

Community Radio Times

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RADIO IS US!

BY SHARON ROLLS, WITH THE FEMLINKPACIFIC TEAM

"In May 2004, as the (then) Coordinator of femLINKpacific, I witnessed a new reality – our first suitcase radio broadcast," reflected Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific's Executive Producer-Director ahead of a month-long commemoration of World Radio Day on FemTALK89FM. "That broadcast hosted by student volunteers brought the diversity of Suva-based civil society together – human rights and disability activists, ecumenical groups and the Fiji Media Watch – they all became part of a monthly broadcast."

"In that journey since then, I have often been asked about our audience. Our community radio approach with FemTALK89FM has been that our target audience, the women, in rural communities are defining the content."

This has resulted in investing in a rural community media network, resourcing convenors, correspondents and production meetings. Radio is reaching the women because it's their programmes.

"Since femLINKpacific's early days, I was putting in practice my personal beliefs that amplifying women's peace and security via a media platform would not only bring them to a wider audience beyond the CSO sector, but it would also enable more women to feel confident enough to discuss their issues in a safe space that wasn't commercially driven but for and by women," said Tabua Salato, femLINKpacific's General Manager.

Salato is not alone in her beliefs – in fact, it is that aim to bring a space to women that drives us all.

"In the early days, when we just had a tape recorder, I embraced community radio as a tool to engage women, record their voices and document their narratives," continued Adi Vasulevu, femLINKpacific's convenor for the Northern division. "This was key as Fiji was emerging out of conflict at the time."

"We needed to break the silence, so that's what we did. We created an enabling space where women's thoughts, voices and ideas mattered."

"FemTALK89FM is the only platform where space is given to the women as well as other minority groups in the community," added Losana Derenalagi, one of femLINKpacific's convenors in the Western division. "From the mat, it amplifies and increases their visibility as leaders in their community."

Look At My Abilities, hosted by women from disability networks, continues as a weekly show since 2013. We also have Rainbow Connections, the launch of which coincided with the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) 2013 with our LGBT allies.

Since the very beginning, not only has there been a focus placed on the women leaders who had already affirmed their leadership, but there has been continued involvement and investment in the future – in young women as leaders, as producers and as broadcasters.

Fane Boseiwaqa, now a convenor in the Western division, started out as a young woman, out of school and looking for something to do. A wife, mother and leader in her own right today, she recalled the investment in her over a decade ago.

"As a founding member of the Generation Next project (2007-2011), I was given the confidence and felt empowered as a young woman to have a voice and speak out on the issues that women and young people faced in the community," she said. "The suitcase radio station, travelling around Fiji, was a platform for the women to come together and have a safe space."

Sulueti Waqa also began her community radio journey as a volunteer. Encouraged by her mother in the Western division, Waqa started as a volunteer in the capital city and is now a key member of the team in the Northern division's Labasa Community Media Centre.

"It is not only a tool to educate the women, but also the policy makers so that they are aware of the issues in the community," she shared. "It has also empowered me to further develop my understanding of other technology – not just using a tape recorder, which is sometimes the most accessible and appropriate technology – but finding new ways and new equipment to document, compile and share the voices of women in all their diversities."

"Being a correspondent for FemTALK89FM is eye-opening for me," continued Sokoveti Lutumailagi, correspondent based in the West. "The women are not only talking, but they are participating to make change in their communities."

"While talking to these women, it's obvious they are looking forward to being heard and they are proud to have a voice."

Not only have we seen the value and power of community radio as women through our networks grow, but ourselves.

"At 15, I saw my mother and Sharon Rolls broadcasting at the Labasa market with rural women singing into a strange-looking machine," said Lucille Chute, femLINKpacific's Programme Assistant based at the Northern division's Labasa Community Media Centre and Adi Vasulevu's daughter. "I couldn't wait to find out what it was, so when I asked my mother I was so excited to find out that it was a suitcase radio station where you could speak, share your stories and even sing – which would all be broadcasted out to whoever would tune in."

"We would be visited by the suitcase radio before we got our very own in 2011, becoming the first and only radio station on Vanua Levu, it was so beautiful because it brought together all the rural women – even though they were afraid, shy and silent, they kept coming to talk and share."

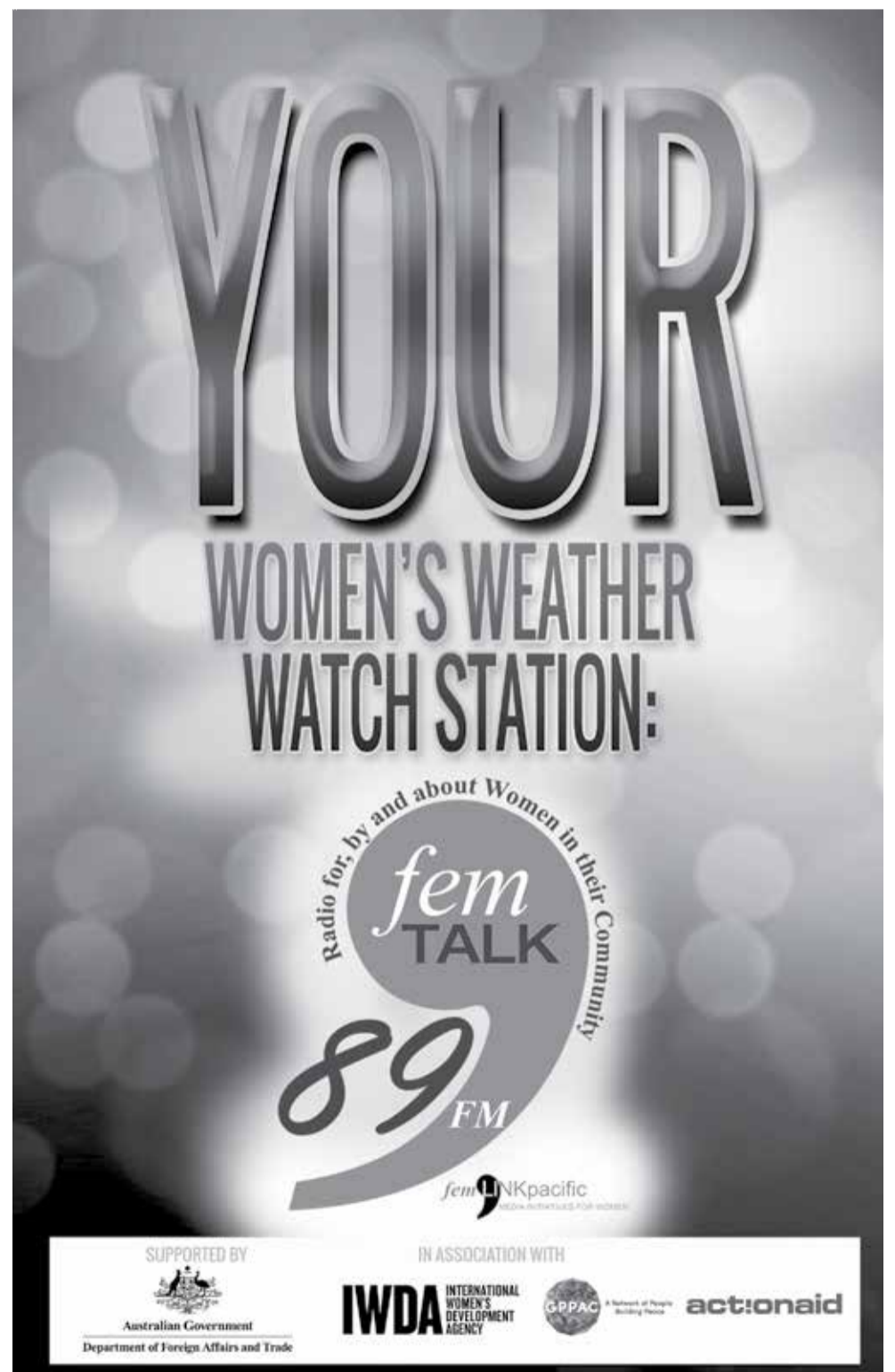
"I am learning all the time as part of this regional community media network that reaches across the Pacific – like about a woman leader's lived reality in rural Fiji, about how women of faith are leading the work for peace in Bougainville and what young women in all their diversities think, feel and believe," continued Alisia Evans,

femLINKpacific's Programme Associate: Research.

"FemTALK89FM has taught me so much as a young woman," added Hannah Hicks, femLINKpacific's Programme Associate: Broadcast. "It continues to strengthen my ability to make a difference as well as mould my leadership when it comes to the running of the radio station."

"While FemTALK89FM is our flagship media platform, the women's voices don't stay there – they go into our 'Community Radio Times' that is shared back to the women, 'The Thirteen 25 Report' that is our bi-monthly online magazine and even to our policy documents."

As we embark on the 13th year of FemTALK89FM, we celebrate all that we have been able to achieve and our vibrant network of women in all their diversities. Commemorating World Radio Day 2017, on the 13th of February, is not just a one day event – everyday, our radio broadcasts say 'Radio is You!'



ENGAGING WOMEN LEADERS ENABLES ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

BY SULUETI WAQA

“From attending the consultations, (at) district level and at national level, I have learnt a lot,” shared Amra Wati, a member of the Labasa Market Vendors Association.

Speaking during the October 2016 district consultation held at the Labasa Community Media Centre (CMC), Wati’s comments were echoed by Dimakita Lena, President of Naleba Multi-racial Women’s Group. Lena added that meetings held at the CMC helped rural women leaders like herself to engage at the divisional and national consultations.

Lena and Wati were two of the six rural women leaders from the North who attended femLINKpacific’s 3rd National Women’s Human Security First: Women’s Weather Watch consultations held in the first week of October last year.

Such opportunities not only empowered them as leaders to speak and engage with larger spaces like at the national level, it also enabled them to reaffirm their leadership back in the communities.

“At the district level, I have learnt a lot especially with economic security (so) I am (sharing) with women in the market on how to save money in the market,” explained Wati.

It also gives them the encouragement they need to keep the momentum going for other rural women.

“My vision for peace and conflict prevention... is for more women to be involved in decision making,” shared Sera Waqalevu, a member of the Naqai Women’s Club who also attended the recent national consultation.

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS THE WOMEN INVOLVED

BY FRANCES TAWAKE

“Development plans should include grassroots people who really face difficulties in their everyday lives,” said Rosemary Paligaru, representing Soroptimist International.

Paligaru was one of the 10 rural women leaders who attended femLINKpacific’s first of two Central Division consultations for November in Suva on Monday the 21st. Together, the women leaders represented a total 2506 other women from Waituri Mother’s Club, Nausori Young Women’s and Women’s Club, Catholic Women’s League Nadera, Soroptimist International, Korociriciri Mothers Club and Naselai Women’s Club.

The following day, there were 11 rural women leaders who attended femLINKpacific’s consultation in the central division. Together, the 11 women leaders represented a total of 357 other women from Navua Multiracial Group, Naivikinikini Women’s Club, and the United Market Association.

“I have four children and my husband is not working and I have to put my children to school,” shared Georgina Palu from the Navua Multiracial Women’s Group.

The women leaders discussed the upcoming 16 Days of Activism, their expectations and recommendations for the national development plan and messages in line with our Women’s Weather Watch recommendations.

The national development plan recommendations built on the work of femLINKpacific since mid-2015 and since TC Winston to highlight women-centred development priorities that have been documented and published through our Women’s Human Security First reports.

The rural women leaders who attended the consultations also discussed concerns with local governance, including the draft village bylaws currently in the consultation phase.

“Women should be given spaces especially in the village meeting - in the Tikina Council meeting and in the Provincial Council meeting - so that their voice could be heard,” added Luisa Yalobula, representing the Tosovata Bulileka Women’s Group.

“Women (should) be included in the planning and budgeting because women are the ones that understands and experience all that is going on in their communities,” continued Meresiana Dimiqalau from Dromoninuku in Savusavu.

As Dimiqalau points out, women have valuable insider knowledge of their communities - knowledge vital to enhancing preparedness before and resilience to natural disasters. That is why the women continue to call for space at the table and why femLINKpacific continues our Women’s Weather Watch campaign to raise the visibility of the development concerns they need addressed to enhance their communities’ resilience.

“In 2004, femLINKpacific started raising awareness of disaster risks, the need for resilience and the need to enhance preparedness through our Women’s Weather Watch model,” outlined Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific Executive Producer-Director. “Drawn from the experiences and voices of rural women leaders, it is a model for monitoring natural disasters and disaster management in the communities, providing real-time information with a local touch and is a constant campaign.”

“Such a model enables communities, including women in all their diversities, to define what their preparedness, protection and response needs and capacities are throughout the disaster and development cycle.”

So tune in to FemTALK89FM in Labasa, Suva or online to listen to the three seasons of Radio with Pictures produced this year during our 3 National Consultations as well as documentaries by diverse young women producers as we continue to communicate Women’s Weather Watch.

“Village bylaws should represent the deepest need of the society and the draft should be produced when everyone is consulted,” said Nanise Cakaunitabua, representative of the Nausori Village Soqosoqo Vakamarama and President of the Rewa Sub Division Community Health Workers.

The rural women leaders also felt that the village bylaws should have a direct link to the already existing laws and policies, such as the National Gender Policy.

“Women and communities needs to be included and consulted because we are the one who faces the brunt and the blame when something bad happens,” added Sheleni Lata, assistant leader of the Sheetal Sharda Mahila Mandal of Nausori.

She continued, saying that it is for that reason that there needs to be more education made available to women so that they were able to meaningfully participate in all processes.

“Education cannot be stolen from you,” Lata said. “Materialistic things can be stolen but your education is with you forever.”

“There is no age limit to education. When a woman is educated, she will know how to run her household and give knowledge to her children, then there is peace at home. If there is peace at home then the children will not go out and do wrong that will ruin our community and especially our family”.

