

The Cook Islands

National Report for the 2014 Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) Conference and post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

“Navigating Stormy Seas through Changing winds” -

**Developing an Economy whilst preserving a National Identity and the modern
challenges of a Small Island Developing State**

GLOSSARY

AUSAID	Australian Agency for International Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADB/CIER	Asian Development Bank/ Cook Islands Economic Report 2001 and 2008
BPOA	Barbados Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIANGO	Cook Islands Association of Non Government Organizations
CINCW	Cook Islands National Council of Women
CIG	Cook Islands Government
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
CSO	Civil Society Organisation/s
ECE	Early Childhood Education
GADD	Gender and Development Division (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
GNI	Gross National Income
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
JNAP	Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MSI	Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
NESAF	National Environmental Strategic Action Framework
NES	National Environment Services
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
NCDs	Non Communicable Diseases
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PEFA	Public Finance Expenditure Assessment
PICTA	Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PSC	Public Service Commission
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRIC	Strengthening Resilience of Island Communities Program
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TCI	Telecom Cook Islands
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UN	United Nations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cook Islands national development strategy is known as the “Te Kaveinga Nui,” which is translated as the ‘national journey the Cook Islands is making in its development as a country.’ The last decade has seen the largest sea change in the history of the country since self-governance with significant depopulation coinciding with a decade of unprecedented economic growth. The Cook Islands in this respect is quite unique, and there is an obvious need to take a deeper look into the development dynamics in-country to make sense of these changes.

This report provides an opportunity to reflect on the development experience over the course of this period, ascertaining lessons to be learned, gaps in the development framework, key challenges and opportunities in aligning the country’s development approach with its aspirations in future. Accordingly the report is comprised of five sections: 1) Stocktake and Review of Development Progress; 2) Areas for Recommitment; 3) New and Emerging Challenges; 4) Priorities for Sustainable development; and 5) Conclusions.

Stock take of development progress

The stock take on development progress reviewed the Cook Islands development experience through the lens of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Barbados Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPOA), the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States - 5 year review (MSI+5) and the regional development themes as identified by the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP) Agencies. This first section is an overview of the development Cook Islands through different lenses of the aforementioned themes (totalling 38) under the eight priority development areas set out by the National Sustainable Development Plan. The Cook Islands is for the most part on track to achieve its MDG targets and the introduction of the NSDP has greatly augmented the policy and planning framework of government. However, consultations and closer analysis shows gaps assessing the development of the country. Reflections on the country’s recent development experience revealed the following key lessons:

1. The **MDGs have helped** improved planning and resourcing in Education and Health.
2. The establishment of a consolidated national development plan (**NSDP**) **has helped** to align national plans and actions.
3. **Evidence-based policy** has helped to **improve the efficacy of development** efforts over time.
4. **Improvements** resultant from the use **Evidence-based policy require mid to long term commitment** to embed in the institution framework of departments and agencies.
5. Improvements in **Public Financial Management** and the Policy & Planning framework have **improved accessibility** to donor support for development

Our review of development themes and reflections on the development experience also revealed the following gaps:

- Some MDGs and targets were **not relevant** to the Cook Islands context
- Some **development partners are unable or unwilling to use national systems** that could deliver development assistance efficient manner
- Appropriate metrics or **policies to address population movement** do not yet exist
- Non-reporting on the informal economy and its impact undervalues its contribution to national welfare.

Areas for Recommitment

The second section of the report focuses on identifying areas that require further commitment and attention so the country can better approach its development in a holistic manner. The report recommends five different areas that require greater attention in helping the country to address its development needs.

- Governance
- Evidence-based Policy
- Policy Coordination
- Depopulation
- Investment in the Social Sector

The policy development framework is still in its relative infancy and despite improvements with capacity building and planning there is a need for greater appreciation for **evidence-based policy**, thus resulting in a lack of resourcing and commitment to improve information collection and reporting systems. There have been significant advances in the policy framework with development of the NSDP and progress with public financial management improving the Cook Islands ability to manage funds and activities through its national planning systems and in the process negotiate better terms with development partners for the access and use of development funds. However there remains a need to continue to improve and address weaknesses in **governance structures** particularly the **coordination and implementation of policy**, through resourcing of the policy coordination and political commitment to accountability in the implementation of policy. The impact of an unbalanced appreciation of the range of development priorities, with political attention fixated on economic development has seen **investment in the social sector decline** as a percentage of total government expenditure of the course of the last decade. The most pertinent and stark illustration of the neglect of social issues is the **absence of policy directly addressing depopulation**, which is almost unanimously regarded as the country's most pressing issue.

New and Emerging Challenges

The report identified three key emerging and cross cutting issues that the Cook Islands must respond to in effectively addressing its development needs.

1. **Climate Change** is a cross cutting issue that will require coordinated policy response from the public sector and civil society in addressing adaption measures, food security and in the longer term, sea level rise.
2. **The Global Economic Crisis** has and will continue to influence the policy environment of the country for the foreseeable future. In addressing development needs, there must be consideration of the wider costs of the current stimulus approach and the perceived trade off between investment in economic growth and investment in the social sector and environment.
3. **Societal and Cultural Changes** have impacted the development needs of the country significantly with depopulation and the increase of immigrant labour and its resulting diversity substantially altering the context for policy in this area. The erosion of the traditional extended family unit and community support system with cultural change has also drastically reshaped the expectations and demands on Cook Islanders and government in ensuring the welfare of the country.

Priorities for Sustainable Development

To align current development priorities with those identified in the report as needing recommitment, as well as meet the challenges mentioned in the previous section, the report outlines six priorities for sustainable development.

1. **Good Governance**; being a prerequisite for the effective and efficient administration and allocation of resources to support the country's development efforts in accordance with long term aspirations.
2. **Population and People**; with the need to protect and invest in the people that are the target beneficiaries from the country's development program.
3. **Self Sustainability**; with a view to reduce economic dependence and vulnerability by developing capacity to cater to the nation's own energy needs and food security through investment in renewable energy and food security initiatives respectively.
4. **Climate Change and Disaster Risk management** ; in being proactive in addressing and mainstreaming policy responses to the various short and long term impacts of climate change.
5. **Infrastructure**; to safeguard and improve the welfare and wellbeing of the country in the long term whilst administering its development and management in an efficient and sustainable manner.
6. **Economic Development**; to secure and grow the economy in the short to mid-term focusing on tourism whilst making efforts to diversify the economic base in the longer term (Deep sea minerals, fisheries and revitalising agriculture) for reinvestment into the country's long term development needs.

Conclusions

In synthesizing lessons and reflections from the Cook Islands experience the report offers the following recommendations that are relevant to various forums that this report addresses:

National:

- Identify key metrics that are relevant, applicable and reflective of development at the community and national levels
- Continued strengthening of budgetary and performance management national systems
- Build capacity and capabilities in policy development analysis, monitoring and evaluation
- A review of development priorities for the country

Pacific Preparatory Meeting:

- Research and development of metrics to reflect the contribution of the subsistence economy, culture and society as part of national output and productivity
- Development of a key metric/metrics for climate change adaptation
- Promotion of the use of country systems
- Need for consistency in messages relating to development from the Pacific to the global arena
- Clear linkages between Pacific regional and national development frameworks

SIDS Conference 2014:

- Guidance on development mix (between donor funds and tax revenues) for the sustainable development of SIDS in different scenarios/ stages of development
- Maintaining the special case for SIDS and reflection of the unique challenges faced in the development of the SDGs and Post 2015 Development Agenda, particularly in the case of narrow economic base for most islands; and the threats of climate change and natural disaster to development

SDGs and Post 2015 Development Agenda:

- Including both non-economic and economic indicators into the SDG framework to provide a holistic/realistic view of development priorities
- Guidance in prioritising between development areas and targets in the SDG framework

It is also suggested that in cultivating **effective development relationships**, the Cook Islands with recent improvements its aid coordination and financial management framework, will increasingly pursue bilateral arrangements over regional and multilateral relationships due to inefficiencies in dealing with multilateral and regional mechanisms in accessing developments assistance.

With the various challenges and vulnerabilities outlined in this report, the Cook Islands is fortunate to be in a position where it still is able to be proactive in reassessing its approach to development. By taking initiative and pursuing the above recommendations, the Cook Islands has the opportunity to secure its own development aspirations as well set an example for other SIDS in developing a holistic policy development framework that reinforces sustainable development principles.

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to reflect on the Cook Islands' experience in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to develop a national consensus on new ideas to contribute to the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report will also provide key information for the Cook Islands in preparation for the upcoming Small Island Developing States Conference (SIDs) in 2014 (to be hosted by Samoa). This report will also be submitted to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to share with the UN Secretary General's advisory High-level Panel. The High-level Panel is expected to submit its findings to the UN Secretary-General's report to UN Member States at the General Assembly session in September 2013.

The Post 2015 Development Agenda recommends that new goals should build on the strengths of the Millennium Development Goals. Reviewing the Cook Islands experience of the MDGs and looking at developing other goals, also provides an opportunity to assess the metrics and standards by which the Cook Islands evaluates its development and progress.

Methodology

This report was compiled within the constraints of a 5 week period from May to early June 2013. Initially, a literature review was conducted looking at the broad spectrum national policies, strategies as well as other national and regional reports.

One-on-one consultations were then conducted focusing on key achievements over the since 2000 with persons across government and civil society, reflecting on specific areas of development (in the first section) as well as general reflections on the national development framework, the MDGs and other tools for measurement.

A collective feedback session was held on the 31st of May, 2013 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, where all stakeholders were invited to provide feedback and input into the report. This session helped to provide consensus on key priorities, lessons and conclusions on development issues in the report.

This report has also been reviewed by various persons in government and from civil society organisations. The final draft of this report was lastly reviewed by the Office of the Prime Minister.

Country Context¹

The Cook Islands consists of 15 small islands scattered over 2 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. They lie in the centre of the Polynesian Triangle, flanked by Fiji 2,300 km to the west, Tahiti 1,140 km to the east, Hawaii 4,730 km north and New Zealand 3,010 km southwest. The climate of the Cook Islands is sub-tropical and tropical oceanic moderated by trade winds



The Cook Islands became a British protectorate in 1888. By 1900 administrative control was transferred to New Zealand. In 1965 Cook Islanders chose self-government, in free association with New Zealand. About 70% of the population of approximately 20,000 are domiciled on the largest of the Cook Islands, Rarotonga. Rarotonga is the capital and main commercial and government centre, and hence the country's dominant driver of economic growth. Around 20% of the population lives in the eight islands of the Southern Group. Five are elevated fertile volcanic islands, while the rest are atolls, except Mitiaro, which is raised coral. These Pa Enea (islands) are within 300 km of Rarotonga. The remote Northern Group of Pa Enea, more than 1,250 km from the capital, is made up of seven low lying, sparsely populated, coral atolls and sand cays, with little arable land. A commonly held view is that the size of the populace of Cook Islanders living in the Diaspora is

¹ Extract from the National Sustainable Development Plan 2011-2015

approximately four times the resident population. Continuing depopulation is a significant threat to the development of the Cook Islands by Cook Islanders.

