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**“FIRE CAST ON THE EARTH – KINDLING”:  
BEING MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**SOCIAL ANALYSIS: PACIFIC ISLANDS PERSPECTIVE**

***“ Gender Development in Oceania Region”***

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## “GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN OCEANIA REGION”

The Pacific Ocean, also known as *the liquid continent*, covers about a third of the earth’s total surface area. It covers about 176 million sq. km, of which only 10 million sq. km are land. Of this 10 million, 9.2 million sq. km is Australia and New Zealand. The rest is made up of tiny island nations called the Pacific Islands. Its area is so great that if you put ALL the earth’s landmass in it, there will still be water around!<sup>1</sup>

There are three major cultural, ethnic sub-regions in the Pacific: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Each sub-region boasts a diverse and rich cultural history. Melanesia comes from the Greek meaning “dark islands”. These are the oldest of the Pacific people - arriving in the Pacific at about forty to fifty thousand years BC.<sup>2</sup>

Fiji, Kanaky (New Caledonia), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait Islands are traditionally considered part of Melanesia because of their shared colonial history and common regional situation rather than by a racial classification. Melanesian countries are the more populated island countries in the Pacific. In fact, the largest island country in the Pacific is Papua New Guinea, with 5 out of 7 million Pacific Islanders.<sup>3</sup>

Micronesia comes from the Greek word meaning “small islands”. It consists of hundreds of small atolls or low lying islands spread over a large area of the western Pacific. It is divided among seven territories: the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Palau, the Northern Mariana Islands, Nauru, Kiribati, and the Guam.<sup>4</sup>

Polynesia means the “many islands”. Polynesians are well known for their sea-faring skills. The Polynesian triangle has its three corners at Hawaii, Aotearoa New Zealand and Rapa Nui (Easter Islands), American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Rotuma, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Wallis and Futuna are all located within this triangle.

Here are a few interesting facts about the Pacific:<sup>5</sup>

- The smallest ecozone in the world, Oceania, is in the Pacific Ocean, including Micronesia, Polynesia and Fiji.
- There are an estimated 2500 languages and dialects in the Pacific region.
- There are about 25,000 islands in the Pacific (more than the total number in the rest of the world's oceans combined) with only 20% inhabited.
- 90% of Pacific Islanders are Christians, due to the arrival of the foreign missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Pacific peoples are diverse and different in our cultures, languages, environments and histories but we are united in our struggles to address the concerns and needs of our people.<sup>6</sup>

I am grateful to be able to participate in this conference and share our struggle to address the needs and issues that affect the lives of our people in the region. I am a Tongan, Sister of

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<sup>1</sup> Pacific Islands Year Book, edited by Norman & Ngaire Douglas, (16<sup>th</sup> ed) Australia, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 30-40

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 51-55

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 56

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 58

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 60

Mercy, and work as the co-ordinator for CCJD, CEPAC- Central Region ( CCJD -Catholic Commission for Justice and Development, CEPAC-Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops of Pacific ) and Caritas Oceania representative on Caritas Internationalis Gender working group. This presentation will share with you some important factors that we are facing in the region today. It will mainly focus on “ **Gender Development in Oceania Region**”. Information for this paper was collected from written texts and oral sources and shared at various national, regional and international meetings.

## INTRODUCTION

The term “**gender**” refers to the characteristics and roles that societies define for women and men. Customs, traditions, religion and education determine these roles. Gender is related to how we are conditioned to perceive women and men’s attributes and roles in the family and in society. The process of socialization, from birth to adulthood, shapes our perception of gender. Gender, along with factors such as age and class, determine how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organized and not solely because of our biological differences.<sup>7</sup>

Gender includes roles (what we think women and men should do), stereotypes (what we think women and men should be like) and values (what we think is good for a woman or a man). Roles ascribed on the basis of Gender are socially constructed. We are not born with a specific disposition for any particular role therefore, it can be argued that they are changeable, learned, and vary among cultures. Gender is a key organizing principle in the distribution of labour, property and other valuable resources in society.<sup>8</sup>

### Gender Roles

The cultural beliefs and values practised in the Pacific have survived a long time. They are closely identified with the people and are used to maintain law and order, instil respect and enhance the role of traditional leaders. These cultural norms and traditions influence **gender roles** – what women and men do. For example, in many societies men are traditionally<sup>9</sup> assumed to be the breadwinners while the women are expected to take care of the children and household. Today, some values have been questioned and challenged and some have changed. Now, in some of the Pacific countries, gender and development mainstreaming are seen as threats to traditional values and cultures.

