

# Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review

## Joint Submission from the Tuvalu Coalition of Non-Governmental Organisations (T8CNGO)

Date of Submission: 29 March 2023



### Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA)

The Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA) is a non-government, not-for profit organisation established in 1989. TuFHA's work is focused on:

- a. Campaigning for greater greater awareness on SRH rights awareness of and support for family planning, reproductive and sexual health for all
- b. Promoting family planning, planned parenthood and other health related issues for all.
- c. Providing and promoting quality of care service family planning, reproductive and sexual health needs of the underserved, poor, and youths
- d. Supporting and collaborating with the government also with the key implementing partners as well to implement national family planning, reproductive and sexual health programs.
- e. Building capacity of the organization, strengthen leadership, coordination and develop competencies skills for technical staff, to ensure to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness.
- f. Ensuring quality services are available in line with IPPF international medical advisory panel statement and IPPF services delivery guidelines.

### Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu (Fusi Alofa)

Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu (Fusi Alofa) is the only umbrella Organization for Persons with Disability in Tuvalu, established in May 2009 and registered as a non-government organisation (NGO) in June 2012. Fusi Alofa strives to be the leading advocacy organisation on disability related issues in Tuvalu, and provides the following services:

1. Disablement Awareness for the community, Schools, Government, and Business
2. Education for sign language, wheelchair mobility and maintenance, training teachers with disabilities
3. Medical support for Devices, medication, and rehabilitation.
4. Special child education and Rehabilitation.

### Fakapotopotoga Fafine Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (FFEKT)

The FFEKT was informally established as a church women's group in Tuvalu, in the early 20th Century. The organization was formally recognized in 1982 with the establishment of its Steering Committee. Its constitution was put in place in 1990. FFEKT is founded on Christian principles and aims to empower and improve the status of women in Tuvalu, and focuses on the following areas:

1. To strengthen FFEKT capacity to enhance and empower women in congregations to address key challenges and issues that they continue to encounter.

2. Better use of Information and communication technologies (ICT) to develop better monitoring and reporting mechanisms, effective use of information and communication strategies to help sustain programs and activities while combatting the onslaughts of climate change and pandemics.
3. Create an enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development and activities.
4. Take measures to ensure women and men's equal access and full participation in decision-making as a mean of enhancing leadership and governance at all levels.
5. Eliminate all forms of violence against women and children.

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## I. Executive summary

This present submission was prepared for the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle Universal Period Review (UPR) for Tuvalu by the Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs. It highlights key human rights issues identified by the three contributing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and calls on the Government of Tuvalu to address these issues accordingly. The issues highlighted in this report are:

- Discrimination against women in relation to decision making and taking up leadership positions.
- Women’s Access to Education opportunities
- Economic empowerment of Women
- Rights of people living with disabilities
- Domestic Violence
- Lack of access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Information & Services

## II. Key Issues and recommendations

### A. Issue # 1: Discrimination against women in relation to decision making and taking up leadership positions.

1. It is difficult for women in Tuvalu to take up high level decision making and leadership positions in the country, due to cultural beliefs and long-standing practice and traditions. While the law provides equal opportunity for women and men to contest elections, only two women out of 37 candidates run for election since 2019 until now and only 1 woman is currently a member of the Parliament (out of 16 seats). More women are now part of the Falekaupule (island councils) and out of 48 positions in the Kaupule, 6 were occupied by women in 2021. <sup>1</sup>However, despite the recognition that women are the backbone of their community, they have limited opportunities to voice their concerns and participate in decision making and leadership roles.
2. In one of the main churches in Tuvalu, the protestant Church comprised 92.4% of the Population<sup>2</sup>. More than half of this percentage are women but there is only one woman out of fifteen representatives in the Executive Committee. The general meetings of the women fellowship of this church have consistently raised motions in the Biennial meetings of its Executive to increase the number of women representatives. However, this has been met with resistance as it is believed that women should not hold leadership positions in the church. It is imperative that women take up high level decision making and leadership positions to ensure that voices of women are heard, and their issues are raised.