The rural women leaders also shared their concerns as they discussed economic security issues. “Financial problems are a barrier and is one of the main issues why most of the women and girls cannot attain higher education,” said Frances Qounadovu, President of Naivikinikini Women’s Group in Lami, “More quality employment opportunities should be available locally and decreasing or removing the VAT on food items will be quite helpful to us.”

“We need to increase the minimum wage so that people can improve their standard of living,” added Sophie Fox.

Gender inclusive planning, the women agreed, means ensuring meaningful participation and supporting women to access decision making spaces. This can also ensure families and communities are also better prepared during the current cyclone season.



FEMTALK FROM THE MARKET TO THE AIRWAVES

BY SULUETI WAQA

“Women have the right to be educated,” said Mereia Tabuvale, secretary of the Labasa Market Vendors Association. “The more training or the more awareness or consultation women attend, the more experience they will have.”

She was addressing the theme of the annual 16 days campaign in a series of radio programmes being produced for FemTALK 89FM’s annual 16 days of community radio linked to the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, with the theme ‘From Peace In The Home To Peace The World: Let’s Make Education Safe For All!’.

In her interview, Tabuvale highlighted barriers to education is poverty and cultural barriers.

“We have the culture barrier (where) women are (told) to be at home or the belief that women’s place is at home,” she said.

According to Nirmala Sharma of Vunucuicui Multiracial Women’s Group, some children do not attend school due to poor road condition and lack of transport.

“If the location of the schools is far away from home, it is an additional challenge to accessing

education,” she said.

For Luisa Yalobula, it is also economic barriers which create a negative impact on women’s access to education. She herself recently got registered as a market vendor in the Labasa Market to assist with her family’s income.

Previously a teacher, Yalobula left seeking further education and turned her attention to the market so that she could better support her children’s education.

Amra Wati is another market vendor in the Labasa Market who shares that through education and training she has received since starting at the market, she is skilful in the market and able to save and support her family.

“If women want to do good in business, they have to invest in education,” she added. “Women should look for ways to gain more skills so that it could assist them with their small businesses which would further increase the income earned from sales each day.”

“It is also time for women to move away from their comfort zone,” continued Mareta Tagivakatini, Assistant Secretary of the Labasa Market Vendors Association.

Bringing you the stories of rural women leading their communities as well as programmes from our community media network, FemTALK 89FM in Labasa is on air from 10am to 2pm every weekday!

ACCESSING EDUCATION, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES - SUCCESS STORIES FROM OUR NETWORK

BY ADI VASULEVU AND SOKOVETI LUTUMAILAGI WITH SLAN ROLLS

As Litea Ledua, the Assistant President of the Bulileka Young Mother’s Club in Labasa, reflected on the challenges she faced as a young woman growing up in a rural village, she also shared her pride with how far she has come.

“(The consultations have) helped me a lot... in my personal life and my growth towards education as well as in my leadership role,” she said. “I am appreciative for the empowerment I have received here especially in proceeding to extend my education this year.”

“I am happy to say that, at this month, I have graduated (with a) Diploma in Community Development.”

A huge achievement, Ledua has beaten the odds in attaining her education – on the cusp of her 40th year, she has come far because she has been provided a space that she has chosen to engage in as well as given opportunities that she has seized.

This is why it is critical to invest in rural communities, especially rural women who are often forgotten.

“One of the barriers I can mention is we (are) looking at some of the schools in rural communities - some schools are located far away and the children have to walk (a) long distance to school,” said Timaima Ralolokula, President of Veilomani Women’s Club in Nadi.

“Three years ago I was in an all-girls school and going through these years I got to meet some intelligent, smart girls who were heading to higher heights... into being chefs, lawyers, teachers and many more,” continued Grace Vukiyalau, 20 years old and a member of Youth With A Mission in Lautoka. “But now, some are mothers, housewives and thinking that their dreams are over and that it’s too late to go back.”

“Some are thinking of continuing further studies but are worried about their children and families. I honestly believe that all our young women who are going through these things deserve a chance to fulfil their dreams and reach their goals because they are worth it and they have a lot to offer.” Someone who needs that reinvestment to ensure her step up is Nalini Deo, a young mother from Vunimoli. A newcomer at the Labasa district consultations, she pointed out that investment in women’s education is not just the money, which is a large factor in many cases, but also the support of the family and community.

“When I completed form 6... my mother was unwell and father was in hospital,” she shared. “They could not put me back to education at that time.”

“The nearest school was 32km away and (we) could not afford the coss, so my parents arranged for me to get married. Now, I want to complete my education. I have a one year old baby and I have asked my husband and my mother in law if they (can) support with the care of my child, I would want to complete my education.”

While women are trying to make strides, the momentum needs to continue as times become harder, even though it has been almost 10 months since TC Winston hit the country.

“The prices of food are getting higher and higher, so we want the government to look into this,” said Anita Devi, Treasurer of Wailoaloa Lively Women’s Club in Nadi. “The wages are not good and poor people can’t afford to buy proper food.”

The district consultations in December brought 35 rural women leaders together in Ba, Labasa, Nadi and Lautoka.

In Labasa, 15 rural women leaders from 7 communities represented 885 women leaders from the areas of Naleba, Bulileka Young Mothers Club, Tosovata Women’s Group, Vunimoli, Vunucuicui, Labasa Market Vendors Association, Vitinavou, FENC Fiji. In Nadi, 6 rural women leaders gathered, representing more than 2000 women from Almadina Women’s Club, Veilomani Women’s Club, Wailoaloa Lively Women’s Club, Nadi Disability Group and Navakai Multiracial Community. In Lautoka, 6 rural women leaders gathered, representing more than 5000 women from the Market Vendors Association, Lomolomo Community, Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei Vuda and Ba as well as Youth With A Mission.



INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION CRITICAL FOR RESILIENCE

BY SLAN ROLLS

“(To have inclusive decision making is) to get everyone’s voices heard, which is a very hard thing to do,” said Supreena Naidu, of the Citizen’s Constitutional Forum (CCF). “So, (it requires) a lot of mapping exercises, grouping, putting ideas together and strategizing a good and effective, simple implementation (plan) for decision making – something that works for everyone.”

As femLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch initiatives continue to amplify, meaningful and inclusive participation is a key factor when it comes to building resilient, prepared and responsive communities. Just as women need to participate, so do young women – a vital element of any society, community and family.

“For decision making to be more inclusive, I’d like to see more youth... (especially) in the community,” shared Keenen Chung, representing Social Empowerment Education Programme (SEEP). “I’d like to see youth, women in village meetings – which is happening around the country but not as much, and also to see the women and the youth participate in the bese ni vanua.”

“These meetings are of the elite of the communities, those who are traditional title holders. I know that in a few communities, women and youth are participating in these spaces - which is a good thing because at the end of the day, it’s the women and the youth who go out, who are the ones who hold the community together.”

As the cyclone season continues and with the 5 and 20 year National Development Plans soon to be taken back out into the community, it is critical for consultation processes to engage everyone – not an easy task, but a deeply important one.

“One thing that can be done is for the people who go out (to) not only have the people present in the room – they might have the youth and the women present – but to actually engage

everyone in the process,” outlined Alisi Rabukawaqa. “Sometimes, people will be present in the room but they won’t speak and when the activity is reported, they will say that it was an inclusive conversation but it wasn’t.”

Women of all diversities including persons with disabilities and young women must be supported to engage in decision making process.

“It starts by recognising their leadership and expertise and – the table needs to be made bigger to account for the diverse needs of all those who are members of our communities and country” explained Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director, outlining one of the recent recommendations emerging from Women’s Weather Watch.

Drawn from the experiences and voices of rural women leaders, Women’s Weather Watch is a model for monitoring natural disasters and disaster management in the communities, providing real-time information with a local touch and is a constant campaign of femLINKpacific.

“But one cannot expect meaningful participation to be possible without investment in capacity building and information platforms,” Bhagwan Rolls continued. “There is a need to support communities, including rural women leaders, through the provision of clear, accessible and relevant information at all times as well as the need to include women in decision making spaces at all levels and at all times - commitments already made under the Women’s Plan of Action and the National Gender Policy that need to be realized in line with CEDAW.”

The processes of government institutions and governance infrastructure have long been mysterious constructs. However, since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals last year, member states of the UN are expected to work towards all the 17 goals equally – this includes SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

“It’s also reflecting and analysing processes so that when people are in the room, they’re also speaking and if they aren’t speaking... taking them aside – these are some actions that you may need to take depending on the situation,” said Rabukawaqa. “You can’t have a set to do list, it’s also about the experience and understanding the situation.”

INFORM, EMPOWER AND HEAR THE RURAL WOMEN LEADERS, FIRST RESPONDERS

BY HANNAH HICKS

“Women don’t have time to rest,” said Salome Raqiyawa, representing the Soqosoqo Vakamarama of Nalalawa in Rakiraki. “Before Winston, (they) had time to rest but now women’s time is affected because of the heavy burdens they have in their houses.”

When it comes to the humanitarian response after any natural disaster, it is evident that there is still a gap in recognizing the role that women play in their homes and communities; there is a gap in having a gendered humanitarian response.

In order to bridge this gap, there is a need to build women’s capacity and to create spaces for dialogue with relevant stakeholders to deliver collaborative efforts.

Of course, women experience humanitarian crises differently compared to men and, while they are victims of humanitarian crisis and have to deal with multiple issues, women are also active participants in preparedness, protection and as first responders.

“(For) preparedness, (there needs to be) improvements of the public media in disseminating quality, accurate, inclusive information to women because when women are informed well in advance, they’re able to prepare and move to evacuation centres,” highlighted Frances Tawake, femLINKpacific’s Programme Associate: Network Coordination. “They’re able to prepare their food, dignity packs and this is preparedness to the women.”

“When it comes to communication, (they need to be) given the right information and talking to people who are there.”

In the aftermath of TC Winston, women were the first responders - bearing the brunt of responsibility in preparing for the cyclone, searching for safety for themselves and their families and motivating post-disaster rebuilding.

There is a strong need to transform the structures that are in place, to make space for women in formal decision making processes at national and local level to safeguard responses and ensure management of programmes are developed to be inclusive of everyone based on human rights.

“Complying with the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) means complying with article 14,” underscored Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director. “It requires all parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the particular needs of rural women are met and to ensure rural women have access to health care services, training and employment opportunities and social security schemes.”

“If we can have 30% women involved from community as we have the turaga-ni-koro, we can also have the marama-ni-koro so that the messages reach women,” added Raqiyawa. “Women are more secure in conversation with women during disaster and after disasters in sharing their information.”

“If we can also have more advisory councillors (that are) women, (it is) easy for us who come from the community and settlement to go interact with (the) advisory councillor because we can voice our message clearly.”

Throughout our network of women we heard of many women leaders who acted as communication nodes disseminating key weather updates to the wider community.

Nila Rao, an advisory councillor in Rakiraki, sustained a high degree of damage to her own property while still managing to provide first response assistance to her community. Her experience illustrates that women were actively participating as humanitarian first responders defying the risks and threats that come with being active on the frontline.

The continuous echoing of voices from femLINKpacific’s network of women is the agreement that women of all their diversities should be included and supported in future decision making bodies when it comes to planning for early warning and preparedness and developing humanitarian contingency, direct response and resilience building.

“It starts by recognising their leadership and expertise and the table needs to be made bigger to account for the diverse needs of all those who are members of our communities and country” concluded Bhagwan Rolls.



WOMEN VITAL TO BUILD RESILIENCE

BY ALISIA EVANS

“When something happens, when disaster strike(s), when there is a coup in place...when something happens in our country, young women and girls... they face violence, abuse,” said Frances Tawake, femLINKpacific’s Programme Associate: Network Coordination. For Tawake, also team leader of femLINK’s Young Women’s Leadership Team, having been involved in discussions on women’s peace and security issues at district, national and regional level since 2009 has increased her understanding of the gendered impacts of humanitarian crises. However, Tawake also shared that investing in building the capacity of young women and girls is important - particularly in terms of ensuring they are able to effect change in their local communities whether in the context of natural disasters or man-made crises or even on a day to day basis. “I find, in my experience, that in most of our rural contexts, women’s education was not prioritised.” echoed Adi Vasulevu, femLINKpacific’s convenor for the North. “That disempowers girls and women and weakens their involvement in peace building and conflict prevention.” This continues to this day – the continued disempowerment of women and young women even though including women in all their diversities in building resilience, especially in

terms of natural disasters, always yields better results. “Study after study has shown that educating women and girls is the single most effective way of lifting communities out of poverty.” highlighted Robert Glasser, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) in a press conference held during Pacific Resilience Week. “Not only do they lift their families out of poverty but they lift their entire communities out of poverty and some of the most innovative solutions to reduce disaster risk will come from women.” The role of civil society, including women’s rights organisations such as femLINKpacific, in highlighting the resilience of women as first responders in humanitarian settings is critical. “We are influencing change when it comes to education because, one, we’re educating the women, they are also educating us and also we are educating the people who are making decisions,” explained Tawake. However, the first step of building women’s resilience and ensuring they are able to participate in decision making is not easy. “In the community, woman are socialised to think that they are less important than men,” shared Losana Derenalagi, femLINKpacific’s convenor for Nadi and Lautoka. “It is vital that we support these women to challenge those... unequal (notions of) power.” “(Also) infrastructure - women can’t travel (or) access education when the road is not good,” continued Tawake. “They have to travel hours, on horseback, cross how many streams in order to get to the mainland.”

