

Community Radio Times

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MEDIA INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

WOMEN ARE FIRST RESPONDERS - NDMO

BY CAROLYN KITIONE WITH SIAN ROLLS

At a global level, the discourse has often featured the phrase along the lines of 'women and children are the most affected by disasters'.

"Through Women's Weather Watch, we are putting the spotlight on women's leadership as peacebuilders as well as first responders in emergencies," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

While we continue to amplify the work of women leaders as first responders, natural disasters continue to wreak havoc.

It presents us with an opportunity to address women's role in disaster resilience, pre- and post-disaster.

Recognizing this, the National Disaster Management Office is working to include a gender perspective in the draft Humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction Policies with contributions from women-led groups in the country.

Using Tropical Cyclone Winston as a benchmark for Fiji's preparedness and response plans, one recurring theme was the inclusion of women in decision-making spaces like the National Disaster Management Council.

"You (women) are the spear headers of development," stated Permanent Secretary for Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, Meleti Bainimarama during femLINKpacific's 2nd National Consultation. "The men say they meet and talk and decide, but you are really the decision-makers."

While there is acknowledgement of women's role as first responders, more needs to be done in terms of bringing women to policy making tables.

As Fiji undergoes a review of the 1998 National Disaster Management Act, one recommendation that has been put forth by the International Red Cross committee overseeing the review, is the need to have more input from women.

"The consultations before, few men would sit in the room and they decide what happens for everybody," Bainimarama explained. "For the men it's an advantage because there are men sitting there but there's no women to sit and say, 'we women would like to see something else like this.'"

As the country braces itself for another cyclone season, communication, in terms of information sharing, is an area that needs to be strengthened.

"We are working very hard together with Fiji Met service so that we can come up with a weather forecast or weather information - not only cyclones but also hazards - that can be understood by the general public," explained Viliame Tuimanu, National Disaster Management Officer (NDMO) senior admin officer.

One suggestion that femLINK continues to push for is the development of the Public Emergency Broadcast Strategy that builds on its Women's Weather Watch model - a recommendation that is now being integrated into the Disaster Risk Reduction policy.

"There should be an emergency broadcasting network whenever there is an emergency," Tuimanu said. "We have to expand communication capabilities, dedicated broadcast frequency. The messages need to be disseminated at a faster time and we have to clarify the role of the communication cluster."

In its role as a community media platform, femLINKpacific has continued to campaign for the inclusion of women in all aspects of disaster preparedness, response and recovery as well as call on stakeholders to establish strong communication links with women leaders.

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RURAL WOMEN LEADERS DEFINE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT

BY SIAN ROLLS

"Gender equality for me is inclusiveness - equal opportunities for women and women with disabilities in the decision-making process," says Jashnita Reddy, a representative of the Moto Youth Group in Ba. "It's also the equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender or disability."

femLINKpacific's community media consultations in October were dedicated to celebrating Rural Women's Leadership ahead of the annual Rural Women's Day (October 15).

That has meant more than 100 women meeting and talking together in Nausori, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki and Labasa about their development priorities, including disaster preparedness:

"Women leaders are active agents of economic and social change in their homes and communities," explained Frances Tawake, a Programme Associate at femLINKpacific who convened the Nausori consultation. "Despite their diversities, women of diverse ethnicities, ages and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are demonstrating a dedication to coming together to discuss ways forward for their communities."

"For me, as a young transwoman, I want my voice to be heard and recognised in spaces and be free from stigma, discrimination and violence," added Rochelle, a representative of Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network in Lautoka. "I want to be treated equally, I want to be loved, (and) I want to be cared for." For the Rural Women Leaders who met this week, achieving gender equality is not just about men working with women:

"Inclusiveness is very important - they need to tell their stories and be heard," outlined Fane Boseiwaqa, convenor in Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki for femLINKpacific. "They need to be part of decision-making."

"We should not be discriminated whether we (have a disability), are a man, or a woman," stressed Prem Lata Bhan, Secretary of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal. "In rural areas, we should have the power to

move around freely without hesitation, without feeling fear... and do community work. (It is also) to have a say in the community, have farmland and do agriculture for our living."

"The men will say 'my wife is just staying home' but she's the one doing the washing, cooking, cleaning... they need more recognition (for the work they do)," added Losana Derenalagi, convenor in Nadi and Lautoka for femLINKpacific.

"The men... they just put women in the house to be like house girls," explained Ana Sikoa, President of the Catholic Women's League in Lautoka. "They must remember that we women are the backbones of the family - we are the chefs... we are the doctors, we are the policewomen and we are also farmers. I think in the future, we have meetings in the villages or when government people come around to the village or the island, the men should also call more women... to the meeting."

Without their meaningful participation in decision-making, the issues and trends of hardship are not able to be accounted for and that is why the community media consultations also looked ahead to the themes of the next Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) - 'Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls' and 'Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women':

"Empowering rural women is a pre-requisite to fulfilling the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals that aim to end poverty and hunger, achieve food security and empower all women and girls," outlined Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "Our community media network, using appropriate and accessible information communication technology, is bridging the information gap for these leaders to strengthen their leadership skills as well as make visible the trends of human security across the country. Every month, we continue to consistently engage with the network of women leaders. It is because of the commitment of these rural women that FemTALK 89FM is able to dedicate more than 800 broadcast hours of a month in Suva and Labasa to issues related to gender equality, peace and human security."

The first International Day of Rural Women was observed on October 15, 2008. This day recognizes the role of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty.

CELEBRATING PEACE, REAFFIRMING A WOMEN'S HUMAN SECURITY FIRST APPROACH

BY SIAN ROLLS

"The voices of these women full of emotions... hands scarred and wrinkled with years of hard work still fight for their space in society," shared Losana Derenalagi, convenor in Nadi and Lautoka for femLINKpacific. "(These are) women who share stories with tears in their eyes. Most of us share our peace as love, joy, happiness and so on. That's exactly what these women want. Unless we see peace from a conflict prevention lens, their peace is far-fetched."

She was speaking during femLINKpacific's commemoration of International Day of Peace at the inaugural 'Women's Peace Table' event.

Held in September, it was attended by members of the faith community and women's civil society.

"We continue to localise UNSCR 1325 through the district convenings which support the production of radio programmes that amplify messages of gender equality, peace and human security," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "A key message since 2014, has been the call for a Women's Human Security First agenda, one that ensures development and governance processes are inclusive of human rights and peacebuilding and supports the participation and leadership of women of all diversities including rural women, women with disabilities, LGBT, young and older women."

