

Community Radio Times

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Publisher: Susan Naisara- Grey, Executive Director, femLINKpacific



Rural Women Leaders Converge in Nadi for First National Consultation

Forty-nine (49) rural women leaders from across the Northern, Western and Central Divisions gathered in Nadi in July for femLINKpacific's national consultation on localising community approaches to disaster management and supporting women in decision-making.

The consultation discussed ways in which women of all diversities can be supported to play a significant role in being a strong network member of Women's Weather Watch and participating at all levels of decision-making. Executive Director of femLINKpacific, Susan Grey welcomed the network to the consultation and presented an overview of the organisational updates.

This included the importance of improving public messaging in all stages, the immense potential of Women's Weather Watch network and platform, the tracking and analysis of policies and laws and the importance of ensuring the network voices are heard with Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management.

Fiji is placed in the Top 10 of the world's most vulnerable countries to disaster alongside Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

Disasters magnify gender inequality in decision-making as well as existing disadvantages.

Over the three days, the women leaders shared their key messages on disaster management, particularly around women's participation in decision-making; safety and security of diverse women and girls, and defining resilience. "The women will also look at the transformative change that they hope for and the influencing factors in their lives and their communities," said Grey.

During the consultation, participants all feature in a new series of 'Radio with Pictures' as well as FemTALK 89FM's 'Here are the Women' series. This will amplify the voices of these rural women leaders.

femLINKpacific's first national consultation for 2019 is supported by the Australian Government through the #WeRise Coalition and the Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund.

A second national consultation is expected to be held in September.

FemTALK89FM turns 15!

On May 24, FemTALK89FM marked 15 years on air! Since 2004, FemTALK89FM has enabled a cadre of diverse young women to use community media to bridge the information-communication gaps between communities and decision-making bodies.

By providing information through accessible and appropriate technology, we are supporting the amplification of women's voices and enhancing diverse women's leadership at all levels.

FemTALK89FM broadcasts within the Suva-Nausori corridor (24hours), and within Labasa town (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday), the Labasa Community Media Centre being the only radio station in the Northern Division.

FemTALK89FM also holds an annual outdoor broadcast in the Western Division in July, coinciding with the second divisional consultations with our Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN).

With 15 years on air, FemTALK89FM continues to support the visibility of women with disability and the LGBT community on the airwaves through the Look At My Ability (LAMA) and Rainbow Connections show.

The vision now is to extend the community radio movement through our regional partners in Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with support from the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). femLINKpacific was recently in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands to train correspondents for Women's Weather Watch. Primarily, much of the work of the suitcase radio has been bridging the inter-generational gap that exists – with young women learning the technology and older women finding their voice, often after years of being told to be silent.

The expansion of the suitcase radio to two community media centres has only been possible through years of hardwork and dedication by teams of young women producer-broadcasters.



Editorial

In this edition, we look at particularly at the regional cross-learning events for Pacific Women Weather Watchers (WWW) which were conducted in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

This Pacific Women's Weather Watch programme amongst others enhances the visibility of women as first responders, strengthens their capacity of network leaders and correspondents to inform, influence and lead humanitarian response and in turn being able to communicate recommendations to national and inter-governmental processes.

Important achievements centred around the consolidation of the WWW First Responders and correspondents with the naming of all the regional appointments concluded after the implementation of the last regional WWW cross-learning event that was held in Tonga in September.

With a target number of 80WWW first responders (average of 20 per country), this total has now been exceeded with Fiji's WWW database now reaching over 600 women, and each of the regional country, providing names slightly exceeding the average of 20.

A core smaller group of Fiji WWW responders would be looked at via the Fiji's network's management collectives and clubs that have been recently formed.

A visual mapping of Fiji's WWW First Responders through the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) outlines the reach of the network at the local-level and also outlines the areas in which possible future WWW presence should be.

At the same time, the rural women network leaders have been actively discussing and amplifying the call for real action on bringing women to meaningful spaces that would consider their voices and decisions.

The safety of women and girls, particularly women living with disabilities and the LGBT network where there is for instance safe access to evacuation centres and where there is overall gender-sensitive actions in the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes.

Susan Naisara- Grey
Executive Director, femLINKpacific: Media Initiative for Women

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT



femLINKpacific would like to congratulate our Programme Associate: Broadcast, Maxine Tuwila, on being named as one of Mai Life magazine's '30 under 30: The Faces of Fiji's Future' campaign.

According to the magazine, the 30 Fijians "represent the very best of the best the young adults of this country have to offer."

Maxine joined femTALK89FM Suva shortly after femLINKpacific's 16 Days of Activism consultation in 2015 as a representative from Youth Champs 4 Mental Health.

A passionate activist, Maxine is a regular contributor to our 'Women's Human Security First' series:

"For me, peace as a young woman means having access to positive mental health and also mental health services. When I say mental health services, I mean having the necessary information on mental health and suicide prevention," she said in 2017, during a roundtable discussion on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 which addresses the involvement of young people on issues of peace and security. In addition to her role as FemTALK89FM's broadcast team leader, she is also the current President of Youth Champs for Mental Health and has represented Fiji at several international meetings on youth development and mental health.

The '30 under 30: The Faces of Fiji's Future' campaign is the culmination of a partnership between Mai Life magazine and the Fijian Government.

What's happening...? Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund

With the growing number of humanitarian crises including intensifying, extreme and slow-onset disasters, it is imperative that international and regional gender equality commitments are applied in these situations to ensure women of all diversities are assured of protection with dignity as well as supported to provide key insights to strengthening risk mitigation and disaster response activities. This, however, does require innovative and sustained support for women's participation in the entire process of protecting sustainable development gains where possible, and preventing the loss of peace dividends whenever a crisis or shock hits.

Women's Weather Watch, an inter-operable communication platform developed initially for early warning communication to rural women, is also supporting the access to information as well as highlighting women's leadership as first responders in emergencies, including humanitarian crises, bridging the gaps in access to and sharing of information to and from communities that are remote and hard to reach by government and external actors.

This 24-month project will directly support local women's organisations as well as contribute to strengthening the technical capacity of local women leaders, to be better informed, able to engage and lead humanitarian response. It builds on the existing Fiji based WWW program and is leveraging the work of the Pacific regional 'Women, Peace and Security, and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection' project.

Here are the women: Hon. Selai Adimaitoga

By Carolyn Kitione

“Look at yourself. Look at your ability and what you can do.”

This was shared by Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, during a visit to femLINKpacific’s office earlier this year.

Although the visit was brief, Hon. Adimaitoga shared her leadership journey with the team of producers and convenors.

“I never dreamt that I would be up there. I was pushed by farmers to stand in 2014 but I said I was not ready,” she says.

Prior to becoming a member of parliament, the Hon. Adimaitoga was a member of the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) in Tavua, and the founder and the President of the Senimokosoi Women’s Group.

As the group gained more members, she noticed that in their communities, women’s concerns were not a priority.

“These women, I’ve noticed, we’ve noticed in general that they sort of just been put aside and most of the good issues that they’ve raised are not being heard,” she said, during a 2017 ‘Here are the Women’ profile.

Speaking of her time with the Senimokosoi Women’s Group, Hon. Adimaitoga said that while it started off as a “good thing” eventually it lost favour with the community.

“It started off as a very good thing then it goes down, down, down then you become unfavoured by most but then don’t look at that. Keep on going,” she shared.

During her recent meet with the team at the Suva Community Media Centre, the honourable Member of Parliament spoke fondly of her time as part of the network, saying it had empowered her.

“We use to share our issues and I believe this is the only space for our voice to be heard, and we have so many recommendations empowering women so I believe through this network, they have given birth to someone who is sitting right up in parliament right now,” Hon. Adimaitoga said, sparking a round of applause from the room.

“Where you are today, you will be empowered. I was empowered through this network.”

As a woman leader, the honourable assistant minister has had her fair share of resistance from the community but she has used it as motivation to balance the scale.

“When I look at all the men sitting around the table and a woman sitting up there, I’ve heard it, ‘oh she’s a woman, we should not be listening to a woman,’” she shared.

“I said, ‘well, it’s time for a change.’ I’m just trying to ask you women not to look at yourself. Look at your ability and what you can do. Don’t [just say], ‘oh, I’m fine here.’ It’s time for a change and we need to go forward.”