“Young women with disabilities are limited with moving out during the day time,” added Luisa Miracle Tinai, host of the Look At My Abilities show on FemTALK89FM and a representative of the Fiji Disabled People’s Federation. “They also feel this double burden on them.” Thus, the need to remove the barriers – physical, societal and structural – to enable women’s participation is critical if the end goal is a more resilient community. “Our commitment to the empowerment of young women stems from our foundation and the success of the Generation Next project,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific Executive Producer-Director. “In 2004, femLINKpacific started raising awareness of disaster risks, the need for resilience and the need to enhance preparedness through our Women’s Weather Watch model linked to our 1325 network.” “Now, since the adoption of UNSCR2242 and 2250, we want to ensure the gains and lessons learnt from 16 years of implementation of 1325 supports young women to lead in defining humanitarian responses as well as conflict prevention and human security strategies.” So, to keep up on what the women are doing in their communities, including affirming their leadership, tune in to FemTALK89FM in Suva, Labasa or online to listen to the three seasons of Radio with Pictures produced in 2016 during our 3 National Consultation that year as well as documentaries by diverse young women producers as we continue to communicate Women’s Weather Watch.

WOMEN OF THE NORTH HIGHLIGHT INCLUSIVE PREPAREDNESS STRATEGIES

BY SULUETI WAQA

“All broadcasters, including community radio, have a vital role to communicate weather information, not just bulletins and updates, during cyclone season to support community based preparedness,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director. “This is one of the key lessons learnt from Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston and so weather patterns and advice must be localised via a range of media platforms.” This is evident as femLINKpacific continues to build on Women’s Weather Watch, which was activated on the 1st of January 2016. Throughout last year, women have echoed this message, including by rural women leaders in the North. “From my past experience, the community didn’t know what was category 5 and they could not prepare much,” said Mereisi Mara, representing the Nabaci Women’s Group in Savusavu. Mara’s community was on the direct path of TC Winston. Most families were affected and their houses were destroyed. Apart from the damage to infrastructure, water and sanitation were other major issues she continuously raised – including at last July’s divisional consultation. She urged the community to prepare. “As we (are) approaching the hurricane season, my advice to the community is to listen very well to the radio stations and also to other medium of communication like internet... to prepare well so nothing will happen to us like (during) Winston,” she said. Mereia Tabuale, member of the Bulileka Young Mothers Club and a market vendor in the Labasa Market, shared the importance of preparation and workshops. “It is very important for us women to be (prepared) all the time like to be up to date with the news and weather bulletin,” she said, sharing that her experience in the market has been that no matter how much time has passed the vendors still face the impact of the February disaster. “It’s very difficult for us to manage our sales every day because we (are) experiencing the price of food is increasing.” “Most of us in the market, our source of income (comes from) farmers. We (are) buying bananas and root crops from the farmers and most of their farms were washed (away) during TC Winston.”

“It’s time to start planning and strategizing,” highlighted Lucille Chute, femLINKpacific’s Programme Assistant in the North. “(There should be training for) turaga-ni-koros in all villages to know their roles before, during and after natural disaster and also how to mobilise the communities,” added Kinisimere Ceyaqalo, host of FemTALK89fm in Labasa. She continued that disaster committees should be established in the villages with the meaningful participation of all - including women, youths and men - who will be able to assist and respond to communities before, during and after the disaster. The community radio station provides a key platform for women to share their experiences as they will next week at our last district consultation for this year and as we will continue to do on FemTALK89FM Labasa. “We constantly amplify the voices of diverse women when it comes to their participation and preparedness including during humanitarian assistance pre- and post- disaster as well as their recommendations,” said Bhagwan Rolls. “Such recommendations include the need to support communities, including rural women leaders, through the provision of clear, accessible and relevant information at all times as well as the need to include women in decision making spaces at all levels and at all times - commitments already made under the Women’s Plan of Action and the National Gender Policy that need to be realized in line with CEDAW.” “Women must be involved in all disaster management and response programmes and committees because women knows the problems in our communities and families,” outlined Mara, adding women are often the first responders in times of disaster and thus should be included. “For the house, start renovating it and build it stronger,” continued Chute. “Kits should contain first aid kits, a torch, batteries, candles, a lighter, rope and some useful tools.” “Prepare now so that you don’t lose more than what you already have.” As Mara highlights, information is important. “We should attend workshops to be informed of what action to take or how to preserve things,” she said. “(This includes) which area to go to (when you are evacuating) and how to leave.” Therefore, as the cyclone season continues, it is important to prepare well and to ensure that there are evacuation strategies to assist during disaster as well as the need continues to be informed at all times.

RAKIRAKI WOMEN LEADERS HIGHLIGHT VALUE OF PARTICIPATION FOR COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO REBUILD

BY FANE BOSEIWAQA AND SIAN ROLLS

“We need to recognise the different roles that women play in their leadership roles in the family, village, community, district and national level,” said Salome Raqiyawa, a member of the Nalalawa Women’s Club. “Women have been the first responders in terms of any natural disaster from preparedness, protection and human security we have to recommend women to be participating in disaster planning committees at community, district, and divisional level.” Raqiyawa was one of the 7 rural women leaders who attended femLINKpacific’s district consultation in Rakiraki in November. There were also representatives from Naboutolu village,

Burenitu, Caulasi, Cociu and Wairuku, collectively representing 302 other rural women in all their diversities and 902 households. The women leaders discussed the then upcoming 16 Days of Activism, their expectations and hopes for the national development plans as families continue to recover in some of the most affected communities ravaged by TC Winston. The Women’s Weather Watch messages are clear. “Some families are still living in tents and sheds,” said Litia Naivila, one of the young women attending the consultation. “They need to be in a safe place as we are approaching the hurricane season this month, November to April, so people need to be safe in their own homes (but) students are still studying in tents.” “We need to have more women’s (clubs) invited to participate... to come and voice out their issues,” said Eta Tuvuki from Burenitu Village. “This can lead for more women to be in district advisory councilor (positions) so that they address their needs and they can be heard at the national level.”

PROTECTION IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT PARTICIPATION

BY ALISLA EVANS

23 November 2016

Nine months after TC Winston hit, another cyclone season had begun. Rural women leaders continue to call for the promotion of women's human rights before, during and after any natural disaster as key to ensuring they feel protected and safe in their communities.

"The only way we can do that is that women (need) to be included in planning or decision making processes, whether it's in local government or whether they are represented in parliament," said Rajni Kumar, Secretary for Women's Information Network (WINET) Fiji, based in Suva.

Yet the impact of TC Winston since February 2016 is a sober reminder that natural disasters impact social, economic and political systems, where all too often women remain under-represented.

"We know from our Women's Weather Watch networks that women are critical actors at the community level. Women

are the first responders to any natural disaster whether it is a flood, drought or cyclone," highlighted Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific's Executive Producer-Director. "However, we saw that even in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment carried out after TC Winston, it was done so from a gender-neutral perspective, without reflecting the role and, therefore, the impact on women in the agricultural, communications and economic sectors."

"During community meetings, leaders need to emphasise the importance of protecting women and children," stressed Vasemaca Ketewai, member of the Vunivivi Methodist Women's Club in Nausori.

Ketewai was one of 44 rural women leaders who gathered to discuss their human security and development priorities at femLINKpacific's 3rd National Women's Human Security First: Women's Weather Watch consultation held in Suva during the first week of October 2016.

Protection emerged as top of their list.

Protection, as defined by our rural women leaders, is something broader than just the prevention of gender-based violence – which is important – but also must take into account human and social security.

Collecting disaggregated data, especially at the community

level, is critical to ensuring that women's and children's needs are addressed before, during and after natural disasters. As a mother of three, Ketewai explained that protection and security for her and her family is about making sure that dignity packs and basic food items and water are readily available in all evacuation centres.

"We have certain needs," she outlined, reflecting on her experience during TC Winston. "During disasters, we do not know that some of us would be pregnant, some would be having their menstruation at that time."

The impact of TC Winston highlighted the gaps in our current national disaster management legislation to adequately prepare, respond and recover from disasters.

"What is required is a more transformative, gender inclusive agenda for humanitarian response that operationalises the commitments in the National Gender Policy of 2014 to ensure women's participation at all levels of disaster risk reduction, management and climate change," said Bhagwan Rolls. "We must ensure a more holistic and gender inclusive definition of security – one that is defined in human terms."

"One that will ensure women feel secure in their homes and communities."

"WE'VE STOPPED PLANTING BECAUSE IT WILL BE A WASTE"

BY FRANCES TAWAKE

"The dry season does not help us prepare for the worst and since it's cyclone period now, I fear that I won't be able to prepare much vegetable and food for my family," shared Pritika Sen from the United Multiracial Women's Group in Tavua, speaking in December of last year.

Changes in weather patterns affect everyone either directly or indirectly – when it happens all we need to do is to prepare. But, for women living in rural areas, food preservation and preparedness is a different story.

"It's cyclone season, and how can we prepare when our vegetables is not matured and taking long to grow," said Inise Dawai from Sikituru Women's club in Nadi.

"The well and the creek are drying up and we have been living in fear and it seems like we will experience another cyclone soon," added Nila Rao, an advisory councillor in Rakiraki. "Last weekend (late November 2016), it only rained for 15 minutes which (did) not help at all."

"We have stopped planting vegetables because it will be a waste since it won't grow well during this dry season," continued Urmila Prasad, also an advisory councillor in Rakiraki.

"This is the only time we (have to) prepare also for our children's education before the beginning of 2017," said Salome Raqiyawa from Nalalawa Women's Group in Rakiraki. "If we are not ready next year, then our children will be missing school again in the next few months."

Everyone is affected by the changes of weather but not equally because society does not consider everyone equal.

Women experience cyclones in a deeper way because of their responsibilities. While women try to adapt their lives to the change in weather pattern, they are now challenged by the impact on their food production roles as well as dealing with less income for the family.

Despite wearing many hats, looking after children as well as the elderly, they are still unable to meaningfully participate in decision making spaces.

This limits their ability to adapt to the change in weather as all of society struggles to cope. In most cases, women have limited or even no control over family finances and assets. Women are mostly underrepresented in community meetings and have little influence over community planning that will support their rights and needs.

"What is required is a more transformative, gender inclusive agenda for humanitarian response that operationalises the commitments in the National Gender Policy of 2014 to ensure women's participation at all levels of disaster risk reduction, management and climate change," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific's Executive Producer-Director. "We must ensure a more holistic and gender inclusive definition of security – one that is defined in human terms."

"One that will ensure women feel secure in their homes and communities."



"PREPAREDNESS DESPITE THE BARRIERS"

BY FANE BOSEIWAQA WITH SLAN ROLLS

7 December 2016

Vani Tuvuki, leader of the Koronubu Women's Fellowship, is concerned that persistent barriers to participation include age and marital status.

"Women have been stigmatised because of age and marital status," she said. "For example, if they are old and they can't attend workshops (or) if they are over 55, their education is not good... those kind(s) of stigma."

Women's networks like femLINKpacific's monthly network meeting in Ba in early December enables women of all diversities to access information and share their concerns. Which is why the 8 women, including young women and women living with disabilities from Tauvegavega, Badrau, Koronubu, Nailaga Tikina, Ba HART, and Namosau were meeting. Together they were representing more than 531 other women and 1112 households.

Together, they reflected on the few months prior – predominantly focused on TC Winston response and recovery as well as Women's Weather Watch action learning and advocacy, which now means a more intensified focus on preparedness.

The plans, according to the women, must result in more inclusive, prepared and protected communities.

"For us in the HART Home, we are preparing ourselves," said Sainiana Tinai, a resident of the Ba HART Home. "(But) the community needs to have a proper evacuation centre and it should be close to us.

"We need to form a Disaster Committee in the (community) so that they are the ones who will be passing the information to us – and that what we are doing with the community if a disaster happens."

"More women to be in decision making areas – at least 50% – and more gender awareness programme to be organised in remote areas," added Kamla Lajendra, representing the Sanatan Nari Sabha.



WOMEN NEED TO BE AT THE DECISION MAKING TABLE

BY ALISIA EVANS

"I don't have (a land) lease and it is not safe for me - they can chase me (away) anytime. Where (am) I gonna go?"

These were the words of Kala Wati, Vice-President of the Navakai Multiracial Women's Club in Nadi - spoken honestly and openly to Sokoveti Lutumailagi, femLINKpacific's correspondent for Nadi and Lautoka, about her access to land during our October rounds of rural women leader's meetings across Fiji.

Kala Wati is 56 years old. She also happens to be the health worker for her community of Navakai.

Wati's words strike a chord - despite being a leader to the 42 women from the Navakai Multiracial Women's Club, as well as the 150 households that live in her community, Wati still doesn't feel safe in her home.

Through women's eyes there is a broader notion of security - one that is defined in human, rather than military, terms. Until women, like Kala Wati, feel secure in their homes and communities, countries cannot be assured of sustainable peace in the nation.

This has been the crux of femLINKpacific's work on peace and security since 2000.

In 2016, femLINKpacific convened 77 district consultations as well as 2 rounds of divisional consultations in the west, north and central divisions and 3 national consultations held in Suva. The messages emerging have been clear and consistent.

Women want to be at the decision making table - a table that needs to get bigger.

Take, for example, Nila Rao.

At 62 years old, Rao is the National Vice President of the TISI Mother's Sangam and the advisory councillor for the Caulasi Settlement in Rakiraki.

Following TC Winston in February, Rao recounted in detail how she was the first person out

into the community. She conducted immediate assessments in her damaged community - on top of her usual responsibilities as advisory councillor - passing the information on to her Provincial Administrator.

"(But) then the roads were closed, the power lines were down, the posts were down...we couldn't take a vehicle," she shared. "So, I had to walk from house to house assessing the damage."

"Then they required us to write down the number of members in a family so that they could provide emergency rations. So what I did was I did the assessment and then I passed it on (to) the P.A. I had to walk five to six kilometres to reach the centre."

Rao's monthly allowance is \$150 a month or \$5 a day - one wonders if this is enough to support Rao in her leadership role in the community. On top of that, even though Rao gathers and submits the impact assessment forms, she is not involved in the designing and implementation of the emergency relief responses.

The truth is women's security, whether during times of natural disaster or on a day-to-day basis, becomes even more untenable in their homes and communities simply because their leadership is not recognized or even supported in local and national governance processes.