Summary of Social-Economic Indicators

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Projected</i>	<i>Projected</i>	<i>Projected</i>
Economic Activity (Real Prices and CPI at Constant 2006 Prices)					
Nominal GDP (\$'000)	361,424	388,687	410,893	429,722	436,622
Per cent change (YOY)	2.9	7.5	5.7	4.6	1.6
Real GDP (\$'000)	306,987	321,261	331,655	337,605	332,780
Per cent change (YOY)	2.3	4.6	3.2	1.8	-1.4
Inflation (base Dec. 2006 = 100)					
Consumer Price Index	118.4	121.7	124.6	128.1	132.0
Per cent change (YOY)	0.6	2.8	2.4	2.7	3.1
Construction/Capital Investment					
Commercial Building Approvals (\$'000)	1,918	2,975	2,975	2,975	2,975
Residential Building Approvals (\$'000)	9,529	5,887	5,005	4,255	3,618
Public Works (\$'000) includes	21,709	34,011	23,847	33,116	23,340
Productive Sector Indicators					
Visitor Arrivals	108,752	116,600	120,800	127,700	133,800
Per cent change (YOY)	8.4	7.2	3.6	5.7	4.8
Estimated Visitor Expenditures (\$'000)	174,938	192,800	204,500	222,000	239,900
Pearl Exports (\$'000)	639	550	550	550	550
Fish Exports (\$'000)	3,105	2,564	2,560	2,560	2,560
External Sector					
Merchandise Trade Balance (\$'000)	(129,611)	(131,362)	(131,400)	(131,700)	(132,400)
Services Trade Balance (\$'000)	174,938	192,800	204,500	222,000	239,900
Exchange Rate (USD/NZD avg)	0.757	0.805	0.825	0.828	0.828
Financial Sector (at end of financial year)					
Net Government Credit Position (\$'000)	NA	NA	89,000	84,600	80,100
Private and Public Enterprise Deposits (\$'000)	191,974	228,949	233,465	0	0
Private and Public Enterprise Loans (\$'000)	286,213	280,364	273,279	0	0
SOCIAL INDICATORS (2011 Census)					
			Total	Male	Female
Total population			17794	8815	8879
Resident population			14974	7490	7484
Mortality					
Life Expectancy			72.8	69.5	76.2
Labour force					
Employed population			6938	3708	3230
Unemployed population			616	331	285
Non Labour force					
Students			733	359	374
Retired			1101	578	523
Home Duties			1254	294	960
Employment-population ratio			0.64	0.69	0.59
Unemployment rate			8.2	8.2	8.1
Education					
School Enrolment rates of 5-15 yr olds					
Proportion of population with:					

No formal education	53	22	31
Primary Level	2697	1443	1254
Secondary	10614	5349	5265
.....Tertiary qualifications	10.4%	9.7%	11.2%

1. TAKING STOCK OF DEVELOPMENT – ‘ESTABLISHING BEARINGS’

This section looks at the Cook Islands achievements and progress towards its development goals as well as lessons learned in its recent experience. This builds upon information from the 2010 National MDG Report, the recent NSDP Progress Report (*Monitoring our Progress – 2012*)² and other reports against regional and international commitments. In keeping with national reporting systems this brief stock take looks at themes under the eight priority areas of the NSDP:

1. A vibrant Cook Islands economy
2. Infrastructure for Economic Growth, Sustainable Livelihoods & Resilience
3. Energy Security
4. Opportunity for All people Who Reside in the Cook Islands
5. Resilient & Sustainable Communities
6. Environment for Living
7. Good Governance
8. Safe, Secure, Just & Stable society

Subheadings in this section reflect the different themes from the MDGs, BPOA, MSI+5 and regional development themes³. The coloured boxes on the right of sub headings denote relative progress with respect to that development theme under three different categories. Green denoting satisfactory progress, yellow for within range of acceptable progress and red denotes an area in need of urgent attention.

1.1 A Vibrant Cook Islands Economy

1.1.1 Eradication of Hunger and Poverty



The Cook Islands does not have any severe poverty in terms of persons who face starvation or suffer from homelessness, however, there may be a case made for malnutrition being an issue from poor dietary choices resultant of financial hardship..

In considering share of the poorest quintile in national consumption there are limited statistics on income inequality or hardship. The aforementioned lack of poverty can also be primarily attributed to the Cook Islands economic “safety valve” which refers to the significant and unencumbered outward migration of native Cook Islanders to New Zealand and Australia to seek economic opportunities. The Cook Islands diplomatic relationship with New Zealand allows Cook Islanders free access to work and live in New Zealand as citizens as well as affording the benefits of New Zealand’s Closer Economic relations (CER) agreement with Australia which allows Cook Islanders to also work and live in Australia without a visa or work permit. It can be argued that this masks deeper issues of economic equality and hardship in the economy as well as the expectations that Cook Islanders have for success in life despite the country’s relative prosperity. The last MDG report (2010) contained the following:

Figure 1: Poorest quintile in national consumption⁴

² Refer to appendices for further information.

³ Sustainable Development Working Group (2013) *Sustainable Development Briefs*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/documents/briefs-sustainable-development-working-group/>

⁴ Cook Islands Government (2010) *National MDG Report*, p14.

1.3 Share of poorest quintile in national consumption	Not Available	<i>Population (%) below basic needs</i> Cook Islands Ave: 28.4 Rarotonga: 30.5 Southern Group: 23.6 Northern Group: 7.6	Yes	Cook Islands Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2005/2006
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A recent study to ascertain levels of hardship in the Cook Islands posited that it possibly over 40% of Cook Island households live in “hardship”. Hardship was defined to be the income level at which an average household (two adults & two dependants, one infant and one over the age of 12) could not afford all of the items in the basket of goods in order to live at a minimum standard as determined by the 2005/2006 HIES⁵. This was a “one off” produced statistic and despite the general belief that there is no poverty in the Cook Islands there is very little in the way of metrics, monitoring or analysis in tracking those who are or may potentially be economically vulnerable on the main island of Rarotonga and the outer islands of the country. There also remains sporadic information available on domestic migratory patterns though the limited data shows that depopulation is most evident in the Outer Islands of the country where few economic opportunities exist with more than 90% of GDP generated on the main island of Rarotonga⁶.

The metrics of ‘a dollar a day’ or ‘poverty gap ratio’ are not applicable to the Cook Islands. This presents an opportunity for the Cook Islands to develop its own threshold for poverty.

1.1.2 Employment



The census conducted every 5 years provides an insight into employment in the Cook Islands. The labour market indicators for the resident population 15 years and over are summarised in the table below.

Indicator	2001	2006	2011
Number of persons employed	5928	6794	6938
Number of persons employed – private	3291	3589	Na
Number of persons employed – public	1452	1721	Na
Unpaid workers, subsistence workers	82	87	123
Unemployment rate (%)	13.1	8.9	8.2
Labour force participation rate (%)	69.0	70.2	71.0
Employment-population ratio (%)	60.0	63.1	64.0
Gross average annual income from all sources	\$12,253	\$15,059	\$15,028

(Source: Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management)

Labour force participation has increase over the period 2001-2011. However gross average annual income has slightly decreased in 2011 compared to 2006.

The Cook Islands has and continues to experience significant outmigration of native Cook Islanders to New Zealand and Australia. It is widely believed that migration over the past decade has resulted in a labour shortage, though statistics belie this assertion⁷. The apparent shortage of labour in the lower skilled areas has been met through the importation of labour from Fiji, Philippines and to a lesser extent Tonga and China. Shortages in expertise in managerial and professional roles have largely been supplemented by

⁵ Cook Islands Government (2006) *Household Income and Expenditure Survey*.

⁶ Cook Islands Government (2012) *2011 Census Report*

⁷ Reeves (2012) “Cook Islands Minister talks up population ahead of Forum,” *Pacific Scoop*, August 28.

employees from New Zealand and Australia. This also is illustrative of a rise of income inequality with upper echelon of income earners being dominated by New Zealanders and Australians⁸. The rise of fiscal leakages from the economy due to remittances from foreign labour and foreign investment in all sectors of the economy is a growing concern. Whilst the NSDP recognises that depopulation is a critical issue and posits that the implementation of the plan will result in a “Cook Islands where Cook Islanders want to live” a direct and targeted policy response has yet to be proposed to address the issue of depopulation, though it is evident that failure to do so will lead to further economic losses for the national economy⁹.

1.1.3 Sustainable Production and Consumption



Consumption in the Cook Islands is high with the majority of products imported to meet local demand. The regulatory framework for the effective production, usage and disposal of consumer goods, and larger capital items and commercial products, has been taking shape over the past decade. However, commercialization and economic development has outpaced developments in the regulatory framework and thus the Cook Islands has struggled to manage the negative externalities of consumption and production¹⁰.

In recent years there has been push for locally produced goods with the ‘Go Local’ public campaigns. In addition to the obvious fruit and vegetable market, there are opportunities for local water and beer to compete with imported goods. The Ministry of Agriculture and other stakeholders are currently in the process of developing an import substitution strategy. Such a strategy would need to consider capacity building through training, twining and mentoring to address issues of consistent supply and quality of product as well as mechanization to address depopulation and the labour shortage gaps that exists. With the Green economy report endorsement of a solid waste policy and strategy, an amended regulatory framework for dangerous goods and new land resource management strategy pending in the 2013/2014 year, it is hoped that these will provide the impetus for the implementation of sustainable practice in the growth of the Cook Islands economy¹¹.

1.1.4 Food Security & Agriculture



Food security is an issue that is slowly gaining more attention in the Cook Islands policy framework. However, there are real concerns about the country’s ability to meet challenges related to food security in the future¹². With the decline of agricultural exports and activity, in general the country has become more reliant on imports, increasing its exposure to rising global food prices. There is some evidence to suggest increased import substitution¹³ though statistics in the area of agricultural production and the informal economy are incomplete. The Cook Islands has been active in its bio-security programs but still struggle with capacity in dealing with periodic invasion of foreign species. On the whole recent efforts around agriculture have focused on:

- Pest eradication;
- Revitalisation of agriculture in particular in the islands of the southern group;
- Increasing crop resilience;
- Education of farmers and youth;

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Radio NZ. “Depopulation Our Biggest Threat, Says Cooks Prime Minister.” 5 August, 2005. <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=18517>

¹⁰ Cook Islands Government (2013) *National Solid Waste Policy and Strategy 2013-2016*.

¹¹ Newport, C (2012) *Greening our Blue World: Report on Cook Islands National Assessment on Greening our Economy*.

¹² Ministry of Marine Resources (2010) *Food Security and Livelihoods- Fisheries for the Cook Islands: A Strategic Approach*.

¹³ MFEM (2013) *National Budget Appropriations Book I*, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

- Promotion of biological and organic production to support green growth;
- Subsidisation of fertilizer as a short term measure to encourage crop production;
- Small loans facility for farmers facilitated by the Business Trade and Investment Board; and
- Strengthening alternative growing methods such as hydroponic.

Additionally, climate change presents further challenges which are increasing becoming evident such as the variations in the seasonality of crops, saltwater intrusion affecting traditional and contemporary crop cultivation, species distribution, traditional knowledge associated with agriculture increasingly becoming questioned and traditional crops being replaced by faster growing, high yielding crop varieties.

In the 2013-2014 financial year the agriculture sector will endeavour to develop a consolidated strategy to address what has been a somewhat fragmented policy approach to the development of the agricultural and horticultural sector, to take advantage of current and future opportunities¹⁴, but there will be a need for further funding and support in this area if these plans are to be realised.

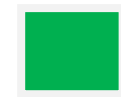
1.1.5 Globalisation and Trade Liberalization



The Cook Islands has established formal diplomatic relations with thirty three different countries around the world as part of long term efforts to grow its global footprint and establish its identity as a sovereign nation on the international stage. The country still faces challenges in establishing relations and gaining formal recognition from larger traditional powers such as the USA and United Kingdom due to questions of around the sovereignty and independence with the country's relationship with New Zealand, with the Cook Islands being self-governing in free association with New Zealand¹⁵.

The Cook Islands has been a leader in the region with respect to the liberalization of trade and reduction on import tariffs, and is considered the most compliant countries with respect to meeting its obligations according to PICTA. A new immigration policy and legislation may also improve efficiency in the labour market as well as other immigration reforms that will assist further compliance with PACER. However, it is important to consider the real world pragmatism and benefits of these initiatives as the theoretical benefits do not seem to fit the realities of the Cook Islands context. Trade with regional partners is minimal and savings, resultant from tariff cuts, have not been passed on to consumers with competition in such a small economy being either a minimal or non-existent and anticompetitive behavior being extremely difficult to regulate. The Cook Islands exports are minimal and shrinking with limited production capacity and diminishing access (via the reduction of shipping and air services, see section 1.2.1 *Transportation*) to markets. In the longer term there are hopes to establish a deep sea mining industry which would give the Cook Islands a commodity for international trade and help diversify the economic base of the country¹⁶.

1.1.6 Tourism



Tourism is the key economic driver for the Cook Islands contributing to over 50% of its GDP. The opening of the Rarotonga International Airport in 1974 catapulted tourism growth in the Cook Islands, which peaked at 120,800 total visitor arrivals in 2012¹⁷ with growth predicted to continue as illustrated in the table below.

¹⁴ See Tuia Ltd. (2011) *Import Substitution Project*.

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (2013) Interview, 28 May.

¹⁶ Lynch, P. (2011) *Towards the Development of a National regulatory Framework for Deep Sea Mining in the Cook Islands*, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

¹⁷ Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (2013) Interview, 30 May.

	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Total
2010/11	33,886	26,936	19,460	28,470	108,752
2011/12	36,296	28,888	20,559	30,896	116,639
2012/13	38,543	31,719	20,600	29,900	120,800
2013/14	40,100	33,000	22,300	32,300	127,700
2014/15	41,100	35,000	23,500	34,300	133,800

Source: Cook Islands Government Budget Estimates 2013/2014

The economy has become increasingly reliant on tourism returns with shrinking agricultural production, lack of exports and a greatly diminished subsistence economy.¹⁸ There have been a number of significant developments in tourism including:

- The recent expansion of air access to include a non-stop service between Sydney and Rarotonga, which also opens the gateway to Asia and Europe;
- The development and execution of a Destination Development Strategy to enhance the visitor's experience through improved tourism infrastructure, event development, tourism training and education, cuisine development and environment management;
- The establishment of a Tourism Industry Accreditation Scheme that provides independent assessment of industry standards and quality assurance measures; and
- Establishment of an annual tourism exchange forum in the Cook Islands to create first hand dialogue between the tourism operators and wholesale partners in source markets.