Participation is key: Nausori Women Leaders

By Carolyn Kitione

“For me as young woman I feel that our voices are not heard, we are always left out,” says Kajaal Dutt, a member of femLINKpacific’s Nausori network.

“We are always left out, it’s like a culture, it’s like a mindset that we are not allowed to speak in the community meetings or village meetings.”

Members of the Nausori Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) have continued to use the monthly consultations to emphasise the need for decision-making spaces to be inclusive.

“As a young woman my participation is very important so that I can encourage and empower other young girls to be part of decision-making within their community as they are our future leaders,” Dutt said.

“My participation is important - voicing issues from the grassroots level, giving a voice to the voiceless, taking back to my community,” added Silvia Masau of the Young Women Solo Mothers and Widow Group.

“We are told to be quiet and for women, the widows - they are being discriminated. They face a lot of difficulties in accessing their rights,” she said.

Masau believes that diverse women must be empowered to raise their voice in communities.

“Encourage the young women, the children when they want to voice out their issues to let them voice out their issues,” she said.

“Also, don’t discriminate - whether you’re a transgender, whether you have a disability or you’re old, they are human beings, they should be included.”

“I think we should encourage women/girls too attend workshops so that they can be encouraged and find confidence within themselves to raise their voice,” said Leena Reddy of the Korociriciri Mothers’ Club.

“For us women with disabilities we need more support and empower others,” said Naomi Kasainaseva of the Tailevu South Disability Network.

“As a woman living with disability, we need to participate and build partnerships with the mainstream women’s group for capacity building and understanding of various gender frameworks.”

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - which forms the foundations of the monthly consultations – recognises the importance of women’s equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.

One of the key provisions of the UNSCR 1325 is to “increase participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making”.

“Women strongly feel the need to relook at structures that is already in place and the importance of supporting women,” said Frances Tawake, femLINK’s Central Division convenor.

“It is crucial that any decisions made for women are inclusive and effective of all diverse women’s needs as one of the biggest common challenges in rural communities is that men are still the decision-makers when it comes to well-being of the women and girls.”

“As a young woman I feel that a man...cannot make decisions on behalf of us [women] because he doesn’t know what our needs and wants are,” said Dutt.

“I think women should speak up for themselves and make sure that they are part of the decision-making table.”

Here are the Women: Recognising Women Leaders

By Carolyn Kitione

"Women have voice and power to be agents of change," says Litia Masei of the Vitogo Paipai Women's Club.

Masei is a member of the Lautoka Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) and a regular to femLINKpacific's district/divisional and national consultations. When it comes to political security, Masei believes women's leadership must be recognised at all levels.

"It is a powerful role where we women have to be heard and recognised not only in our communities but to the national levels," she emphasised.

Leadership to Masei means doing what you can to help those in your community.

"Being a leader the most important thing is knowing your organisation and fighting for your members...of what the needs that they have," she explained.

"Our women live in rural areas where they need shelters and this is one of the security priorities...what we are doing we are trying to liaise with Habitat for Humanity and other non-government organisations for them to help, even the government, to help along, just to help them."

For young women in the Nadi/Lautoka network, political security means being part of decision-making.

"It mostly means a woman's ability to participate in a decision-making process and having leadership roles," said Karishma Naicker of the Lomolomo Sanatan Nahri Sabha Youth Club.

"Political security it means to me when we are secured when we are part of decision-making in the community or any organisation we are part of," shared Mereoni Narisia of the Evangelical Proton Ministry.

Political security is also about ensuring that women of all diversity are represented at the decision-making table.

"Political security for me means woman being represented in the decision-making processes, the participation and involvement of young women in vulnerable groups especially the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and [person with disability] in the country's decision-making processes and their voices to be heard," added Shakuntla Permal, an advisory councillor in Lautoka.

Permal also says that in order for women's voices to be heard, communal support for women leaders is important.

"There are a lot of issues that women are facing and if they don't have the support, they don't have a place in the community that they can talk about such things but if a woman is there, then women's issues are taken across."

This starts by providing women and girls with access to opportunity and addressing the barriers that they face.

"Women should be empowered, they should be trained and they should be given the opportunity, equal opportunity as men," Permal stated.

"In the final decision-making, women should be involved so that they can raise the women's issues or the women's problems that they face. Women are managers in the homes so why can't they be managers in the community or in the nation?"



Access to information amplifies women's leadership

By Carolyn Kitione

"When we receive the information from the Women's Weather Watch as women leaders, I would receive that information and I'll try to contact my members, the members with disability living in areas that's going to be affected so that's how they get the information," shared Unaisi Bakewa of the Tavua Disable People's Association.

During district convenings in April, the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) discussed access to information during times of disasters.

"When the cyclone is coming we have to inform them really they have to be prepared," Bakewa added.

Women leaders in Rakiraki have highlighted the role community media plays when it comes to making information accessible:

"[It is] helping people at all levels to communicate and empowers them to recognise important issues and find common grounds for action and builds a sense of identity and participation in order to implement their decisions," said Suliana Nateru of the Yaladro Youth Group.

"It has raised an opportunity for women not only women but youth as well of different background to get together to share and voice out their issues in their community."

Bakewa added, "I think community media is really important, really playing a very important role because it's not only listening and sharing but it's really encouraged us

as women leaders and it's really empowered us."

Nateru said one of the barriers to access to information was the fact that women are often left out of meeting spaces:

"Firstly, women are always left out of meetings, for example, farmers' meeting in Qalela. Secondly, women are not informed by government departments of workshops, awareness programmes and agriculture assistance application.

"Information is really not reaching out to the community," said femLINKpacific's Ba, Rakiraki and Tavua convenor, Fane Boseiwaqa.

"The women continue to share the importance of accessing information and also in terms of how information and communication has really supported their work as rural women leaders."

Boseiwaqa also added, "They're also giving us their recommendation in terms of media and ICT and how it relates to their empowerment, human security priorities and gender equality, the equal representation of men and women in accessing information and the importance of women's participation in decision-making levels."

Through the National Gender Policy (NGP), the Fijian Government is committed to "Provide increased innovative opportunities for women and men engaged in unwaged housework to access information communications technology, lifelong learning, and opportunities for part-time, short and long-term income earning possibilities. Such opportunities will include contemporary employment strategies that allow persons to work from home, or take extended work leave to care for young children and the elderly, and return to the job market without penalty and loss of opportunities."

The NGP also calls for the enhancement of women's participation in leadership across all sectors.

Bua women leaders speak on how best to address social justice issues and the fight to end violence against women and girls

By Kelerayani Gavid

In 1995 Fiji ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the state has adopted several progressive laws in relation to gender equality and women's rights, as well as the National Gender Policy in 2014. Yet, violence against women is widespread exacerbated by social marginalization, cultural discrimination, and economic deprivation, the lack of political voice and information gaps.

As part of its Divisional convening in February, the

femLINKpacific Labasa Community Media Centre (CMC) teamspoke to Unaisi Musudroka Tabua from the Raralevu Youth group, Semaema Waqa from the Namulomulo Youth group and Unaisi Maria (Sela) from the Vuya women's club who is the secretary for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama in the province of Bua. Focused group interviews with a core group of thirty (30) diverse women from 10 districts in Fiji to verify root causes and intervention solutions documented through femLINKpacific's Women, Human Security First report series. The larger convening also had conversations with 14 rural women leaders from Vuya women's club, Nabukebuke women's club, Veniyanuynu women's club, Wainimala women's club, Soqosoqo Vakamarama Bua, Namulomulo Youth Club, Catholic women's league last not the least the Raralevu Youth and they come from the villages here in Bua, the Bua village, Makolei village, Nabouwalu village, Namulomulo settlement and Raralevu settlement.

When asked what safety meant to her as a young woman who is also a mother and a daughter in law, Unaisi Musudroka Tabua from the Raralevu Youth group shared that in terms of the provision of services such as street lights and efficient transport it is a big issue. She said "...Safety to me means feeling secure in my environment...it is not all safe in parts of the community I live in because when walking down the street, mostly at night here in Nabouwalu, the electricity

usually turns off at 11pm and comes on again at 5am so when we walk most nights the lights are off and that is not safe especially when we walk a distance from there to the medical facilities and it's quite a distance and I would say it's not safe especially from 11pm until 5am when walking in the street, walking up that hill, taking up your medical mattress up to the medical facilities up there at the medical centre. You have to walk up that distance with no electricity, and that is definitely not safe. And the transportation here in Bua is a big problem because the buses come hourly so we have to go by that 5am bus right from Wainunu right up to Labasa with only one bus picking up passengers and imagine if you are going for an interview or if you are going for a medical reason and that is the only day that you have to attend that interview or you have to go in for checkup in Labasa for that x-ray. And with that being the only transportation so if the bus is full from Wainunu when it reaches up to Nabouwalu we won't be picked up in that transportation..."