It is exactly this lack of support that femLINKpacific is highlighting and will continue to highlight through our policy initiatives such as Women's Human Security First and Women's Weather Watch campaigns.

"Through our women's weather watch programme, we have seen and documented the resilience and leadership of women including the few that are advisory councillors," emphasised Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific's Executive Producer-Director. "There must be links to the commitments of women in decision making especially in local governance."

But this also requires a change in the way in which government engages with women.

"It is about building on the work of the women's movement to support and sustain women's participation by tackling the root causes of the barriers," added Bhagwan Rolls. "A human security approach is a must to support women's participation for the prevention of all forms of violence and ensuring community security."

16 Days

16 DAYS OF COMMUNITY RADIO

BY HANNAH HICKS AND SHAN ROLLS

22 November 2016

"It's not just about the elimination of violence against women, it's also about looking at the root causes of violence against women in terms of women's human security first and what women have been talking about is not just being victims of violence but that opportunity for them to talk and share their story in terms of addressing the root causes," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific Executive Producer Director. "That's a really important message that we want to use the airwaves to amplify so that decision makers can hear that they shouldn't just be setting out programmes that are talking about violence but actually really addressing the root causes and how to support women's empowerment and women's leadership to overcome those problems."

From the 25th of November to the 10th of December, 2016, femLINKpacific marked 16 Days of Community Radio for this very reason alongside the global commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence.

"The 16 Days of Community radio started in 2004," Bhagwan Rolls explained. "It was our first national training where we brought rural women and young women activists and civil society leaders based in the capital together and we mobilized for the first time community media correspondents - women community media correspondents - out to rural communities."

"We coincided it with the 16 Days campaign because first and foremost it's an important global campaign that is grounded in local realities and as a feminist media organization it's important for us to not just dedicate one day but to significantly dedicate the airwaves throughout the 16 Days to this campaign because it covers a number of priority areas that women have been talking about on the airwaves of 89FM since 2004. The other issue for using community radio and the 16 Days of Community Radio is it's also about demonstrating that media technology, both the broadcast platform and what is linked to it - our stories on Facebook, our tweets, the other information now as we get more active with social media - has an important role to play in communicating the issues relating to these global campaigns."

At the local level, embracing the global theme for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, 'From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All', rural monthly network meetings had weaved their discussions around education.

"Some of the key messages they shared was the lack of access to education and women talked about personal security for

women especially for those that come from (a) large family where at times the priority of their personal education as women is not being prioritized," shared Adi Vasulevu, femLINKpacific's convenor based in the North.



"What I've been hearing from the women (and) for me personally I think we need to continue to educate the women, continue to empower women that there's a way out for them to end violence," said Fane Boseiwaqa, femLINKpacific's Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki convenor.

"(But) it's not just our voice," added Bhagwan Rolls. "The 16 Days covers many themes, many political issues - disability rights, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, World Human Rights Day."

"It's really important as a community radio station that we bring the community of civil society together over the airwaves which can be shared not only with our listeners on 89FM in Suva, with our 300 watt transmitter covering the Navua to Nausori corridor, but also shared with listeners in Labasa on 89FM Labasa in Labasa town."

"We need our homes to be places of harmony and joy where we can play and laugh together. But even laughter can be cruel, when we laugh at someone not with them. Jokes at someone else's expense are common in our Pacific cultures. We laugh at those who are different. And often we laugh at children, treating them as objects of amusement without any respect", highlighted Tessa MacKenzie, a key woman leader who had been part of the Peace Vigil back in 2000 - a space where femLINKpacific was born.

We also had the opportunity to speak to Seona Smiles - a feminist, a writer and a journalist - who never fails to share her message with a bit of humour.

"Sadly, many teachers and even more parents apparently believe that children learn best by having education beaten into them," she said. "I can tell you smacking the seven times table into my palms with a stick never taught me anything except to hate maths of any sort and to forget figures."

"I mean even now I can hardly tell the time".

"Most of these teaches needs to be sensitized and they need to be educated on certain issues that most of these NGO's have mandated on the type work that they do," added Jofiliti Veikoso, from Transparency International. "For example, on mental health and maybe on the LGBTIQ communities that we have."

Throughout the 16 days campaign there were numerous guests sharing their messages and stories from the perspective of the education sector, faith based organizations as well as other diverse civil society groups including Jackie Leota of the University of the South Pacific, Rev Tevita Nawadra of Fiji Council of Churches, Audrey Seru of Diverse Voices and Action for Equality and Gazala Akbar of Vision Fiji.

"We do not always respect the richness of diversity that we have among ourselves, richness of colour, size, shape, background, religion, age, gender," concluded MacKenzie. "We have a diversity that we can cherish and enjoy, when we give due respect to all."

CHANGE THE MINDSET THROUGH ACCESSIBLE AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

BY FANE BOSEIWAQA AND SHARON ROLLS WITH HANNAH HICKS

“Women are always... (thinking that) their place is to be in the kitchen and they are underestimated by men all the time,” said Sainiana Tinai of the Ba HART Home. “That is one of their biggest problems.”

There is still the need for the barriers to women’s participation, internally and externally to be addressed – this was one of the issues raised at November’s rural leaders’ consultation in Ba.

9 rural women leaders attended, including young as well as elderly women, and representatives of LGBT and disability groups. Collectively, they represented 532 other rural women and 940 households in Ba from communities like Badrau, Yalalevu, Nailega Tikina, Ba Hart Home, Koroqaqa, Koronubu and Tauvegavega.

The rural women leaders also reflected on the theme for the upcoming 16 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence – ‘From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!’

“If we look across the children, the schools - many of the schools that have been damaged during TC Winston (have) not been fixed up and children are studying under tents,” continued Tinai. “Imagine the heat... the environment is not good.”

“We should have (an) adequate environment and equal access to education,” recommended Iliesa Qele an LGBT representative who was also present at the convening. “We need to promote gender equality programmes in basic education and provide gender equality in the classrooms.”

“It’s not only about development issues, but it’s about what women have been going through as victims of violence - not only gender based violence but violence in all areas,” shared Fane

Boseiwaqa, femLINKpacific’s convener for Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki. “It (includes) violence within the family.”

“If there is no food, women go through violence. If there is no clean drinking water, women go through violence.”

femLINKpacific has been, since 2000, lobbying for policy changes that inform and transform notions of security, particularly to ensure conflict-prevention strategies are inclusive of women’s human security priorities. This is further amplified through our Women’s Weather Watch initiatives.

“In 2004, femLINKpacific started raising awareness of disaster risks, the need for resilience and the need to enhance preparedness through our Women’s Weather Watch model,” added Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific Executive Producer-Director. “Such a model enables communities, including women in all their diversities, to define what their preparedness, protection and response needs and capacities are throughout the disaster and development cycle.”

As women like Sainiana highlights, communities in Ba and other affected communities are resilient and determined despite the fact that they are still in recovery mode almost 10 months since TC Winston. Of concern is that progress is marred by a gender-blind approach in implementation plans and operationalisation are often determined without the meaningful participation of women. This is why we are continuing our Women’s Weather Watch work because reforms are needed to build and sustain capacity for all stages of disaster response and management to ensure women’s human security priorities are accounted for. Our consultations have successfully demonstrated the importance of sustaining local women’s networks on the ground that create safe spaces by and for women to engage in open dialogue on their human security and protection issues at the district, divisional and national level.

“On a monthly basis, it is a time for (the rural women leaders to) get together,” continued Boseiwaqa. “It’s a time for (the women leaders) to dialogue and share information through our monthly network meetings.”

NORTH LEADERS FOCUS ON 16 DAYS CAMPAIGN MESSAGE - “MAKE EDUCATION SAFE FOR ALL”

BY LUCILLE CHUTE

“Girls and young women in most societies still face severe challenges of accessing education,” said Reverend Angela Suruj, representing the Association of Anglican Women (AAW).

Ahead of the annual 16 days of community radio action linked to the annual 16 days of activism campaign, Rev Suruj was attending femLINKpacific’s monthly network meeting in November which brought together 15 women leaders who collectively represented 5,047 other women from 10 communities including Naleba, Bulileka, Vunimoli, Vunicuicui, Mali, Tawake and Lagi as well as representatives from the Diverse Voices and Action for Equality North and the Labasa Market Vendors Association.

The women discussed that education for girls and boys alike has been affected as families continue to rebuild their lives and rehabilitate farms almost 10 months since Fiji was hit by Tropical Cyclone Winston.

“In the pursuit of gaining an education, girls and women are still vulnerable to discrimination practices, abuse, attack and harassment,” added Rev Suruj. “(We need to) make education safe for all.”

Amongst the recovery is the awareness that we are now in the midst of a new cyclone season and according to Luisa Yalobula, representing the Tosovata women’s group in Bulileka, through the regular district meetings, she has been able to enhance her preparedness; for her, economic and food security are priorities pre and post disaster.

Yalobula is doing backyard gardening of capsicum, eggplant and cabbages to cater for the off season in the market. She shared that she is also being very mindful to manage her weekly income and expenses, making sure that she puts aside \$10 for savings, \$24 for her stall fees, \$12 for bus fare, \$5 for plastic, \$10 for her children’s education and \$20 for other bills.

“Our long term priorities (are), we want to ensure that houses are built to cyclone and floods preventative standard and ensuring all houses too have access to clean drinking water for example taps and water tanks,” added Mareta Tagivakatini, representing the Labasa Market Association. “(Also) for the ministry of agriculture to have more supplies of seedlings and stems.”



EDUCATION FOR ALL MEANS DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

BY SULUETI WAQA

“Education is the answer,” stressed Rev Angela Suruj, representing the Association of Anglican Women during the district consultation last week at the Community Media Centre in Labasa.

Discussing the theme of the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence, ‘Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Accessible to All’ was the focus of the November 2016 district convening among the 15 rural women leaders who attended.

Rev Suruj highlighted that access to education is important in order to earn for the family and to be financially stable as, she believed, most violence in the family is rooted in economic insecurity.

She added that education and empowerment will provide women with employment, knowing their rights and also assist them with their everyday lives.

Despite the positive impacts that education of women in all their diversities has for women and their families, there are still obstacles that prevent women from accessing their right to education.

A lack of income, according to Rev Suruj, is high on the list. “We live in large extended families which makes it harder to access quality education for children and adults,” she said. Support mechanisms for education should be accessible to allow women and girls to attain quality education was also a recommendation.

“Children do not attend school because of poor road condition,” outlined Nirmala Sharma, representing the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Group. “Sometimes, in rainy seasons, they don’t have proper bus service just because

of the road condition.”

Personal security of women also needed to be considered when ensuring their access to quality education.

“There is no safe space for women and girls where they can stay, even with their relatives,” added Sharma. “(They cannot) go to school because some of the higher tertiary is not available nearby to their house.”

Thus, decentralising services will enable rural women to have a quality education.

“I see that the government needs to make some more new improvements like providing hostels for rural children and persons with disability (as well as those of diverse sexual orientation and) gender (identity) as most of them live far away from the intuitions,” continued Rev Suruj.

She also urged parents to assist by sending their children to school and to make use of the government initiative of having free school fees. She added that the community needed to be empowered to value education and know its benefits.

“Every day we hear on the news that there are child abuse (cases) and this has to be stopped,” said Rev Suruj. “When people are educated, they know about it and this will decrease violence.”

Sharma also shared that she wanted to see a review of the available scholarships for students at tertiary levels.

Education is key in order for women to fully participate in addressing the issues that they face in their families and communities.

Education for all is far from being achieved yet is critical to ensure. There needs to be equal access to education regardless of what background a person is from – ensuring a secure future for all, including women and girls, addressing some of the root causes of violence like economic insecurity and poverty.

With education comes empowerment, enabling women and girls to know their rights and be involved in decision making to improve the status of women in their communities, at the national level and in the world.

YOUNG, MUM AND RURAL

BY SULUETI WAQA

“Due to (a) lack of access to information, some expectant mothers in rural setting aren’t aware of the importance of (going to the) clinic and other services in the hospital,” shared Kinisimere Ceyaqalo, broadcaster for FemTALK89FM in Labasa. “They often put their health and their baby’s health at risk.” Unplanned pregnancies are a reality because early sexual activity is a reality. However, according to Ceyaqalo, availability and access to contraception for rural young women, safely and without judgment is a challenge. “Even if resources were available, whether single or married women, they still feel reluctant to access the services because of how sensitive the issues is when it comes to traditional norms,” she explained. “If they choose to access this services, it could possibly raise (a) question in homes, communities as (some people say) it is conflicting to tradition(al) and religious beliefs.”

Many of these problems can actually be addressed, according to Ceyaqalo, by ensuring the health services are available in the communities, via the village nurses and community health workers, many of whom are women.

“Village nurses need to be trained to do workshops in villages on reproductive health and rights because they know their community better and they know the best approach in reaching them,” she concluded. Ceyaqalo, like myself, is a young mother who grew up in a remote rural community of Tawake. I was born in Tavua and grew up in Navosa and Ba.

Ceyaqalo also just had her second baby, a little girl, on the 31st of December.

“What I am hearing from women who live outside of Labasa Town (and) even from my community, (a) major challenge for them is accessing to proper maternal health services,” she said. “For all expectant mothers, around about 8 months, if you live far away, (you) have to try to move closer to Labasa.”

“It is an added cost as they have to worry about the money for the host family, food they have (to) buy while staying with relatives, transportation costs and other expenses.”

Mereisi Mara from Nabaci village in Savusavu shared that health centres and hospitals must be well equipped.

“We had a pregnant woman who did a normal delivery and we don’t have any equipment to cut the umbilical cord... the nurses were there but they don’t have any resources,” she said.

Ensuring a safe delivery is also about the road conditions and accessibility to affordable transport.

“There is only one truck carrying all these people from the village,” said Titaku Tabuariki of the Buakonikai Women’s Group on Rabi Island. “The young mothers with the children, they want to go to the clinic, the elders, the disabled.”

