might be removed leading to lasting women's involvement in politics. Below are respondents views on what can be done to encourage greater female participation in standing for Parliament.

- Introduce quotas representing 50 per cent in Parliament. Gender equality awareness coverage. Active singular movement among women to drive the incentive for women's issues on a national/constituency level. Promote women's roles in Parliament through quotas and changes in legislation.
- Have training courses for women in politics. Get more information on women's rights. Promote breaking of barriers to have women choose powerful careers, for example lawyers, doctors and pilots. Role model support program (get information from women in the Pacific region who are currently/previously in powerful careers. Re-educating society on in the role of women in the home and community and promotion of women's rights. Women's groups should be more involved in building up women's confidence.
- Community outreach to encourage youth to be more proactive and organise youth rallies and gatherings.
- Nauruan women should follow Western women's confidence to overcome blocking barriers. Women's rights to be fully and strongly supported through family gatherings, communities, religion, women's groups etc. Establish workshops on women's political participation. Instill ambition and awareness of capability to stand for Parliament.
- Re-educating the role of women in the community with relevance to their stand culturally and politically. Stand for Member of Parliament. Campaign public support for women candidates. Women to have self confidence. Husband to fully support wife.
- Need support from women's groups, church, government and the society. Therefore need to change the nation's attitude towards women standing for Parliament. First and foremost women must be in Parliament through quotas, as this will break the barriers. This is urgently required and to enforce legislation as this is the only way to break the cultural and traditional barriers. Women should be involved with other political parties to stand and not on their own, but mixing with other political parties
- The women's affairs department needs to encourage women candidates by providing workshops, seminars etc. Women should also consider forming a political membership club to be established in Nauru.
- The educational institutions need to be better informed of Parliamentary processes.
- It could be built into the supreme law or if we have to build into the constitution a reasonable number of women in Parliament but how do we go about putting in place for the next national election in 2007? Some thoughts on that but will depend on the referendum from the public. As said earlier, a referendum can bring up the matter on reserving seats for women but people on Nauru should decide on that rather than Parliament.
- Re-educating society to accept such participation. Woman candidate to become part of the process by seeking nomination and then campaigning strongly. Workshop courses through USP such as election campaign strategy, and carrying out of research on how

to overcome problems and encourage greater female participation. Majority of women have to be open, socialize and mix.

- One hundred per cent support for women who wish to stand, to assist them in their quest to enter Parliament and in their campaigns and endeavour.

Those opposed to affirmative action provisions pointed to the equal opportunities given to men and women in law and suggested that there should be no special treatment for women. Women should be able to enter Parliament on the basis of their known achievements, rather than some artificial legislative-based encouragement. Women elected via quotas might lack popular legitimacy. Any use of reservation might be 'undemocratic', and susceptible to cronyism or abuse via 'family voting'. Some of those opposed to reservation of seats thought that cultural barriers were 'minor', and that education would be a preferable means of enhancing women's position. Considerable numbers believed that, with the emergence of more credible women candidates, electoral fortunes would change. This view was also supported by the participants in a workshop to discuss this report in September 2006, where the majority emphasised the importance of equal standing for all, merit-based achievements by women, and the unfairness of quota systems.

Even for those opposed to an affirmative action position, there was acceptance that something needs to be done about women's representation in Nauru. Whether this be statutory or voluntary, women merit a greater role in Nauru's politics, and the question is what means should be used to achieve this.

14. CEDAW & the Ministry of Women's Affairs

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) has not yet been adopted in Nauru. Mixed feelings exist towards the adoption of CEDAW. According to the Director of Women's Affairs, CEDAW has been under consideration by government since 1997 and no decision has yet been reached. Political instability since 1997, and the regular turnover of governments have led to changes in portfolios and many documents have gone astray. The Secretary for Women's Affairs believes that Nauru does not need to introduce new legislation, and that the contents of CEDAW do not apply to Nauru. Nauru needs advice on what amendments to existing legislation are required if CEDAW is to be implemented. The Secretary suggests, "in the past it is not in the government's best interest to ratify CEDAW because women have always had equal opportunity to work, equal pay, equal education etc." The current Minister for Women's Affairs (also the President) was not aware of the status of CEDAW but fully supported women's participation in the political arena. The Minister further awaits recommendation from the Department of Women's Affairs on CEDAW.