Understanding the issue of gender means appreciating that it will actually enhance and strengthen the culture and values as it strengthens the relationship between men and women, women and children, and family living as a whole. Giving women equal opportunities in education and employment allows them to strengthen their ability to provide upkeep the family, thus improving their status.<sup>10</sup>

To empower women does not mean removing or lessening the powers traditionally held by men; it means working alongside men without discrimination and / or victimization. Empowerment can be facilitated by accepting gender issues as a part of development, by putting it in its right perspective and by introducing it at a pace acceptable to the people.<sup>11</sup>

Essential to discussion of gender roles is the **gender division of labour** – the difference between the tasks done by women and by men. These differ among cultures and sometimes

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<sup>7</sup> Forum Secretariat, 1998. Gender \through Pacific Eyes, Forum Secretariat Suva

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 66

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 79

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 88

within cultures and may also vary between a culture's rural and urban communities. In some cases within Pacific cultures it may be appropriate for a woman to do her own housekeeping or for a man to work as a labourer.<sup>12</sup> There are also certain tasks that were always referred to as men's tasks and women's tasks. Men were expected to attend meetings, build structures of homes, sell women's produce, drink kava and do some fishing (boats and diving). Women were expected to do housework, take care of children, collect herbal medicines, plant plait thatching mats and do some fishing (collecting seafood from shore).<sup>13</sup>

Understanding past and present influences on gender relationships can give insight into future constraints and opportunities for affecting social change in general, and gender relations in particular. For example, the rise of religious fundamentalism can impose new restrictions on women, limiting their ability to participate in other responsibilities and non-traditional work, or it can help them gain greater independence. Crises such as war or drought can significantly alter gender relations and lead women into new roles as leaders, organizers and skilled workers. Sometimes these new roles are temporary but often they lead to changes in the community that improve the status of women.<sup>14</sup>

### **Realities to consider**

Socio-cultural:	Socialization through education and family upbringing, tradition, belief systems, cultural practices that teach gender roles; changes in culture and lifestyles.
Economic:	Access to and control of land, employment, other economic resources (e.g. agricultural produce, forest resources), economic policies (e.g. structural adjustment programmes)
Political:	Commitment of the government and church to the advancement of women, including the provision of resources to promote affirmative action and provide mechanisms to facilitate active and full participation of women in the development process.
Religion:	Religious beliefs/teachings about women and men; religious practices
Media:	The images of men and women that the media projects can either reinforce or weaken gender biases and gender stereotyping.
Environmental:	Status of natural resources (forests, water resources, etc) that have some bearing on the activities of women and men; natural disasters (e.g. cyclone, hurricane, earthquake)
Legal;	Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); constitutional provisions that have bearing on women's right (e.g. land rights, reproductive rights); all laws that affect men and women differently.
Education:	The level and quality of education for boys and girls; gender stereotypes in the curriculum; exposure of Western lifestyle and values. <sup>15</sup>

### **Gender Issues**

Gender issues are matters related to the conditions and position of men and women in society. Where there are differences in opportunities, roles and situations between women and men, particularly differences in access to power and control, gender issues arise.

Class, poverty, ethnicity and physical location may also create inequalities but gender tends to make them more severe. Gender-intensified constraints - refers to the rules, norms and values that are part of the social construction of gender and are found in such things as, workloads,

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<sup>12</sup> Building Capacity for Change: A training manual on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of discrimination against Women IWRAW/Asia Pacific, 2001

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 67

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 80

<sup>15</sup> RRRT: Regional Rights Resource Team Pacific Human Rights Training Manual August, 2002

return to labour efforts, health and education and access to productive assets. They reflect the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities between women and men in the household. Where resources are scarce, women find themselves at greater disadvantage than male members of the family. Some inequalities may be the result of community norms, such as customary laws and governing inheritance. Others arise from decisions in the household, often because females are seen as having less value than males.<sup>16</sup>