Unaisi Maria (Sela) from the Vuya women's club who is the secretary for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama in the province of Bua shared that "...personal security to me is very important in my role as a woman, I know my role in teaching my children because I am the first teacher before they go to school. I share with them on how to respect each other and to behave. I also agree on the issue about street lights as my two friends have



said already I have to stress that too because I live in a settlement that's beside the roads near the sea, it's very dangerous because by 11 O'clock when the lights turn off it makes it easier for robberies and theft...the last two weeks or three weeks now our key has been missing from when we went to Labasa last week...we usually hide it but when we returned it was missing and then later our entire lock was changed...that's why we want the street lights to stay on until day light..."

The women leaders are reflecting on real issues that affect their safety and security particularly in semi urban to rural zones like in the communities they live in, and living in the Bua province certainly presents its set of challenges as shared.

When asked about what they understood to be the root causes of gender based violence in their communities, Semaema Waqa from the Namulomulo Youth group said "...the root causes that contribute to the factors of gender based violence is the use of substance abuse, peer pressure and unemployment such especially for young men and young women graduates and then poverty which often increases the pressure on parents and guardians to provide for their families against hard cases which result in frustration, violence and abuse..." This is the thread that runs through many of the narratives from our rural women leaders and is an indication of the social justice issues that permeate our social fabric in the communities.

Sela in addition also shared that "...one is the lack of awareness, the family, the community and the school. There should be a lot of awareness done for everybody and the second one is our culture. In the iTaukei culture, women are usually expected to be quiet and our personal businesses are not talked about or shared. Like in the villages, women will not share their personal problems and instead keep it hidden so especially if it involves another family or community member. Then there is religion, which teaches that we should be respectful and understanding of one another and to work as a community united and often we get too involved and don't consider the impacts for example leaving our children at home to go to a church meeting without thinking about the safety and security aspect of it..." According to a Fiji NGO CEDAW report (2017) 72% of women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The violence also extends to non-partner physical violence and sexual violence, which 31% of women and girls have experienced in their lifetime. The report highlights that 47% of women and girls are not reporting to formal agencies or authorities because they lack in the justice system.

The women leaders agreed that addressing gender based violence in their communities should involve education on substances and alcohol abuse particularly for youths and young adults, and that the government

needs to exercise stronger law enforcement against crimes in communities. For Bua, the ladies shared that there was only one police post in Lekutu and one police station in Nabouwalu to cater for the whole of Bua. The ladies also addressed the need for government to improve access to services and resources including more street lights that stayed on longer, more legal services, better roads and transport and also stronger enforcement of laws that addressed violent crimes and criminal activities.

For the case of traditional versus formal methods of reconciliation in cases of gender based violence, the women leaders agreed that they preferred legal and formal means of justice and that the traditional methods are not enough. Again the issue of access to services and resources were raised by Waqa who said that for police services in a case of rape "...Yes in case you call them but they will be delayed due to transportation. Most of the time the Legal Aid officer is not around and for Fiji Women's Crisis Centre only the hotline is available but the real service needed is not provided..."

These are the voices of our women leaders and with our community radio media, the women are speaking out against violence against women and girls. They demand change that will ensure safety and security and recognition of their roles in their communities!

Here are the Women: Nirmala Sharma

“Women have so many talents,” said Nirmala Sharma of the Vunucuicui Multiracial Women’s Group.

Sharma was awarded with a ‘Women Development Award’ from the Labasa Youth Council earlier this year for her work as an advisor to the youth council.

A member of the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN), Sharma shared the award was not something she expected.

“First of all, I was not aware that I would be receiving this award but I was told by a district youth council coordinator that, ‘Nirmala you will have one pass for you and you will be attending this award night,’” she recounted.

“All my friends were also there and they were saying, ‘Nirmala you are always hardworking, you [are always out of your house] and socialising and you helping and supporting others and today you are achieving what you do, the hard work is key to success for you and today you are getting it.”

A regular attendee to youth council meetings, Sharma has used her involvement to highlight the issues rural women leaders face in their community.

“Climate change really affects the women at the moment. In communities most of them are farmers so they hardly get money so they have to wait for their goods to get ready and then only they can produce.”

But she’s also taken the opportunity to encourage members of the council to be more entrepreneurial.

“So I have to tell my Youth Council members that it’s another good opportunity people can get money like they can sell their vegetables on the roadside and those people who are crossing [Labasa Bridge] because it will be a really busy road and people need vegetables every day so they can just buy it.”

For the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network, Sharma’s award is proof of

what women are already doing in their community. But it’s also a commitment towards bettering intergenerational dialogue in communities.

“Women have so many talents in them so bring up your talent. Be supportive and be part of with your youth [clubs]. Help and support them and motivate them to go ahead,” Sharma said.

According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports Facebook page, the Youth Minister Parveen Bala told the youth council that the government has recognised their efforts and contributions to the community.



Savusavu women leaders address gender based violence: There is no excuse for gender based violence and education is key!

By Kelerayani Gavid

“...Safety means to me as a young woman, that for incidences like the evacuation centre, it’s was not secure and there is only one place provided is the Naweni District School. During disaster Dromuninuku and Naweni village come up to the school during the disaster and there’s a large population so it’s a small area of the school and can’t cater (for) the whole village so therefore some people in the village (will) stay back in their own home because there’s no space. And for us women it’s not secure because we also stay with different people like men and boys...” This was expressed by Meresiana Dimaiqalau the president of the Dromuninuku women’s club when asked about what her concerns on safety was as a young woman during the Divisional convening that was held in Savusavu by femLINKpacific’s Labasa Community Media Centre (CMC) staff. Safety and security in the context of violence against women and girls is a crucial area in both rural and urban areas. Staff also spoke to Varanisese Volau Vakamelei the president of the Wainidruki women’s club, Maraia Silani Naiqama from the Naweni women’s group and Unaisi Nolau from the Dromuninuku Youth Club during the UNVAW Divisional consultation in Savusavu. Focused group interviews with a core group of thirty (30) diverse women from 10 districts in Fiji to verify root

causes and intervention solutions documented through femLINKpacific’s Women, Human Security First report series.

Fiji ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995, and the state has adopted several progressive laws in relation to gender equality and women’s rights, as well as the National Gender Policy in 2014. Yet, violence against women is widespread exacerbated by social marginalisation, cultural discrimination, and economic deprivation, the lack of political voice and information gaps.

According to the Fiji NGO CEDAW report (2017) 72% of women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The violence also extends to non –partner physical violence and sexual violence, which 31 % of women and girls have experienced in their lifetime. The report highlights that 47% of women and girls are not reporting to formal agencies or authorities because they lack in the justice system.

For Varanisese Volau Vakamelei the president of the Wainidruki women’s club, she shared “...safety means protection...when we are protected (in an enabling environment) we confidently feel we have the freedom to speak, we have (the) freedom to live and work, that our children (are equally) safe at home, that we have freedom to walk around in the village and in the community...without any barriers, and with no fear in the community...” It’s evident from this discussion that women and girls, vulnerable members including persons with disabilities and minorities encounter these difficulties and these issues need to be highlighted and given visibility as priority areas of improvement. The women leaders were also asked about their thoughts on what the root causes of gender based violence was and how they could address these issues. Unaisi Nolau from the Dromuninuku Youth Club shared “...the underlying causes are unemployment and the influence of alcohol and drugs sometimes relationship between husband and wife (where) there’s no good relationship and money (and the) lack of

(which then becomes an) economic problem...” Maraia Silani Naiqama from the Naweni women’s group also mentioned “... (the) underlying factors causes of gender based violence for one is (the) lack of finance. Women have been abused (and forced to) be the leading bread- winner of the family. Also it’s the lack of dialogue to solve the family and the village problems and the lack of information and knowledge...Social problems, influence of liquor, laziness these are some of the causes of that contribute to that...Crimes Stoppers (a law enforcement Police TV show on latest statistics) has shared on how we have to (engage) with many groups of people including committees to address these...we have the Turaga-ni-koro, Turaga-ni-yavusa to work with men to combat the problem. Church leaders, women groups, different organisations, youth organisations... We need everybody in the village to work together and be informed of the right information about responsibilities we have...”

