

RESPONDING TO AGEING TO BUILD INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES IN THE COOK ISLANDS

**1st Ministerial Forum On Management Of Social Transformations
(Most) Programme**

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BACKGROUND

- Cook Islands - 15 remote islands
 - 11 inhabited
 - scattered across 2 million km²
- Population under 15,000
 - largest island (Rarotonga) with 10,000 people
 - smallest atoll (Palmerston) of less than 50
- 70,000 live in New Zealand and 20,000 in Australia
- Tourism is the key industry

DEMOGRAPHIC AGEING PROFILE

- Aged 60 and over is increasing
 - 9.2% in 1996
 - 12.6% in 2011
 - 22.8% by 2050 (estimate)
- Three key reasons:
 - Continuous low birth rate
 - High out-migration - High levels of out-migration abroad, since the opening of our international in 1974, have diminished the number of family members available to care for older relatives.
 - Improved health care - people living longer

GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF AGEING

- Women live longer than men by some six years
 - women's life expectancy at 78.4 years and men's 71.5 years
- At age 65 and older:
 - 20% of males were widowed
 - 44% of females were widowed
- Higher level of dependent older women who may also be vulnerable to poverty
- Older women typically the main care-givers of older persons, spouses and grand-children

AGEING AND DISABILITY

- Health needs change as people age
 - more and different specialized services are required
 - Proportion of people with a disability increases with age
 - from age 45 the proportion of the population with a disability increased continuously until it reached about 33% of the population, aged 75 and over.
- Cook Islands National Policy on Disability – sensitive to needs of older persons
 - Provides training and support for care-givers
 - Priorities access to buildings and public spaces
 - prevention measures
 - caring for the most vulnerable including women and girls

National Policy on Ageing 2012

- Vision - A healthy, empowered and active older population supported to live a quality life with dignity and respect
- Priority Area 3 - support to families to provide quality care for older persons
- Priority Area 4 - health care
- Priority Area 5 - financial security
 - Old age pension from the age of 60.
 - 10% of total Government operating expenditure on social welfare payments (80% on the Old Age Pension)
 - The current pension rates are: 60-69 US\$350 a month; 70 and over US \$460 a month
- Fiscal sustainability issues

Opportunities

Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (Goal 9) – Accelerate gender equality, reduce vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities, youth and elderly

- Adequacy of our current pension rates
- Assessing long term fiscal affordability
- Encourage personal retirement savings
- Encourage older persons to remain longer in the workforce
- Encourage healthy ageing
- Formalize the care-giving economy
- Empowering women participation in the labour force
- Closing the gender pay gap
- More women in parliament and leadership roles

- ***A 70-year old woman parliamentarian friend of mine once said in our Parliament “The place of women is in the house, the House of Parliament”***