In the last decade air services access to North American and European markets has fallen dramatically. Following the September 11 terrorist attack and the Global Financial Crisis, the airline business has changed significantly to operate commercially viable routes through higher loadings. In order to develop long haul routes, alleviate tourism seasonality and attract high yield visitors, the Cook Islands government underwrites a weekly non-stop Air New Zealand flight to both Los Angeles and Sydney. This underwrite makes up more the 10% of the government annual operating budget appropriation. An economic study and review of the underwritten flights are regularly conducted to justify this significant cost to the Cook Islands Government. The Cook Islands Tourism Corporation has recently executed an aggressive marketing strategy to address its strong competition in the market place.

1.1.7 Green Economy



Green economic development is an emerging idea in Cook Islands development. The NSDP establish the standards and expectations for green economic development stating "Green standards will underpin every element of business". At present it is an amalgam of fragmented efforts in different areas in the Cook Islands economy. The Green Report was commissioned in 2012 as a first step in synthesizing these efforts into a coordinated approach¹⁹. There are signs that coordination is improving with ministries and agencies that focus on economic development meeting as a group to discuss work plans and areas of collaboration.

Chief amongst the Green initiatives promoted by the Cook Islands government are:

- Renewable Energy Road map – with the ambitious goal to have 50% of electricity coverage provided for by renewable sources by 2015 and 100% by 2020;
- Cook Islands Marine Park– setting standards for the use and conservation of marine resources; and

¹⁸ Cook Islands Government (2011) *NSDP*.

¹⁹ Newport, C (2012) *Greening our Blue World: Report on Cook Islands National Assessment on Greening our Economy*.

- Tourism Destination development – with an emphasis on tourism activities that work in cohesion with efforts to maintain and enhancing the natural environment and biodiversity.

With respect to mainstreaming green economy initiatives, there still remains a great deal of work to be done in implementing policy tools to encourage green economy protocols such as polluter pays and the use of sustainable practices and products in business and industry.

1.1.8 Marine Resources



The Cook Islands faces the paradoxical policy challenge of trying to further the prosperity of its people in utilising its marine and coastal resources whilst looking to protect these resources from permanent damage and unsustainable and destructive practices. The Ministry of Marine Resources has been proactive in attempting to address both challenges.

In relation to offshore fisheries the following data outlines the fishery catches in the Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):

Table : Fishery Catches in the Cook Islands EEZ

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Designated longline fishery	825	2,151	3,467	3,409	3,115	3,446	3,072	7,047	7,070	8,467	10,478
Exploratory longline fishery											1,722
Purse seine fishery	3132	1,598	4	45	79	4	205	1,537	245	476	11,753
TOTAL CATCHES (tonnes)	3,957	3,749	3,471	3,454	3,194	3,450	3,277	8,584	7,315	8,943	23,953

The Ministry of Marine Resources believes that the Cook Islands has now developed a significant catch history upon which it can begin to assert its rights to the regional fishery. The Ministry intends to establish EEZ zone based total allowable catches and individual license quota for key species. This is a shift from monitoring of an 'open fishery' to now actively managing a 'closed fishery'.

At the local level, the Ministry of Marine Resources together with the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation and the individual Island Governments have promoted eco-tourism ventures such as the successful bone-fishing initiative in Aitutaki which allows for communities to conserve bone-fish and collect revenues from recreational bone fishermen who return the fish to the sea after catch. Also significant is the role played by traditional leaders and communities to establish and enforce 'Rau'i' or conservation of areas, so that marine life can grow undisturbed by human activities for specific periods of time.

Studies have indicated that the Cook Islands has significant deposits of manganese on its seabed which the country anticipates will be a potential source of revenue in the future. In preparation for future harvesting, the Government has established legislation, the Seabed Mining Authority and currently developing regulations and processes to ensure prospective mining will be managed sustainably and mitigate against adverse impacts of seabed mining.

Efforts in offshore, inshore, seabed, marine resource management are anticipated to all be integrated with the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP), which designates over a million square kilometres of the Cook Islands EEZ as a marine managed area. Consultation with communities are currently being undertaken to assist the multi stakeholder Cook Islands Marine Park Steering Committee in determining the operationalization of the CIMP.

1.2. Infrastructure for Economic Growth, Sustainable Livelihoods and Resilience



1.2.1 Transportation

Transportation, in terms of both aviation and shipping, are two of the Cook Islands most pressing immediate concerns. The narrowing of air routes has been a concern as discussed previously in regards to tourism. There are potential opportunities moving forward with airline carriers out of emerging Asian markets expressing formal interest in establishing links to the country, but substantial moves are not expected in the near future. Of even greater concern is the instability of shipping to the country with the primary international sea freighter going into receivership and the recent abolishment of the Forum Line shipping service. Though the gap left by these recent developments in international shipping have been filled, the concerns of the fickle nature of providing stable shipping services for a small market remains. Domestic shipping is also a growing concern with the depopulation of the outer islands resulting in decreased demand severely compromising the economic viability of what is an essential service for those islands. An amalgam of different options have helped to fill the void with shipping services provided by tourism/cruise oriented boats, presenting an opportunity for a non-traditional approach in addressing transport issues. This is a still an area of concern with the government monitoring the situation and assessing long term policy options around domestic transportation.

1.2.2 Communications



The sole provider of telecommunications is owned by a New Zealand telecommunications company and the Cook Islands Government, with the New Zealand company being the majority shareholder. Whilst the provider currently has a legislated exclusive monopoly, the government is reviewing legislation that will introduce competition to the telecommunications sector.

Despite sub optimal market conditions there have been steady incremental improvements in coverage, access, bandwidth and lowered costs of telecommunications over the past few years. The O3B satellite network, which promises a ten-fold boost to bandwidth and connection speeds to parts of the country, is expected to come online at the end of 2013. The Cook Islands government is also still looking to explore the feasibility of an underground sea cable to link the country to the global internet backbone. However, the primary focus is to review the legislative framework to introduce competition to the market with a view to improve service delivery and lower costs. New legislation is likely to be drafted in the coming financial year which will provide impetus for reforms.

1.2.3 Science and Technology



The Cook Islands has limited resources specific to the advancement of science and technology. However, with efforts in agriculture, marine resources, deep sea mineral mining and biodiversity, there is a need for expertise in science and technology. To this end, there has been inter-agency cooperation to develop career pathways for young Cook islanders from the secondary level through to tertiary education and training to potential careers in science and research in the Cook Islands.

1.2.4 Management of Solid Waste



Solid waste in the Cook Islands is a growing problem due to unprecedented development in the last fifteen years. There have been some efforts to address this issue in the past decade, notably:

- The development of the Rarotonga and Aitutaki Waste Management facilities;
- The purchase of a bailer for the compacting of solid waste mass; and
- Promotion and advocacy for separation of waste and recycling

However, these efforts have not been in concert with a coordinated approach. Initiatives such as the waste management facilities lack sufficient funding to operate in an efficient and effective manner. Furthermore, with the exception of Rarotonga and Aitutaki, the other islands have no proper solid waste management facilities and waste is deposited in certain uninhabited parts of the islands.

The Cook Islands recently drafted a Solid Waste Management Strategy with the aim to modernize the way in which the country addresses solid waste and rationalize the framework for its management. The strategy focuses on the need to upgrade the legislation in the area of waste, introduce and enforce polluter pays practices as well review the institutional framework for waste management. The policy and strategy sets out a broad architecture for work to be done over the course of the next four to ten years. However, with significant e-waste and hazardous waste deposits and no clear way to dispose of them in an environmentally friendly fashion, there is need for immediate action. With limited resources there is need for development assistance in this area.

1.2.5 Management of Septic Waste



The Cook Islands have taken recent significant steps in addressing its growing septic waste problems, beginning with the passing of the Public Health Sewage Regulation and Code in 2008. This regulation and code outlines the rules and standards related to the treatment systems and disposal methods for septic waste. Since 2008, all new construction and disposal of sewage must comply with the Public Health Sewage Regulation and Code.

In 2009, the government partnering with the Government of New Zealand started implementing the WATSAN program as a starting point for addressing the greater issue of sewerage and sanitation. The program targets the negative impacts of mismanaged sewerage in problem areas. Currently, the program is focused on the south east coast of Rarotonga, which has the highest concentration of tourism development and the lagoon has high susceptibility to the harmful effects of septic waste. It is envisioned that lessons learned from the WATSAN pilot program can be transferred to a larger national model for management. The Government of New Zealand has pledged continued long term support to improving sanitation in the Cook Islands and sector support from the European Union has also been committed to sanitation.

1.2.6 Climate Change



The NSDP provides the platform for rationalising actions to address climate change in the Cook Islands. Climate change is reflected in six of the NSDP goals. Under the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Cook Islands have submitted its First and Second National Communications outlining the national status, vulnerability and adaptation, greenhouse gas emissions inventory, mitigation measures, constraints and gaps related to climate change for the Cook Islands. The Joint National Action

Plan (JNAP) for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation further articulates adaptation strategies and actions, while the Cook Islands Renewable Energy Chart (CIREC) and Implementation Plan outlines mitigation measures for implementation.

Climate change is recognised as an issue which will greatly impact on the development of the Cook Islands. The priority given to climate change is perhaps reflective of the fact that both the climate change and renewable energy coordination offices are under the purview of the Office of the Prime Minister. Notable achievements in this area include:

- Completion of the drafting and commencement of the implementation of the JNAP;
- Establishment of the Climate Change Cook Islands and the Renewable Energy Development Division in the Office of the Prime Minister;
- Commencement of the pilot project for ‘the Integration of Community Vulnerability Mapping and Adaptation Planning into the Development of Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Policy’;
- Commencement of Secretariat of the Pacific Community –European Union Global Climate change Alliance program targeting support to access climate change finances, maintaining and improving lagoon water quality in the northern islands and providing climate change advisory support; and
- Implementation of the ‘Strengthening the Resilience of Island Communities (SRIC) Programme’ which targets a range of climate change related issues ranging from water security, coastal protection and livelihoods improvement.

The Cook Islands continues to strengthen its institutional arrangements for greater coordination in addressing climate change. It has also commenced the process of applying for National Implementing Entity for direct access to climate change funding.

1.2.7 Water Resources



Water has always been a key development issue for the Cook Islands and this is evident in the number of completed and planned initiatives to address water security. Water is sourced from a mix of options with Rarotonga’s primary supply being surface water, ground water and water harvesting being utilised for the remainder of the southern islands and water harvesting for the atolls in the north. The recent events of sporadic rainfall and the anticipated impacts of climate change, has pushed the management of water resources to the forefront of national priorities. To this end, there are ambitious plans in place to address the issue with steps already taken, including:

- The distribution of domestic water tanks through grants and subsidies in Rarotonga;
- Exploration of ground water resources in the Southern islands;
- The announcement of an estimated \$60 million project to upgrade Rarotonga’s water infrastructure to commence in 2013; and
- The construction of domestic and community water catchments in the other islands supported by the Government of New Zealand and under the SRIC programme.

1.3 Energy Security



1.3.1 Energy Resources

The Cook Islands has embarked on an ambitious energy security campaign with the stated aim of achieving 50% energy self-sufficiency through the pursuit of renewable sources by 2015 and 100% by 2020²⁰. The government has committed significant resources to achieve this aim with the establishment of the Office of the Energy Commissioner and the designated 'Renewable Energy Development Division' (REDD) under the ambit of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Energy Security is goal 3 of the NSDP and strategies and initiatives to achieve this goal is articulated in the 'Cook Islands Renewable Energy Chart'. With an estimated cost of NZD\$257.65 million, the Cook Islands government has engaged the support of some key development partners to help fast-track the implementation of the Cook Islands Renewable Energy Chart. The key principles of the Chart are:

- Least costly approach to meet the national renewable energy targets;
- Managing risk, with respect to the sequencing and timing of new investments and where necessary, development of portfolio of options;
- Long term financial sustainability in the electricity sector;
- Social and environmental sustainability; and
- Clear, appropriate and effective definition of roles of stakeholders.

To successfully progress towards its renewable energy targets, the Cook Islands would need to access further funding, overcome the challenges of its absorptive capacity and the costs of implementation in the most isolated islands.

1.4 Opportunity for All People Who Reside in the Cook Islands



1.4.1 Universal Education

The Cook Islands has a strong institutional education system as a legacy from its colonial history, which saw the establishment of primary schools in the most remote areas of the country. Improved telecommunications and information communications technology has helped the Ministry of Education (MOE) service the needs of students in remote locations²¹. There have also been noteworthy achievements in literacy and numeracy with progress shown since the inception of the Education Sector Master Plan in 2008²². Numeracy and literacy rates are on target with over 60% of students achieving at or above expected levels in numeracy and 70% for literacy.