“The road isn’t good. Sometimes, during heavy rain, the truck won’t be running because it’s slippery and if it breaks down, they have to walk.”

EVAWG IS EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY

BY FRANCES TAWAKE

“If we don’t address domestic violence now, it will become a national crisis,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific during a media education training coinciding with the annual 16 days campaign organised by PACMAS – the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme.

‘Strengthening Capacity and Collaboration to Communicate the Elimination of Violence against Women’ coincided with the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign which has the theme ‘From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!’ and brought together 11 participants who were drawn from public, private and community media as well as the Department of Women, Department of Information and Empower Pacific.

“Domestic violence is not a women’s issues and women don’t have to fight violence alone,” said Brigitte Leduc, Gender Equality Advisor from the Pacific Community (SPC) who spoke alongside Bhagwan Rolls. “It is a national issue.”

Meanwhile, at the November Central Division network meetings, participants once again voiced their concern that domestic violence is becoming a pandemic and that violence against women and girls is a violation of women’s human rights. Of concern is the potential for the rates to spike during the festive season.

“We need peace and harmony during Christmas and New Year by taking care of our children... (we don’t want to) have any violence,” said Georgina Pau from Navua Multiracial Women’s Group.

“I would like the police to have more patrols in my community especially in the red zone areas so that there won’t be any violence and to have a peaceful festive season,” added Sheleni Lata from Sheetal Sharda Mahila Mandal in Nausori.

Violence against women denies women their most basic rights and freedoms, including freedom of opinion, equality and justice.

It also creates a barrier to women’s participation at all levels such as preventing their access to quality and accurate information, education and employment. This injustice cannot continue. While decision makers have made promises by ratifying CEDAW and making laws and policies, it is everyone’s responsibility – during the 16 Days of Activism and every other day of the year – to end violence against women and girls.

SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH BARRIERS REMAIN

BY HANNAH HICKS

“Young women, young people face many barriers when trying to access sexual health services, particularly family planning and contraception,” said Isabelle Gurney, Program Officer: Resource Mobilisation at International Planned Parenthood Federation’s (IPPF) Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific (SRPOP).

According to Gurney, IPPF aims to improve the quality of life of individuals by providing and campaigning for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) through advocacy and services, especially for poor and vulnerable people.

SRHR is an umbrella for various issues that affect men and women alike. It represents four separate areas: sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health, and reproductive rights.

The unfortunate reality for some such area, sexual reproductive health (SRH) – a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system – there are still many barriers.

“(First is) Stigma of pre-marital sex, second is the sub-cultural or perceived sub-cultural issues and the third is the provider or the health staff restriction,” explained Aggie Dawainavesi, a Program Officer also at IPPF-SROP who spoke to FemTALK89FM.

These barriers are very common across the Pacific and hinder a persons’ ability to access accurate and safe information and services on sexual and reproductive health, to be able to access (an) affordable and acceptable contraception method of their choice and to be informed and empowered to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections.

When sexual and reproductive health needs are not met, individuals are deprived of the right to make crucial choices about their own bodies and futures, with a cascading impact on their families’ welfare and future generations.

As women are the bearers of children, they

also bear the responsibility of nurturing them, and therefore sexual and reproductive health and rights issues cannot be separated from gender equality.

Dawanivesi shared that a key part of their work is to engage with the social structures that play a role in being a deterrent to the expansion of sexual reproductive health services.

“Indeed there is a lot of awareness (on SRHR) that is being done but translating that into practice is where the gap comes in,” she added.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has in their deliberations clearly indicated that women’s right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health. This means that States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil rights related to women’s sexual and reproductive health.

In addition, the Beijing Platform for Action states that ‘the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.’

“The unfortunate reality for an area such as sexual reproductive health (SRH) – a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system – is there are still many barriers to overcome.

“Parents talking to their children is so important,” continued Gurney. “People know about family planning, they know about sexual health, there’s been big campaigns in the past but you really need to have people talking about it.”

“Until parents feel like they can talk to their children about this sort of stuff and teachers are comfortable discussing comprehensive sexual education or family life education in the classroom, it’s going to be hard to improve people’s sexual health and change unhealthy sexual behaviours.”

The Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific (SROP) is a component of the East & South East Asia and Oceania Region (ESEAR) based in Suva, Fiji. SROP is responsible for the nine Member Associations (MAs) of the Pacific Region, namely, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Fiji.



PACIFIC FEMINIST FORUM REPORT

The 3-day Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) consisted of a series of workshops aligned to the theme, plenaries open to the public and closed plenaries exclusively for PFF

participants, information booths and market set-ups. The PFF brought together more than 100 women and human rights activists from 22 island states including Fiji and Rabi, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The forum was organised by the Fiji Women’s

Rights Movement in partnership with Bold Alliance, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Haus of Khameleon, the Pacific Young Women’s Leadership Alliance (PYWLA), International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA), the University of the South Pacific, UN Women, the Westpac Women’s Markets and FemLINKpacific. This activity is supported

through the We Rise 2 program, with the We Rise Coalition, and funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

As the media partner to the PFF, femLINKpacific produced a range of media initiatives as well as hosted content from the 3 day event.

EDUCATION FOR ALL - CRITICAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND RURAL WOMEN LEADERS

BY SULUETI WAQA AND SLAN ROLLS

"I want to make sure my daughter completes Form 7 (Year 13) because I couldn't," shared Salome Raqiyawa, member of the Nalalawa Women's Group from Rakiraki. "My father couldn't afford the fees (so I had to stop going to school)." Ahead of World Human Rights Day and the culmination of the 2016 annual 16 days of activism campaign, femLINKpacific and the Poetry Shop were in Tavua collaborating on an activism project supported by UNWomen Pacific. Young women, like 17 year old Artika and 19 year old Sainiana of Rakiraki, who femLINKpacific first interviewed in May 2016, shared their perspectives on the 16 days theme 'Making Education Safe for All' with rural women leaders who have been actively involved in femLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch campaign. "My mum worries about my safety when I have late classes," said Sainiana as she shared the increased need for classes after the disruption TC Winston caused in February. As Sainiana spoke, she also shared the support her mother showed for her and her siblings since the increased load of

schoolwork.

Family support is critical to ensuring that girls are able to be successful in school – a message also shared a day before the activism project at the Labasa district consultation.

"Sometime(s) it is tradition and culture that has been a barrier to education where women think that her place is only in the kitchen," said Julie Adivuvutaki Waqa, President of the Vunivucui Multiracial Women's Club. "Women need to change their mindset in order to be educated."

"They need to attend training and consultations."

Manjula Devi Ram, Treasurer of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal, added that there is (a) need to encourage women, despite their age or marital status, to go to school. She also believed that elders in an extended family needed to change their mindset to ensure that their in-laws could continue to go to school if they wished to further their education.

Deepshika Raj, a young woman from Vunimoli who often accompanies her mother to femLINKpacific consultations in Labasa, shared that for her, the professionalism of teachers plays a big part in girls wanting to stay in school.

"Sometimes the teacher use languages that can sometimes overturn the student's morale," she said. "I believe that the professional environment needs to be created which will boost student's morale and help them strive (for better)."

And like Raqiyawa's experience, women in the North also shared the hardships of a lack of available resources in investing in their education as young women.

"The barrier to access quality education is transport problem and also financial support in rural communities," shared

Nalini Deo of Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal. "My school days (were) very difficult."

"I (didn't) reach school in time and it is mostly when the first class is already over."

Deo, during her school days, would wake up at 5 o'clock and caring for her sickly mother before leaving home to make the 32 kilometre journey to school – often returning home after dark, with some time to spare for study if she was lucky.

"We need education to be safe and accessible for our daughters and also rural women who had to drop out," added Raqiyawa, highlighting the need not only to invest in the future, but bridge the skills of rural women today.

"By providing this mother and daughter space for rural women leaders from Rakiraki and Tavua to hear from Artika and Sainiana, we are localising the campaign theme as well as giving clear insights on recommendations that ensure the formal and informal education system paves the way for empowerment and leadership which leads to meeting the goals of gender equality, human rights and human security" said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific's Executive Producer-Director.

The activism consultation will result in a short film and podcasts which will interweave women's narratives documented through femLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch campaign with that of the spoken word style of communication. The programmes produced at the district consultations are available on FemTALK89FM in the Central Division and in Labasa as well as online.

PFF REPORT

THE LEGACY OF THE PACIFIC FEMINIST MOVEMENT CONTINUES

BY SHARON BHAGWAN ROLLS

Suva, Fiji - 28 November 2016

The legacy of the Pacific feminist movement lives long and bright - emerging from the decade of freedom and innocence of the 1970s and continuing to sustain herself.

139 Pacific feminists from 13 countries came together in a journey that stemmed from the first opportunity for Pacific young women to participate in the UN Decade for Women, related by Dr Claire Slatter in the keynote address of the Pacific Feminist Forum.

Slatter reminded the 139 Pacific feminists that they must develop strategies which will not only assist them in dealing with the reality of global peace and security challenges but also the unresolved issues of the Nuclear Free Independent and Pacific Movement while grappling with the reality of living in island communities facing the destruction of lands and river systems due to mining, intensifying natural disasters and growing economic inequalities.

"It's important always to remain autonomous and in control of your own work and not get caught up in donor agendas," she outlined.

The 2016 Pacific Feminist Charter will be a key outcome of the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum that got underway at the University of the South Pacific (USP) Laucala campus today builds on the legacy of Pacific feminists organising since the mid-1970s.

"I think that document - because it's such an aspirational document - getting feedback, getting ownership from Pacific feminists in the room is going to be a highlight," said Michelle Reddy, the Acting Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

According to Reddy, the next three days brings together the experiences of feminists from across the Pacific to learn, inform and strategise together on issues that matter from trade and climate justice to inter-generational organising.

"I think another highlight, and I guess I'm biased, is the all-GIRLS session that will be led today," she outlined. "Straight after the plenary (it) is going to be something, because it's the first time that an all-GIRLS session will be held by the girls themselves."

"FWRM is super proud and really looking forward to seeing that session take place."

In her remarks to Pacific Feminists and allies at the opening plenary, Reddy acknowledged the journey of planning and organising for the event and the desire to host a truly Pacific event and it marks the beginning of future feminist organising.

"The thing about inaugural events is that it allows one to dream big, to envision something spectacular, to do something that has not been done before," shared Reddy. "So, this Pacific Feminist Forum is our dream, which today is a reality!"

This is a dream that was shared by the first wave of Pacific feminists in the mid-1970s when young women like Claire Slatter, Vanessa Griffen and the late Amelia Rokotuivuna and the late Ruth Lechte organised a Pacific Women's Conference at the USP which brought together 89 politically diverse women from Tahiti, Palau, Kanaky, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea (PNG).

"We were feminists who organised it and we had a feminist agenda, but we couldn't call it a feminist conference," said Slatter. "We wanted Pacific Island women to be able to speak freely among ourselves without feeling constrained in any way."

This was the start of the journey of Pacific feminists talking, learning and developing a Pacific feminist agenda, often facing the challenges of resourcing feminist action and initiatives.

"Among the conference resolutions were proposals to form a Pacific Women's Association and set up a Pacific Women's Resource Centre," said Slatter.

The resource centre was subsequently established but closed after 4 years handicapped by insufficient resources and moral support and poor communications support from the region Slatter outlined, but Pacific feminists persisted working through the series of UN conferences - lobbying with governments and being part of official negotiations as well as resisting the effort to roll-over back on commitments and by the nineties the Pacific feminist movement was experiencing a huge expansion in regional organising and activism with positive results from violence against women, peace and security, trade and environmental issues, climate change and development as well as LGBTIQ rights.

"In all, the last 20 years have been extremely active ones for Pacific feminists and you can feel justifiably proud of your hard work in building the movement through training programmes and solidarity, contributing to regional and global agenda setting processes and improving respect for and realisation of rights," Slatter concluded.

EVERY MOMENT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY

BY ALISIA EVANS

Suva, Fiji - 28 November 2016

"The hardest audience we've had have definitely been our politicians...to hear from them saying that gender is not of priority," said Kathryn Relang of Women United in Marshall Islands (WUTMI). "It was hurtful."

Relang was a speaker at the opening plenary of the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum which got underway in Suva this morning, recounting her experience of the last 7 years.

For close to 30 years, WUTMI has been a leading advocate for gender equality in the Northern Pacific and Relang acknowledged the foundational work of Daisy Alik-Momotaro and the first woman to be elected as President of the Marshall Islands this year - Hilda Heine.

As a feminist, every moment is one that must be utilised to continue to advocate on gender equality underscored Relang.

She herself admitted to using birthdays, funerals or just meeting a politician at the store as a lobbying opportunity.

The plenary also featured Dr Claire Slatter, Michelle Reddy, Akansha Kant and Joleen Mataele which presented the inter-generational focus of the Pacific Feminist Forum from the outset.

"It's the mindset of people...we need to speak up," shared Kant, the youngest panelist, and graduate of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's (FWRM) Grow Inspire Relate Lead Succeed (GIRLS) programme. "It's not just men...(but) we girls can lead (into) the future."

"It's a learning process," added Relang. "As young feminists we are still learning."

"You're always going to be up against these fabulous feminists but that's an area, that's a space that you should take advantage from and learn from them."

Intergenerational leadership is about power, highlighted Michelle Reddy, Acting Director for FWRM.

"It's not about them and us (but) it's about us as an individual in a space that includes everybody else," she shared. "Your power has an impact on how everybody else in that room communicates and how they engage as feminist and human

rights defenders."

"We're doing this...for the sake of the younger generation," continued Mataele, President and Executive Director of the Tonga Leitis Association. "It's about talking and fighting twenty-four-seven for the rights of our people."