It was this approach that was further underscored during the day's event.

"Peace for me as a young woman means freedom, peace for me as a rural woman means access, peace to me as a diverse woman means free and equal, peace for me as an activist and feminist is to be able to build a community of resilience," shared Lucille Chute, a programme assistant based at femLINKpacific's Labasa Community Media Centre.

"Peace for (our network of rural women leaders) is when their development priorities are met," said Fane Boseiwaqa, convenor in Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki for femLINKpacific. "If women are part of the processes... having their voices being heard and being part of the decision-making process... this is peace."

"If we are not creating spaces, we are not bringing justice to these women," Derenalagi added.

"Yes, I can speak on my doorstep, on the mat, and my voice will be heard," continued Adi Vasulevu, convenor in the Northern Division for femLINKpacific. "The important tool of communication and the consistency and looking at the appropriate approaches in applying these tools in our contexts. It brings safety and dignity for women at local communities."

Meanwhile, femLINKpacific launched a short film during the event.

Titled 'Women's Peace Tables', it looks at the role of women in building peace and examines how women have progressed peace and human security throughout periods of conflict, in all their forms. The short film places a spotlight on the need for national and regional inter-governmental spaces to make the decision-making table bigger.

The narrative places particular focus on intergenerational dialogues with the film interweaving the reflections of Emanita Vaka'ahi, a young woman living in Tonga, with peacewomen across the Pacific region.

The 'Women's Peace Table' was held in Suva in collaboration with the Peacewomen Across the Globe (PWAG).

Similar Peace events were organised by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific network members in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu linked to the efforts to progress Gender Inclusive Conflict Prevention and Human Security as advocated by the GPPAC Pacific -network which is supported by the Pacific Islands Forum-Non-State Actors programme with funding assistance from the European Union.



REAFFIRMING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP - THE FIRST RESPONDERS

BY HANNAH HICKS

"It's very critical... it's the network of the women (that) get the message out on a particular issue," said Minister Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, the Minister for International Development and the Pacific in the Australian Government, speaking to femLINKpacific during a visit to Fiji.

Fierravanti-Wells who was a guest on FemTALK 89FM Suva, femLINK's 24 hour community radio station, has served as a Senator for New South Wales since 2005 and was sworn in as Minister for International Development and the Pacific in February 2016.

In early July, the Minister was in Fiji to attend a Climate Action Pacific Partnership meeting.

With Fiji chairing the 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23), the Australian government had contributed to assisting this role and one of the steps was to ensure that the Fiji government sets up a Trust - of which \$2M was set aside for regional consultations, where the stakeholders in the Pacific came together.

"It's very important for the Pacific Small Island Developing States to put forward their views and many very strong views in relation to global climate issues and so to exchange ideas, to talk to each other," explained Minister Fierravanti-Wells.

As much as governments need to talk to governments, there also

needs to be meaningful engagement of women, including Rural Women Leaders, those living in the most affected communities as first responders on the front line of climate change and disasters. But this is not happening and there remains the need to support women's leadership and amplify their voice at every level. This is one of the very reasons that femLINKpacific links humanitarian crises situations to the priority area of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security – with the impact of our continued work through Women's Weather Watch starting to be more and more visible from the community level. "Now, my community asks me for Women's Weather Watch information," shared Vani Tuvuki, leader of the Koronubu Women's Fellowship in Ba.

Too often, women are portrayed as victims of natural disasters and climate change, rather than as equal partners in designing strategies and agreements on how to tackle related issues. Local leaders must be provided with good governance and leadership skills training so that the women's role as agents of change are recognised within the humanitarian machinery – so that they can engage directly with government officials.

"Part of the work that we want to do is to ensure that we address those barriers and to ensure that women as much as possible are well informed and to make them stronger, to make them more resilient so when the next disaster does strike they're in a far better position for themselves and for their families to deal with that," said Minister Fierravanti-Wells.

Women's Weather Watch links women in their communities with the Fiji Meteorological Service and the National Disaster Management Office and the media.

It started as a simple SMS alert system in 2004 and has progressively expanded linking community radio to a variety of media and ICT platforms to translate and communicate scientific weather jargon into local and accessible language and formats for rural women leaders and local communities via our community

media network.

In 2017, the FemTALK 89FM network committed to dedicating 5 minutes every hour to Women's Weather Watch updates and information. But it is more than just about the weather.

Women's Weather Watch has enabled women to highlight in national consultations and on the national television series 'Radio with Pictures' of the need for reform of disaster management practice through greater representation of local women's groups. "Participation is vital but so is preventative action and a human security approach in the planning and delivery of immediate and long term humanitarian recovery strategies," explained Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "If women have control over land agricultural production will increase, improving food security and it will benefit the family and the community," added Inise Dawai, Secretary of the Sikituru Tikina in Nadi.

Yet women who contribute to the management of family farms are not registered on the Ministry of Agriculture's database.

"We know that there is a lot of gender-based discrimination and although women make up around 43% of agricultural labour force in developing countries due to gender discrimination they do not have the same access as men do," added Minister Fierravanti-Wells.

"A key Women's Weather Watch recommendation to the National Disaster Management Office, as it develops a National Humanitarian and Disaster Response and Recovery Policy, is to reaffirm women's roles as first responders in their homes and communities and the importance of having reliable and simple to understand information being disseminated to the public," stressed Bhagwan Rolls. "The localisation of the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit, Sendai and Pacific Resilience Frameworks must take practical steps to uplift women's leadership."



May you
Soar through 2018
Embracing the

HEROWIN

within you
Amplifying your voice
Rising together challenge the status quo of Patriarchy
Shifting the Power together



May your story be the headline
May your recommendations transform the structures
For the betterment of women and girls lives
And may we continue to Work together
For Equality, Non-Violence and Peace with Justice

UNPACKING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

Over the past few months, social media has seen an unprecedented level of discussion on sexual violence against women and girls thanks to the global campaign #MeToo.

As the world commemorates the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, urgent action is being called for to ensure women and children's safety is guaranteed.

In Fiji alone, despite increased reporting on violence against women and children, the crime levels don't seem to be decreasing:

"Violence has intensified, we can say that," stated Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) Coordinator, Shamima Ali at a public seminar on family violence held ahead of the 16 Days of Activism.