The Ministry of Education Act 2013, hopes to improve the coverage of primary education by introducing compulsory preschool education starting from age three and extending the leaving age of school to sixteen.

Gender equality has improved over the course of the long history of the education system so much so that males are now struggling to keep pace with female achievement. Programmes with alternative pathways approach targeting the retention of males in colleges are now being implemented.

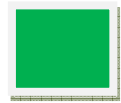
²⁰ Cook Islands Government (2012) *Cook Islands Renewable Energy Chart Implementation Plan*.

²¹ Ministry of Education (2012) *Education Sector Stakeholder's report for the year 2011/2012*.

²² Ministry of Education (2013) Press Release: http://www.education.gov.ck/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=937:establishment-of-cook-islands-tertiary-training-institute&catid=1:general-education-news&Itemid=55

The MOE have undertaken a strategic approach improving literacy and fluency in Cook Islands Maori, as outward migration and increased westernization of the country threatens the survival of the language²³. Central to the MOE's future plans is the need to preserve and promote Cook Islands culture within the system and curriculum whilst cultivating students who are able to participate and thrive in an increasingly global society²⁴.

1.4.2 Sustainable Education and Capacity development



The Tertiary and Continuing Education sector has had significant historical support from New Zealand through providing scholarships and funding. There has also been significant change in the institutional framework in the merger of the National Human Resources Department and the Ministry of Education (MOE) in order to centralize administrative functions and harmonize the transition from Early Childhood Education through to Tertiary education.

In April of 2013, the MOE announced the establishment of a new Cook Islands Tertiary Institute in conjunction with the Cook Islands Tertiary Education Strategy to provide access to training for all Cook Islanders via face to face and online learning for industries from tourism to trades²⁵.

1.4.3 Culture and Well-Being



The Cook Islands' culture, society and way of life is under increasing strain from the influence of globalization, consumerism and increased exposure to foreign media via television and the internet. Fluency in Cook Islands Maori is falling and teaching methods have not kept pace with the need to teach Maori as a second language with the rise in Cook Islanders who can no longer speak the language²⁶. The increase of commercial development over the last ten years on the island of Rarotonga has put pressure on traditional land tenure practices and seen the sale of lease hold land to a growing number of foreign interests²⁷. There is a growing undercurrent of frustration as the country's economy becomes dominated by foreign interests.

Also of concern is the changing structure of the average Cook Islands household, with the break-up of traditional extended family units into nuclear families or single parent households. This trend has seen the decline of intra-family care for the young and elderly and an increased burden placed on health and social government systems ill equipped and underfunded to support both young and elderly who are not adequately cared for in some cases²⁸. However the Cook Islands is one of the few countries in the region that has a social welfare system with monthly benefits paid to children (up to 12 years of age), the elderly, disabled, care givers and the infirm. It is estimated that in the 2012/2013 financial year NZD\$13,095,800 was spent on welfare benefits. This is estimated to increase to NZD\$13,583,800 in 2013/2014. Though the welfare payments help to soften the hardship of these trends, the government will have to look at greater resourcing of services to provide care for the different groups of vulnerable persons in the Cook Islands.

²³ Crocombe, R. et al. (2007) "Absentee Landowners in the Cook Islands: Consequences of change to tradition," in *Reconciling Customary Ownership and Development, Making Land Work*, Volume 2 – Case Studies.

¹⁹ Ministry of Health (2013) *Interview*, 24 May.

²⁵ Ministry of Education (2013) *Interview*, 28 May.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Knowles, S. (2012) *Cook Islands Banking Review*.

²⁸ Ministry of Internal Affairs (2013), *Interview*, 10 May.

1.4.4 Health Services



The Cook Islands have made great strides in the improvement of Prenatal and Antenatal health care, which has helped to strengthen both maternal and infant health statistics. Changes and improvements can be linked to greater integration with development partners including the WHO and New Zealand. Also of note are attempts to develop a Strategic Plan for Health, which has assisted to further longer term and policy initiatives to improve resourcing and care. These efforts in the sector have been synthesized into the Cook Islands Health Strategy 2012-2016²⁹. However, the challenge of delivery of equitable health services to diminishing populations across all islands remains a challenge.

1.4.5 Child Mortality



The Cook Islands have maintained low infant mortality rates and have made progress in improving services in this area. Efforts in this area include:

- Proliferation of infant immunization programs;
- Public health advocacy programs for prenatal and antenatal programs;
- Rigorous follow-up prenatal and antenatal programs; and
- Community based health out-reach programs.

The challenge for the Cook Islands in the future is to continue to maintain these programs in an environment of constrained financial resources and competing priorities.

1.4.6 Maternal Care



Maternal Care has been strengthened over the last decade with improvements in a number areas including:

- Prenatal education;
- Antenatal education;
- Training for midwives; and
- Standardised referral systems for mothers with potential complications

It is hoped that as these practices and educational programs become embedded in the normal behaviors of mothers in the future and results will continue to be maintained and improved over time.

1.4.7 Non-Communicable Diseases



The impact of NCDs is a current and growing problem for the Cook Islands. The Ministry of Health reports the incidence of NCDs is the second highest in the Pacific region with 75% of Cook Islanders at risk of acquiring NCD related illnesses³⁰. Already as much as 45% of the medicines dispensed by the Ministry of Health are for the treatment of NCDs³¹.

Data related to NCD prevalence and incidences 2004 – 2012 is summarised in the tables below:

²⁹ Ministry of Health (2013) *Cook Islands Health Strategy 2012-2016*.

³⁰ Ministry of Health (2013) *Interview*, 24 May.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Prevalence of NCD cases

Years	MedTech Registrations	Hypertension				TOTAL
		Hypertension	Diabetes	& Diabetes	Asthma	
2004-2008	Total	1,200	340	709	669	2,918
	Resident	1,063	301	602	627	2,593
	Deceased	137	39	107	42	325
2009	Total	1,284	396	750	764	3,194
	Residence	1,139	352	641	719	2,851
	Deceased	145	44	109	45	343
2010	Total	1,343	420	768	879	3,410
	Residence	1,197	374	658	834	3,063
	Deceased	146	46	110	45	347
2011	Total	1,398	436	786	988	3,608
	Residence	1,250	389	675	942	3,256
	Deceased	148	47	111	46	352
2012	Total	1,496	457	807	1,128	3,888
	Residence	1,346	410	695	1,079	3,530
	Deceased	150	47	112	49	358

Source: Ministry of Health

Incidence of NCD Cases Registered by Year.

Years	MedTech Registrations	Hypertension				TOTAL
		Hypertension	Diabetes	& Diabetes	Asthma	
2004-2008	Total	1,200	340	709	669	2,918
	Resident	1,063	301	602	627	2,593
	Deceased	137	39	107	42	325
2009	Total	84	56	41	95	276
	Residence	76	51	39	92	258
	Deceased	8	5	2	3	18
2010	Total	59	24	18	115	216
	Residence	58	22	17	115	212
	Deceased	1	2	1	0	4
2011	Total	55	16	18	109	198
	Residence	53	15	17	108	193
	Deceased	2	1	1	1	5
2012	Total	98	21	21	140	280
	Residence	96	21	20	137	274
	Deceased	2	0	1	3	6

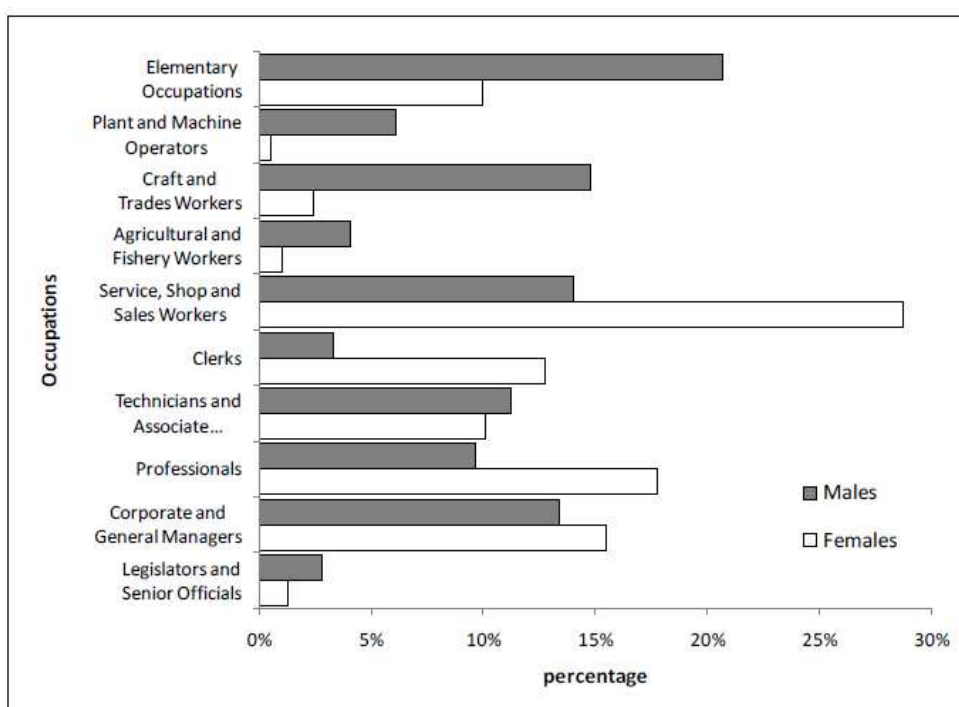
Source: Ministry of Health

1.4.8 Gender Equality



The Cook Islands has made incremental gains in the last decade to progress gender equality with the Gender and Development Division at the Ministry of Internal Affairs working closely with the Cook Islands National Council of Women to meet the country’s reporting obligation under CEDAW³². The Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action, 2011-2016 was completed in 2011, with funding from Australia and the United Nations to support further work in this area³³. At almost all levels of society parity is evident with significant gains in education, women’s promotion in the work place and representation in senior management positions in both the private and public sector³⁴. In the Public Service half of the 26 Heads of Ministries/Agencies are women.

The graph below illustrates Resident Population by Gender and Occupation and shows greater percentages of women in professional and managerial roles.



2011 Cook Islands Census Report

The one prominent area where equality is yet to be achieved is in political representation with only three of the 24 members of parliament being women. There have been consistent efforts to encourage women’s involvement in politics and calls for political reforms to address the issue by establishing special temporary measures to increase the representation for women in parliament. However, there does not seem to be political support at this time for these reforms and women in the country are split as to whether establishing special measures for women is an appropriate strategy. Advocates for increased women participation in the political sphere is continuing with strong lobbying from the National Council of Women.

³² Cook Islands Government (2012) *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Second Period Report*

³³ Cook Islands Government (2011) *The Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action, 2011-2016.*

³⁴ Cook Islands Government (2012) *2011 Census Report.*

1.4.9 Disabilities



In 2008, the Cook Islands passed its Disability Act and ratified the Convention of the Rights Persons with Disabilities in 2009. The implementation of the Act and the Convention was encapsulated in the National Policy and Action Plan 2008 -2012 to guide the efforts of government agencies, community organizations, private sector and traditional and religious leaders in promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities³⁵. The Policy and Action Plan are currently under review with the view to develop the Action Plan for 2013-2018. It is envisioned that this will help to pave policy efforts in the future to improve services for those with disabilities. Additional notable achievements have been:

- The inclusion of the Creative Centre (a place of gathering for adult persons with disabilities) within the national education framework;
- The practice of inclusive education for children with disabilities in schools and colleges and the provision of additional staffing to cater for specific needs; and
- The provision of welfare payments to those with disabilities and caregivers of persons with disabilities.

The efforts by government have been well complimented by the implementation of programmes by non-government organisations such as Cook Islands National Disabilities Council and Te Vaerua. A women with disabilities group has very recently been established to better target the needs of women and girls living with disabilities. Despite these gains, there still remains work to be done to improve awareness and advocacy around the rights of persons with disabilities and access to support and resources.

1.4.10 Youth



Youth occupy a special place in society in that their success and wellbeing are crucial for the future of society and yet they sit in the margins between infancy and having the financial or societal stature to have a voice in defining and influencing the country and political environment around them.

The value placed on the role of youth in the Cook Islands appears to have diminished over the course of the last decade with a reduction of funding for government related youth activities and the effects of depopulation reducing the active number of youth engaging in society. There have been some efforts to address the plight of youth such as:

- The formal establishment of a National Youth Council (2008);
- Establishment of a freecall and freetext 24 hour HELPLINE which was an outcome of the Youth Suicide Prevention Project 2012;
- Establishment of baseline data based on the 2006 Census;³⁶ and
- Development and Implementation of the Youth Suicide Prevention Project 2012 lead by a multi-stakeholder steering group.

