



Cook Islands

Jim Marurai
Prime Minister and Minister of Education



Sixty-one year old Mr. Marurai became Prime Minister in December 2004, and has held the Education portfolio throughout successive governments, since 1999. His additional responsibilities are Police, National Human Resource Development, Head of State, and Telecommunications. Mr. Marurai was last re-elected in 2006. He is from the Southern Outer Island of Mangaia where his professional experience includes: HOD of Commerce at Mangaia College, Deputy Principal, and Principal of Mangaia College. He first entered Parliament in 1994. He is also a graduate of Otago University in New Zealand and enjoys rugby, and has an interest in growing, and reading. He is a widower with five children.

Education Outreach: Expanding the Tools for Learning

Over many years, the Cook Islands has afforded the highest of its priorities to the Education sector, underscored by additional support for social advancement and equity. However, as a Small Island Developing State, these past decades have presented a number of constraints, which have, and continue to shape, the development of policy toward Education, and the implementation of strategy.

Firstly, Government must extend its Educational priorities beyond the main island of Rarotonga to schools in nearly a dozen Outer Islands, contending with the barriers associated with distance, isolation, and communication difficulties. The Cook Islands also remains vulnerable to ongoing climatic change and severe weather conditions that often hinder planning and the maintenance of facilities in far flung village communities, especially schools.

Secondly, the Cook Islands has an emergent priority concern that revolves around population drift and the capacity of its human resource base. Past years of economic reform have sharpened the focus on Education and Health, particularly in terms of the required level of investment in human capital. Expanding and improving the tools for learning necessitate a careful balance between boosting the operational aspects of the sector, and lifting the teaching profession.

This year, the Education sector launched a longer-term, forward-looking strategy that sets a key foundation based on "learning for life". The Education Master Plan embraces the tools for learning in an invigorated manner to build real meaning and bring results to target areas of development. The State is also maintaining its support for institutions both in the public and private sector and this Plan speaks directly to equal access to opportunity – a policy that has been part of our national outlook for many years.