ACKNOWLEDGING THE STRUGGLE, WEAVING THE FUTURE

BY SHARON BHAGWAN ROLLS

Suva, Fiji - 29 November 2016, World Human Rights Defenders Day

"What changed for us in Bua is when the mining started without consultation and without engaging communities – not just the men but women and children," said Alisi Rabukawaqa of the Bua Urban Youth Network who was one of the 9 women of diversities on the mat for the second plenary session of the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum. "It was our duty to share our knowledge in our community."

During the plenary, participants were asked to face their fears and obstacles and consider how the movement can demonstrate solidarity – interpersonally and inter-generationally.

These challenges are not new and generations of feminists have had to challenge their own communities to acknowledge that women's struggles can be confrontational and shocking especially when you knowingly go against the tide but you do so purposefully and decisively.

"It's about doing something for my community and protecting our earth," said Rabukawaqa.

"The work I do is sensitive – challenging the government and multimillion (dollar) corporations," related Tamara Kruzang Mandengat of Act Now PNG whose work also involves community mobilization because of extractive industries such as logging and seabed mining.

The Bua Urban Youth Network, according to Rabukawaqa, also recognised the increasing vulnerability of young women which catalysed them to act.

And, increasingly, the Pacific Feminist Forum is hearing from more young women like Yoshiko Yamaguchi-Capelle of the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance, who highlighted the struggle of finding the balance between your feminist values and principles and loving your family when addressing the priority issue is your sexual reproductive health or sexual orientation and gender identity.

"People think you are promoting sexual activity in the community," said Yamaguchi. "(So you still) have to watch what you say about your rights and your sexual reproductive health rights."

"Sexuality is still taboo and difficult to talk about and media portrayal perpetuates shame even though young people are sexually active," added Maryann Lockington, a representative of the Emerging Leaders Forum.

However, for many women with disabilities, they are not even part of the conversation.

"(The Pacific Feminist Forum) signifies the inclusive thinking but the reality for many women and girls with disability is that we are regarded as asexual and services don't include us," shared Savina Nongebatu of the Solomon Islands Persons with Disability network.

Amacy Antonio, of the Haus of Kameleon has greater expectations.

"To me, solidarity is powerful," she said. "If you don't mean it, don't say it."

"It's about (supporting) legal gender recognition and access to health services."

Lockington added that that is one of the reasons why there is a need to rewrite the media narrative on feminism – by creating our own content because much of the media images and content about the feminist movement does not accurately reflect the Pacific feminist movement, in all her diversities.

Tomorrow, the Pacific Feminist Forum adopts a Pacific Feminist Charter which will communicate the way Pacific feminists are re-shaping and re-defining freedom and solidarity in a manner that is inclusive yet also acknowledging and respecting diversities.

"(Together) we can weave together feminism, faith and culture like a beautiful pandanus mat," said Rabukawaqa.

MAPPING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE OF PACIFIC FEMINISM

BY ALISLA EVANS AND SHARON BHAGWAN ROLLS

Suva, Fiji - 29 November 2016, World Human Rights Defenders Day

"Feminism does this really well," said Noelene Nabulivou the Political Adviser of Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality at the start of Day 2 of the Pacific Feminist Forum as feminist came together to talk about the uncomfortable and silent issues faced by activists across the Pacific.

It was International Women's Human Rights Defenders Day as nine diverse women from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands sat on the mat to discuss feminism in the Pacific.

"Feminism is a power," said Adi Finau Tabakucoro, the General Secretary for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama in Fiji. "(But) when you are excluded, you are prevented from exercising self-determination."

Feminism can be scary as well, according to Kini Tinai from the Patriots Community and Sports Club and mobiliser for Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji.

"When we are marching, the scary part is as an LBT (woman) how everyone looks at us...I've experienced that every time (I march in public)," she shared.

"The beauty about feminism...is the creativity," explained Savina Nongebatu from People with Disabilities on Solomon Islands. "Your success will be defined by how much passion you put into what you do."

"I continuously thank the trans and women's movement to give space to talk about our issues," summed up Amacy Antonio, member of the Haus of Kameleon and femLINKpacific's team of producers and broadcasters for FemTALK89FM Suva. "It's about accepting our diversity."

"It's not wrong being different – it makes us human."

Like the first Pacific Women's Conference organised by feminist forbearers' in 1975, the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum of 2016 is providing an inter-generational space enabling younger women's human rights defenders, like Yoshiko Yamaguchi-Capelle of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to speak to her Pacific sisters who have come together from 13 Pacific Island countries.

"It's hard to speak out because (coming) from a small community you have to watch what you say," she said. "People have this perception that you are promoting sexual activity when you talk about sexual and reproductive human rights."

Yamaguchi-Capelle also represents the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance and is on the advisory board of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development.

"Confrontation with family members (has meant that I) have to step back and think about why I am doing this," she continued.

The plenary session reminded participants that, as Pacific feminists, one of the challenges that remains since the first UN Decade for Women is transforming the power structures, including those within our organisations and movement, as well as economic, social, political and cultural structures – including faith based institutions which are integral to our daily lives.

The Pacific Feminist Forum will adopt a Pacific Feminist Charter to communicate the way Pacific feminists are re-shaping and re-defining freedom and solidarity in a manner that is inclusive yet also acknowledging and respecting diversities. The organisers of the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum are adamant that the charter will be able to chart a course for a new future.

"It can be both and it can be all," added Alisi Rabukawaqa. "(Together) we can weave together feminism, faith and culture like a beautiful pandanus mat."

NAVIGATING DIVERSITY - THE FIJI WOMEN'S FORUM

BY ALISLA EVANS

Suva, Fiji - 30 November 2016

"It brings us together on fundamental principles (about) shifting the power around political participation" said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer Director of femLINKpacific, a co-convenor of the Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) along with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama (SSVM), Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and National Council of Women (NCW).

The co-convenors were sharing their individual and shared experiences of mobilizing women from community to national level as well as amplifying women's interest in playing a leading role towards democratization since 2012 in Fiji.

"We felt that it was time to influence the form of governance that we wanted to see," added Michelle Reddy, acting Executive Director of FWRM.

Established in 2012, the FWF is the first coalition in Fiji and the Pacific region that works across the women's movement to achieve national unity and has since convened 5 successful women's forums at the national level.

"(This) speaks volumes of the tenacity, perseverance and will of the women's organisations," attested Fay Volatabu, NCW General Secretary. "Collective bargaining is a very powerful tool."

The power of numbers means the FWF can amplify the voices of women across Fiji.

"Our coming to the forum was to get exposure and have a collective voice on issues," explained Adi Finau Tabakucoro,



SSVM General Secretary.

But working in coalitions is not easy, especially to amplify women's diverse interests and is not an easy task simply because women are not a homogenous group.

"When you talk (in public fora) you represent a certain group and you talk with the mandate of those behind you," stated Tabakucoro. "(There are) difficulties of my members to accept and embrace some of the ideas of feminism."

As the session continued each of the co-convenors unpacked how they navigated and negotiated diversity into the work they do. It was apparent that to advance the women's movement in Fiji there needed to be constant negotiation and discussion across multiple levels.

"Have the courage to say what is not working for you," added Reddy, who acknowledged that this is a particular strength of the women's forum.

How we navigate diversity is about respecting each other's rights, highlighted Tabakucoro and supporting women organising – within and externally requires resourcing to sustain and building political agency.

"(We need) resources to ensure that not just the coordinator (of the Forum) but that the organisations are able to build and strengthen understanding between different ethnicities, LGBT as well as religion through our work," explained Bhagwan Rolls. "We are the Fiji Women's Forum and everybody must (be able to) see themselves in the programme, activities and everything we do."

A PACIFIC FEMINIST CHARTER IS ADOPTED

Suva, Fiji – 30 November 2016

The march continues says acting Executive Director of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, Michelle Reddy with the hope that there will be increased investment in feminist organising, particularly in rural, remote and marginalised urban communities.

“Feminism looks at the root causes of the power structures that need to change,” she said.

Speaking as the Pacific Feminist Forum concluded today, with the launch of the 2016 Pacific Feminists Charter for Change which identifies effective methods for further development towards the progress of Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights in the Pacific, the forum has proven that women across the 22 Pacific Islands Countries and Territories are committed human rights for all, a system of fairness and justice and equality for everyone.

“It is not just about two or three priorities but being resilient and claiming our space,” said Miki Wali of the Haus of Khameleon, highlighting that the Pacific Feminist Charter reflects the diversities and builds on the struggle as well as addressing priority issues including the multiple forms of violence and climate crisis.

“How can you have sustainable development if people are still fearing for their lives,” added Noelene Nabulivou of Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji.

She reiterated that the charter commits to personal principles as well as the following collective principles:

- The leadership of women’s organisations and networks in our region should be led and managed by Pacific women from small island states;
- Recognising the leadership of women of all ages, including older women, young women and

girls, and women of all intersectional identities;

- Spaces of power sharing are created across our diversities, in socio-economic and other class and privilege systems, generations, ethnicities, spiritual beliefs and other intersectionalities;
- We recognise our privilege or lack of it, including education, cultural and traditional status, ethnicity, race, urban status, language, sexuality and others;
- Transparency, accountability, and financial responsibility are practiced in our collectives, partnerships, coalitions, networks, organisations and institutions;
- Feminist ethics is practiced every day;
- All women and girls, including those in rural, remote and urban communities must have access to information and communication platforms, including feminist, appropriate and accessible media and Information and Communications Technologies (ICT);
- Social and economic justice, including sustainable livelihoods, universal social protection and fair and decent work are realised;
- We will collectively escalate our work to address the climate and ecological crisis of our times, and protect our commons and our planet;
- We commit to decriminalization of LGBTQI people of all countries in the Pacific region, and advancing legal rights of all LGBTQI people, with a focus on third gender legal recognition;
- We commit to decriminalize sex work in all countries of the Pacific;
- We commit to decriminalize abortion in all countries of the Pacific;
- We commit to protecting women human rights defenders including trans human rights defenders;
- We commit to escalate and support innovative feminist social organising efforts by all Pacific women, inclusive of marginalised rural, remote and urban communities.

The complete charter will be available via the FWRM website: www.fwrm.org.fj or the PFF Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pacificfeministforum/>

WOMEN ACT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

By Sian Rolls

14 November, 2016

“One of the ways that you can address the lack of substantive, direct voice of women from the economic South is to have these campaign moments,” explained Noelene Nabulivou, Political Advisor, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji.

She was describing a recent social media campaign of DIVA for Equality – in line with the Women Act for Climate Justice 10 Days of Global Mobilisation held from the 28th of October to the 6th of November.

“We’ve extended it over the 2 weeks of the UNFCCC, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is

on right now in Marrakesh in Morocco,” added Nabulivou. “There are initiatives all around the world.”

“They’re positive propositions from feminists and that we should be highlighting them much more firmly and in the structured spaces as much as we are building them as movements. So, this is just our part of that.”

The campaign brings women of all diversities together to define and share the issues they’re passionate about and are experiencing in their communities.

“There are women who are in many, many networks,” outlined Nabulivou. “(This includes) (rural women leaders) in the Women’s Weather Watch and other organisations... Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei had a lot to say that they wanted to raise, Catholic Women’s League had a lot to say (and) there are those from our DIVA LGBTQI hubs.”

“They want to talk about climate justice and they want to talk about disaster and they want their voice to be heard so some of the campaign memes that have been coming up are around sand dune mining, are around water quality,

are around dredging in rivers... there’s a plethora of issues. The human right to water, food sovereignty, biodiversity, the range of issues is huge as we know – from an interlinkage perspective, climate change touches every aspect of our lives.” According to Nabulivou, it was also a time to highlight the women leading on the ground.

“Around the same time, we’ve had this interesting moment where the United Nations suddenly decided that Wonder Woman would be the new, I don’t know, ambassador for gender justice,” she said. “We just thought that a tongue-and-cheek approach was to say ‘that’s really a ridiculous notion’ because there are women all around the world who are already in many ways counter-heroines to this idea that you have to be some superhero to change the world.”

“You don’t, you just have to work in your own area. So, the yellow capes was linking to the Women’s Climate Justice Campaign and we just put capes on everyone.”

‘IS THE FIJIAN BILL OF RIGHTS DIVISIBLE?’

By Carolyn Kitione

6 December 2016

“Are women of all diversities participating in decision making? Do we all hold the power to claim our rights to development? Are we all assured of our safety and security – whether it is discussing the weekly family budget or priorities for the national budget?”

These were some of the hard-hitting questions femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer Director, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, asked audience members at the Citizens Constitutional Forum’s recent Annual Public Forum on the Bill of Rights held late last year.

Focused on the theme, ‘Implementing the Bill of Rights: Is the Fijian Bill of Rights Divisible?’ Bhagwan Rolls was one of four panelist at the Friday event.

The only female on the panel, she was joined by Ashwin Raj, the Director for the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, Richard Naidu, prominent Suva lawyer, and Hon. Matai Akauola, a government MP.

Speaking on human rights as a whole, Ashwin Raj described the Bill of Rights as the ‘soul of the constitution’ and that in order to bring the Bill of Rights to life, one needed to persevere.

“At times, the rhetoric of indivisibility obscures the reality that the fulfillment of specific rights can be in conflict with one another, requiring limitations, reinterpretations of the rights or indeed choices to be made between them,” he said.

Addressing the audience, Bhagwan Rolls called out stakeholders on the need to talk to women as their work was ‘inextricably linked’ to their social and economic status.

“Constitutions must protect equality for women and girls – ensure girls’ right to primary education and protect women’s political rights including women’s rights to vote, right of association and right to hold legislative office,” she said. “As a document that shapes the country’s legal and political systems, the constitution is a place where the protection of women’s fundamental economic, social, political, cultural and civil rights are embedded.”

Bhagwan Rolls also shared findings from femLINK’s district, divisional and national consultations held in 2015 and 2016.