The Youth Council has struggled for relevance with lack of support and capacity. Efforts around suicide prevention have highlighted particularly concerning issues around the impact of family dynamics and home situations on youth. The Cook Islands Youth Survey completed in 2012 reveals a high prevalence of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Demmke, A. (2012) *Cook Islands Youth: A Statistical Profile*.

depression and hopelessness amongst the nation's youth³⁷. Future efforts in addressing issues with youth will be centered on improving coordination between agencies providing services and support to youth as well as ensuring the provision of basic life skills to youth to be able to better navigate through life's challenges. Support for youth health and wellbeing services and community based groups is necessary.

1.5 Resilient and Sustainable Communities

1.5.1 Disaster Management



Disaster risk management has become a cross cutting issue with not only the effects of climate change and extreme weather conditions, droughts, cyclones, tsunamis, but also renewed recognition of other human induced disasters such as invasive pests, threats on key infrastructure, introduction of disease, and so forth.

Disaster risk management is coordinated by Emergency Management Cook Islands (EMCI), which operates under the ambit of the Office of the Prime Minister. Policy and plans are coordinated under the National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management 2009 –2014³⁸ and governed under the Disaster Risk Management Act 2007. The National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management has now been augmented with the establishment of the Climate Change Unit and the implementation of the JNAP for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation.

The effects of cyclones in the last decade have set back development efforts significantly with limited resources for development diverted to rebuilding broken communities in the aftermath of cyclones. These cyclones have presented opportunities to adapt to lessons learnt and further strengthen disaster risk management and response. In 2011, the Cook Islands established its Disaster Response Trust Fund for immediate response in times disaster following the lessons learnt from 2009 Cyclone Pat in Aitutaki. New challenges have emerged, such as the very recent outbreak of the Asian fruitfly which has the potential to cripple the agricultural sector. These incidents require evaluating institutions, arrangements and appropriate responses and highlight the need to constantly improve coordination and collaboration amongst stakeholders.

1.5.2 Adaptation



National efforts for climate change adaptation are outlined in the JNAP for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation. At the community level, participatory approaches have been employed to identify adaptation measures across vulnerable sectors in terms of four key parameters that are altered by climate change. These are temperature rise, rainfall variation, extreme weather events and sea level rise. Vulnerable sectors identified are coastal zones, infrastructure and coral reefs; marine resources and fisheries; water supply and quality; agriculture, food security and diet; biodiversity; human health and wellbeing; cross cutting socio-economic considerations. The Cook Islands has secured approximately USD\$7 million to implement adaptation initiatives at both the national and community levels, however, it is obvious that additional external resources are required to ensure the Cook Islands can build its resilience in the vulnerable sectors identified. In accessing climate change finances to build resilience, the country must also consider, its own absorptive capacity to utilise funds in a timely manner.

³⁷ Brown, J. (2012) *Cook Islands Youth Survey*.

³⁸ Cook Islands Government (2012) *Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation (JNAP) 2011 -2015*

1.6. Environment for Living

1.6.1 Biodiversity



The Cook Islands was one of the first countries to sign the Convention on Biodiversity at the Earth Summit in 1992. Implementation of the Convention has been articulated in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Notable achievements of implementation include:

- Establishment of the Biodiversity Conservation Unit under the National Environment Service;
- Downgrading of the endemic Kakerori (*Pomarea dimidiata*) from an IUCN listing “critically endangered” to a “vulnerable” species;
- The re-establishment of the Kura (Vini kuhili) species on Atiu;
- Completion of the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database in 2007; and
- Biodiversity regulations drafted in 2007.

Despite significant achievements in this area there is need for further support as many threats to the biodiversity exist. Chief among these threats are habitat change, invasive species, and the impacts of climate change. Also of concern is the loss of traditional knowledge on the conservation of biodiversity. Efforts around biodiversity conservation are still primarily funded through donor support, with very little government contributions besides from salary, with government spending on biodiversity and environmental protection (from the former Environment Protection Fund) now redirected to other government priorities³⁹. Whilst biodiversity has been mainstreamed in the National Environment Strategic Action Framework and the NSDP, effective mainstreaming at the operational level is not apparent. Another area where more effort is required is in the formulation and implementation of effective management plans for major alien species that threatens ecosystems, habitats or species.

1.6.2 Land Management



With the Cook Islands limited land mass and the growing demand of the economy, land management is becoming an increasingly important issue. The past decade has seen unprecedented development on Rarotonga with future development likely to spread to the Southern Islands in the next decade and beyond. Despite having a Land Use Act (1969) there has not been any movement to actively plan or regulate the management and usage of land.⁴⁰

The Cook Islands has significant issues with regard to land degradation and has been an advocate for rational Sustainable Land Management (SLM) initiatives. Land resource use and management are principal issues at the national planning level mainly due to the high level of competition to use the limited land resources to support the growing national economy. Significant changes have been seen over the last decade in the pattern of land areas being developed, the intensity of development and pressure upon the natural areas.

³⁹ Cook Islands Government(2002) *National Budget Appropriations*, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Rarotonga Cook Islands

⁴⁰ Cook Islands Government (2012) *UNCCD National Action Plan*.

Given the fragile and vulnerable state of the natural land resources of the Cook Islands understandably, sustainable land management (SLM) is one of the government's key priorities. Over the past decade, substantial resources have been invested in environmental protection. While these have helped in part, much more needs to be done to minimize the implications of human and environmental threats, especially as regards to population growth, development, land use change and incidents of land degradation.

The Cook Islands National Action Programme (NAP) for Sustainable Land Management has recently been drafted to provide for an integrated platform to address land degradation in the Cook Islands. The NAP endeavours to bring together stakeholders, both government organisations (GOs), non-government organisations (NGOs) and local communities in a joint effort to achieve sustainable land management.

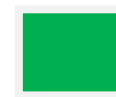
1.6.3 Coastal and Marine Management



As aforementioned (refer to section 1.1.8), conservation efforts (Rau) are being combined with proactive management of resources to allow the sustainable use of these resources for the benefit of Cook Islanders. Chief amongst conservation efforts is the creation of the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) covering an area of more than a million square kilometres of the country's exclusive economic zone. The creation of the Marine Park is considered to be a symbol for acknowledging the Cook Islands long term intention to manage its coastal and deep sea marine sources in a sustainable manner⁴¹. The envisaged long term outcomes of the CIMP are; a healthy environment which maintains its biodiversity and habitats, its ecological integrity and resilience; sustainable multiple use where non-destructive activities are conducted in a way that maintains the widest range of opportunities for appropriate sustainable use and does not adversely affect the ecological integrity of natural systems; maintenance and enhancement of aesthetics, ecological, economic and cultural values; integrated community based management; and informed, involved and committed communities.

1.7. Good Governance

1.7.1 Governance



Good governance is one of the priority areas and goals of the NSDP. Key strategies for implementation are strengthening the role of parliament to hold managers to account for performance; strengthening electoral systems and processes; ensuring that government services delivery is efficient and effective; promoting partnerships with civil society and public sector; strengthening information and data collection, analysis and management for informed decision making; ensuring access to information; improving accountability and transparency of financial management; establishing and strengthening external relations that will benefit the Cook Islands. Notable achievements include:

- Establishment of Public Expenditure Review Committee as a watchdog body on public spending;
- Conducting the Public Expenditure Financial Assessment in 2011 to identify areas for improvement of Public Financial Management;
- Implementation of the Public Financial Management Roadmap;
- Establishment of the Public Accounts Committee in 2012 comprising of parliamentarians to scrutinise public spending and hold managers to account;
- Conducting a functional review of the machinery of government;
- Passing the Official Information Act 2009; and

⁴¹ Ministry Marine Resources (2013) *Interview*, 23 May.

- Reforming the governance arrangements of the outer islands to empower local governments to determine and manage the development of their respective islands.

Public Service performance has also been identified as an area of concern with recent technical assistance enlisted with support from ADB and NZAID to help develop policies and procedures for enabling the effective and efficient performance of government and the delivery of public services. A human resources policy and procedures manual is due for completion in the next year and further technical assistance is being sought to help implement a performance management framework.

1.7.2 Knowledge Management and Information for Decision-making



The last 15 years has seen a proliferation of reports, documents, strategies and policies with a concerted effort from the Cook Islands government and development partners to develop a strong policy framework for the Cook Islands. However, the Cook Islands government does not yet have a systematic approach for the compilation or consolidation data and information. It has also been noted that a lack of quality environment, socio-economic and spatial information, including on patterns of natural resources, land resource characteristics, population dynamics, resource demands and risks contributes to inconsistent and poorly founded decision-making⁴². Information is currently managed in an adhoc nature. This has been identified as a weakness in the NSDP and there are plans in place to address this with the progress expected on the Statistics Master Plan in the 2013/2014 fiscal year as well as improvements in information management through ICT centralization efforts which started in 2012 and continue in the 2013/14 financial year⁴³.

1.7.3 Monitoring Development Progress



There has been some improvement in information based decision-making with the NSDP and the new midterm budgeting framework requiring government agencies to link decisions and actions to longer term priorities and historical data. The Cook Islands has diligently reported on MDGs and other international obligations with attempts to provide a holistic picture of development and have started in 2012 to monitor and report annually on NSDP implementation.

Within the policy framework there is a “chicken and egg” debate about the provision of statistics and the lack of demand by policy makers for statistics. Of concern is the fact that the Statistics Office has not received any additional funding for nearly a decade despite the emphasis on improving evidence-based policy⁴⁴. There are indications of intent to build upon work done in monitoring and evaluation framework; however there is a need for concerted support effort to further build capacity and resource these efforts.

1.7.4 Develop a Global Partnership for Development



The Cook Islands has worked diligently to improve coordination of development partners. Notable recent achievements include:

- Establishment of the Overseas Development Assistance Policy;
- Streamlining of donor coordination through the Development Coordination Division (under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management);

⁴² NES(2008) *Cook Islands NSCA Capacity Development and Action Plan and Final Report*, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

⁴³ Cook Islands Government (2013) *National Budget Appropriations 2013-2014 Book I*, Rarotonga Cook Islands

⁴⁴ Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Statistics Office (2013) *Interview*, 22 May.

- Establishment of the National Sustainable Development Committee to advise cabinet on all ODA;
- Integration of ODA into the budget process, improving transparency and public scrutiny of development activities; and
- Regular annual development partner roundtable addressing NSDP areas of focus.

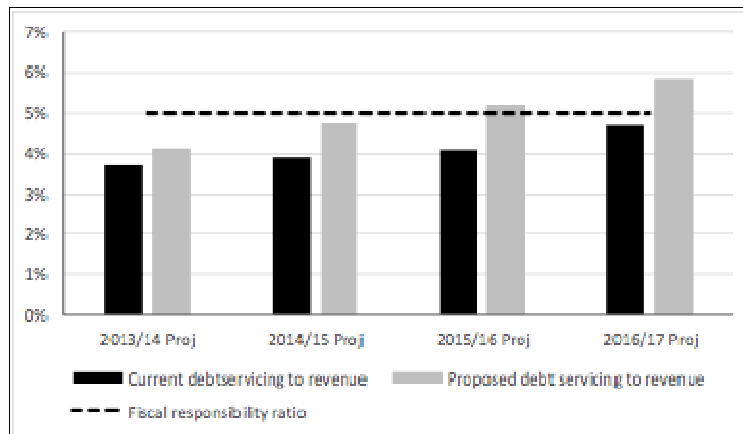
The Cook Islands have improved its own systems and processes in the management of donor funded initiatives and strongly advocates for the use of national systems including direct budgetary or sector support.

1.7.5 Public Finance and National Debt



Fiscal reforms implemented in the late 1990's have helped to consolidate the country's financial practices with government mandated to have a balanced budget every year. The Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Report in 2011 found deficiencies in areas such as procurement, transparency and a lack of parliamentary oversight, with significant delays in the production of finalized and audited annual accounts for government⁴⁵. MFEM have moved to address issues identified in the PEFA by developing a Public Financial Management Roadmap. Most of the recommendations have been achieved with the exception of processes related to procurement. It is anticipated that procurement will be strengthened in the 2013/2014 fiscal year.

There have been recent improvements in debt management with annual budgeting now reporting on debt sustainability and sensitivity analysis on debt levels. The graph below shows net debt servicing as a proportion of total revenue.



Extract from Cook Islands Budget 2013/2014

The benchmark for net debt servicing to total revenue ratio is not to exceed five per cent. This ratio is currently estimated at 4.4 per cent by end of 2013-14. The proposed new borrowing from the ADB will push this ratio above the five per cent limit by 2015-16 when the grace period for new borrowings passed and principle falls due. Net debt servicing is estimated to be at 5.2 and 5.8 per cent by fiscal year 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively⁴⁶. With an improved understanding of their debt obligations government must now make crucial decisions in the future on whether to borrow to finance ambitious goals around infrastructure and or opt for a more fiscally conservative approach to infrastructure development (keeping within the recommended fiscal responsibility ratios).