As the country raises its efforts to eliminate violence against women and children, programmes and policies in place requires a collaboration between different sectoral stakeholders mainly between both the State and civil society.

But there are challenges:

"This relationship is not always...often there is tension when there's government change - governments have different priorities and so the advocacy that happens from civil society to keep putting pressure on the government of the day to live up to its commitment that it's made internationally," shared Virisila Buadromo, who moderated the seminar.

These international commitments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Despite having ratified CEDAW in 1995, Fiji continues to have one of the highest rates of violence against women.

At the symposium, Ali revealed that the FWCC's 2011 national research had found that more than three out of 5 women (64%) who had ever been in a relationship had experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner.

The research also found more than half the women (55%) who had experienced physical violence had children who witnessed the abuse.

For Rosie Batty, who was named Australian of the Year in 2015, the thought of having to go through trial after the violent murder of her son, Luke, by his father, was difficult: "Often though, reporting, going through the courts, it is often more traumatic than the violence you experience," she shared. "The community attitudes, the backlash, the victim blaming, the judgment...it can make a... very difficult to actually leave a violent situation."

But as violence against women starts gaining traction in national discourse, there is a need to revisit and strengthen existing programmes and policies.

"We need to look at and understand and have responses for that together with what has been done in the past," stressed Nalini Singh, Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

However, according to Batty, there was also a need to stop violence before it begins:

"We need to be really clear that this is unacceptable and it can't go on and should not go on and it will not go on," she stressed. "This is a problem that involves men and we need more and more men taking and sharing this load."

But as Ali reminded the audience, accountability is also critical, particularly when it comes to the implementation stages of policies and programmes.

"I can talk about many other services, justice department and so on where they've failed women miserably so...we all need to come together on this," Ali said.

The public seminar on family violence was organised by Leadership Fiji and the Luke Batty Foundation on the 16th of November.

TACKLING VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

As we continued commemorating the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, rural women leaders have reaffirmed the need to challenge existing power structures:

“Domestic violence affects many women across the region and not only mothers suffer as well as there are grave consequences to women’s health and their children,” said Mareta Tagivakatini of the Labasa Market Vendors Association. “The root cause goes back to the imbalances of power in the environment they live in and men uses their power over women to the extent that they neglect their duty as a parent.”

Tagivakatini made these comments at an intergenerational Peace Process Education Consultation in the Northern Division convened by Transcend Oceania, the Fiji focal point of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific.

Facilitating the consultation was Adi Vasulevu, femLINKpacific’s convener in the North and the GPPAC Pacific Fiji country focal point with Transcend Oceania.

GPPAC Pacific is commemorating the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence with events across the network in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

As mothers and daughters gathered at the consultation, Adi Vasulevu said one of the key objectives of the intergenerational session was information sharing and seeking solutions for intervention and prevention with the use of peace education:

“The intergeneration discussions gave space for in-depth sharing of elder women sharing their experiences of violence, how they handled or address the violence,” she shared. “And how we turned it around and used that to be lessons for us and how we could influence these stories to (create a) positive impact rather than using ‘power over’ stories.”

Adi Vasulevu noted power dynamics was one of the reasons women often chose to remain silent and not able to share their stories freely to achieve that peace and security.

“The women today also prioritized the continuation of creating these education safe spaces to shape leadership, promote participation and quality decision-making as a priority focus,” she remarked.

For many of the women at the consultation, peace meant an environment free from violence, beginning from the home.

And to achieve that, one needed to look at the root causes of domestic violence:

“Young women and girls are victims of this serious (sexual) assault,”

said Ronika Chetty of the TISI Sangam. “We need to learn more about the root causes of this and ask questions (like) ‘How could this be prevented?’”

But as the conversation on violence against women gains more attention, there is a need to engage with young women.

For the young women at the consultation, this included taking a hard look at what the statement ‘working together for gender inclusive, conflict prevention and human security in the Pacific region’ meant:

“For me, it is taking measures as a whole unit to defuse the root causes of conflict and violence against women and girls,” said sixteen year old Jiteshna Chetty. “To empower women and girls in education and create more learning spaces and awareness.”

Fifteen year old Sera Frances also made a passionate plea to end child abuse:

“By stopping child abuse we can prevent the motivation of violent conflict, give respect and dignity to girls and children for security, a peaceful and sustainable community,” she stressed.

As empowerment and communication become key strategies in tackling root causes of violence in the community, Adi Vasulevu stressed the need to recognize the different dimensions and different levels of power that exists in communities that further contribute to discriminations and violence.



TRANSFORMATION FOR ALL - INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES!

BY SIAN ROLLS

"I would like to encourage all women with disabilities... young women, older women, not to look down at themselves, to stand strong, be firm and voice your issues, communicate, talk about it, don't hide it within," shared Mere Roden of the Fiji Disabled People's Federation women's network and Spinal Injury Association. femLINKpacific spoke to Roden as well as Anaseini Vakaidia of the United Blind Persons of Fiji ahead of International Day for Persons with Disabilities, commemorated on the 3rd of December. Lanieta Tuimabu, also of the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, shared her messages via email.

This year, the global commemorations put the focus on inclusion with the theme 'Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all'. It is this inclusion that Roden, Vakaidia and Tuimabu stress on a daily basis:

"Sometimes it's still difficult to find the right people to go and

advocate on issues," admitted Vakaidia. "Some of our members, they know the issues but then they still face fear in trying to speak out on the different issues and also how they can go out into the communities and talk about it. This is still some of the contributing factors and also for us it would be the help of able-bodied people or people without disabilities also trying to find the right people to come and help us if they have the passion to help us."

"The environment is not accessible and I'm always encouraging and pushing and saying if I don't go out there, then they don't get to know what's happening," Roden said.

"We need to stop violence against women with disabilities," continued Tuimabu. "This can only be realised if services for survivors of violence is accessible for different disability needs, the need for data collection and prevalence studies on women and girls with disabilities. There is also a need for service providers to work closely with disabled people's organisations in ending violence against women and girls in Fiji, the need for policy to be disability inclusive and the need for justice systems to be disability friendly and accessible to women with disabilities."

"For carers, they need to work with the person that they are taking care of because you're the one that's disabled, you are the one that feels what's happening, you feel the changes and you know what you want to meet that," added Roden. "The carer has to work with the person in the chair, the person that's vision impaired, whatever the disability is and to be able to do that you have to listen then to communicate. Dialogue is very important."