“So talk to the women – as we have done – and it is clear that women’s right to water, health, economic security and participation in decision making remains largely unaddressed,” she said. “The state is yet to meet its target of 30% representation of women in decision making so local consultation, planning and development processes continue without any change to

representation.”

“So social, economic and political systems persist and an example of where women were under-represented or even invisible is the 2016 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) which is subsequently a gender-neutral economic and social impact report – that does not account for the losses by women in the agricultural, communications and economic sectors. National reports of this nature perpetuate the institutional violence and result in personal violence linked to economic and food insecurities and causing increased levels of unpaid care work.”

“It’s lawyers that people look (to) to legally enforce constitutional rights,” continued Naidu, adding that authorities needed to respect the rights of the people. “Really what we need, for the purpose of effective implementation of these indivisible rights, is a change in attitude from people in power.”

This brought up the issue of the level of engagement between those in power and those on the ground, particularly the media – a point made clear by Akauola.

“We need to be engaging – there has to be a paradigm shift,” he concluded. “There’s a new constitution, let’s engage.”

“We want this country moving forward.”

Implementation, stressed Bhagwan-Rolls must be transformative.

“It is critical that the application of the Constitution addresses the persistent imbalances such as the under-representation of women in decision making and the gendered realities of women because of disability, age, location as well as sexual orientation and gender identity that further marginalises them,” she continued. “Ultimately, it is these women who rely on commitments made by the state through the ratification of CEDAW to ensure their peace and human security.”

“Every woman must be able to experience the commitments of the Bill of Rights as a day to day reality. These cannot be just words on paper – human rights must be realized through concrete structures and mechanisms that fulfil women’s rights to participate in these processes.”



SECTION J IN ACTION - WACC LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO END SEXISM IN NEWS MEDIA

Cross Post from the 10th of December, 2016

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Network and other partners have launched a campaign to end news media sexism by 2020.

The campaign start date coincides with Human Rights Day, the 10th of December, 2016, to underline gender equality in the media as a human rights issue.

The “End News Media Sexism” campaign will encourage and assist national advocacy to change media policy and journalistic practice.

The campaign aims to support and highlight intensive efforts in several countries with the hope that new evidence will emerge on strategies that work to bring about fair and equal representation of women and men in the news media.

In the Pacific the campaign is linked closely to ongoing advocacy by women’s media networks in the Pacific to promote the use of the GMMP to address the root causes of gender imbalances and sexism in media content says femLINKpacific Executive Producer-Director, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, who has been the GMMP Pacific coordinator since 2003.

“Pacific Governments through the outcomes of the 2013 Pacific Women’s Triennial Conference affirmed the need to address gender inequalities in and with the media,” she said. “As a feminist media organisation and a member of WACC we are pleased to be able to partner with the Pacific Community (SPC) to do this through an MOU arrangement since November 2015 however this does require consistent resourcing for systematic media monitoring, analysis and advocacy.”

“16 days of activism media training supported by the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme in the past month is a step in the right direction particularly as it focused on content creation. The Fiji National Gender Policy with a specific section on the media is actually a good model to replicate as it reflects recommendations from the Beijing Platform for Action, Triennial 2013 and feminist media networks.”

“This is a call for action to all those who are committed to gender equality. Media have a significant impact on how we perceive our reality,” comments Rev. Dr Karin Achtelstetter, General Secretary of WACC. “The campaign will tackle these issues and challenge media outlets to take professional ethics for gender-fair practice seriously.”

“We hope Pacific media outlets will make commitments to and promote their gender policies as well,” continues Bhagwan Rolls.

WACC is the General Secretary of the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG), a global network of media organisations, civil society and other actors interested in gender equality in and through the media.

The campaign follows on the heels of the launch of the Step It Up for Gender Equality Media Compact by the UN agency responsible for gender equality UN Women to urge media

organisations to play their part in advancing gender equality and women’s rights. The campaign is informed by the results of media monitoring research by the GMMP network in 114 countries.

Conducted over a 20-year period, the research found persistent severe disparity between news media portrayal and representation of women and men. On several key indicators of gender equality in the media, the research revealed that progress had either slowed down or ground to a halt.

The “End News Media Sexism” campaign takes a variety of approaches to bring about news media accountability for gender equality. Various tools are provided for audiences to gain a critical awareness of gender issues in media content and to engage with their local media. The tools developed include a scorecard on which media will be rated on their performance on key indicators of gender-sensitive reporting.



BUDGET ALLOCATIONS MUST SUPPORT GENDER RESPONSIVE COMMUNICATIONS INCLUSIVE, EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS

FEMLINKPACIFIC STATEMENT - 9TH JANUARY, 2017

“The adoption and resourcing of the tsunami response plan and the draft National Humanitarian Policy must be in line with the commitments in the National Gender Policy (2014) to ensure women’s participation at all levels of disaster risk reduction, management and climate change,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director.

Drawing from our Women’s Weather Watch campaign series, femLINKpacific is looking forward to the adoption of these policies as well as working closely with the national disaster management office and partners in their implementation.

“It’s not just about preparedness,” added Bhagwan Rolls. “It is also ensuring that the response and recovery efforts - whether it’s a tsunami, flood, or cyclone - are gender inclusive, responsive, and effective and demonstrate the Fijian government’s commitment to leading the region in humanitarian response.”

femLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch model commenced in 2004 and links United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and our own work on the ground on Women Peace and Security - reaffirming women’s leadership in humanitarian crises including natural disaster in Fiji. In 2016 we were able to engage with more than 440 rural women leaders across Viti and Vanua Levu, who represent more than 11,700 women from over 120 clubs and a further 15, 428 household members.

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PROTECTED **PREPARED**

This Cyclone Season!

A FemLINKPACIFIC Women’s Weather Watch initiative.

November to April is cyclone season but other natural disasters including floods and droughts, earthquakes and tsunamis can happen at any time. It’s time to ensure inclusive early warning and disaster preparedness, response and recovery by supporting and strengthening diverse women’s capacities to participate, organise in all levels of disaster management and response

TABUA SALATO PRASAD



By Sian Rolls

Tabua Salato Prasad, a founding member and General Manager of femLINKpacific, has a deep herstory in the women's movement. Her introduction to the movement was simple enough as a familiar story, a family member got her active and involved and the momentum continued. "My aunt who was on the board of the Fiji Women in Politics (WIP) project of the NCW... (so) I come in and do some volunteer work for the Fiji WIP project," she shared. "When the crisis happened in 2000, I was still essentially part-time volunteer, part-time staff."

"Then we (the NCW) started convening the peace vigils for those 56 days whilst the hostages were being held in parliament with Sharon (Bhagwan Rolls), of course, as Secretary of the National Council of Women then and emanating from the peace vigils was femLINKpacific."

Her work within the movement saw her work up the ranks of the NCW as the years went by.

"From 1999 till about 2006, (I was doing) various levels of work within the National Council of Women... then, of course, I took a break, stayed home to look after my children," she said. "From the moment you wake up to that moment you sleep, you (are) just constantly doing things. There's no such thing as a luxurious life while staying at home."

However, despite a separation from the movement spanning a decade, Salato Prasad has resumed her active work within the movement last year within an organisation she helped bring into the world. While it may have been some time since she played an active role, the issues are still all too familiar.

"The issues that women face, the challenges are still prevalent," outlined Salato Prasad. "The issues are deeply rooted."

"(But) our advocacy is working and the women are being encouraged, motivated and also build up their capacity to be able to contribute to decision making and effectively be political participants in the process. It is challenging but our role as the women's movement and to enable us to be a strong and effective voice to continuously, consistently and confidently advocate for women's issues and use all the platforms that we have at our disposal to do so."

One such platform has been femLINKpacific's own community media initiatives like FemTALK89FM. "Since femLINKpacific's early days, I was putting in practice my personal beliefs that amplifying women's peace and security via a media platform would not only bring them to a wider audience beyond the CSO sector, but it would also enable more women to feel confident enough to discuss their issues in a safe space that wasn't commercially driven but for and by women," said Salato Prasad.

Such a space has also been a platform for amplifying women-led protection in humanitarian situations, known as the Women's Weather Watch campaign. Such a campaign, according to Salato Prasad, has been critical to provide the information that women need.

"It's been really effective from my observations," she said. "I'm still learning how to internalise (the information) and share that with my family (and) when it comes to how (rural women leaders) receive the messages and how they then mobilise their community accordingly, it's been really encouraging to

note that."

At the same time, Salato Prasad noted the need not just to facilitate the exchange and documentation at peak times of humanitarian emergency, but at all times – continuously raising the issues that women and their communities face every day. Issues like human security concerns – unemployment, a lack of food or economic security and violence in the home and community.

"(Such issues are) a breach of one's peaceful environment, so to speak," she continued. "It's an invasion of one's expectations in relation to how they would like to live peacefully."

"We have to live side by side. Some of us live together, we have to ensure that there is no misunderstanding... no resentment. I would love see that we first of all get together and understand each other's cultures and appreciate it – you know, the differences and the similarities – and work together from there, because no nation can work together if there is constant divide. First and foremost have that solid platform, that solid foundation, and I am sure our nation will flourish. All these things contribute to that whole concept of peace, having better community relations, having a better understanding of one another and that understanding would lead to more tolerance and more acceptance."

This includes acceptance of the leadership that women are capable of as well, including what they demonstrate during disasters.

Reflecting in 2001, the then 24 year old Salato outlined what she saw as challenges for young women who wished to engage with decision making spaces.

"Being a woman and being young, it's not easy having our concerns and issues taken seriously," she said in 'Not Just Sweet Talk'. "Young women in Fiji society today should take a more active role in decision making."

"When it comes to taking up their issues to any level, whether it be at the rural setting, urban setting, national level, young women should know that they have every right to take up their concerns and their issues in whatever form."

Such challenges ring true today, not just for young women but for women in all their diversities.

"It really boils down to confidence in your abilities," Salato Prasad stressed. "Women, because of the culture that we have... even in religious teachings, we are taught to be submissive to our husbands, to our elders, (including) male elders."

"So, it really is about women learning to have confidence in their ability to contribute to decision making, whether it's in their homes, on a personal level, within the communities, and to build that confidence up and the capacity to be able to contribute to decision making and to really take leadership. It's not just encouraging women to enter into decision making and to be participating in political process, it's also changing the mindsets of our men and menfolk. It's not just starting at the adult stage, we should really start doing it from when they are boys, encouraging them to accept women as equal... as equal participants in decision making so even at that level."

That changing the mindset is something she is also looking to contribute to, beyond her professional capacity – within her home with her own family and children.

"I encourage my daughter to be forthright and to be opinionated and to not be afraid to express her views," said Salato Prasad. "I also am teaching my boys that it's not alright to undermine girls (and) women (as well as) not alright to physically hit so that is something that I'm constantly instilling in my children."

When it comes to leadership, she also firmly believes in values that include as well as transcend the realm of parliament.

"Honesty, transparency, (and a) basic understanding of the people they represent," outlined Salato Prasad, reflecting on values of leadership she deems as part and parcel of good governance. "Whether it's at a club level or national level or policy making level, understanding... and being able to articulate and knowing that as a leader you're responsible for (that) organisation."

ADI VASULEVU



By Hannah Hicks

A womentor, an inspiration and a guiding hand, Adi Vasulevu has been an active member of the femLINKpacific team, whether in direct collaboration or in her own work, for over a decade.

Her involvement in the movement began as a young woman witnessing the first coup of 1987 and its violent effects.

Then, her experiences of the 2000 coup gave rise and revelation to the existing ethnic and political divides, as well as the state power structure at the time, gave her a foundation to build her interest in conflict resolution and

peace building. "Women, youth and children were the most affected," she reflected. "They were vulnerable and they were silenced."

"The question for me was 'what can we do together to create (and) rebuild positive opportunity, encourage safe space, and contribute to build peace, safety and security and, most of all, what can I do to contribute?'"

The flames of her inspiration were further fed when she first met Sharon Bhagwan Rolls in 2000 – a time when interested individuals were mobilising and key members of civil society and faith based organisations seeking strategies for peaceful interventions. She then began her work with femLINKpacific in 2004 with the communication and peacebuilding tools based in Labasa for the Northern Division.

femLINKpacific's Women's Human Security First campaign has highlighted that development processes and priorities must be defined from the community level up, particularly to prevent conflict over resources.

"Listening on the ground (through) my work with (femLINKpacific's) rural women's network and other communities, as well as the justice and peace building work, I hear the consistency of issues," she said.

On a personal level, peace and security is a state of safety with dignity and, therefore, as a human person, you are able to receive and treat people as well as being treated the same way. She also felt it is also having a sense of freedom and rights with responsibilities – believing that in every situation, you have a role to play.

One role she plays actively is as a communicator through femLINKpacific's community radio network. "What the radio has taught me (is that) I can be the speaker as well as a listener," Vasulevu shared. "Both are important and responsible roles."

Vasulevu also stressed the role community radio has when it comes to being a medium for peacebuilding. "Being the convener and one that has journeyed with femLINKpacific's community radio from its genesis... has helped widened my perspective and develop my work in view of peacebuilding and communication," she explained.

Since 2004, she has witnessed the changes it has brought to women – from being silent to speaking out, becoming more visible and more active in communicating their peace and security. It is through the voice of these rural women leaders who believe in the community media network and process, that the Women's Human Security First campaign is able to be a participatory process of engagement – providing a mirror we can hold up to governance systems and processes to remind decision makers of their commitments to women's human rights, peace and security.

Such work is a critical role of the women's movement – to be a strong arm that works to ensure women's peace, safety and security, constantly challenging the 'Pacific culture' where the norm is that only some can speak.

"The movement provides this safe space where any women, despite colour or age, can participate and a platform to communicate our voices and positively influence policy," she added.

Women in the Pacific and around the world have been using UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) as a key to open doors into negotiations, as a loud hailer to have their voices heard. It presents an opportunity for women's leadership, priorities and participation to be central to sustainable development with the aim to prevent conflict. With UNSCR 2242 (2015), such resolutions highlight the need for women's human rights to be central when it comes to community focused humanitarian response and that's where femLINK's Women's Weather Watch (WWW) model comes into play.