### **Examples of gender issues**

- In some countries women cannot own land. Tonga is among the countries in the Pacific that women cannot own land but they are allowed to lease land.
- In many cases women are paid less to do the same tasks as men, or are paid less to work just as hard as men. In Tonga women are given the same wages as the men. Men are known to do the hard physical work
- For many years, women were not represented in government. They are still not represented equally with men in decision-making bodies. This is true in Tonga, where the men outnumber women in the government. It is a slow process. Women are climbing rapidly in Education and this might cause changes to come about.
- Domestic violence, as well as rape, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women are often accepted. Gender is the core reason for discrimination against women within the home, and for not being consulted and involved in decision making in the home or community. Women are expected to constantly cook and clean and look after the welfare of the children in spite of having a job. Lack of support in activities which are considered unconventional e.g. study and sports. Another reason is the cultural attitude based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of men or women or on stereotyped roles of men and women.
- If a family does not have enough money to send all their children to school, boys are sent first. This is not practised in Tonga, where parents believe in the education of their children. The statistics report of Ministry of Education, shows that Tonga has 100% literacy and a higher percentage of the population with university degrees.
- Lack of female management executives and lack of male nurses because of gender roles ascribed to these positions. This does not apply to Tonga. Female management executives in Tonga are progressing; women are climbing high in the academic field and it is now recognised that they can do the same work as men or even better.<sup>17</sup>

### **Gender and Poverty**

This is one example of how women are badly affected by the issues because of gender inequality. While nearly two thirds of the world's poor are in Asia and Pacific region, two thirds of the region's poor are women, and poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural areas.<sup>18</sup>

In poor families, the gender division of labour and responsibilities for household welfare mean that the burden of poverty falls most heavily on women. Given gender disparities in education, health care, economic participation, and incomes, women are the most vulnerable category.<sup>19</sup>

Youth unemployment has increased in Tonga. Youths tend to depend a lot on their parents for their financial support. So more and more families live in poverty. Mothers become more and more the breadwinners in the families. Because of shortage of land some families have to find

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid 25

<sup>17</sup> Kingdom of Tonga: National Policy on Gender and Development: Towards Gender Equity, Harmonious Society and a Better Future for All, August, 2001

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 20

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 45

some ways to plant mulberry trees for making tapa and pandanus for weaving mats. Tapa and mats play a very important role in the culture of Tonga. They are used for traditional attire in wedding celebrations and decorations of the dead; they are used in traditional presentations and used for decorations and an identity of the wealth of a mother in collecting them. It is a disgrace and often regarded as foreign, when a Tongan woman has no collection of mats and tapas.

The number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately over the past decade, compared to the number of men. Male migration in search of work and consequent changes in household structure has placed additional burdens on women, especially those with several dependents. In the Pacific region, the proportion of households headed by females ranges from 20 – 40 percent.

The disproportionate numbers of women among the poor poses serious constraints on human and social development because their children are more likely to repeat cycles of poverty and disadvantage. **Improving the political, legal, cultural, economic and social status of women is thus pivotal to escaping the poverty trap**<sup>20</sup>

### **Manufacturing Sector**

Increased industrialization and manufacturing sectors in a country replaces a lot of labour with machines and new technology in order to increase productivity and efficiency.<sup>21</sup> As a result the level of unemployment increases and the majority of unemployed are women. Most of these women are in female-headed households and are the sole breadwinners for the family. This is not a reality in Tonga, but it is more present in our neighbouring countries, for example PagoPago Samoa. Tonga does not have much manufacturing business, because of lack of natural resources.

### **Access to Land**

The land tenure system in Pacific countries is a major obstacle for women's full participation and contribution to trade. In Tonga, women are not allowed by law to own land; it is a cultural issue. There are social roles separating women and men; the women are to concentrate on household duties, and childcare and the men to farm in the plantation.<sup>22</sup>

### **Access to Quality Education**

In most of the Pacific countries, men have priority in accessing education in a family so whatever resources a family has are dedicated to spend on educating the son. Girls will either have to work hard to gain a scholarship or will enrol as far as high school then stay home and assist their mothers in household duties. In Tonga, education in all levels gives equal opportunities to both girls and boys.