Having addressed the issues raised by the women leaders on the root causes of gender based violence, it was important that they knew what solutions or remedies where available to them in terms of accessing resources and services. When asked if she was able to access certain services, Vakamelei shared “...to access to law, yes, I can say yes! But there’s one thing that stops us from accessing (the) police post, the places where Legal Aid is, and that is the roads...the transport which covers the cost and the distance being barriers of us not reaching the offices and locations...” This is not a new issue for the women leaders given the distance that their communities are with regards to urban areas for example between the 4 women who were interviewed the distance the range fell between 12 – 25 km from the town center. Imagine travelling distances as such being further exacerbated by unsafe and dirt roads and costing quite a few dollars for fare. Nolau agreed that although she knew where to go “...yes we know where the police are and the women crisis when something happens to us but we need more information so we have access to them when we come up with the problems...” This is an indication of the underlying dynamics that relate

to women's access to efficient services and correct information particularly given the means of accessing this information is challenging for many women. Lastly the women leaders were asked to share their perspective on formal and traditional means of justice and reconciliation including for example the 'bulubulu' ceremony in iTaukei culture that simply involved yaqona and other forms of traditional wealth but which did not really address the victims and survivors needs. The women agreed that because of the empowerment through the learning from the convening spaces, they understood how the systems worked but were also aware of when that traditional system simply did not

give justice to the victim or survivor and therefore legal and formal remedy could address it. Vakamalei said "... first you report the matter to the Turaga-ni-koro and then it's taken to the village meeting and (often) this is where fear arises and women are ashamed to come up with the issues...so at this point we speak up and speak loud and get the information right across to every woman and girl..."
Naiqama said "...well I believe that we work both ways and it depends on the nature of the situation. If there is violence the law has to step in...I think when everything is addressed right we have the confidence to report the matter because when he (perpetrator) is found, he was

informed and there is no excuse to that...we hate the action that he has taken and that terrible...action has to be addressed by the law..." The ripple effect on the victims of violence has multi-dimensional effects and this needs to be stressed when discussing penalties for the crimes of gender based violence.
femLINKpacific aims that by 2021, there will be enhanced attention to the prevalence and root causes of GBV experienced by diverse women and girls in 10 centres in Fiji through the innovative application of media technology to amplify prevention measures, including during disasters.

Labasa's Rural Women Leaders Addressing Violence against women and girls in their Communities: Our women leaders are demanding more action!

By Kelerayani Gavidi

Fiji ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and since then the state has adapted several progressive laws in regards to the gender equality and women's rights as well as the launching of its National Gender Policy (NGP) in the 2014. However, violence against women and girls is still experienced by 2 in 3 women and is further exacerbated by discriminatory social norms that govern the way men and women are treated and expected to act, behave and/or conduct themselves.

Against the backdrop of the main town Labasa in the second largest island in the Fiji group, the Labasa Community Media Centre (CMC) team sat down to speak with women leaders on addressing gender based violence against women and girls in their various communities and how these issues affect their lives.

The team conducted interviews with Prem Lata Bhan the secretary of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandel, Selai Vuibucaisau from the Adi Qacoya Women's Group, Mereia Tabuvale from Bulileka Young Mother's Club and Petero Cagilaba (aka Petra) from House of Colors. The main focus of the interview was on the root causes of gender based violence and recommendations on how to reduce it, the challenges of accessing the justice system and the sharing of information on how to improve it. The larger group included 23 rural women leaders, all the way from the Naleba Multiracial Women's Group, Adi Qacoya Women's Group, Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandel Women's Group, Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum, Bulileka Women's Group, House of Colors, Nakama Hotspring Women's Club.

The women leaders shared on how the social constructs in their communities influence the roles that women and men are expected to play and how this impacts their representation and access to platforms of decision making. When it comes to safety and security and the role women played in the community, Mereia Tabuvale from Bulileka Young Mother's Club said "...We must feel safe at home, in the community and in church...in decision making spaces (where) women's voices are represented (especially) in disaster times (as most) women will be the first responders..." Safety and security as a key pillar under UNSCR1325 work acknowledges the challenges women and girls encounter in both rural and urban centers.

According to recent statistics shared by UN Women, about 39% of women in Fiji aged 15 years and over are categorized as economically active. One third of those involved in informal sector economic activities are women, and women form 30% of the non-agricultural workforce. Prem Lata Bhan, Secretary of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandel shared similarly and spoke of how "...the main root cause of the gender based violence in the community (is with the) first one (being) misunderstanding. Women's voices are kept back (despite the) truth they share. (There is a) lack of dialogue. Women are (often) the first responders in the house and they are first one to put food on the table and sometimes due to high cost of food items, women are unable to provide the recommended three meals because there is nothing in the house as there is no money..." This is particularly true for women who find themselves farming, fishing, selling items and or finding means of livelihood to provide for their families should their

husbands or partners be unemployed.

As experienced, power dynamics are an unavoidable component of addressing women's representation and leadership particularly in local communities where leadership and decision making is predominantly male led and vulnerable groups like women, girls, young women, persons with disabilities and minority members have little to no voice. Bhan continued on how she felt "...it (trickles down to the) lack of money, (the) lack of jobs and (when) cultural and religious social norms are introduced into that space our elders (or the older persons) will disallow us from speaking no matter how important our input is..."

Petero Cagilaba (aka Petra) from House of Colors as a minority representative also agreed "...I would like to add on to what (was) elaborated on, and what I think are the underline factors for gender based violence in the LGBTIQ community is usually through how people use biblical views to discriminate us, how they use certain cultural or religious beliefs to demoralize us and what we stand for. Also, unemployment for us LGBTIQ has hard implications with some of our group members mentioning how they felt accepted into the family only because they brought money into the table; put bread and food into the table yet when they were unemployed they felt that they were just barely tolerated and no longer accepted into the family..." Petra continued "... Substance abuse can also impact on the incidences of gender based violence and for sexworkers, one of the major underlying factor in the violence they experience is how people resort to verbal and physical violence against them causing pain and injury..." In Fiji, the rising cases of illegal drug use and distribution have spilled over into the communities with young people and children affected which then cause ripple violence effects.

Regional cases of violence against women and girls and vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities and minority groups on average exceed the global prevalence rates. In Fiji, 66% of women have experienced physical abuse; 26% have been beaten while pregnant; 48% of married women have been forced into sex by their husbands; and 13% of women have been otherwise raped. Around 30% of female rape victims were between the ages of 11 and 15, with children who had been sent from outer islands to stay with extended families in urban areas identified as particularly vulnerable.

Platforms and safe spaces like the convening that femLINKpacific creates are simple yet powerful when the women leaders use it to amplify their stories and narratives and Bhan touched on "...how rural women leaders are coming for the monthly consultations and they are getting educated day by day..." She felt strongly that it was their duty as women leaders to educate themselves, their families and their communities particularly service providers like the police and law enforcement personnel who she felt did not always know protocols when it comes to women and girls.

When asked about how this can be achieved, Tabuvale's recommendation was that more awareness must be done in the community especially for men and boys as they need to understand the root causes of violence against women and children, its impacts and how best everyone can work together to achieve zero violence. The women leaders shared on how information sharing with regards to accessing justice services and resources and how many women encountered barriers through their own family and community members were normal occurrences for many women and girls in their communities.

Selai Vuibucaisau from the Adi Qacoya Women's Group echoed women's key role as first responders in any regard, she said "...I am fighting for that (recognition) in my own village because when any issues occur, I am the first lady down yet most of the time they don't give me the space to speak and be heard..." This is often the case across many of the districts and as experienced by the women and girls living in these communities. One important topic for the convening was hearing from the women leaders on the traditional and formal means of reconciliation particularly in cases of gender based violence.