Information sought on the current work plan from the Ministry of Women's Affairs revealed the national development goals for the advancement of women. The work plan included a document covering 'Women in Decision Making'. This found that "Women on Nauru have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However socialisation and negative stereotyping of women and men including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency of political decision making to remain the domain of men" (Revised Work plan, 2005).

The low proportion of women among economic and political decision-makers at the local and national levels reflects structural and attitudinal barriers that need to be

addressed through positive measures. The 2005-2015 Revised Work plan states the objective of increasing women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership which will depend largely on the full support and the commitment of government and stakeholders to increase women's capacity. A collaborative effort is required to reach the overall objectives of the work plan.

The Department of Women's Affairs will need to take a forward-looking approach and submit the work plan to the Minister for Women's Affairs so that approval will result in a successful implementation for an environment conducive to women. The work plan was initially drawn up shortly after the opening of the national office for women in 1997. The 1998 National Development Plan was reviewed in April 2004 by holding a two day national meeting of women. The meeting was initiated to seek Nauru's input to the Commonwealth Plan of Action and to prepare Nauru's attendance at the 7th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministerial Meeting in May 2004. The plan itself needs revision and refinement, based on further consultation; at present it does not clearly highlight what goals are to be pursued under "8. Decision Making and Leadership":

8. Women in Decision Making Decision Making and Leadership

Objective: Increase Women's Capacity to Participate in Decision Making and Leadership

1. Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls particularly those with special needs, women with disabilities, to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions.
2. Have transparent criteria for decision-making positions and ensure that the selecting bodies have a sex-balanced composition;
3. Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning.
4. Provide gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity in work and management styles.
5. Develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas.
6. Create an environment that is conducive for women to stand for elections.
7. Take affirmative actions by promoting and putting in place policies and practices that enhance gender parity in political representation.
8. Encourage capable women of our society to participate in politics at all levels of decision making in various institutions (Work plan for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2005-2015).

It is important to specify how a 'sex balance approach' is to be legislated, and whether this is to be done via seat reservation.

15. Concluding Recommendations

In a system free of discrimination and bias, women would not only have the legal right to take part in political and public life on equal terms with men. They would be able to share equally in political power and the formation of policy. Women would feel confident that their views were adequately represented to government and understood by government and taken fully into account in policy formation. They would know that, in making a law, Parliament considered whether the law took into account women's well-being, as seen from women's perspective. They would regard the government and executive as their true representative. There would be government of, by and for women and men. (Australian Law Reform Commission (1993), cited in Coopers and Lybrand, 1994:42)

The slow progress of women in Nauru could be overcome by adopting temporary measures such as adopting promotion of women through educational strategies or through the most effective affirmative action including reserved seats to increase women's political participation. Since there are invisible barriers, an entirely new approach is required to change the mindset regarding traditional taboos, social norms and perception of women in Parliament, including voter's attitude. These barriers once addressed will hopefully be accepted by the community at large. Thus the introduction of quotas will enable a kick-start to achieve a sex balance in Parliament. It can also set an example that women are as capable as men therefore changing society's attitudes through education will ensure better results for women participating as candidates and in Parliament.

The Department of Women's Affairs needs strengthening and some greater sense of purpose. The Nauru Womens National Council has a considerable membership, but does not, at present, have an office. Currently, the Department of Women's Affairs is ineffective and the office is plagued by personal animosities. Although many projects exist on paper, little is done in the way of implementation. They also lack the required equipment (e.g. no computer is to be seen in that office). In the past, staff have attended the Community Education Training Centre (CETC) in Suva, but the skills they have acquired have not been deployed. The office could do with some sideways movement of personnel, bringing in new staff to ensure a more dynamic and effective promotion of women's position in Nauru. The Department should be proactive in addressing and coordinating development initiatives in promoting the advancement of women in Nauru. Respondents identified increasing women's capacity in Parliament through national election campaign strategies, political education for women, usage of the types of media available to promote women through awareness programs, formation of stronger women's groups, public support for women candidates including the community, training courses, inviting spokesperson from overseas, conducting workshops, leadership programs, self-confidence programs, getting more women interested in the procedures and practices of Parliament. It is also recommended that regional assistance, possibly through UNIFEM, might support women in organising a workshop to advance woman's participation in Parliament, including bringing to Nauru a successful regional Women Parliamentarian to share her knowledge, expertise and experience as part of Nauru's strategy to increase the participation of women in Parliament.