#### **Recommendation:**

3. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGO recommended that the Government of Tuvalu collaborates with the local non-government organisations to change longstanding cultural beliefs and practices which hinder women in taking up leadership positions in the political, religious, and cultural spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> Tuvalu Gender Equity Policy

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights in the Pacific – A situational Analysis 2020.

**B. Issue #2: Lack of opportunities for Women to access to education.**

4. The rights of women to education, to choose what they like, to serve the lord was taken and controlled by the power of men. Women are not allowed to undertake further studies in the discipline of theology under the decision of the EKT executive body which was dominated by men. This issue has been consistently raised during the Annual General Meetings (AGM) but still no change. Such scholarships for this discipline were also not offered by the Government.

Recommendation:

5. The coalition of NGO highly recommended for the government to strengthen the process of informing the policymakers and increase awareness raising of all the people about gender equity and women's human rights to foster transformative changes.

**C. Issue # 3: Lack of Women's Economic empowerment opportunities**

6. Women in Tuvalu especially in the church (FFEKT) struggle with financial issue and they need to be financially independent. This was deal with the problem of not given trust and money to manage the home. Husbands were mostly the controller of financial for the family and most of the time they used it for their own interest \but not the basic needs of the family. Wherever there are organisations voluntarily contributions, women usually came up with various issues about their own income controlled by men which leads to economic abuses at home. The 2017 mini-Census reported that the participation of women in the labour force was only 39,7 per cent compared to men's participation 58,5 per cent.
7. The Coalition of NGOs congratulates the Government of Tuvalu for providing a space for local businesses to sell their goods for one day only each month. However, women need a reliable and affordable space own by a woman for the business stability and women ownership over it.

**Recommendation:**

8. The coalition of NGO recommended for the Government to invest on equitable access to resources and equal benefits from government programs and services by providing a market space for women, organise business and e-commerce trainings, distribute seed grants for beginners and organise business trainings and awareness.

**D. Issue # 4: Non ratification of the Optional Protocol of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and non-finalization of the national disability policy**

9. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs notes that a disability study was conducted by Fusi Alofa in 2018 found that there are 466 with disabilities in Tuvalu, this comprises of 4.5% of the population.<sup>3</sup>
10. The Government of Tuvalu ratified the CRPD in 2013 and endorsed regional frameworks such as the Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region 2013-2022, and the 2016 Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disability. It developed the 2018 Tuvalu National Policy on Persons with Disability, which was revised in 2022 to implement human rights obligation under the CRPD, The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs congratulates the Government of Tuvalu for this. It also notes that the government had reported in the UPR 3rd Cycle that it intends to hold further consultation on the decision to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Coalition is concerned that little has eventuated to progress this. It also notes that the 2018 Tuvalu National Policy on Persons with Disability that was revised in 2022 is yet to be finalised.

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<sup>3</sup>Tuvalu study on People with Disabilities <https://www.toksavepacificgender.net/wp-content>

**Recommendation:**

11. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs recommends that the Government ratify the Optional Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and complete the revision, finalisation, and endorsement of the Tuvalu National Policy on Persons with Disability.

**E. Issue # 5: Lack of Inclusive education opportunity for Children with Disability**

12. Ninety per cent (90%) of children living with disabilities in Tuvalu currently do not have access to education<sup>4</sup>There are efforts being made to educate children living with disabilities, but resources are centred in Funafuti, meaning that children with disabilities living outside of the capital are unable to access education.
13. A special needs school is also run by Fusi Alofa in Funafuti and in the past, the school has received Special School Grants from the Ministry of Education to meet the salaries of its teachers. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs is concerned, that there is no consistent commitment from the government to provide the education services for children with disabilities. Fusi Alofa's special needs school is at risk of being closed as the Ministry of Education has ceased the provision of financial support through the grant to it. The Tuvalu coalition of NGOs also notes that the country currently does not have all the necessary technical and medical specialists and disability counsellors and therapist to provide support services for people with disabilities.