Pacific Feminist Charter

The second Pacific Feminist Forum took place from 20 – 22 May 2019 in Pacific Harbour, Fiji. The forum brought together over 150 feminists from the Pacific region. Our diversities include; women, girls, lesbians, bisexual, trans diverse people, gender non-conforming identities, ethnically diverse women and girls, indigenous women, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and aids, widows, women living in rural and remote areas, young women, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles, women from faith based communities, women in creative industries and women in the informal sector and others¹. Part of this call to action is ensuring that process and structures of all future Pacific Feminist Forums continue to work on the representation of this diversity. The Pacific Feminist Charter was created at the first forum in 2016 as a living document, intended to guide our analysis and practice. This Action Plan reflects our commitment to the Charter principles, and sets a collective pathway to build solidarity, strengthen our resistance and join our feminist struggles in revolution.

As Feminists from Oceania we:

Solidarity

1. Insist and ensure that our feminist movement is reflective of our intersectional and diverse identities and interlinked realities.
2. Build material and structural change for Pacific women and girls and people of all diversities in all areas of life and through their life course.
3. Enhance support for isolated feminists, women and girls including women's human rights defenders and those in conflict-affected areas through ecosystems of support across the Pacific, particularly those in Bougainville, and West Papua. We support and fight for an independent state of West Papua. We urge all nation states to recognise and provide occupied and colonised territories their status as independent nation states.
4. Accompany New Caledonia in the decolonisation process, ensuring the participation of women and the recognition, implementation and advancement of women's human rights.

5. Co-create and build transparent, accountable and new forms of partnerships, coalitions and alliances between Governments, NGOs, community organisations, faith-based groups and others.

6. Create regional platforms for shared action, alliance building, and international solidarity on priority issues of diverse Pacific women.

7. Communicate through appropriate and accessible platforms, the ideas, strategies and opportunities identified at this forum.

Resistance

1. Action to reclaim the nation state in order to secure women's human rights, ecologically sound and pro-poor development, including social protection, public services and infrastructure for all.

2. Re-emphasising the centrality of intergenerational and intersectional approaches to feminism. As Pacific feminists, we agree that our feminism is intergenerational and intersectional or it is not useful.

3. Commit to a joint call for LGBTIQI human rights including actions to decriminalise homosexuality in all Pacific Small Island States, call for recognition of third gender identities, and for a full review of all legislation, policies and procedures toward compliance with universal human rights.

4. Strengthen, recognise, accompany and promote the leadership of women with disabilities and commit to co-resource sharing so to enable participation in all decision-making roles.

5. Reaffirm the commitment of Pacific Small Island States to the Pattaya Declaration on decriminalisation of sex work.

6. Commit to creating, enabling and strengthening spaces to collate, document and amplify local feminist movement stories, issues and strategies as tools of resistance.

7. Ensure that corporations and governments are transparent and accountable in all activities in the Pacific region, including a call for a UN binding treaty on corporations and human rights.

8. Support dialogue and actions of grassroots feminist work in order to challenge patriarchy in all its forms.



¹ From here on when we mention 'women and girls' we refer to specific identities and needs of lesbians, bisexual, trans people, intersex people, fa'afafine, leiti, and other non-heteronormative Pacific identities, Francophone women, diaspora women, indigenous women, women living in occupied and colonised territories, migrant women and girls, women with disabilities, and women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, sex workers, living with HIV aids, women living in rural and remote places, young women, the girl child, single mothers, women with albinism, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, and creative industries.



Revolution

1. Support strategies for feminist knowledge sharing, and education for liberation, including through formal and informal learning and resources for peer support throughout the region.
2. Declare a global and local economic, ecological and climate emergency. We commit to an urgent and just shift from fossil fuels to safe, renewable energy, recognition of loss and damage experienced by climate frontline communities, and for the polluters to take main responsibility, according to common but differentiated historical responsibility for imperial, colonial and other inequalities.
3. Enhance feminist collaboration to learn together and reshape the humanitarian agenda by imbedding women's rights and leadership in humanitarian coordination efforts across the cluster system.
4. Amplify the call for an increase in dedicated, flexible funding to sustain the transformative work of diverse Pacific women. We call for the establishment of an independent Pacific Feminist Fund, and demand that the Green Climate Fund and Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and other climate finance initiatives immediately resource climate emergency work led by Pacific feminist and women led organisers and local front line communities.
5. Break all chains of inhumane treatment of women, girls and people of all diversities, and insist that the State, CROP, UN agencies, civil society and communities adopt practices and use maximum available resources to end all forms of sexual and gender based violence and discrimination.
6. Ensure that Pacific Feminist Forum informed positions and commitments, including the Charter and Action Plan, are carried into all Pacific inter-governmental decision-making spaces, including the 14th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and the Pacific Leaders Forum, among others.
7. Demand universal health services including sexual and reproductive health and rights, that is free from stigma, discrimination, coercion, violence, with full respect for bodily autonomy, privacy, confidentiality and full and informed consent.



#IDAHOBIT 2019: Justice and Protection for All!

By Carolyn Kitione

“Hey hey, ho ho,
homophobia has to go!!”

The chants of activists and allies during the first Fijian Pride parade attracted crowds of people in downtown Suva, as close to a 100 people marched through the city commemorating the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) on May 17.

“Today is important - it’s to commemorate the stigma and discrimination of LGBTIQ community all over the world and this is part of our awareness and this is some of the things that we do back in our community,” said Isimeli Naitawa, Project Coordinator of Survival Advocacy Network (SAN) Fiji.

Launched in 2004, IDAHOTB became the single most recognised LGBT event focused on educating the public about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights as well as increasing advocacy work for sensible public policy.

The main purpose of IDAHOTB is to raise awareness on the violence and repression faced by those who didn’t conform to gender and sexual norms.

“We are all looking for justice and protection for all, for myself and my community. All we need is acceptance,” said Sophie of the Strumpet Alliance Network.

May 17 was chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization’s decision to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders back in 1990.

The march was organised by the Fiji Rainbow Coalition, and is the first of its kind in Fiji and the Pacific.

“For me, for this march is very important because as a lesbian woman, we need to be safe in public areas, even in our family, even in a faith-based area - we need them to respect us and I think that it’s time for us, like we’ve had enough and we need people and our family to respect us,” shared Elenoa Qica of DIVA for Equality.

“As an ally it’s important that we come out and support because human rights is accorded to every human being and we need to respect that for everybody and not just people that subscribe to a certain form of sexuality or sexual orientation or gender identity,” added ally, Tura Lewai.



Here are the Women: Amasai Jeke

by Carolyn Kitione for Oceania Pride

“We usually talk about the beauty of the work but we never talk about the struggles and the hardship,” says Amasai Jeke, a trans-feminist activist.

Amasai and I are sat across from each other and the conversation we have is marked by laughter and tears. Growing up, Amasai struggled to put a label to who she was – a journey made difficult growing up “in a community full of toxic masculinity”.

“Boys had to be boys and girls had to be girls but I felt so different and so I said, ‘oh maybe I’m gay’ but then I was more feminine than other gay boys,” she says.

As a young trans woman, her idol was Sulique Waqa – a prominent face in the activist sphere.

“I’ve always loved the way she ... she kind of portrays herself in social media and I was so intrigued by that and every time I would see her I’d say, ‘oh my gosh I love the work that you do, I always want to be part of it.”

With Sulique as a role model, Amasai began to look for entryways into the trans-feminist movement.

“I said, ‘I think I should join the Adi Senikau pageant’ and that’s how I started and then after the Adi Senikau pageant, I was invited to go out into the community and to be part of their work and my first ever workshop was on a mental health,” Amasai says.

It was at this workshop that Amasai met other young activists who helped shape who she would eventually become.

“Part of my activism is always thanking those that have done so much and have left but also every young person who’s here and who’s continuing to ... continuing to carry out the work,” she explains.

“It’s a beautiful thing but it’s also an ugly thing but we usually talk about the beauty of the work but we never talk about the struggles and the hardship it took us or took people before me, you know, to even move where it is today.”

In movements that can be marred by gatekeeping, it sometimes takes skilful navigating and diplomacy to move things along.

“Most of the time for me I would feel that all the activists would take up a lot of space and then sometimes we had to fight our way in to be in spaces,” Amasai said.

“One thing I’ve really learned is to deconstruct things but deconstruct it in a way where we can turn it into a beautiful thing and you know, young LGBTQI people are now getting more involved within the movement.”