"The idea was adopted during one of Sharon and I's rural travel along the corridor of Vunimoli in Labasa," recalls Vasulevu. "We were met with women of Vunimoli washing along the small drain along the road side."

It was 2004, after a cyclone and flooding had devastated communities. Vasulevu highlighted that the women were suffering alone. It was because of this that during conceptualisation, one of the major roles of the Women's Weather Watch was to play would be to provide weather information as well as a space to amplify the experiences of women in all their diversities.

Since the idea first popped up, WWW has become an active network of women leaders who are hubs of information – one text message to a rural woman will not just reach her and her family, but her own network of leaders and their communities. Ultimately, it is about a better human security approach. It is about environment security – whether it is climate change, the impact of development or reducing the risk of disaster responses and management of situations.

"At local level, this has strengthened my faith and trust towards my leadership as well as amongst the women leaders and their communities," Vasulevu continued.

But affirming leadership for oneself or for others is not easy. It takes multiple efforts to challenge the ideas of male-centric spaces and dominating, negative power.

When asked about the opportunities and challenges when it came to political participation, Adi Vasulevu was quick to point out that the community radio has provided a space and opportunity whereby civil society and the government, as well as members of parliament, are able to listen to issues and identify priority development through the eyes of women and community based initiatives.

This, therefore, enables policy and development partners to make informed decisions through the eyes and voices of women.

"There has been a shift I think from my perspective since 2000," she added. "There have been some changes in terms of the stepping up of women and young women since 2000 for women's peace and security."

"We hear in the areas the discussions that women have been included. (But for this to continue), I recommend that the development communication system is improved to a two way communication that will protect its communities, preserve its reserved land and resources and respect the Vanua."

Political security for women and women's participation is vital to ensure that peace and stability are defined from a preventative action approach. This requires transformation of existing structures including a review of the mechanisms which may currently impede women from participating in local decision making processes.

"We still need to claim our stand and claim the space and understand and call for our participation to keep that consistency," Vasulevu concluded.

FANE BOSEIWAQA



By Alisia Evans

Fane Boseiwaqa, one of femLINKpacific's convenors in the Western Division, has been journeying with femLINK since 2005. Beginning as a volunteer, Boseiwaqa was a founding member of the Generation Next project (2007 – 2011) and is now a wife, mother and a leader in her community.

"I was given the confidence and felt empowered as a young woman to have a voice and speak out on the issues that women and young people faced in the community," recalled Boseiwaqa, of her first encounter with femLINK. "The suitcase radio station, travelling around Fiji, was a platform for the women to come together and have a safe space."

Now, twelve years later, Boseiwaqa plays a lead role in organizing and facilitating safe spaces for 99 other rural women leaders in Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki for femLINK's monthly network convenings.

"I only took time off to get married and have children," she said in an interview with ActionAid Australia in 2016. "Otherwise, I have been there all this time."

"I volunteered initially because I wanted to get involved in femLINK's feminist work supporting rural women to participate in political processes because I grew up in a rural village. I have seen the issues that women are dealing with on a daily basis. It is women, who are responsible for ensuring that there is good food on the table. In rural villages in Fiji, families are dependent on their farms for fresh food. When there is a drought, or a cyclone, as there so often is in Fiji, when there is not enough water to sustain them, or crops are devastated, putting food on the table becomes almost impossible."

When Severe Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston struck Fiji on 20th February, 2016, devastating the Western Division, Boseiwaqa was invaluable as part of femLINK's Women's Weather Watch (WWW) network.

When the nation was in a state of emergency, Boseiwaqa continued to communicate information to and

from femLINK's Community Media Centre in Suva and the rural women leaders leading the response and recovery in their communities.

"It was really an important information (source) that we were giving out to this women in the sense that most of these communities, at that time, do not have access to electricity to be informed through radio or television or through SMS message," remarked Boseiwaqa. "(They were kept informed) through the work with Women's Weather Watch with femLINKpacific."

"The women won't be excluded (as) we are (enabling) them to speak out about their needs... to set the agenda of the emergency response."

Boseiwaqa's continual engagement in our WWW process means she was able to network to break the story of flooding in Toga and ensures she asks very specific questions about the local weather for specific purposes.

"When there's a storm they need to prepare not only in terms of stocking up food but also in terms of saving their livelihood," explained Boseiwaqa. "How well do they look after their (cattle) – because, most of these women, they are unemployed, they're rural women and they depend on income generating projects."

When questioned on why she continues to meet with women month after month, Boseiwaqa said that in terms of engaging with local decision makers the results speak for themselves.

"They believe that it's through (the) femLINKpacific network (and) having this platform that had really empowered and (educated them)," she said. "To stand and speak out not only for themselves but for their community as well."

"(But) women need resources for continued mobilization... to be heard at the local and at the national level."

Since its establishment in 2000, beginning with the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil, femLINK has continued to invest in providing a space for women to share and connect their stories – linking its work with the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 ensuring women's participation in decision making.

Seventeen years later, women like Boseiwaqa are working to ensure that global commitments to achieving gender equality are realised at the local level.

"Most of these women leaders make use of the opportunities when any of the government departments are visiting our district to attend and also to participate in addressing different issues that they face in their communities," outlined Boseiwaqa. "(The women know) it will take long for development but they want their voices to be heard."

LOSANA DERENALAGI



By Sulueti Waqa

"When we talk about development, we are talking about people," underscored Losana Derenalagi. "Development is for the people and in order to have a successful and a fruitful government, we need a consultative and participatory process where all member(s) of the community are represented."

"Good governance is like having a good family where all the member of the family are able to share and talk freely with one another and contribute to the welfare of the family."

It all began with an interview for a suitcase radio broadcast in Nadi in 2006. For

Derenalagi, she wanted to highlight the situation of single mothers, an issue that she was well aware of as a leader of the Nadi Tikina Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei.

In 2012, she accepted the mantle of convenor in Nadi and has since expanded to engage with diverse rural women leaders in Lautoka as well – a role that supports her leadership.

"These meetings facilitates women coming out of their shells, to advocate to other women and to the policy makers," she explained in 2014, as reported by the Fiji Sun. "It is important to consider the needs of (women)."

"Development priorities concern (them) as well."

Through her extensive experience as a leader in her community, one of the ongoing issues she has seen raised is the frequent flooding of Nadi town.

"Right now in Nadi, the challenges that the women still face is the environment," she explained in 2014. "We just had the flood and what we have noticed is that the level just keep on rising up and they think it

is due to the development on Denarau Island."

"They have cut most of the mangrove and the reclaiming of land and that's where most of the water from Nadi River... rests but now, when it goes out, it looks like it's coming back."

It is through the continued engagement of a multicultural network of women leaders, femLINK's Women's Weather Watch campaign is able to assist their mobilisation through enhancing their access to information.

"Women still find communications and information (of the weather bulletins through the mainstream media) are unclear, inaccurate (for their areas), infrequent or ineffective," she explained. "Women's Weather Watch have also helped government officials in providing information through the Local Government, Divisional and of course the NDMO – especially through interactive dialogues with women, (our policy) reports and the comic books."

While Derenalagi is a key focal point for femLINK in the West, she is deeply passionate about empowering the community of women she has come to know.

"We do need a stronger women's movement to strengthen our network in order to have a stronger voice (and to) empower one another so that more women can be part of decision making processes," Derenalagi explained. "For women to participate at a political level, we need to continuously empower women through consultation and speak of the importance of their input into the development process."

"In order to have a successful society we must have equal participation and contribution of man and women. (But) I think there is still a gap for women and other minority groups in terms of representations in our country even though we have ratified CEDAW and other international conventions. There (is also) a need for more civic education and the need for Temporary Special measures (TSM) to ensure equal participation of women in political structures."

It is these promises that she has continued to raise, wanting to see a realisation through shared decision making by men and women, from the provincial level to the Bose va Koro and up to Parliament, for the benefit of all.

It is for this reason that Derenalagi continues to work together with women leaders in all their diversities to strengthen the women's movement at the community level to improve the status of women throughout the country.

SOKOVETI LUTUMAILAGI



By Frances Tawake

"In my own little way, I try and create the best through my leadership at home and in my community."

Meet 37 year old Sokoveti Lutumailagi, a dynamic rural woman leader living in Nadi, she documents and produces women's stories to inspire positive change in her community.

Like every other woman, Lutumailagi wears several hats. She's the secretary of the Namotomoto Church and the Namotomoto Women's Methodist Group as well as the treasurer of Navoci Circuit Women's Methodist group – all alongside managing

her family.

Waking at 4.30am is the norm as she has seven children and a husband to get out the door on time to school and work respectively.

"Being a mother and a leader is a huge task as I have to juggle my responsibilities and manage my time wisely," she shared.

Lutumailagi finished secondary school in 1998 with a dream of becoming a teacher; dreams that were shattered when her father told her that he could not afford to pay for her tertiary education.

"I attained good marks in school and even scooped the first prize for the Nadi oratory contest but (I knew that) if we are not supported financially it will be a challenge to achieve our dreams," she said.

A year later, she joined a community television station operating in Nadi at that time as a volunteer

presenter. Soon after, the station was shut down and she ventured into the hotel industry and worked there for 9 years.

It was after her fourth child was born that Lutumailagi decided that it would be best for her to stay home and look after her children. With whatever little spare time she had, she got involved with working with the women in her community.

Seeing this, her mother-in-law, Sereima Lutumailagi, introduced her to femLINKpacific's regular district consultations and, since 2015, has been supported to continue leading as a correspondent.

"It has given me so much experience and it has inspired me," said Lutumailagi. "I have seen and heard the challenges these women face every day."

"Women have raised their needs and have been empowered to speak confidently in our community radio space. With the use of the radio, it has bridged the gap and has allowed audience participation (and) engagement."

At the same time, through femLINKpacific Women's Weather Watch campaign, she has been actively engaged in disseminating and collating stories from the women.

"The text messages that were sent around to our network was a great help to the women and they tend to quickly share the information to other women in their community," explained Lutumailagi. "The women were also encouraged to prepare ahead of time."

It is the provision of such information that reaffirms women as leaders and first responders in their communities, including to disaster – women who continue working despite going mostly unrecognised.

"(But) the community radio is making quite a lot of difference since we are voicing out the women's issues," she reflected. "Community radio is broadcasting women sharing their ideas and views and struggles."

Lutumailagi hopes that it is this continued broadcasting that will make a change – a change of mindset as to what a leader is as well as what is currently being done by decision makers.

"Leadership comes with responsibilities and listening and working with your community is very important especially when it comes to the different needs of the people living in our community," she said.

"We have to increase women's participation in all levels of decision making and we have to include women in all development projects activities from planning to implementation."

AMPLIFYING YOUNG WOMEN'S VOICES

By Frances Tawake

"We are the future leaders and we need to build our capacity in taking up leadership roles within our community especially when it comes to preparedness," shared Maxine Tuwila, FemTALK89FM Suva producer/broadcaster and representative from Youth Champs 4 Mental Health.

But despite the call by young women for capacity building and inclusion, especially on their right to participation in disaster preparedness many are feeling side-lined because of their age and gender, rather than being supported as active agents of change who can contribute to sustainable development.

"When we take part in decision making, we bring in new ideas that influence change and also we know what is best for us," added Bulou Verebunuya, also a FemTALK89FM Suva producer/broadcaster.

There isn't just one kind of young woman – some are mothers, including single mothers, some are living with disabilities, some are still at school, some have had to leave school, some have jobs and some are struggling to make ends meet.

In all their diversities, young women have a right to contribute and participate actively in discussions that decide their present and future – decisions that would either guarantee or overlook their protection and human security needs, including in times of natural disaster.

When they are left out, their community misses out from capitalising on their innovation and resilience – something clear for many through their experiences of TC Winston earlier this year:

"As a single LBT mother, the first thing that struck my mind when I heard the warning was to put up the shutters," shared Sereima Damuni, FemTALK89FM Suva producer/broadcaster and representative of Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji.

Damuni also participated during femLINKpacific's Young Women's Learning Exchange in February, 2016. For her, the Learning Exchange was a chance to reflect, to understand the Women's Weather Watch model and a space to define preparedness and protection for herself with the experience of TC Winston in mind.

"I was aware of the way... the cyclone was heading... (I was) just putting up the shutters, getting candles, sugar and diapers," she continued. "I didn't feel prepared."

"Young women's participation in disaster preparedness will prepare us for the future," added Tamara Balenaveikau, Programme Manager of femLINKpacific. "Learning from our elders and acquiring food preservation skills which is now fading, needs to be practiced again."

This use of traditional knowledge and other innovative programmes are key to building a resilient community and has been echoed throughout our rural network by other women leaders.

Intergenerational spaces and dialogue can play a key role in the months ahead, sharing information and skills with young women so that they are not just waiting by the side-lines without being actively involved.

"This is one of the reasons why femLINKpacific has continued to support young women - not just as the audience of our media initiatives but as active producers and broadcasters of content," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "We

have sustained our commitment to support young women as content producers something which was catalysed since our Generation Next project from 2007 to 2011."

"It is also about sustaining the women's movement and supporting young women to not just see the barriers but tackle them – by being heard!"

When any woman rises, she carries everything with her - her name, her values and her knowledge. There needs to be investment in the next generation of leaders to continue to carry on the tradition of women who have led the way.

When young women gain visibility, their voices are heard and will contribute in the transformation of their community. They are able to make the choices that they see fit that will impact them later in life as well as ensure their human security priorities today.

Creating safe spaces and giving young women the space to express their views to promote their own perspectives should also be at the forefront of our agenda.

For too long, young women have been left out by the negative ideas and norms of the community. It is time to shift the power and allow young women in all their diversities to participate at all levels, in all spaces and at all times.



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