### **Conditions of Work**

The recent change in women's employment in export-oriented industries mostly involves poor quality jobs. Women are mainly employed in the garment manufacturing sector and it requires long hours of standing and sitting in the factory. This has created an adverse impact on the health of women. Another example is the Tuna cannery in Fiji and Solomon Islands where canning is mainly done by women, standing for long hours inside the factory with poor conditions such as poor ventilation, while men drive trucks, load and unload produce.<sup>23</sup>  
(video – In the name of growth)

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<sup>20</sup> A Research Project Publication in Collaboration between UNV/APC Noumea/UNIFEM Pacific and CWL Tonga, November 2005

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 25

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 30

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 78

### **Differences in salary**

Women's and men's educational levels are usually the same but their social roles create the female pay differential. This form of inequality and discrimination affects the working morale, motivation and contribution of women. This inequality is caused by the social and cultural ideologies that are used to decide which jobs are for men and which ones are for women. Even though some women have been able to break into better jobs, previously male dominated, the majority of women are still in low paying jobs with little training or opportunity and no prospects for promotion.<sup>24</sup>

There is a marked difference between the work of chiefly women and those of the lower rank. Women of chiefly rank are in a privileged position indeed. They do not have to labour to produce commodities. They can supervise the work of other women, make garlands for personal decorations and even design kupesi for tapa making. The heavy planting, hoeing and harvesting of crops, fishing, cooking and heavy craft work such as canoe making and house construction are all the domain of men. Light agricultural duties such as weeding of home gardens, growing plants with scented flowers, leaves, roots or barks for scented oil-making, mat weaving, tapa cloth and craft work relating to these were considered appropriate for women. The raising of children, although largely the responsibility of women, was shared among members of the extended family including the males.<sup>25</sup>

### **Women in the Churches**

It is unfortunate that some churches in this region are still very much influenced by our social setting of responsibility. Regardless of how many women succeed in their theological education like their male colleagues, they are still not considered for higher positions in the churches. They are either expected to teach, or work in the school libraries or just stay at home and assist their husbands who are already in ministry.<sup>26</sup>

Many of the churches in the region still do not recognize the capacity of their female members to do theological studies. Therefore the question arises as to how the churches think they are responding to their prophetic call of promoting justice in Oceania? How can they speak to the full participation of all in church ministry?

### **Differences are influenced by the following factors:**

1. Unequal access to resources and control over these resources such as land, forest, marine resources, education and training, decision-making, finance, etc. The impact in Tonga is that the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. This also creates more unemployment and forced migration from rural to urban areas. The King and government own all the resources and make final decisions in Tonga. This has a great impact on the people.<sup>27</sup>
2. Unequal access to and control over benefits that are generated from resources or development interventions. The King household have the ownership of all the resources in the kingdom of Tonga. Princess Pilolevu, the king's sister, owns Tonga Satellite-space<sup>28</sup>
3. Gender division of labour within the families and communities. Churches which influence the health and social and economic conditions of women and men. The division of labour between the sexes in Tonga is a direct manifestation of the societal

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> A United Nations Volunteer: CEDAW information Research Report 2005 "Bringing CEDAW Home to Tonga"

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

- and religious concepts of the essences of female and male. Work which requires hard physical labour and implies sweat and dirt is allocated to men.<sup>29</sup>
4. External factors that influence gender relations and access to control over resources and benefits. The economic and political structures in Tonga have undergone big changes. The introduction of a market or money economy from the 'Westemised' countries has been the controlling factor in changing the roles of women and men.<sup>30</sup>

### **Gender Equality**

- Women and men have identical rights and status
- The need for women and men to be treated equally under the law and in society.<sup>31</sup>

### **Gender Equity**

- Women and men are treated fairly. In theory, women and men are equal; therefore they have equal human rights. These rights include the right of choice and security in marriage; the right to land, property and inheritance; reproductive rights; the right to education and employment; the right to their individual identities; and the right to freedom from violence (Pacific Platform of Action, South Pacific Commission, 1995).

In practice, however, gender equality and gender equity are often different. The social and economic structures and conditions that disqualify women from getting just treatment, support advantages and privileges for men; and even though both are entitled equally the issue of equity remains. In international human rights law, for example in interpreting CEDAW, this distinction is seen as the difference between 'formal equality' and 'substantive equality.'