⁴⁵ Okotai et al. (2011) *Cook Islands PEFA Report*.

⁴⁶ Cook Islands Government (2013) *National Budget Appropriations Book I, Rarotonga Cook Islands*

1.8. Safe, Secure, Just and Stable Society



1.8.1 Human Rights and Governance

The protection of human rights and the security of persons are key in the development of countries and societies. Ensuring human rights allows for truly representative and democratic elections to be held and allows for representation of all peoples within a society. The Cook Islands constitution and laws contain the basic tenants of a free and just society. Recent/impending achievements include:

- Progress on the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Progress on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and
- The Office of the Ombudsman being the focal point for Human Rights.

The major impediment to the Cook Islands ratifying and reporting against other human rights conventions is the government's limited institutional capacity. Steps will need to be taken to address conventions that have become pertinent to the country's changing context such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW).

1.8.2 Law and Order



Law and Order are considered pre-requisites in developing a fair and free society and sustainable development⁴⁷. The Cook Islands has a long history of civil rest and order, with a relatively low incidence of violent crimes with the vast majority of crime being theft and misdemeanours. Notable achievements and innovations in this area include:

- Establishment of the second chance program for young offenders⁴⁸;
- Initiation of "Breaking the Silence" campaign targeting domestic violence⁴⁹;
- Implementation of the "no withdraw" policy whereby complaints of domestic violence cannot be withdrawn and must progress to court;
- Review of crime related legislation and regulations; and
- Working in partnership with the New Zealand Crown Prosecutors Office and other partners in drafting new legislation and regulations.

Key Lessons Learned

1. The MDGs have improved planning and resourcing in Education and Health

By providing clear and relevant targets (MDG goals 2, 4, 5 and 6) the MDGs have proved a valuable and useful tool in the areas of Education and Health in focusing efforts and resources. International commitment to these MDGs has helped to streamline donor and national programs and resources.

⁴⁷ Masaurua, F. (2013) "Human Rights and Governance", PIFS, Suva, Fiji

⁴⁸ Cook Islands Government (2012) *Monitoring Our Progress – Report on the NSDP*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2. The establishment of a consolidated National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) has helped to align national plans and actions

The NSDP has been a catalyst for the wider development of the policy framework and strategic planning and coordination activities across different sectors of government and society. It has become ubiquitous and central in the discourse of both government and civil society.

3. Evidence-based policy has helped to improve the efficacy of development efforts over time

Most prevalent in Education and Health, information based policy of government has helped to augment the understanding of issues in these areas and assisted in creating better and more effective policy response over time.

4. Improvements resultant from the use evidence-based policy require mid to long term commitment to embed in the institution framework of departments and agencies

The success of evidenced based policy initiatives has been achieved through concerted effort and support over the last decade or more as it takes time to build capacity to develop the correct metrics and also to make sense of them in terms of how they are best used in the development of future policy frameworks.

5. Improvements in public financial management and the policy & planning framework have helped improve accessibility to donor support for development

There have been great strides made in improving the PFM and policy framework resulting in development partners being more willing to provide direct budget support that has allowed for delivery in a more effective and efficient manner.

Remaining Gaps

1. Some MDGs and targets were not relevant to the Cook Islands Context

This relates in particular to MDG 1, with the measures of poverty too conservative for the Cook Islands context. The use of measures that are not applicable risks masking concerns in this area such as the growth of income inequality or outward migration from lack of economic opportunities. This presents an opportunity to develop more relevant and holistic indicators.

2. Some development partners are unable or unwilling to use national systems that could deliver development assistance in a more efficient manner

This in particular pertains to (some) regional or multilateral development agencies where the Cook Islands, despite the significant improvements in their own PFM and donor coordination processes have significant difficulty in accessing and utilizing development assistance. The Cook Islands strongly advocates the use of national systems.

3. Appropriate metrics or policies to address population movement do not yet exist

Universally considered the Cook Islands largest development concern, a lack of metrics and understanding of the specific nature (beyond aggregate counts) of the outward migration, means that there has not been a formal policy response to address this issue.

4. Non-reporting on the informal economy and its impact undervalues its contribution to national welfare

The lack of information pertaining to the contribution of the informal economy, from subsistence activity to the work and efforts of families caring for dependants, young and old, is not expressed, measured or reported upon when considering the output of the country. As a result the loss of such these informal efforts and the societal risks and costs it imposes are not understood or appreciated in policy development framework.

2. AREAS FOR RECOMMITMENT – ‘CORRECTING COURSE’

As a small islands developing state it is consistent that almost each and every part of the country is in need of more attention, support and funding. The challenge for LCDs and SIDS is to determine priorities among the many different needs of countries. It is inevitable that in attempting to do so within budgetary constraints, some critical areas will not receive the attention required and therefore will impact negatively on the ability of the country to develop in a holistic manner. This report provides an opportunity to reflect on potential areas of neglect or that require further support so that the Cook Islands can meet its development needs. The following outlines areas for “recommitment” so as to ensure that the Cook Islands remain on track to meet all its development aspirations.

2.1 Governance

The Cook Islands recognize the need to invest in and improve systems of **governance** with government being the primary provider of public service to the country. Within the last decade the Cook Islands have devoted more resources and have also targeted development assistance in this area. However, there still remains much work to be done.

Reporting on policy effectiveness and implementation of policy is still fragmented with information often being unreliable or incomplete in providing a comprehensive assessment. Significant progress made towards achieving the intended goals of the Public Financial Management Roadmap has not yet been complemented by a framework to manage government and public service performance. There must be continued and sustained commitment to improve processes and procedures as well as resourcing these efforts appropriately.

2.2 Evidence Based Policy

In attempts to improve accountability, the Office of the Public Service Commissioner has placed a greater emphasis on providing empirical measures for performance measurement. However, the use of **evidence based policy and decision-making** is yet to be embedded across the wider government with policy too often based on incomplete information or crude analyses with insufficient research to adequately weigh and balance policy options. Despite improvements in ICT, systems and procedures are either not in place or inadequate for the recording, sharing and dissemination between agencies and departments of the wide range of data that is collected. With this there are lost opportunities to develop statistics to help inform policy and improve the quality of decisions made. As mentioned earlier, there is an argument within government whether the lack of evidence-based policy is due to the lack of the provision of statistics or the lack of demand for statistics and data. What is disconcerting is that despite the requirements of the MDGs and the need to improve the quality and quantity of statistics in understanding the national context and track progress, funding for the national statistics office has shrunk in real terms, over the course of the last decade. There are plans to develop and implement a Statistics Master Plan in the 2013-2014 fiscal year which will help address this situation. It is crucial that there is a wider commitment across government to improve the quality of policy and decision-making.

2.3 Policy Coordination

Weaknesses in the application of evidence-based policy are symptomatic of significant weaknesses in **policy coordination**. A capacity assessment conducted for the Cook Islands government in 2012 found that there was a severe shortage of expertise in the area of policy. This means that despite significant improvements in the policy framework, with the second iteration of the NSDP and the midterm budgeting framework, there is insufficient capacity to provide relevant policy advice and analysis for decision-making across the government. The Office of the Prime Minister, core function of which is to coordinate policy does not have the funding to attract adequately qualified/specialist skilled staff to assist in this role.

2.4 Depopulation

The inability of the OPM and the government at large to recruit qualified persons is not only symptomatic of a lack of funding to create a demand for these positions, but moreover a lack supply in terms of the number of qualified candidates available in country. This labour shortage of qualified persons (and less skilled labour) is symptomatic of the country's largest problem, the **outward migration of Cook Islanders**. This has had significant impacts on the economy of the country, with outmigration of the country's productive adult population, and also socially with significant changes to the fabric of Cook Islands' society. Despite this being acknowledged by most as the primary issue in terms of capacity, economic development and cultural preservation, there is yet to be a formal policy response to this issue⁵⁰. There are plans to initiate a migration profiling analysis which would help augment an understanding of the issue, but it is crucial that resultant of this analysis the Cook Islands take steps to develop a policy response to depopulation that is negatively impacting all aspects of the Cook Islands economy and society⁵¹.

2.5 Investment in the Social Sector

In addressing factors that may influence migration there is significant opportunity to improve social push factors such as health and education with **investment in the social sector**. In recent years there has been considerable government spending to stimulate growth in tourism and infrastructure, resultant largely from a response to the Global Economic Crisis. A consequence of this, however, is that social services and spending in social sector (which includes Education and Health) have suffered. In the last decade there has been a decline in the percentage of government funds spent on supporting the social sector from 48% in 2002/2003 to only 40% in the 2012/2013 Budget⁵². In the 2013/2014 Budget, the appropriation towards health outcomes have been increased by NZD\$965,000 and an increase of NZD\$1.315 million appropriated towards education. Additionally, welfare payments for those over 70 years have been increased from NZD\$400 to NZD\$500 per month. However, despite these efforts, with the shifts in society and the erosion of traditional social support systems, government must also anticipate and plan for increased burden on social services for youth and the elderly.

2.6 Summary - Seeing the Forest through the Trees

The rationale for many countries is to focus on economic development in the short run so that it can place itself in a position to fund its own development in the long term. The danger of this approach is that the environmental and social needs of the country do not receive the required attention whilst economic growth initiatives are pursued. With the Global Economic Crisis and the impact on national economies, there is increasing pressure to focus on economic policy and investment. With limited resources and capacity the Cook Islands are embroiled in a struggle to keep their fledgling economy afloat whilst protecting the people

⁵⁰ Radio NZ. "Depopulation Our Biggest Threat, says Cooks Prime Minister." 5 August, 2005.

⁵¹ Office of the Prime Minister(2013), *Response to draft*, June 6th 2013

⁵² MFEM (2012) *Cook Islands Government Budget Estimates 2012-2013, Book I*.

of the country and its environment. With recent socio-cultural shifts from depopulation, the breakdown of traditional extended family units, and more infrequent access to the outer islands, the plight of the some vulnerable in the country over the past decade has worsened. There is an immediate need for a concerted policy response with funding support to services that address growing issues in this area from disaffected youth to rising neglect of the elderly. The physical environment of the country has also coming under increasing strain with unprecedented development over the past 15 years and the inability of government to effectively manage the by-products of economic development⁵³. Whilst, there have been some good gains made in recent years, there remains a strong need for political recommitment for a more balanced approach and distribution of limited resources to avoid the risk of developing an economy for a people and culture that will no longer exist in an environment degraded beyond repair.

⁵³ Cook Islands Government (2013) *National Solid Waste Policy and Strategy 2013-2016*.

3. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES – ‘CHANGING WINDS’

3.1 Climate Change

The new millennium has bought change at a rate that is unprecedented and unrelenting. The change which will have the greatest impact over the medium and long term is that of climate change. The emphasis of dialogue around climate change has shifted from mitigation to adaptation and coping with its effects. The Cook Islands as a Pacific small island developing state is extremely vulnerable to the most severe and immediate effects of climate change – that being the increased severity of extreme weather conditions, which for the Cook Islands means the annual threat of destructive cyclones for five months of the year.

3.1.1 Adaptation

The establishment of the Climate Change Cook Islands unit within the Office of the Prime Minister in 2011 has helped coordinate the Cook Islands policy responses to climate change through adaptation efforts. The JNAP lays out a template for country-wide adaptation activities over the course of the next five years. To date, support to implement adaptation programmes have been received from the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund, UNDP, European Union Global Climate Change Alliance, Australian Government, South Pacific Regional Environment Program, and Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Programmes currently implemented target water, agriculture and food security, marine resources, capacity building, and improving the resilience in productive sectors. The JNAP is the first in-country step in developing a “mainstreamed” strategy for climate change. The success of mainstreaming efforts will require improved policy coordination, which in turn requires consolidated effort to support and develop capacity in this area.

3.1.2 Food Security

The Cook Islands anticipates that climate change will impact on the food security of the Cook Islands, in both horticultural crops and stocks of fish and marine life. The Ministry of Agriculture with the support of regional organisations are researching new varieties of weather and disease resilient fruit and vegetables. Adaptive farming practices and biological agriculture have been actively encouraged by the Ministry and growers associations over recent years. Practices such as mulching to help improve water retention in soils are now widely practiced. The use of hydroponics on islands with poor soils to produce vegetables has increased. Also evident is a return to traditional methods of crop rotation and composting.

The Ministry of Marine Resources is actively monitoring lagoons for changes in temperature, salinity, turbidity and quality. It is anticipated that early detection of changes can assist in managing and reducing impacts. In addition, the Ministry is currently engaged in training and capacity building in aquaculture. These aquaculture techniques may help to supplement the potential loss of marine fisheries stock from ocean acidification in the longer term. It is envisioned that Cook Islands Marine Park initiative will also play a crucial role in actively managing and monitoring the impact of climate change on both the coastal and deep sea marine ecology.