And as conversations continue, it is critical to also talk about things often left unsaid.

"I think violence against women is a growing issue nowadays," said Vakaidia. "We cannot laugh about it – it's in the everyday news, you can hear there's cases of violence not only for women but also girls. But for women with disabilities sadly for me I feel that this is still a growing issue."

"It is still silently faced by them as there is not much awareness and attitudinal behaviour with stigma affects how often these cases are reported," outlined Tuimabu. "There is also a need for awareness raising through media providers and social media. There is also a need for women with disabilities to be empowered about gender based violence, to share their stories and report the cases."

"It's gotta work in both ways," added Roden. "The women educated on taking precautions on these things happening and continuing same with the males that this is not supposed to be happening."

In our own ways, we can contribute to making the change: "During this 16 Days of Activism, it would be good to look at your rights from all perspective - whether you're a woman with a disability or transgender or anything," recommended Vakaidia. "It would be good to sit back and reflect and also at the same time come out of your comfort zone and try and talk about your rights and share your problems with others because when you share your problems with others, they might help and try and give out advice or solutions to whatever you are having problems with."



SHINING SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN AS LEADERS, PEACEBUILDERS, FIRST RESPONDERS

PRESS RELEASE

In November 2017, femLINKpacific held its second Women’s Weather Watch National Consultation for 2017 with more than 30 women leaders of all diversities from the Central, Northern and Western Divisions of Fiji. “Through Women’s Weather Watch, we are putting the spotlight on women’s leadership as peacebuilders as well as first responders in emergencies,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific ahead of the event. “The women leaders attending bring their leadership, knowledge and the collective issues from the districts they come from. In 2017, we’ve had 71 district consultations across Fiji with 3 divisional consultations – that means that in Nausori, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki, Labasa town, rural Macuata, Bua and Savusavu, more than 500 women of all diversities have been meeting throughout the year. All of these women are being represented by the women leaders that are coming to the National Consultation.”

The consultation culminated in the production of the second season of Radio With Pictures for 2017 in collaboration with Fiji Television:

“By amplifying and increasing the visibility of what women of all diversities are saying, we are demonstrating how it will bring women to the table – as a result of targeted, strengthened capacity to organise and influence decision-making at district, sub-national and national systems,” added Bhagwan Rolls. “The Radio With Pictures platform is an important partnership that we have with the media.”

HEROWINS 5 LAUNCHED!

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

A comic book series that highlights femLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch model continues to amplify the contributions of rural women leaders as first responders.

The fifth issue of the HEROWINS series was launched on the first day of femLINKpacific’s second National Consultation by Christina Munzer, the Australian High Commission’s Counsellor for Development Cooperation in Fiji and Tuvalu.

In launching the latest addition of the comic series, Munzer reaffirmed the importance of the model as well as the role that community radio plays:

“Women’s Weather Watch continues to be an important communications system for woman and proves that technology can and should be accessible to everyone,” she said. “We know that radio, especially community radio, has the ability to share information in a way that is suited to the needs of its audience and the language and the style required.”

According to Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific, a number of recommendations in the latest HEROWINS issue remains consistent in terms of the promotion of equality, disability rights and protection with dignity:

“I always say that one of the reasons we publish the comic book is so that the members of parliament can understand what we have to say,” she added.

First published in 2015, the HEROWINS series has continued to shed light on the inclusion of diverse women at all decision-making levels, drawing from their own lived experiences.

This latest issue will be distributed through femLINKpacific’s network of Rural Women Leaders and was published with the support of the Australian Government.

The comic book is also available online at: <http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/actions/policy-documents/597-herowins-5-prepared-protected-leading>



WOMANITARIANS OF WOMEN'S WEATHER WATCH

Women's Weather Watch is femLINKpacific's inter-operable communication platform that has been developed initially for Women's Weather Watch.

At the heart of this system is community radio, linking a network of women leaders and correspondents to real-time information via SMS alerts (mobile phone and bulk system) as well as a Viber group and Facebook.

The system is a two-way information system enabling the network members to also provide real-time situation updates which are used for media and podcast productions.

The system is coordinated from femLINK's regional hub based at its Suva community media centre and activated in the disaster preparedness stage and is also used as a disaster impact assessment tool. It can be operated from a desktop, or mobile device.

Women's Weather Watch documents the lived experiences of women in disaster affected communities and supports the leadership of women to ensure more gender-inclusive preparedness and humanitarian response during times of disasters – storms and cyclones, droughts and floods as well as tsunamis, as well as in the recovery stages post-disaster.

The leadership of women in Fiji like...



Bonita Qio

Coordinator, Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network – Lautoka

Actively involved in a variety of civil society organisations, Qio works tirelessly to engage all members of the community especially young women, sex workers and the LGBTIQ community.

Following the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston she was out in the field, visiting members of the LGBTIQ community and distributing basic amenities under the Pacific Gender and Climate Justice program facilitated by Diverse Voices in Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji.

Later on, she was also part of the Fiji Red Cross Response Unit, visiting each community in the Western Division and conducting field assessments, collecting analysis data and feedback.

"I have seen less participation of young women. Young women have their own needs - our voices are different and we tell our stories better than someone else, that's why we have to be sitting in (decision-making) spaces telling our stories."



Nila Rao

Advisory Councillor, Caulasi Area – Rakiraki

After retiring from a life of teaching, Rao became an active participant in local governance – first as a member of the Rakiraki town council in 2010 before becoming an advisory councillor in 2015. After TC Winston, despite facing her own challenges after the devastating event, Rao was out in the community almost immediately. Assessing damage was no easy task with Rao having to travel on foot amongst the closed roads and fallen power lines.

"Now the ladies are coming in... we have proved to the people that no matter like how intense the cyclone was, whatever we had to go through but we did whatever we were supposed to do."



Vani Tuvuki

Leader, Koronubu Women's Fellowship – Ba

A breast cancer survivor, a former teacher, and counsellor, a certified lay pastor and community advocate on gender awareness, and ending child abuse and domestic violence – Tuvuki is a pillar of the community. Women's Weather Watch has been a critical source of information for the cane-farming community of Koronubu as many residents look to Tuvuki for information whenever a shift in the weather happens. After TC Winston, she was involved in relief work, distributing food to those without homes after the cyclone. She continued to call for equality in decision-making at all levels to improve the standards of living for all.