**CEDAW** , stands for The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and in September 1981 the convention entered into force when 20 states ratified the convention. As of May 2000, 165 countries had acceded to or ratified CEDAW. CEDAW, is also known as the Women's Convention or the Women's Bill of Rights. Tonga has not yet signed CEDAW.<sup>32</sup>

Tongan traditional society was and is still, highly stratified. Both the social and political structures are based on units linked loosely together through elaborate kinship networks. It is a very complex system made more difficulty by the fact that the social and political units are sometimes synonymous or overlapping and at other times contradictory.<sup>33</sup>

However, it should be noted that the social and political units more or less operate under similar principles. Tongan society continues to be organised in a form of a pyramid. At the top are the ruling monarchs, the Tu'iTonga, Tu'iHa'atakalaua, and Tu'iKanokupolu, in descending order. Below these groups are the chiefly families or 'Eiki, who are members of the aristocracy by virtue of impeccable blood lines and hereditary titles. In the next level are those known as Matapule who are functionaries of title as hereditary chiefs. Below these are ranked the vast majority of Tongans who are known as Tu'a or commoners. There are different languages used in these rank categories.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of rank is pivotal to an understanding of the Tongan socio-political structure. "Rank" is the quality commanding respect and deference, and inherited from one's parents and cannot be altered either by one's own achievements or by one's failures. The kinship links or

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Latukefu. S. 'Church and State in Tonga, Canberra Australian National University Press, 1974

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

blood ties in Tonga determine to a large extent the political and social rank of any individual in the society. But although blood ties are all important, it is not the only element in the equation. Sex and age are also important considerations and all these are mediated through the further principles of 'power' and 'authority'.<sup>35</sup> These principles operated at the 'famili (limited extended family) level as well as in the larger political society.

Priests and Religious in Tonga are in the second unit of the pyramid, that is the aristocracy and nobles. Different language is used for the King, chiefs and commoners. Society has put priests and religious on the second category. This is very challenging to them because most of the priests and religious are commoners and as soon as they become a priest or religious they are already in the chiefly rank; and the society expects them to act likewise.

In the social structure women outrank their male relatives. The father's eldest sister has the highest rank within the family, and is accorded 'fahu' status. The fahu has been defined as the person (usually woman) with unlimited authority over others within her blood kin. This means in social terms that the woman and her children have the right to ask and expect goods and services from her brothers and mother's brothers and kin over whom she is fahu.<sup>36</sup> Both societal and social ranks are predominantly determined by the rank of the mother.

In Tonga the family unit is the basis of society and the Church. Therefore, being a patriarchal society, the father is the head of the family. The father is invested with some privileges within the family-circle where he is respected and often treated specially. Traditionally, it is disrespectful for the children to touch father's head, because the head is regarded as sacred. Children do not use father's clothing in any way, or eat his leftover meals, or sleep in his bed. All his belongings are not to be touched, a symbol of power and sacredness. Moreover, whatever the father says ought to be obeyed for he is the most powerful figure in the family unit. To disobey the father is to violate the Tongan tradition.<sup>37</sup>

There is also a matriarchal element in Tongan society, though it is quite a complicated one. To touch just the surface of it, women have socio-cultural power. In this sense, within a family unit, the girls have higher status than the boys. For this reason, say a social occasion like a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday or wedding of one of the boys, the eldest sister has the privilege of receiving the 'top cake' with the best fine mat and tapa cloth (Tongan treasures).<sup>38</sup> This is a symbol of love and respect from the brother to his sister. This 'sort of privilege' held by women is known as the "Fahu System". It is well practised in the island even today. Therefore women hold some kind of socio-cultural power. Unfortunately, with the penetration of the money economy upon traditional culture, the element of materialism and consumerism complicate the medium of gifts and interchange of gifts, hence, the relationship in this case tends to be based on materialistic values rather than genuine love and respect to one another.

In the early 1960s, the Bishop of Tonga at the time, Bishop Rodgers, appealed to the Christchurch Mercy Sisters to meet a felt-need in the diocese of Tonga in the area of education. In response to this appeal, four pioneer sisters were sent to Tonga in 1964. They worked in the area of education, village development, and visiting the sick, the aged and the prisoners.