3.1.3 Sea level Rise

Rising ocean sea levels will increase the erosion and storm surge damage, impact on coastal infrastructure, escalate salinity of the freshwater table and low lying crop cultivation areas, degrade habitats and breeding

sites and loss of land and traditional livelihoods. Adaptive measures to increase resilience to sea level rise must be implemented.

Most threatened by rising sea level in the longer term are the northern atolls of the country. At this stage there are no plans for resettlement of the population on these islands. The 2013 Nansen Conference hosted by the Cook Islands may prove to be the first step in considering the issues of population displacement from climate change and natural disasters. The next step will be the development of a strategic policy response to protect vulnerable populations in the Northern Cook Islands.

3.1.4 National Reflections on Climate change

The Cook Islands is an active member of the Pacific Islands Forum and of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in pushing forward the agenda for SIDS in relation to climate change.

At the national level, work around climate change will continue to be mainstreamed into the implementation programmes of all relevant stakeholders in both government and non-government sectors. The Cook Islands will continue to advocate that it requires financial support from external parties if it is going to progress on adaptation measures that are required to build the resilience of the country, the individual islands and communities. The country is undertaking the process of gaining National Implementing Entity to directly access climate change finances. With the progress the Cook Islands has made in developing their donor coordination and financial management systems, the country has made the case for the use of these national systems to be utilised by development partners. However the international ambiguity and inflexibility of some development partners with respect to the use of national systems has translated into inefficiency at the national level with duplication of processes and responsibilities in the implementation of adaptation actions. The mainstreaming and rationalization of delivery through national systems has been compromised by the inflexibility or inability of some donor systems and the need to cater to these inefficient systems in the pursuit of further funding of adaptation efforts. This will likely continue until there has been greater clarity and commitment at the international level on the funding and delivery of climate change adaptation support.

3.2 The Global Economic Crisis

The various development goals of the Cook Islands and the rest of the world have been hindered by the global economic crisis. Social and environmental goals have been overshadowed by the need to save businesses, banks and entire economies. In responding to the crisis, nations have adopted strategies that generally fall somewhere in the spectrum between two alternatives: austerity and stimulus.

The Cook Islands Ministry of Finance and Economic Management Act (1996) stipulates that government expenditure must not exceed government revenues⁵⁴. This stipulation and the act was established as a response to the Cook Islands own fiscal crisis in 1996, with government budget since then either balanced or in surplus. The consequence of this is that the Cook Islands does not face the severe debt crisis of other nations. The Cook Islands also adhere to a number of fiscal responsibility ratios which include:

- 1) Maintaining taxation to GDP ratio of 25 per cent (to control the size of Government's operating expenditures);
- 2) Keeping cost of the public service within 40 per cent of total revenue; and

⁵⁴ Cook Islands Government (1996). *MFEM Act*.

- 3) Undertake new borrowings within the country's debt carrying capacity, 35 per cent of nominal gross domestic product that significant sums are flexible for development programs.⁵⁵

However in looking to keep within these ratios and pursue an aggressive development agenda, the country runs the risk of sacrificing essential operating expenditure for the provision of essential public services. The country's small size and heavy dependence on imports and tourism make it extremely vulnerable to external economic movements which could dramatically impact the country's debt carrying capacity. The uncertain global economic outlook and any significant negative movements pose a serious risk to the Cook Islands government's financial health.

3.2.1 The Cost of Stimulating the Economy

Strong management of debt and prudent fiscal management has allowed the Cook Islands to engage in fiscal stimulus spending with funds centred on tourism growth, infrastructure development and renewable energy projects. However, increases in stimulus spending have yet to yield returns in tax revenues to service the nominal increases (inflation adjusted) operational and personnel costs of government. In order to balance the budget, government has had to reduce spending on other public services and current practices favour cuts in operating costs and service provision rather than personnel. It is expected that the Budget revenues will total NZD\$178.5 million in the 2013/2014 fiscal year with projected expenditure of \$130.9 million. Traditionally the Cook Islands have supplemented shortfalls in support from the national budget with donor funding. Total ODA for 2013/2014 has been budgeted at NZD\$59,363,162. However, the Global economic crisis has put a strain on global funding arrangements, with donors such as the European Union countries facing a huge debt crisis, and with slow growth in the New Zealand economy and a poor global economic outlook for the foreseeable future⁵⁶. There is a serious possibility that donor funding will be more limited in future and recipient countries such as the Cook Islands will be left with considerable financial void in funds they depend on to provide various services. In the Cook Islands context, operational budgets for sectors such as Health, Disabilities, Gender and Environment are supported and supplemented by donor funding. Also at risk are the services provided by the many NGOs in country whose operations are often almost entirely dependent on donor funding.

Reflections: Optimal development- A Balanced approach or a strict trade off

The choice between underfunding the social sector to stave off economic collapse is not one that the Cook Islands or other nations wish to make. Indeed it is in this decision making progress that there is no clear cut guidance or goals provided by the MDGs or other international development tools. Indeed the international community seems split on the matter with austerity proving to be ineffective in Europe and stimulus packages that are not large or long enough to create sustainable economic development to counteract global recessionary pressures (low international demand, rising unemployment). Though there are recommended levels of debt, government spending to GDP ratios among many other measures, struggling developing countries are increasingly finding it difficult to pursue development priorities, especially in times of national, regional or as the case may be, global economic recession where fiscal resources are severely limited. This is the key question that governments face heading into an uncertain future and despite the intent of the MDGs and BPOA, their failure in not directly addressing the issue of economic sustainability, many governments find themselves facing a trade-off between the two with government invariably choosing to address their clear present problems of the economy.

⁵⁵ Cook Islands Government (2012) *2013-2014 Budget Consultation – To seek the input of Cook Islanders in to the future of the Cook Islands*, 15 November, Rarotonga Cook Islands

⁵⁶ Gould B. (2013) "Budget hides bleak economic outlook", New Zealand Herald, 23 May.
http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10885461

3.3 Societal and Cultural Change

With the significant economic sea-change going on in the world, the Cook Islands, in the last 20 years has experienced its most dramatic socio-cultural change since colonialism. The country's own fiscal crisis in 1996 kick-started the beginning of the country's most aggressive and prolonged period of depopulation, the result of which has changed the demographic face of the Cook Islands and dramatically altered the fabric and dynamics of Cook Islands society.

3.3.1 Depopulation

Since 1996 the country's resident population has declined from 19,600 to approximately 15,000⁵⁷. This masks even greater population decline of native Cook Islanders with foreign labour constituting up to 15% of the current resident population⁵⁸. This decline has been from all parts and ages of the country but with outward migration most deeply felt in the outer islands where in most instances the total resident population has more than halved over the space of less than two decades. This population exodus is enabled through the Cook Islands free association with New Zealand which allows Cook Islanders to work and live in both New Zealand and Australia. The causes of the country's depopulation issue have been debated and though the specific degree of influence of different factors is not known, the reasons include: higher wages; job opportunities; health care (especially for older persons); education; job dissatisfaction; and personal debt pressures among the most prevalent⁵⁹.

3.3.2 Rapid Emergence of Ethnic Diversity

The impact of this mass migration has a profound impact on the demographics on the country. Entirely new ethnic demographic groupings are emerging from the importation of labour from Fiji, the Philippines and China to supplement labour shortages in country. Alongside an increase in foreign labour has been an increase in foreign investment. The Cook Islands must now adapt to a newfound ethnic diversity in its society after generations of relative homogeneity (which includes mixed race Cook Islanders from the long standing influence and presence of New Zealanders). At present, ethnic tension is not an issue but there has been growing dissatisfaction with the rising influence and levels of foreign investment in the country.

3.3.3 The Breakdown of the Cook Islands Extended Family Unit and Community

Another impact of depopulation is the break-up of traditional extended family units and its broader impacts on society. Traditional Cook Islands extended families were generally close knit with grandparents caring for infants whilst parents work, and children generally taking responsibility for parents in their elderly age. The absence of extended family has meant that these traditional informal family structures of socialization have all but disappeared. The result can be seen at both ends of the demographic spectrum with adult supervision of young children and infants either being purchased services (usually by way of a foreign caregiver) or neglected in some cases. The elderly face inadequate care or sometimes complete abandonment. It is now left for government to assess how it can cater for social services that were once provided by informal social and family networks, putting increasing pressure on already strained public funded welfare services.

⁵⁷ MFEM, (2012) *2011 Census Report*

⁵⁸ MFEM (2012) *2011 Census Report*.

⁵⁹ Wright-Koteka, E. (2006) *Te uu no te akau roa: Migration and the Cook Islands*.

3.3.4 The cost of Western Ideals and Aspirations

Depopulation is not the only cause for the shift in social norms in Cook Islands society with an equally significant factor being that of increasing globalization and importation of Western norms and culture. The aforementioned shift away from extended family units has been towards smaller nuclear household units, with the average household (as of 2006) consisting of two adults and two dependants⁶⁰. This also has seen the rise of the Western expectation or aspiration of home ownership for nuclear family units, with an explosion in housing development centred mostly in Rarotonga over the past decade or more.

The increase in housing development is symptomatic of the shift in the socioeconomic structure of the country from a culture based on subsistence and practices associated with communalism, to an aggressive commercial and consumer culture with an individualistic focus on wealth maximization. The last decade and a half has seen the biggest shift to this end. It could be argued that this shift has happened at a rate too fast for Cook Islanders' to adapt to, with unprecedented economic growth predominantly benefiting only foreign or foreign borne commercial interests. The Chamber of Commerce and business community is dominated by foreign or foreign-born persons, and are easily the most vocal, well-organized and influential lobby group in the country. Further evidence of many native Cook Islanders struggling to adapt to the expectations and structure of a consumer based economy exists in the commercial banking debt crisis, with the country's banking sector accumulating a large portfolio of bad debts and loans (16% of total lending) accumulated by Cook Islanders over the last decade⁶¹. The banking community has pointed to a lack of financial literacy for the high prevalence of under performing loans which has consequently lead to high interest rates stifling investment and increasing the cost of living⁶². Consumerism has also meant the diminishing of subsistence living and an increased reliance on imported goods and produce. This trend means the erosion and loss of traditional practices and embedded values and norms. The influence of Western and global culture has also been facilitated by the rise of the internet, satellite television, and more frequent and lower cost air travel. English has become the common language of transactional conversation especially amongst the youth of the country; those fluent in Cook Island Maori have become the minority. Maori language traditionally taught and spoken in the home must now be taught by schools as a second language, and the education system is pressed to develop skilled and qualified persons and teachers in this area.

3.3.5 Reflections: Development for the People

In reviewing the impact of societal shifts in the Cook Islands gives rise to fundamental questions about Cook Islands development such as: What is it that we are developing? Who are we developing our country for? What are we losing, and what is it that makes us Cook Islanders? The great socio-cultural change in the Cook Islands has "shifted the goal posts" for development and government. There are now new concerns and burdens for government, with the need to provide for services for the vulnerable and needy those were once provided by families and communities. The aforementioned change in the family unit has left gaps that civil society and government have been unable to adequately fill with those most affected generally being youth and the elderly. Of particular concern is the plight of youth where many youth are disengaged and disenfranchised within society and struggling to cope with adversity and the trials of adolescence⁶³. The culture of family support and community systems have been eroded and youth are isolated and neglected in an increasingly individualistic and competitive society.

Metrics (like the MDGs) and international policy tools offer little direction on 'development' in this area. The intrinsic value and contribution of subsistence activities and cultural practices and systems are difficult to

⁶⁰ MFEM (2006) *2006 Census Report*.

⁶¹ Knowles, S. (2012) *Cook Islands Banking Review*.

⁶² Cook Islands Research Association (2009) *Economic Crisis Forum - Minutes, February 4*.

⁶³ Brown, J. (2012) *Cook Islands Youth Survey*.

measure and account for when trying to understand their impact on the quality of life. More effort must be dedicated in terms of research and policy to understand the real impacts of the socio-cultural changes so that appropriate and effective policy responses can be implemented to safe guard the wellbeing and identity of the nation and its people.

4. PRIORITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – “STEERING THROUGH INTREPID WEATHER”

4.1 Governance

Improvement of governance systems remains a priority and is a prerequisite for sustainable development. In the current climate of tough economic conditions and uncertainty, now more than ever the onus falls on government to allocate and distribute resources in a manner that will facilitate the servicing of short term considerations whilst preserving and promoting longer term sustainable development interests. Greater support must be given to policy coordination to help manage limited resources and an increasingly challenging and complex context.

4.2 Population and People

With depopulation considered the country’s most pressing and cross cutting issue, and the widespread impacts of the aforementioned societal changes, there is an urgent and immediate need for further research and development of policy responses. Greater research in this area will help to uncover the long term economic costs of policy neglect, but moreover shed light of possible solutions and actions to address this complex but vital issue. In maximizing efficacy of efforts in this area, a greater examination and reevaluation of the government’s engagement with civil society, communities and families may help to strengthen the national platform for sustainable development in the future. Policy and action on this issue, seemingly due to the difficulty and complexity of the issue, can no longer be neglected.