"Disaster preparedness could be improved by giving us accurate information. As women leaders, we all have to stand up - we are the first responders in most of the communities."

COMING SOON: A NEW SEASON OF RADIO WITH PICTURES

"We are encouraging women to come out of their own safe space and be resilient and stand on their own two feet and do income generating." - Vani Tuvuki

"Women are the first responders, I say, and women are there - everywhere women's are there, they know what to do." – Jai Mati

"If I'm at the club, we can talk, just go and talk with the club, they spread the news in the community." - Sarojani Gounder

"We are all leaders, women are all leaders out there." – Inise Dawai

"The disaster management committee planning stage I think they should include a lot of women in that so that we can talk from our own perspective." – Nila Rao

"It's very important before disaster women need to know the accurate information when it comes to weather updates." - Frances Tawake

"We are not waiting for any warnings from the Met Office, we are securing our houses every day because after TC Winston we haven't taken any warnings lightly." - Jashnita Reddy

"When we are talking about women's empowerment at the community level, we also see that women with disabilities are also leaders within their community and empowering other women with disabilities." - Lanieta Tuimabu



Mereisi Mara

Assistant President, Nasaulevu Women's Club – Savusavu

During TC Winston, Mara took an active role in her community in ensuring the safety of her community – a role she felt ownership of as a mother and rural woman leader. From collecting food, water and clothing to helping the elderly and people with disabilities evacuate, Mara believes that protection with dignity for all is critical. Since the cyclone, she has been an active voice and busy pair of hands both in rebuilding her community and speaking out on the lack of provision of clean water to her community.

"Women must be involved in all disaster management and responses program and committees because women knows the problems in our communities and families. 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."



Unaisi Sela

Secretary, Soqosoqo Vakamarama Bua – Bua

Coming from a community affected by TC Winston, Sela knows the challenge of recovery that is gender blind. Living in Vuya, a three hour drive from Labasa town, has continued to underscore the need for proper access to information including clear preparatory messaging ahead of natural disasters. During the cyclone, Sela housed those living close to the coast as well as supported the community through the canteen she was running.

"(Women) have to attend some consultation... the women in the villages, they need to be encouraged to attend the workshops, to know that (they are leaders through their roles) as mothers, as a woman."



Vikatoria Tuivanualevu

Leader, Naweni Women's Club – Savusavu

A community hard-hit by TC Winston, Tuivanualevu has continued to highlight the challenges not just after the cyclone but the gaps created by a lack of preparation. Shortages of food supplies, in particular, at the evacuation centre was a major issue that threatened the protection with dignity of her community members. In her community, the women are continuing to work in partnership to recover from the damage to housing and their surroundings, over a year and a half later.

"We women have an important contribution during natural disaster. We bear the burden of the disaster either it hurricane, tidal waves or even flooding."

A GENDERED APPROACH MAKES GOOD BUSINESS, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BY HANNAH HICKS AND SIAN ROLLS

"It all starts with valuing a role," explained Leanne Hunter of J Hunter Pearls Fiji.

femLINKpacific caught up with Hunter in Savusavu in July to find out more about the modality of work of J Hunter Pearls Fiji in engaging communities, especially women, in pearl farming in the Northern division.

Involving women said Hunter makes good business sense as well as ensuring sustainability in natural resource management:

"With women as the backbone in these rural communities, they know what they need (in their communities) already. It's about talking to them and communicating it, not us going and (saying) 'this is what you need to do to make your village better and make it run efficiently' and 'this is the model for business and you can generate this much and then returns'. We actually listen to them and they tell us and we provide the means for them to be able to do it. That's always been our approach to working with communities from the grassroots level."

What is also important, she says, is supporting women to recognise and reaffirm their leadership roles:

"In a traditional aspect, within the village, women don't value the role of their natural role that they're given within that community and they don't value the worth of that role from a communal aspect. Once they do, that type of empowerment will lead them on to other things."

THE BUSINESS OF GENDER EQUALITY

In October this year, leaders of Pacific Island states and territories as well as private sector and civil society organisations are expected to converge at the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 6th Meeting of the Pacific Ministers for Women in Fiji's capital.

For a solid week, those in attendance aim to unpack the realisation of women's economic empowerment across the region; a challenge

all sectors, including the business community like J Hunter Pearls Fiji, are slowly chipping away at.

According to Adi Vasulevu, femLINK's Northern Division convenor there is a valuable opportunity to learn from the J Hunter Pearls Fiji practice model which can support progressing commitments to women's economic empowerment.

In her own work, she has enabled communities, including and especially women's groups and networks, to come together and realise their income generating programmes:

"Like (Leanne) said, they (the women) were the ones that told us, they are the ones that actually contributed to the model that you have now and what type of development do they want to take on to the village. Although, at the same time, they are building their economic security and they're part of the decision-making."

"I think that's also a long term model too," added Hunter. "You know you don't want instant responses to it or instant gratification from whatever you do."

EMPHASISING QUALITY IN A SHIFTING ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Sustaining the economic activities is not just about ensuring that women learn the skills of pearl farming.

"It's a good lesson to also teach these communities that it's not so much about quantity but it's about quality," explained Hunter.

"Through rarity and uniqueness... by applying the quota system to these farms, we then keep the level of production at where we want it to be that we are still unique."

Enabling a synergy between traditional economic systems and culture has also been at the heart of the J Hunter Pearls Fiji approach:

"It works within their traditional model anyway (and) what's especially important for us in that respect is that these jobs are not taking women out of the village - we're taking the spat collectors to the village so they still have their children around them, they can still do their traditional roles within the village at the same time they have an opportunity to benefit economically as well," she continued, adding that the communal approach to work and remuneration has also augured well for the villages they work in. "When you go into the villages and you take the work to them, one woman might not be available every day of the week from that time to that time. She might come for two days, another one might come for one day because they have their other responsibilities within the village.

The money goes into a community fund, from there they allocate a little bit off to everyone but the larger percentage of that money goes towards projects that they've got listed down. That model actually works for them anyway to be able to put the money into a

community fund and then they decide how it should be siphoned off and then how much to go to a project."

This approach, adds Hunter, is in sync with the communities: "It's what they decided and traditionally that's how they work within the village anyway. We just facilitated that along the way. By taking the work to them... the model just formed as we grew and developed and then we found out that our model is feasible."