She acknowledges that even within feminist movements, ‘solidarity’ is a conversation that they need to have.

“I’ll say I’m privileged to have been part of the feminist movement where really solidarity becomes an unpacking conversation. Solidarity does not only mean that ‘okay I’ll come to your side event and speak’ or ‘I’ll come for this interview’ but solidarity means a lot of things.”

Intersectionality also needs to be at the forefront of these conversations.

“We need to put intersectionality in every conversation so that we ensure that when we are talking about a particular certain group of people or person or an issue, we’re not leaving out critical things,” she emphasised.

Amasai says this is how we can sustain movements – making way for younger activists and staying open to new ideas.

“We’ve seen young LGBTQI people that are coming up and taking ownership of spaces that we are co-creating; we are co-organising and we’re building a different dimension of activism and feminism.”

“For me, I’ve really learnt to be very unapologetic,” she says. “For every young person to be unapologetically fierce in their own beautiful way.”



Pacific Feminists Commit to Action Plan for Change

22/05/19

Pacific feminists celebrated and reaffirmed their commitment towards sustaining solidarity, strengthening resistance and revolution for gender equality, human rights and justice at the closing of the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF).

Over 150 women human rights defenders and grassroots activists from across the region convened for the 2nd PFF, which was held, from May 20-22 at the Pearl Resort in Pacific Harbour.

The three-day forum was organised by the PFF working group that consists of femLINKPacific, Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji, Tongan Leitis Association and Rise UP (PNG). The 2nd PFF is supported by the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition, Fiji Women's Fund, Mama Cash and the UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office.

"It was an empowering and inspiring 3 days at the 2nd PFF to share our insights, challenges, emotions and stories from Fiji and the Pacific and documenting these to amplify and ensure visibility for all the work we are doing, as well as, having a collective voice to push for positive social change," said femLINKPacific Executive Director Susan Grey.

The inaugural PFF in 2016 produced the Pacific Feminist Charter for Change, which sets out the collective principles that are key to the work of Pacific Feminists. At the culmination of the 2nd PFF, the participants rallied to map out an action plan and recommit to the Pacific Feminist Charter for Change.

"The call to action is based on the Pacific Feminist Forum Charter. This is an important follow-up step to turn a groundbreaking feminist document into a practical plan that can be carried out by diverse feminists in the 2nd PFF. It's been a creative, exciting, substantive space to move forward, the feminist movement in the Pacific," said Noelene Nabulivou of DIVA for Equality Fiji.

"The 2nd PFF celebrated the diversity of the Pacific feminist movement and provided an important space to reflect on the achievements, progress and challenges in our work. It has been 3 years since the Pacific Feminist Charter for Change came into being and the commitment towards these principles remain strong," said FWRM Executive Director Nalini Singh. The 2nd PFF included participants from over 14 countries across the region including Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, West Papua, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Samoa, New Zealand and Australia.

"It has been another momentous achievement for Pacific women human rights defenders' to come together and create a space that is safe and enriching for strengthening our movement. The PFF will continue to be a platform for fostering diversity, connection and intergenerational leadership within Pacific feminist movements at the national and regional level and we look forward to another amazing convening in 2021," said Ms. Singh.

Women's Weather Watch: Engaging with the Fiji Meteorological Services

By Carolyn Kitione
April 10, 2019

Women's Weather Watch is femLINKPacific's interoperable communication platform documenting the lived experiences of women in disaster affected communities and supporting their leadership, ensuring more gender-inclusive preparedness and humanitarian response during times of disasters.

Part of Women's Weather Watch is to engage with weather and climate agencies on the services they provide and how we can strengthen partnership.

In April, the Fiji Meteorological Services was invited to be part of femLINKPacific's second quarterly programme planning meeting. The meeting was an opportunity for the programmes team to better understand the work of the Fiji Met Services.

Acting Senior Scientific Officer in the Climate Division, Arieta Baleisolomone, said one of the challenges was communicating weather and climate information in a way that communities can understand.

"That is one of the most common feedbacks that we get from members of the community. What most of them have suggested is, when we issue our outlook or the different brochures or the information, that we provide relevant examples. For example, Category 1 cyclone [you] can have your house or just banana plants blown down," she explained.

"At the same time, what we are looking at is translation of some of our information into the vernacular challenges and sending it out."

Baleisolomone also explained to the team the products available on the Fiji Met Website [link: <http://www.met.gov.fj/>].

"We have the climate summary that goes out on a monthly basis that talks about the weather for the previous month."

The latest Climate Summary was released on August 7 and according to the summary, "A weak El Niño event continued to persist in the tropical Pacific during July."

"In Fiji when we talk about El Niño, more than 75% of its historical event has been associated with dry conditions," she added.

Executive Director of femLINKPacific, Susan Grey said the Fiji Meteorological Service is an integral partner in strengthening the Women's Weather Watch (WWW) communication platform.

Fiji Met also functions as the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC) for tropical cyclones, under the World Weather Watch Programme, of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

According to the Fiji Met's April climate summary, 'A weak El Niño was established in the tropical Pacific during March 2019.'

The summary goes on to say that, "The weather in July was mostly influenced by a series of troughs of low pressure systems together with the moist easterlies and the cool southeast trades."

The climate summary for August will be release in September.

All climate products can be found on the Fiji Met website, link: <http://www.met.gov.fj/>

World Radio Day 2019 - "Dialogue, Tolerance and Peace"

13 January 2019

"Radio will remain necessary and relevant for as long as there are stories to be told, communities to be helped and changes to be made"

This was shared by Carolyn Kitone, femLINKpacific's Programme Associate: Media, based at the Suva Community Centre.

Kitone joined femLINKpacific as a volunteer producer broadcaster with FEMTALK 89FM in the capital city in 2016. Since then, she has been actively involved in broadcasting the security priorities of women from the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN).

As we commemorate World Radio Day which is celebrated annually on February 13, this is an opportune time to recognise the role that radio plays in informing and communicating information to communities particularly those in the rural and remote areas of the country.

The theme for this year is "Dialogue, Tolerance and Peace" in recognising the role of the broadcasters in bringing content on gender equality, violence against women, and spotlight on the priorities and recommendations from the marginalised and vulnerable groups in the community.

femLINKpacific meets an estimate of 200 women leaders in 10 centres across the country every month, and while providing a safe space for women to have dialogue on the implementation of the seven security pillars of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, radio programmes are produced to highlight the issues and recommendations of rural women leaders which is then broadcast on FEMTALK 89FM in Suva and Labasa.

Through the community radio, the stories are then channelled through various media initiatives as well as through Women, Peace and Human Security Reports that are produced.

femLINKpacific continues to provide capacity and resources for diverse young women to have access to information communication technology and media in empowering young women in the airwaves as well as communicating content on women, peace and security from across the country.

According to the World Radio Statement from UNESCO, "This day marks a time where people around the world celebrate radio and how it shapes our lives. Radio informs, transforms and unites us. It brings together people and communities from all backgrounds to foster positive dialogue for change. More specifically, radio is the perfect medium to counter the appeals for violence and the spread of conflict, especially in regions potentially more exposed to such realities."



International Youth Day – Youths Leading Change in Communities

By Carolyn Kitone

"You are never too young to change the world," says Sera Vulatolu, a broadcaster for FemTALK89FM.

According to the UN website, "12 August was first designated International Youth Day by the UN General Assembly in 1999, and serves as an annual celebration of the role of young women and men as essential partners in change, and an opportunity to raise awareness of challenges and problems facing the world's youth."

Today, young people are leading the movements – from climate change to peace building.

"Young people play an important role in our societies since we're the leaders of tomorrow. We're also agents of change in encouraging dialogue and peace building within young people especially in conflict related issues," says Maxine Tuwila, President of Youth Champs for Mental Health.

"When we talk about young people being our leaders of tomorrow, it is not an assurance to be taken lightly. How our young people engage, contribute and commit to the development of our nation today through dialogue and action, will inform how peace, equality and freedom will be practiced in the future," says Eleni Nabalarua, femLINKpacific's Operations Manager.

"Young people deserve more than just a 'token' place at any space! And it's high time current leaders re-look at the ways they address youth issues and its multi-layered impacts - one shoe CANNOT fit all!" says Kelerayani Gavid, femLINK's Programmes Manager.

