CEDAW IN TONGA

An analysis of the complex interplay of actors, ideas and interests in the policy-making process to achieve gender equality

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OUTLINE

• CEDAW: brief background
• Tonga: in context
• Women in Tonga
• Mixed framework to analyse the policy process
  • Relevant actors and the motivations (Dolowitz and Marsh)
  • Ideational process (Beland)
  • Epistemic communities (Stone)
  • Obstacles (Evans)
• Recommendations
• Conclusion
CEDAW

- The Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the UN in 1979
- Requires signatory states to make necessary reforms to eliminate discrimination against women
- Links to goals 5 and 10 of the SDGs
- Tonga is one of 6 countries that has not signed to the Convention
TONGA

- Population of 103,252; roughly 50% are female
- Constitutional Monarchy headed by a monarch and an elected PM as head of government
- 169 islands of which 36 are inhabited scattered over 700,000 square kilometres
- Tongans is the largest ethnic group with a unique social culture and strong Christian faith
WOMEN IN TONGA

Political

• 1951 – women allowed to vote and run in elections
• MPs predominantly held by males
• 9 of 26 seats are assigned for nobles
  • 36% of total seats
  • 0.02% of male population
• Currently 2 MPs are female
  • 0.004% of female population
WOMEN IN TONGA

Legal/Economic/Social

• Inheritance laws pass through male line
• Women do not have independent rights to land
• Labour force participation
  • Women – 53%
  • Male – 74%
ONGOING DEBATES

- Gendered roles
- Inheritance laws
- Land rights
- Abortion
- Same sex marriage
- LGBTQI rights
ANALYSING THE POLICY PROCESS

• Different actors involved throughout the policy process (Dolowitz and Marsh model)

• Actor-context interaction
  • Who matters?
  • And in what context of Tonga’s polity?

• Ideational approach in providing policy alternatives (Beland)
  • Agenda-setting theory: understanding the factors that shape policy agenda e.g. electoral results, international and local pressure, public opinion
  • Framing ideas to advance interests
  • Policy entrepreneurs as key individuals in the policy-making process
  • Policy legacies shape contemporary issues
EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

• Process of sharing ideas and knowledge contributes to the growing strength of international advocacy

• Developing countries are vulnerable to external pressures

• ‘transfer of ideas and ideologies’ targets the inputs to policy development using tools such as global social movements and coalitions (Stone’s ‘soft’ form of transfer)

• ‘epistemic communities’ reinforces the role of global social movements and coalitions
  • Legitimacy
  • Authority
EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

• Tongan Women in Leadership Coalition was formed comprising of 13 NGOs to petition the government to ratify the convention.

• Reinforces the role of global social movements and coalitions where experts on an issue come together as a network and legitimise their agency through the production of their knowledge.

• The motivation behind epistemic communities differ from other transnational actors because they rely on their expert knowledge which legitimises their approach to translate that knowledge to power.
OBSTACLES

- The question of whether the community’s production of knowledge is reflecting their own values and interest rather than expertise
- Gender equality as a foreign idea that challenges national context
- Bargaining vs. Persuasion
- Factors inhibiting policy processes involve ‘cognitive’ obstacles in the pre-decision phase, ‘environmental’ obstacles in the implementation phase and domestic public opinion (Evans)
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Change the perception of the Convention and the norms around gendered roles in Tonga

• Think and working politically for a successful coalition and re-enforcement of the epistemic communities’ agency in its production of knowledge

• Process-centred approach to policy learning emphasising on agency rather than structure

• Framing policy alternatives where preventative elements shield it from criticism.
CONCLUSION

• In conclusion, studies have shown that policy transfer has shifted from a hierarchical, multi-level form of transfer to a multi-sphered, transnational network involving many actors.

• Know your influential actors/partners that are influential in policy making.

• Framing alternative policies to garner favourable responses.

• Understanding national and political context, policy legacies and the authority of the church and degree of democracy.
THANK YOU