AN ENABLING AND PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT

It's no secret that an eyebrow is raised when the conversation about private sector investment comes up.

However, the value of relationship building was stressed by Hunter as a key approach to not just keep the flow of high quality products but to maintain the social and physical environment around them.

"It's not just taking off and running off by yourself but you know going with the community, empowering especially women," added Vasulevu. "It's also a long term process it cannot just happen today because what I'm hearing community have trust with your company because that's the only reason, the only way they stay working with you and that can happen in a long term relationship."

It just makes good business sense.

"Because pearl farming requires a pristine environment to work in, we find that a lot of the times where we set up, it's in real quite remote areas, they don't have many other opportunities for economic benefits," outlined Hunter. "When we go in and we approach a women's group and say we can offer this to you... those women then say, 'well, look, we have this project already... in line with what we've been talking about for a long time'. (It may be) amongst their church groups or it could be just a women's group or women's initiative. It becomes a way of being able to make this happen now and so that's how it really started for us with the first women's group."

The J Hunter model is demonstrated what is possible to value and support women including elevating women's handicraft production into the high end market which as Hunter says starts with valuing women's traditional knowledge and skills:

"There needs to be a lot more done to pull up all the women's handicrafts. (If) men were making these same handicrafts, they'd be double the price but they're worth nothing. These mats (that women make) with such elaborate designs are worth nothing simply because women are making them and they don't value their own time. It's a natural product, sure, but three months of their work to make one beautiful round mat... someone needs to teach them the value of that, the rarity of that and the marketability of that."



WOMEN SPEAK OUT FOR JUST WAGES AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

BY SHARON BHAGWAN ROLLS ON THE 21ST OF OCTOBER, 2017

Something significant happened on the streets of Suva today. Women and men. Young women and children. Stevedores and factory workers. They walked side by side in solidarity with workers from civil society and academia.

They sang.

They chanted.

They walked for social and economic justice.

"I'm marching because there are so many hard-working people in Fiji who aren't getting the pay they deserve. I see it in my mum's

family," said Mercedes, a young woman who was amongst the throngs of workers, including civil society activists and young people who marched in solidarity through Suva today demanding decent work conditions including the increase in the national minimum wage to FJD4 an hour.

An increase in the minimum wage will contribute to reducing youth unemployment, she added:

"Young people need to come off the streets and actually work - we have a lot of time but no work," outlined Mercedes.

"All we are asking for is fairness in wages and fairness in treatment," said Kuini Lutua who highlighted that 95% of garment and footwear workers are women and with their wage currently set at the minimum rate they survive on the brink of poverty:

"They are workers contributing to millions of dollars to this country but their skills are not recognised. Without long term employment contracts people will continue to be driven down to the poverty level."

"It's a poverty wage that people are being paid - we need \$4 an hour," added Claire Slatter. "It's time for a rise in the minimum wage."

Organising for workers' rights, Slatter continued, is a fundamental constitutional right.

And according to Nalini Singh, Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and chairperson of the NGO Coalition on Human Rights, it is a critical time to exercise the rights to demand for decent work conditions including for women workers who are often more at risk to discriminatory practices in the work place:

"We hope that government will listen to all of us in relation to the wage bans, work opportunities and not put workers further into poverty," Singh said.

She added that this was also a critical time for the state to enter into dialogue with civil society and women's rights groups in line with the National Women's Plan of Action which includes a task force on Women and The Law:

"A significant amount of asks and voices from the ground come through these task forces and it's an avenue to be reinstated and activated," recommended Singh.

UAF-AP - FUNDING WOMEN'S CRITICAL WORK

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

One conversation that continues to dominate civil society space is the importance of funding the work of women's human rights defenders.

"The work that we do - femLINK, me - the work that we do to defend, promote and protect women's human rights or human rights of women is important because if we are not making women aware or the community aware that women have the same rights as men, then violation and discrimination will continue to occur," explained Virisila Buadromo, co-lead of the recently launched Urgent Action Fund Asia Pacific.

The Urgent Action Fund Asia Pacific is a rapid response mechanism for women human rights defenders and headquartered within the Asia-Pacific region and according to Buadromo, the Fund is

specifically for activists who are in moments of risk:

"Risk being that if they're being targeted or persecuted or harassed whether it's by the state or whether it's by other people for the work that they do or because of their identity as women or LGBTI - that's who the grant is for," she continued.

With the Asia-Pacific encompassing a large geographical area, too often the Pacific end of the spectrum isn't at a priority level.

And one of the ways to counter this problem is through a 'shared leadership' model - with Buadromo sharing the position and responsibilities of heading the Asia-Pacific branch with Mary-Jane Real of the Philippines.

"That's one of the reasons because we wanted to ensure that when the grant was launched, or when it was set up, that it had the Pacific right from the beginning rather than as an add-on because usually that's what happens - we'll set up Urgent Action Fund for Asia and later on realise, 'oh, hang on, let's have one for the Pacific - let's just add it on to this'," said Buadromo. "We have recognised that is actually very difficult to have one person usually running an organisation and sometimes I think it's a little bit unfair to have this expectation and because a key part of the work that we do is also about self-care and well being."

So how does one access funds?

Compared to traditional funding, the Urgent Action Fund Asia-Pacific

operates '24/7, 365 days' and recognising the urgency at which requests in approval and disbursement can take anywhere between 48 hours to 10 days with a maximum amount of \$5000 USD.

Because the Fund targets those at the grassroots level or those most at-risk, a bank account isn't necessary.

"We will only give funds to individuals who are associated or are supported by women's rights group and because we are a women's human rights funds," Buadromo stressed. "So, it's open to everybody but the issue is the applicant needs to be a women's human rights group or a women's human rights defenders."

While the Fund acts as an emergency resource supplier, it is important to acknowledge that 'resource' is more than just money:

"We should define the different kinds of resources that we bring to the table - whether it's volunteerism, whether it's networking, whether it's intellectual or intellectual power that we bring to the room," outlined Buadromo. "We need to keep this broader because if we keep talking about money, there will always be a situation... where you kind of promote this kind of inequality because unless you have the money than you don't have much power."

To apply for a grant, visit the Urgent Action Fund website on www.urgentactionfund.org

CELEBRATING THE GIRL CHILD

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

"Team Girl make mistakes however we don't dwell on mistakes. We learn from them and keep on going. If we must, we'll crawl to keep moving forward."