**Recommendation**

14. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs calls upon the Government to:
  - i. Provide funding support to the education sector to strengthen the capacity of the teachers in the outer islands on disability inclusion.
  - ii. Reinstate the grant allocation to the special needs school being run by Fusi Alofa to ensure that children with disabilities can continue to receive the education they are entitled to.
  - iii. Provide scholarships for Tuvaluans to undertake further studies in the areas of medical and disability counselling therapy.

**F. Issue # 6: Domestic Violence impacts**

15. Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women, children, and People with Disability. It affects women and young people and other key populations across the life span from physical, emotional, financial and sex selective attitude toward female forced suicide and abuse, and is evident, to some degree, in every society in the world. The Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019-2020, demonstrated that 38.1% of women aged 15 – 49, who have experienced “Physical violence” since age 15, and 6.6% number of women experiencing physical violence in the past 12 months, prior to the survey implementation. 63% of women's, experiencing ‘sexual violence’ by non-partner relationship.<sup>5</sup>
16. Domestic violence is grounded on power and control allowing the violent partner to exercise persistent forced control<sup>6</sup>In societies with a patriarchal power structure and with rigid gender roles, women are not empowered to protect themselves during situations of domestic violence.

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<sup>4</sup> Tuvalu study on people with disabilities

<sup>5</sup> Tuvalu MICs-2019-2020 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/luP9Y3CaJMMuGwZG>

<sup>6</sup> Forster, C 2011, Ending Domestic Violence in Pacific Island Countries: The Critical Role of Law, *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 123-44. Viewed 15 January 2021. Retrieved from [http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ\\_12-2\\_Forster\\_Final.pdf](http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ_12-2_Forster_Final.pdf).

17. The prevalence of domestic violence in Tuvalu has a serious impact and significant strains on the country's health care systems and this affect families and communities.
18. Domestic violence is a burden on the social system sectors affecting the existing social service, the nation's development, law enforcement, health care, lost labour and general progress in development. These costs do not only affect the present generation; what begins as an assault by one person on another, reverberates through the family and the community into the future. Its continued existence is morally indefensible. Its cost to individuals, to health systems and to society is enormous. Furthermore, there are no safeguards in place to address the health care services.
19. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs congratulates the State for establishing a safe house, however, we note it is not sufficient to respond to the needs of the survivors of domestic violence.

**Recommendation:**

20. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGOs call upon the Government to:
  - i. Urgently establish adequate number of Safe Houses in Funafuti(capital) up to a minimum of 3, to accommodate the needs of the survivors of violence and provide adequate fund for administration of the Safe House scheme.
  - ii. Develop a national standard operating procedure on the prevention and response to domestic violence.

**G. Issue # 7: Lack of access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Information & Services**

21. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. Tuvalu has eight islands; scattered group of atolls separated by ocean. Internet and mass media standards are poor, that lies as a great barrier for the underserved population from accessing positive SRH information and clinical services, such as, Modern Contraceptives Methods, and so forth. Based on the Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019-2020 findings, depict the highest percentage at, Childbearing age. 5% of women with a live birth before age 15. In reference to that, young people (female) are at risks regarding reproductive health status, like gynaecological symptoms, STI infections and Non-Communicable Disease. Having limited access to information resulted in "Poor Decision Making". Assessing the MICs output, illustrated there is a gap need to address; equal access to SRHR information for all, and recommends the following:
22. The Tuvalu Coalition of NGO calls upon the government to:
  - i. Increase financial assistance to existing SRHR service providers.
  - ii. Provide necessary resources to enhance the institutional capacity of the existing SRHR service providers, such as invest financial resources to introduce the digital and telehealth program and develop the Information, Education and Communication online platforms.