At a national workshop held on Nauru on 14th September 2006, the following recommendations were adopted:

1. A focus or core group needs to be established to deal with negative attitudes towards women, and social stigmas against women's participation in politics
2. A taskforce should be established bringing together past and present women candidates, and the former MP, to discuss plans for the November 2007 elections.
3. The Ministry of Women's Affairs needs to establish media-training workshops for prospective women candidates, in collaboration with NGOs prior to the November 2007 national election.
4. Women's organisations need to strengthen their links with NGOs with the objective of lobbying Parliament on issues of concern to women.
5. A woman's political party should be organised, with representatives from around the island. The party needs a clear agenda, and needs to be pro-active in advertising candidates and via intervention in community gatherings (e.g. at the platforms – discussed above).
6. Male candidates should be lobbied to consider female running mates at the 2007 polls.
7. If parity laws are to be applied, they should be trialled initially through already-established Nauru Local Government Council (with 50/50 per cent male/female representation).
8. Public awareness campaigns promoting women's involvement in politics need to be run by the Ministry of Women's Affairs
9. Legislation setting out criteria for candidates for election should be established.
10. Mock Parliamentary sessions should be used to familiarise women with discussing national issues, and to familiarise Nauruans with women playing an active role in politics.

The timely implementation of the above strategies to meet the objective of increasing representation of women in Parliament is critical before the 2007 General Election. The importance of designing and implementing, monitoring and evaluating these strategies is crucial to ensure that women are represented equally to men in Parliament.

Without some increase in the on-the-ground activity by women's organizations, statutory initiatives aimed at ensuring larger numbers of women MPs would be counter-productive. Only in situations where there is active, collective, demand for enhanced women's representation do such affirmative action policies work effectively. Nevertheless, Nauru's electoral system, and constituency design, do lend themselves to increased women's participation at elections. Even without formal statutory legislation, there is much that can be done. Before the 2007 elections, women's group campaigning might appeal to voters in dual member constituencies to back seats being filled by one man and one women, and for the four member Ubenide constituency by two male and two female MPs. Also, campaigns might encourage voters to give 'parity in preferences', so that if they allot a first preference to a male, they give a second to a female (or vice versa); if they give a third to a male, a fourth goes to a female and so on. Work is required now to identify suitable women candidates to stand in the upcoming elections. Women's organizations might also take advantage

of competition between factions at the polls encouraging each side to see its efforts to gain national legitimacy as tied up with fielding larger numbers of women candidates in winnable positions. Women have carried heavy responsibilities during a time of hardship for Nauru; it is time they played a greater role in rebuilding the country. Male politicians have sought to promote good governance, greater accountability and transparency in politics, but it is time to recognize that promoting greater women's participation in politics is an integral part of that programme.

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Notes

1. "Position of women labour (on those rare occasions when it is required) including heavy labour like loading and unloading ships, is mostly done by women. This must not, however, be thought of as connoting their inferior status

or a form of servitude. Appearances suggest rather that the more lively of the women are eager for this kind of activity as a kind of pleasant diversion” (Fabricus, 1992:220).

2. In earlier days, the system was not decimalised, so that fractional results had to be expressed in a most convoluted way.
3. “(5) In this Constitution, unless the context otherwise requires – (a) words importing the masculine gender shall be taken to include females; (Practice and Procedure of the Parliament of Nauru: 279).
(3) Whereas every person in Nauru is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, has the right, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex..., (Practice and Procedure of the Parliament of Nauru: 256).