These were the words of wisdom shared by Peniana Vadei, a Year 8 student, at a national event organised by The Fiji Girl Guides Association and Fiji Brownies to mark the International Day of the Girl Child.

Celebrated annually on October 11, the International Day of the Girl is one that 'aims to highlight and address the needs and challenges

that face, while promoting girls' empowerment and fulfillment of their human rights'.

Her Excellency Salote Konrote, First Lady of Fiji and patron of the Fiji Girl Guides Association, while delivering the keynote address, remarked that there was a need for strong and hardworking women:

"Many people believed, and some still do believe, that a woman's primary role is to be a quiet and obedient wife and mother and so girls were raised to fulfill such roles," she said. "However, times have changed and it is now evident that societies that nurture respect for women, including fostering their talents and providing opportunities for them, have become successful."

Vadei, a student of St Joseph the Worker Primary School, reminded the young Guides to remain hopeful, determined and empowered:

"Nothing is too high that we cannot reach," she stressed. "We are competent and capable. We can rise above all odds and fulfill every dream."

For Vere Maris, another young leader in the Guiding movement, the Girl Guides was a good experience for young girls:

"We like young girls to speak out, act independently and inspire and encourage all girls around the world," she outlined.

For many in the Guiding movement, independence and empowerment was a powerful lesson:

"First of all we would like young girls to be safe from all the crimes that are happening and like for them to think out loud and not keeping it to themselves," shared Zeenat Ali, a Year 13 student of Dudley High School and a member of the Girl Guides. "Also to be successful and taking part in other things that they like and not just because their families want them to do it."

Girl Guides was introduced in Fiji in 1924 with The Fiji Girl Guides Association established in 1930 and became a full member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 1981.

EXAMINING THE GAP FOR WOMEN IN RUGBY

BY CAROLYN KITIONE

'Rugby is not really a sport for women.'

For the women rugby players in this year's Oceania 7s, this was a sentiment they heard too often growing up.

And because this is a deeply ingrained belief in most Pacific societies, challenging the 'norm' is a mammoth task in itself.

"It was pretty hard being a woman, taking up rugby - we were not given too much priority," shared Debbie Kaore, a boxer and vice-captain of the PNG Palais.

This year's Oceania 7s saw the PNG Palais qualify for the Rugby World Cup Sevens and the Commonwealth Games next year.

And yet, for all their success, the side remains relatively unnoticed. "There were times when we would travel without having resources," explained Kaore. "We were always looked...invisible so priority was given mostly to the boys even though we succeeded most of the times, we still were looked past."

This lack of support was echoed by some of the other women in the field.

"For us, the women's team, we have to find our own way especially our training gears - training stuff - for us girls," outlined Rusila Nagasau of the Fijiana 7s team. "We have to buy our own stuff...unlike the men who are provided with everything they want."

Nagasau, who began her sporting career playing soccer, was also a member of the Fijiana 7s Olympic team last year. Despite her impressive athletic achievements, she and a number of the other players on the team are still far from getting the recognition they deserve:

"Even though we don't have any allowance (or) pay - still, we have to sacrifice even though for us...most of us don't go to work but it's the passion of rugby that carries us every single day," shared Nagasau.

For all the challenges that women in rugby face, their male counterparts can be the best support unit:

"The boys (in the Manu Samoa team) are very supportive," said Sui Pauaraisa of the Manusina 7s team, Samoa's national women's team. "They're always around the girls in pushing us even though we've only just met them."

Pauaraisa is just one of the many women in rugby who understands that passion for the game requires sacrifice:

"I've got two little girls so the more they grow up, the more I miss

them when I travel but they do understand," Pauaraisa reflected.

"But the support from my husband and my family really helps." For Cook Islands' Chantelle Schofield, despite coming from a country where rugby isn't even a major sport, the chance to represent her own country has been rewarding:

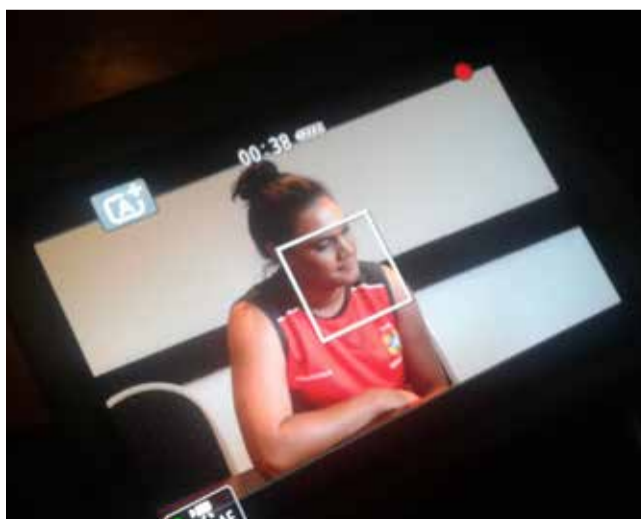
"I feel amazing," she smiled. "To represent our little nation, being able to play in the Oceania Cup to show the world pretty much that we can do this, we can come from a background where this isn't our sport but we can have opportunities for ourselves to play with it." With women continuing to challenge age-old stereotypes, the fight for equal gender recognition in rugby becomes even more important:

"We can become role models," stated Manutala'aho Havili of the Tonga Women's 7s team. "Being that person to step up and play rugby so that people back home, the locals can see and say, 'I wanna be like her, I wanna play rugby...and if she can do it, I can do it.'"

This year's Oceania 7s fielded a record number of 8 women's teams and the message to other young women and girls is clear:

"If you really have the passion for the game...just play," Pauaraisa concluded. "It takes a while but you've got to take it step by step."

For femLINKpacific's interviews with the teams, go to: <https://soundcloud.com/femlinkpacific/sets/oceania-7s-2017>



WOMEN'S ROLE IN GOOD GOVERNANCE

BY CAROLYN KITIONE WITH SIAN ROLLS

As Fiji gears up for another election year, questions have been raised about the representation of women in parliament. At the Citizen Constitutional Forum's (CCF) Annual Public Forum, these questions were put to the floor by Fay Volatabu, General Secretary of the National Council of Women. With the theme of CCF's forum this year's forum being 'Good Governance: What for and For Whom?' Volatabu asked the audience a series of questions: "Participation is one element of good governance," she underscored. "In Fiji today, do all the men and all the women have the same voice in decision-making? How many members of parliament are women? How many leaders of political party are women? How many CEOs in Fiji are women?" In the 2014 Fijian general elections, only 8 women were elected to parliament. Within the wider Pacific, not including Australia and New Zealand, there are 40 women members of parliament out of a total of 559 which is only 7.2%.