4.3 Self Sustainability

The government’s current focus on renewable energy should be captured under a larger goal of self-sustainability, which includes food security and efforts around import substitution – in looking to reduce reliance on external resources as well as reduce the nation’s cost of living in the longer term. Lagging efforts in agricultural and horticultural production are in dire need of support and attention if the country is to mitigate the negative effects of rapidly rising global food prices. The ambitious goals of the renewable energy program must also be balanced with the needs of other sectors and debt sustainability in an increasingly uncertain and volatile global economy.

4.4 Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

Efforts in climate change as with population require cross sector coordination and cooperation. Progress in this area will involve improvements in governance, policy coordination, and the integration of activities around economic progress, social development infrastructure, renewable energy, food security and environmental integrity. The ongoing challenge will be the managing of a distinct climate change program whilst looking to mainstream efforts and maximize their efficacy and efficiency utilizing national systems.

4.5 Infrastructure

Infrastructural development dominates the government’s financial considerations in the short to medium term. The recent institutional issues around the institutional body (the Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning) responsible for the delivery of infrastructure on behalf of government must be rectified if it is to

successfully embark on the renovation of the national infrastructure. If managed correctly intended infrastructure development has the potential to greatly advance the development ambitions of the Cook Islands through the improvement of the standard of living, as well as stimulating the economy through employment and recruitment of Cook Islanders in participating in the building of their own nation.

4.6 Tourism and Economic development

For the foreseeable future, tourism will remain the cornerstone of the country's economy. In attempting to fund development across the country it is vital that the tourism industry is buoyant and resilient. With an increasingly volatile global economy coupled with even more competition, government has recognized the need to back the industry's efforts to support the backbone of the economy. In the longer term it is important to diversify the economic base where policy steps have already been taken for potential future growth in deep sea mineral mining, marine resources and fisheries as well as agricultural production. The Cook Islands must continue to stay proactive across the different facets of the economy in safeguarding the country's short term viability and long term economic sustainability.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Cook Islands is considered to be one of the more advanced Pacific Island countries in its relative success and progress against major development indicators like the MDGs, BPOA, and MSI+5 indicators. However, there is a delicate tipping point between 'getting by' and being a nation in decline, and the drop-off beyond the tipping point is severe and deep. Despite relatively strong performance against its various development metrics and even its own development framework, there are significant challenges such as depopulation and socio and environmental risks of economic development and climate change that threaten the long term welfare of the country and its people. Government has made efforts to address these threats in various ways from the WATSAN unit targeting the externalities of tourism development providing environmentally safe sewage treatment options, to the creation of the Cook Islands Marine Park to manage marine resources of the country in a safe and sustainable manner.

One of the key challenges for the Cook Islands outlined in this report is the need to balance economic growth considerations with the provision of social services. There currently is little direction given in internationally prescribed development metrics that addresses balancing development goals. The national planning framework (NSDP) provides a holistic view of development by including economic growth alongside social and environmental protection goals. However, the Cook Islands are challenged in how it can best prioritize and manage the balance between the pillars of sustainable development.

5.1 Key Recommendations

The following are 'key recommendations' from this report that maybe applicable and relevant to the various forums in which this report caters to:

National:

- Identify key metrics that are relevant, applicable and reflective of development at the community and national levels
- Continued strengthening of budgetary and performance management national systems
- Building capacity and capabilities in policy development, analysis, monitoring and evaluation
- A review development priorities

Pacific Preparatory Meeting:

- Research and development of metrics to reflect the contribution of the subsistence economy, culture and society as part of national output and productivity
- Development of a key metric/metrics for climate change adaptation
- Need for consistency in messages relating to development from the Pacific to the global arena
- Clear linkages between Pacific regional and national development frameworks
- Promotion of the use of country systems

SIDS Conference 2014:

- Guidance on development mix (between donor funds and tax revenues) for the sustainable development of SIDS in different scenarios/ stages of development
- Maintaining the special case for SIDS and reflection of the unique challenges faced in the development of the SDGs and post 2015 development agenda, particularly in the case of narrow economic base for most islands and the threats of climate change and natural disasters to development

SDGs and Post 2015 Development Agenda:

- Including both non-economic and economic indicators into the SDG framework to provide a holistic/realistic view of development priorities
- Guidance in prioritising between development areas and targets in the SDG framework

5.2 Development Partnerships

As previously mentioned, engagement with development partners has proved challenging for the country even with improvements in national planning, policy and aid coordination systems. Being a small country of limited human and financial resources means that the Cook Islands will be continue to rely on development assistance for the foreseeable future, but with limited resources it must be efficient in dealings with development partners. The Cook Islands will logically move towards simpler bilateral alternatives that are more accessible and negate the "middle man" role regional and multilateral bodies often play in the dispersal of development assistance. Successes in the areas of health and education, where universal objectives through the MDGs have been identified that helped to align national and international objectives need to be built upon. The new SDGs need to build upon the success of MDG goals related to Education and

Health and develop a common dialogue through new metrics that are defined in such a way that they address common global development needs while also being adaptable to a country's context.

5.3 Final Word

This report raises questions around the efficacy of development and economic metrics when describing standards of living and welfare in a society, and moreover the key components responsible for influencing the welfare of the populace. It is believed that more research is required to develop measurements to recognize the contribution of what are simply classified as informal parts of the economy including, social support provided by families, the services of CSOs and subsistence based activities. With the need to improve food security and strengthen non- governmental support systems to meet new and emerging global and societal changes, sound research is required to inform policy to this end. Development of new metrics that capture the importance and contribution of community and traditional cultural support systems will help to provide a much more holistic picture of the country and its 'development' needs.

The Cook Islands NSDP and the greater budgeting and planning framework, though still in its relative infancy has helped to bring structure and focus to what had previously been haphazard national development. In learning lessons from the MDG experience, the use of key metrics may be used to augment and further focus the government development efforts and targets. Other recommendations in this report refer to the development of new metrics for the wider SDG framework moving forward. The Cook Islands, however, has the freedom and agency to investigate and possibly implement the recommendations of this report for its own purposes before the 2014 Small Islands Developing States Conference and signing on to the Post 2015 Development Agenda. The Cook Islands has the opportunity to provide an example for other SIDS and developing countries in navigating its own course with innovative research informing smart development decisions and a holistic policy framework.

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APPENDICES

Annex 1: A Snapshot of Progress on MDG Targets

GOALS		Already Achieved	Probably	Potentially	Unlikely		Strong	Fair	Weak but Improving	Weak
1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger									
2	Achieve universal primary Education									
3	Promote gender equality and empower women									
4	Reduce child mortality	?								
5	Improve maternal health									
6	Combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases		?							
7	Ensure environmental sustainability									
8	Develop a global partnership for development									
9	Improved Governance									

Annex 2: A Snapshot of Progress on BPOA, MSI+5 thematic areas

BPOA	PROGRESS				Government Support		
	Ahead of Schedule	On Track	Behind schedule	problematic	Strong	Fair	Weak
Climate change and sea-level rise							
Natural and environmental disasters							
Management of wastes							
Coastal and marine resources							
Freshwater resources							
Land resources							
Energy resources							
Tourism Resources							
Biodiversity resources		?				?	
Transportation and communications						?	
Science and technology						?	
Graduation from least developed country status		?				?	
Trade: globalization and trade liberalization							
Sustainable capacity development and education for sustainable development						?	
Sustainable production and consumption		?				?	
National and regional enabling environments		?					
Health		?					
Knowledge management and information for decision-making						?	

Annex 3: Progress on NSDP Implementation (

Goal 1 A vibrant Cook Islands Economy	Goal 2 Infrastructure for economic growth, sustainable livelihoods and resilience	Goal 3 Energy Security	Goal 4 Opportunities for all people who reside in the Cook Islands	Goal 5 Resilient and sustainable communities	Goal 6 Environment for living	Goal 7 Good governance	Goal 8 A safe, secure, just and stable society
Ensure our tourism excellence	Improve access to water for our communities	Strengthen the institutional framework of the energy sector	Ensure that parents and communities have confidence in our education system and support quality learning and development for the very young	Ensure strong governance arrangements for DRM and CCA	Improve the management and quality of our water resources through an integrated approach	Strengthen the role of parliament to hold managers to account for performance	Ensure that legislative and regulatory frameworks reflect our sustainable development goals and objectives
Unlock our potential from our marine resources	Improve our facilities for waste management	Utilise only proven technology	Ensure that every child is literate and numerate by the end of year 8 and that literacy and numeracy skills for continuing education are provided	Ensure that high quality risk information is available to inform planning and implementation	Improve water quality through better sanitation measures	Strengthen electoral systems and processes	Ensure quality enforcement of our laws
Unlock our potential from our agricultural production	Improve our transport infrastructure	Provide incentives for renewable energy	Enable every young person to have the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to gain qualifications that they need to contribute to the development of the Cook Islands	Enhance effective preparedness, response and recovery	Implement waste minimisation programmes and provide appropriate facilities and incentives to support these with the purpose of achieving zero waste	Ensure that government service delivery is efficient and effective	Improve access to justice
Identify and exploit trade opportunities	Improve telecommunications	Upgrade existing energy infrastructure	Ensure equitable access to all learners to quality education programmes	Build resilience through effective risk reduction and CC adaptation	Implement an eco-system approach to the management of marine resources	Promote partnerships with civil society and the private sector	Improve our land management and land information systems
Build our financial services	Strengthen our asset management	Promote energy efficiency and conservation	Ensure that the Education sector is responsive to the training needs of the wider community through collaboration		Develop and implement interventions to ensure that land use is sustainable	Strengthen information and data collection, analysis and management for informed decision making	Reduce reoffending through offender rehabilitation
			and partnerships with other agencies				
Ensure that our cultural and creative industries are a key force in job and wealth creation and nation building	Ensure robust construction	Build our capacity in the energy sector	Ensure optimum health for our children and young people		Protect our biodiversity and ecosystems	Ensure access to information	Ensure that our communities and visitors are safe, secure and stable through the provision of quality policing
Sustain macro-economic stability	Build capacity in the infrastructure sector		Provide quality health services for all			Improve accountability and transparency of public financial management	Ensure our border security both in respect to the movement of good and persons through the introduction and operation of effective laws and systems
Ensure proactive economic development policies			A multi sectoral approach to combat NCDs			Establish and strengthen external relations that will benefit the Cook Islands	
			Ensure gender equality and empower our women				
			Guarantee that our children are safe and well-cared for; that our youth are given opportunity to grow as valuable members of society; our persons with disabilities are valued and included in our development and our elderly are acknowledged for their contributions to society and are looked after				
			Ensure we have strong families and communities				
			Our people can access an adequate range of different opportunities				
			for leisure, recreation and competitive sports				
			Ensure the promotion and preservation of our unique culture, languages and social heritage				

Annex 4: Persons Interviewed and Consulted

Asian Development Bank
Country Coordinator, Vanessa Jenner

Ministry of Agriculture
Maria Tuoro, Policy and Planning

Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association
Rongo File, Director
Tamara File, Youth

Cook Islands Red Cross
Frances Topa-Fariu

Ministry of Economic Development
Development Coordination, Peter Tierney - Director
Development Coordination, Taimata Allsworth – UN Country Coordinator
Statistics, Taggy Tangimetua - Director
Treasury, Teu Teulilo – Director

Ministry of Education,
Policy and Planning, Director, Gail Townsend

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
Pacific Regional Affairs, Carl Hunter, Director
Pacific Regional Affairs, Amelia Fukafoka, desk Officer
Trade and International Affairs, Dallas Young, Director
Treaties and International Laws, Director, Myra Moekaa

Ministry of Transport
Ned Howard, Secretary of Transport

Ministry of Health
Policy and Planning, Director, Ana Silatolu

Ministry of Marine Resource
Ben Ponia - Secretary for Marine Resources

Ministry of Internal Affairs
Bredina Drollet, Secretary of Internal Affairs
Youth and Sports, Vania Kenning, Director
Child and Family services, Edward Brown, Director
Disabilities, Nono Numanga, Director

Gender Development, Ruta Pokura, Director

National Environment Service

Joseph Bridger, Deputy Director

Louisa Karika, Sustainable Land Management Project Coordinator

Office of the Prime Minister

Elizabeth Wright-Koteka, Chief of Staff

Central Policy and Planning, Nga Puna, Acting Director

Climate Change, Ana Tiraa, Director

Climate Change - SPC, Teina Rongo, Program Coordinator

Climate Change, Policy Officer, Celine Dyer

Office of the Public Service Commissioner

CEO Priscilla Maruariki