"There are deeper roots to what our young people encounter on an everyday basis and everyone needs to understand that they have a pivotal role to play and a stake in youth empowerment and leadership."

In order to sustain movements, we need to continue to amplify and support the leadership of young people.

"We all have different ideas of what peace looks like and when we pool these ideas - great changes occur. Changes that doesn't only benefit a single community but has a ripple effect across humanity," adds Lionel Rogers, a regional suicide prevention trainer and counsellor.

This means opening the lines of communication and actively listening to the demands of young people:

"Talanoa (dialogue) is the beating heart in peace building. It is through talanoa that we are able to develop mutual understanding and trust that creates peaceful productive and supportive communities," said Rogers.

"Our young people have experienced conflict first hand (coups/terror attacks/hate crimes) and it is crucial that they actively participate in dialogue processes towards peace building. They have an idea of what peace looks like in their communities and how trust could be built. They are key players in the process."

Gavid continues: "Youth activism and advocacy are the seeds sown that will reap fruit in seasons of leadership. We need to uphold respect and have no tolerance for violence and I DEMAND that young women and girls be recognized and acknowledged as equal partners in leadership and decision making!"

Women Leaders Map out Community Disaster Management Recommendations

By Hannah Hicks and Maxine Tuwila

“There is no proper community structure so chaos will be increased and there will be disrespect, discrimination and poverty and slow rehabilitation,” says Evaline Fiu of the National Protection Committee.

She said this as femLINKpacific’s concluded with its four (4) day Women’s Weather Watch Consultation in Honiara on June 6.

Women leaders identified key recommendations to ensure a more sustainable response system within their

communities and calling for dialogue with community and national leaders to ensure development priorities are reflective of the needs of women and girls.

“There needs to be awareness and training, seek help by talking to community leaders and having good leadership in the community,” says Loretta Vave of Short Lands Community.

Most of the participants identified peace as having their security priorities met. It also meant ensuring clear and precise information was received at the community level to better mobilize during and after a disaster.

“Peace is having equitable access to services and knowing that my basic needs are met and also being safe and being respected for my dignity, and participation in decision making that will affect my life,” said Evaline Fiu of National Protection Committee.

It is also about ensuring that services provided to the public are of quality and suit the needs of the community they are serving.

“Peace and security means having the basics, proper water sanitation, proper roads, health services that reach everyone and a hospital that has the medicines that will

help with our health needs,” said Ender Rence Women in Media Solomon Islands.

Rence said that in order to clearly identify her peace and security priorities, there needs to be stronger governance systems in place across all sectors; education, health, employment, transport to name a few.

“My peace is when my rights are accessible and provided at all levels of society and equal participation in all levels,” said Stella Waioha of Vois Blong Mere Solomons.

Waioha adds that culture and norms in society can prevent women from making the right decisions about their security. She said that low literacy rates also contribute to negative mindset for the roles of women and girls in the society.

This is an initiative through the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) which enabled the handing over of media equipment to femLINKpacific’s network partner in Solomon Islands, Vois Blong Mere Solomons, to facilitate content generation for Women’s Weather Watch (WWW).



Leave No One Behind: Reflections on Post TC Gita Response and Recovery Phase

By Carolyn Kitione

“Our job is to make that we don’t leave anyone behind but to point out to these different clusters, there is something in this whole support that we provide for communities.”

This was shared by Drew Havea, the Chair of the Civil Society Forum of Tonga, during an interview with femLINKpacific in March.

The interview was part of femLINKpacific’s work in documenting narratives post-TC Gita and providing a platform for recommendations from sectors/individuals of the society that work in the areas of humanitarian crisis assessment.

Havea, who is also Chair of the Tonga National Youth Congress, says that one of the lessons learnt was how all relevant authorities could better their post-disaster relief response.

“When we usually look at houses, immediately we move in to provide tents, shelter for people. But when all these houses were blown away, there was nothing done about toilets,” he shared.

“It’s the small things we need to act on quickly. Just respect the integrity of these

people. Sometimes we think if we get them shelter of their house, we forget the other basic needs.”

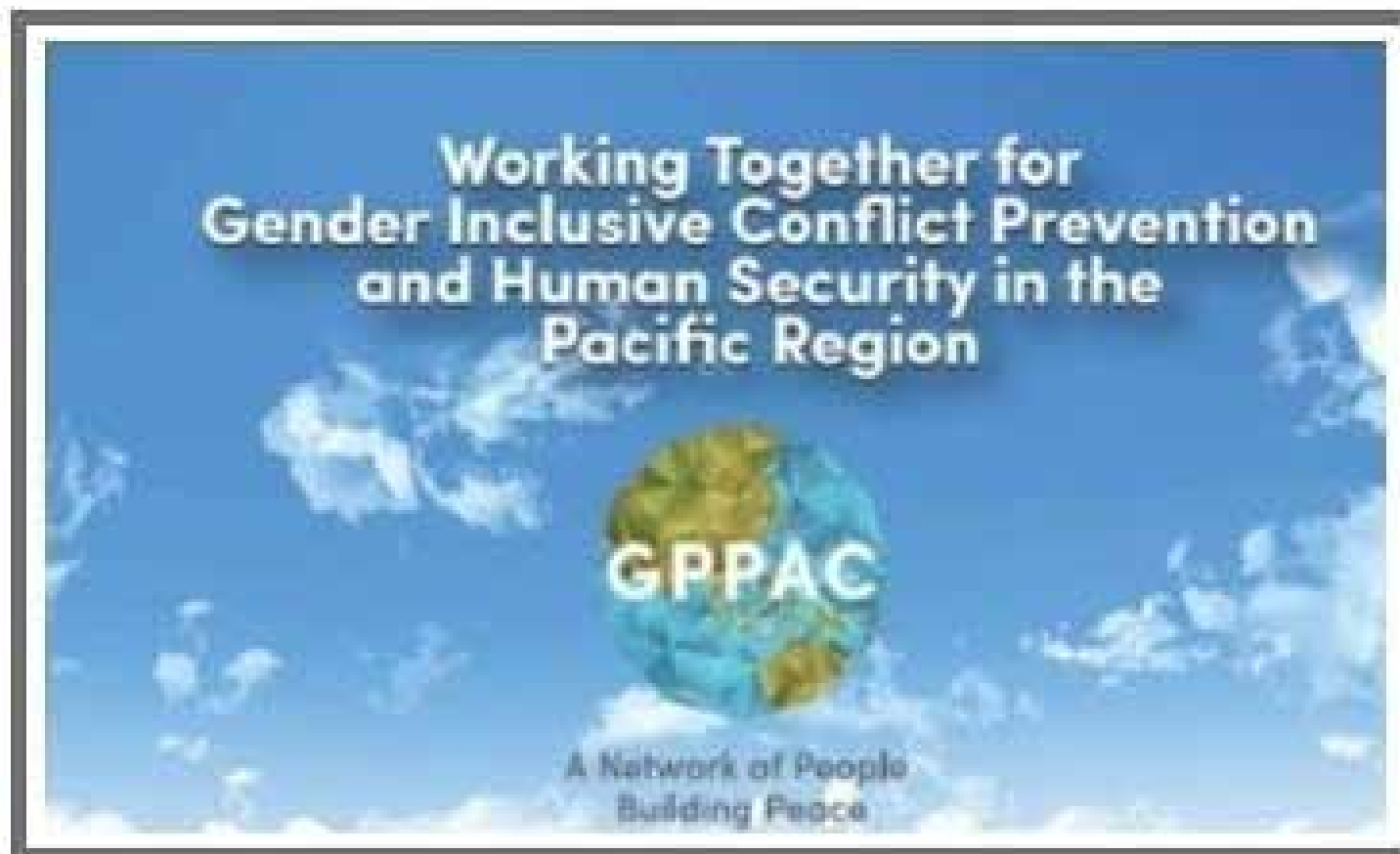
Sio Tui’ano, a town officer with the Kolomotu’a Town Council, shared insights about how they prepared for TC Gita.

“As we did with NEMO (National Emergency Management Office) we did workshops on disaster risk recovery on everything – the houses, food and those evacuation centres to be prepared,” Tui’ano said.

“We used the church halls [as evacuation centres]. A week before TC Gita hit the kingdom, we had programmes on the radio telling the people how to use the traditional knowledge to prepare.”

femLINKpacific will continue to document narratives of the Island Kingdom’s experience with TC Gita from the perspectives of different communities.