As women and Sisters of Mercy, we play a big part in society. Sisters of Mercy are empowering women and encouraging girls in Tonga through their ministry in education. Sisters provide counselling at the Women and Children Centre. At this Centre, women experiencing any form of discrimination and children who are deprived of their rights call in at this house of refuge. There

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Latukefu.S. Church and State in Tonga, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974, 4-5,8-9,30-1

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 32

a Sister of Mercy gives them counselling. This is a big step forward for the Tongan government. It is also a first time for the government to employ religious as a civil servants.

Mercy Sisters working with women at the community development groups train and encourage them to find ways in which they can earn money to help their families. Through the community development groups most families are able to pay school fees for their children, to build family houses and water cement tanks.

The sisters are involved in the Commission for Justice and Development which empowers women to speak up on injustices in church and society. They work to inform and form people, to open their eyes and to find ways to free people from their oppression, especially when they are marginalized and at risk.

The most important needs that we encounter today are the need to empower women to obtain professional teaching skills, and a need for adult education where the impact of western education and economy are great. There is a need among the people for technical skills to earn a living alongside subsistence farming. There is also the important need of adult education in the spiritual aspect of Tongan life where people today are influenced by the media and overseas contact.

The Mercy Sisters in Tonga today continue to follow the Spirit of Catherine McAuley. She would move along with the people in periods of social change:

*“As Catherine McAuley’s contribution to the history of social service is our precious heritage, we should act with courage and initiative like hers in serving others in our pastoral and parish work. We seek out the aged, the poor, the lonely, the immigrant, children deprived of parental care, to show them the spirit of Mercy, a genuine love and compassion. Taking into account social needs of our times, and our own resources, we provide residential care for such people.”<sup>39</sup>*

The Spirit of Catherine McAuley is still alive today seeking out new ways and life-style in order to meet the needs of the new century in Tonga.

A Tongan Sister of Mercy already has the power within a family, church and society. She is challenged in how she uses her power.

### **Gender Issues to be considered**

- Identify the division of labour between women and men at the level of household and community, and identify intra-household transfer between men and women.
- Analyse the patterns of access to and control over resources/benefits at the household and community levels.
- Determine the factors that influence the above two points.
- Define practical gender needs and strategic gender interests of women and men as inputs to project planning and policy recommendations.
- Do not assume that men and women do the same things, have the same access to or control of resources, or have the same needs.

### **Conclusion:**

Undoubtedly, some progress has been achieved in the region in reducing gender disparities and advancing the status of women. However, in spite of these achievements, much remains to be done to reduce the gender gap and achieve greater improvements in women’s social, economic and political status.

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<sup>39</sup> Constitutions of the Federation the Sisters of Mercy of New Zealand, ‘Send by God: Apostolate, p.19 no.77, p22.No.90,p.20 no.84

Gender equality is needed to move us forward, not only to advance the status of women in society and church but hopefully to provide a just and sustainable future for all.

My hopes and dreams for the future of Sisters of Mercy in Tonga:

To contextualize God's mercy in Tonga we start with a very rich heritage. Tongan hospitality and Mercy hospitality are both rich expressions of God's mercy. My dream is that this hospitality can be experienced and shared by the whole family of Mercy throughout the world, but first of all by our Oceania family.

To contextualize mercy in relation to each cultural dimension gives an openness to contemporary emphases like development of people, enculturation, justice and peace. In practise, inculturation means that we be open and look with the eyes of respect to the differences in cultures and values of other countries.

My hope is that Mercy in Tonga is always a voice for the voiceless in society; that it respects the dignity of every person, and that it lives Gospel values. We need not be afraid to be different in our mission in order to respond to the most vulnerable people. We need more sisters working in Tonga, doing more adult education in all areas, more theological education, and more training of clergy so that they are aware of gender issues and cultural clashes.

One of my dreams is that there will never be a time when only Tongan sisters work in Tonga; or that Tongan Sisters of Mercy work only in Tonga.

Finally my dream is that ongoing knowledge and understanding of the story of Catherine McAuley and of the culture of Tonga will be crucial for future planning of mission work. I hope that the Mercy Charism will be alive in all decision making in Tonga. In this way, Mercy Mission will be re-visited and evaluated to empower Sisters in Tonga and in the Pacific, to hear the call to plant the seed of faith as the early missionaries did with great enthusiasm and for the love of Jesus Christ.