GPPAC Pacific Statement: “Women and children must be assured of a life free of all forms of violence - including gun violence”

Friday 12 July, 2019

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific is calling for urgent action to provide and sustain the safety and security of women and children. GPPAC Pacific, members of the Shifting the Power Coalition, joins women’s human rights defenders in Papua New Guinea including the PNG Young Women’s Christian Association calling for urgent arms and gun control and disposal measures to be initiated as well as urgent protection to be provided to women and children.

According to recent news media reports more than 16 women and children were killed this week by assailants armed with rifles in the village of Karida in Hela province of Papua New Guinea.

Urgent action must be taken to also support civil society led disarmament and weapons disposal measures in line with women, peace and security resolutions including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security, 2000):

“As the GPPAC Pacific Regional Secretariat we call for urgent action at national and regional level to increase efforts including support for peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes to resolve long standing disputes and enhance safety and security for communities especially for women and children,” says Adivasu Levu, the Executive Director of Transcend Oceania.

“Given the influence of churches in Pacific communities the Pacific Conference of Churches is committed to ensuring that faith communities promote cultures of peace and justice,” adds the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Rev. James Bhagwan.

GPPAC is a member-led network of civil society organisations active in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding across the world including the Pacific Island region.



25 years after population conference, women still face challenges to 'well-being and human rights', says UN chief

16 July 2019

Many women and girls "still face enormous challenges to their health, well-being and human rights", Secretary-General António Guterres told a High-level General Assembly meeting on Tuesday convened to mark the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), a milestone in reproductive health and rights.

"Violence against women and girls affects one-in-three women worldwide", the UN chief stated, adding that that number is "even higher" in parts of the world and during conflict and emergencies.

While the progress that has been achieved in women's rights over the past 25 years has contributed to reducing

poverty and hunger and improving education and health, globally, some 650 million women were married as children, and every day, more than 500 women and girls die during pregnancy and childbirth.

"We are seeing a global pushback on women's rights, including reproductive rights and vital health services", he informed the participants.

The conference, held in Cairo, "rightly emphasized" that promoting the rights of women and girls is "key to ensuring the well-being of individuals, families and nations", he said. "It recognized gender equality as a pre-requisite to inclusive, sustainable development and affirmed sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right".

The Cairo Programme of Action, the Conference's landmark outcome document, recognizes that women's rights and access to sexual and reproductive health are an essential response to demographic trends that could undermine sustainable, equitable and inclusive development for all.

Young women and men are central to implementing the Cairo Programme, not only as beneficiaries, "but powerful agents of change, able to make their own choices and demand the action needed to address today's challenges", Mr. Guterres argued.

"This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of UNFPA, the UN Population Fund, which has had a major role in implementing the Cairo Programme of Action", the Secretary-General noted. "Through its leadership and operational work, UNFPA has been instrumental

in empowering young people and enabling women and couples to access the sexual and reproductive health care they need; in preventing gender-based violence; and in tackling female genital mutilation and early marriage".

He told the participants that in November, Kenya and Denmark, together with UNFPA, will convene a summit in Nairobi to mark the 25th anniversary of the Cairo Conference, encouraging Member States "to participate and to make firm political and financial commitments to realize the Programme of Action.

Holistic, coherent programme

Mr. Guterres stated that many of the policies set out in the Cairo action plan – from tackling inequality and environmental degradation, to promoting gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health – "remain fundamental to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed two decades later", calling it "a testament" to its "enduring legacy".

He recalled that the Conference shifted thinking around population from specific demographic targets towards a greater emphasis on the rights, equality, dignity and well-being of individuals' lives.

"One of its most important achievements was in making the link between population, human rights, sustained economic growth and sustainable development, and addressing these issues in a holistic and coherent way", maintained the UN chief.

'No hope' global development goals can be achieved without women, says UN Assembly President

15 July 2019

Without the full participation and leadership of women, "we have no hope" of realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the President of the United Nations General Assembly told gender equality leaders on Monday.

"This is an obvious point to make, but it is, sadly, one that we cannot repeat enough", she said, opening the day-long discussion at UN Headquarters in New York to identify best practices aimed to knock down barriers hindering women's full participation and leadership, in what she called "our shared mission this year".

As the fourth woman in UN history to ever preside over the General Assembly, the Organization's main and most representative deliberative body, María Fernanda Espinosa recognized that women decision-makers must lead by example to safeguard achievements and accelerate progress towards gender equality.

Noting that women have come a long way since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action nearly 25 years ago, she pointed out that they still lag behind on virtually every Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

"For example, just 42 per cent of countries give women the same rights to land ownership; just 60 per cent give women equal access to financial services", she flagged. "And the gap is even greater for women in rural areas, women with disabilities, indigenous women and older women".

Moreover, "no country has achieved full gender equality" and women continue to face discrimination in every region of the world, "from suffocating stereotypes to discriminatory laws, harmful practices and violence", she maintained.

This runs counter to the "wealth of hard evidence" of the positive impact that "women's participation and leadership have on economic stability, good governance and investment, including in health, education and social protection.

Child mortality decreases by almost 10 per cent for each additional year of education women of reproductive age have.

"This is just an example of the transformative, society-wide benefits of women's empowerment", Ms. Espinosa said. "Today's discussion is anchored in this crucial link".

Call for Action

The event, "Gender Equality and Women's Leadership for a Sustainable World", issued a 'Call for Action' that aligned with the theme of this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development: 'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'. The Forum, the main UN platform monitoring follow-up on States' actions towards the SDGs, is currently under way in New York.

She invited all leaders to join the global "Call", which 18 world leaders supported, as new synergies were being explored with other initiatives.

"Many of you will have heard me refer to gender equality as the closest thing we have to a 'magic formula' for sustainable development", she said, noting that while "magical in terms of impact", there is "nothing magical about how to achieve gender equality".

The 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action set out what must be done to empower women and girls, and what is needed now are "greater political will; a razor-sharp focus on the most transformative, practical actions; and to widen their scale and impact" according to the Assembly President.

"Today, we find ourselves in urgent need of renewed leadership, partnership and mobilization", stressed Ms. Espinosa. "It is no secret that some of the SDG targets relating to women's rights were the subject of tough negotiations... and the landscape has become more challenging even since then".

She underscored that "we cannot take for granted the gains we have made". And painted a picture of women on the ground working hard, "under duress and at great personal risk" to push back against a pushback, spelling out that they "need our support".

"This is our opportunity to recommit to women's rights and empowerment, to rise to challenges old and new, and – reclaim the agenda", concluded the Assembly President.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told the meeting that women have a strong track record as agents of change.

"From boardrooms to parliament, from military ranks to peace tables and, of course, in the United Nations itself, more women decision-makers mean more inclusive solutions that will benefit everyone".

Because women understand "intrinsically" the importance of dignity, equality and opportunity for all, the deputy UN chief upheld that "women's leadership and greater gender balance will lead to unlocking trillions for economies, enhanced bottom lines for the private sector and stronger, more sustainable peace agreements".

In addition to that, she stressed that "it is critical that we emphasize that women's equal participation is a basic democratic right".

For her part, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, said that next year, when we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the implementation of Beijing Platform, "our theme is 'Generation Equality' because we are emphasizing the importance of intra-generational participation and the role of young people to take us forward".

"All of these, drawn together, give us a fighting chance to increase and sustain the participation of women", she underscored. "We can't wait people, time is up. Time is really, really up".

The high-level meeting brought together prominent women leaders from around the globe, including a Mexican Member of Parliament Gabriela Cuevas Barron who is also the president of the Inter Parliamentary Union and Helen Clark, former head of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

November 25 to
December 10



femLINKpacific
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Contributors:

Fane Boseiwaqa (Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki), Losana Derenalagi and Sokoveti Lutumailagi (Lautoka and Nadi), Adi Vasulevu, Rusila Lautiki and Sulueti Waqa (Cakaudrove, Bua and Macuata), Frances Tawake (Central)

Publication and Editorial Team - femLINKpacific:

Susan Naisara Grey, Executive Director

Carolyn Kitione, Program Associate: Media

Kelerayani Gavidu, Program Manager

Eleni Nabalarua, Operations Manager

(Acknowledgement of Nandni Vandhanas contributions)

Design and Layout:

Albert Rolls

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