AIRWAVES CREATE NEW EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

BY ALISIA EVANS

Community radio is offering new job opportunities to young women in rural and urban areas in Fiji, especially those who have not completed formal education. "I was studying for a certificate in computer studies at the Fiji National University in Labasa," said Lucille Chute, Programme Assistant for femLINKpacific, a Fiji-based women-led regional media network. "But it wasn't what I wanted to do so I dropped out." In 2010, Chute underwent basic community radio training with femLINKpacific's Generation Next Project (2007 - 2011). Today, Chute is assisting in the management of the Labasa Community Media Centre which is home to Vanua Levu's first and only radio station on Fiji's second largest island. Four more diverse young rural women are part of the femLINKpacific broadcast team. The impact of community media including community radio broadcasting has had positive impacts outside of Lucille's professional life: "One significant moment was our simulcast (a radio broadcast that is broadcast on television live at the same time), where I was the radio host," shared Chute. "It was the first ever in Labasa to have 'Radio with Pictures' and I will never forget that. People were talking about it at that time even till now. They would say 'when are you

As the concept of 'good governance' becomes more pronounced especially leading up to next year's elections, so too do the keywords surrounding the concept - transparency, accountability, accessibility. "Transparency is information flowing freely to and from all stakeholders - are the processes, institutions and information directly accessible to those concerned?" Volatabu asked. "There are stories that need to be highlighted and the issues that we face." With political parties developing manifestos that appeal to the masses, there is an important call to action being made by young women" "Prioritising the inclusiveness of young women from all diversities to be part of the local government from young women to transwomen so that there is better understanding when they are making development plans," Chandra Fisi'iahi, a co-convenor of the Fiji Young Women's Forum, told femLINKpacific in an episode of Radio With Pictures in the Field. Some of these challenges are also being unpacked throughout the week as the Fiji Young Women's Forum holds a week-long young women in politics training. But the challenges remain - even at the grassroots level, women are calling for a recognition of women's leadership skills. To help develop that skill, there needs to be a more consultative approach from the community level as femLINK's network of women

going to have that same thing that you had in 2012?' Some of my friends would ask me that because they saw me on television so that was a significant moment for me." But that's not the only place that her work in the media is making waves: "Another thing is our families - they are so proud like knowing that this person is on television and they would switch on and they would tell the neighbours," she continued. "It has meant a lot that way." The model of community media is also empowering the development of urban young women in Fiji's capital. From 2007 to 2011, femLINKpacific's flagship project 'Generation Next' brought diverse young women onto the airwaves. It was a homegrown model that has enabled more than 100 young women to overcome the inter-generational gaps in radio programme productions and lead broadcasts, produce content and also develop and grow within the organisation as well find employment opportunities elsewhere. One of these young women was Veena Singh, currently a Gender Research Officer at the Pacific Community (SPC), who came to femLINK through the Kids Link programme of Save the Children Fiji. As a young woman passionate about child rights, Singh's community media experience complimented her strong sense of social justice and equipped her with the analytical skills to be able to understand and question the structural imbalances that lead to gender inequality in society. Following in the footsteps of the late Moushmi Narain and Ruci Senikula, a disability rights activist, were able to access the 'suitcase' radio to host regular weekend market reports from the Lami Town Council and host 'Look At My Abilities' show on FemTALK 89FM. Eta Rabuatoka who joined Generation Next as a representative of the DORCAS women's group, has gone on to join mainstream broadcasting. Today she is a programme producer and host on Fiji

leaders pointed out. "We need more women (in decision-making) because women understand our problem easily than men," shared Mereia Tabuvale, a member of the Labasa Market Vendors' Association. "More ladies are needed in decision-making process to be in district and divisional meetings, but to be included in that we need ladies to be trained up, to be more educated, to attend consultations like femLINK and know the system (and understand) how it works," added Reverend Angela Prasad from Labasa. As we slowly work towards including more women in leadership spaces and realising good governance, there is a greater need to stay informed and hold accountable those already in the space. Progress is being made, with women leaders of all diversities committed to making the aspirations a reality as the inaugural National Convention of The Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum reaffirmed: "There are persistent inequalities and inequities perpetuated by structures and institutions and societal practices that disregard women, people, agency, human rights, freedoms, indigenous, ethnic minority and other community concerns. As diverse women leaders, we commit to bring the voice, agency and actions grounded in collaboration and solidarity from community to national level to create a better future."

Television. Other former 'Generation Next' members are working in public relations, finance and development sector including Frances Tawake who has gone on to also become a Programme Associate of femLINKpacific. The community radio partnerships has also meant femLINK has been able to provide technical and broadcast skills training of young LGBTIQ women like Audrey Seru. Today, Seru is responsible for audio documentation of Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality in Fiji, as a Management Collective member. The 13th Pacific Women's Triennial Conference was held in Fiji in October, followed by the 6th Pacific Women's Ministers Meeting. The deliberations resulted in the adoption of a new 12 year plan for gender equality. The theme of the conference was women's economic empowerment where a key issue up for discussion includes encouraging and supporting young women to develop skills in technology that enhance their employment prospects. This includes the creation of employment opportunities for young women of all diversities including young women with disabilities, LGBTIQ young women and rural young women. According to femLINKpacific's Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, it is crucial that the women's civil society strategies that support women's economic empowerment are affirmed as much as the role of private sector and development agency programmes. This includes the community media and radio network model: "It's not enough for governments and private sector to simply identify civil society organisations for partnership and collaboration," said Bhagwan Rolls. "It's about getting them resourced, recognising that a strong and diverse women's civil society network is also providing employable skills and employment for young women."



THE FWF AND FYWF - COMMIT TO CREATING A BETTER FUTURE

VIA THE FIJI WOMEN'S FORUM AND FIJI YOUNG WOMEN'S FORUM

"As diverse women leaders, we commit to bring the voice, agency and actions grounded in collaboration and solidarity from community to national level to create a better future."

This is a commitment expressed by 109 diverse women leaders who, from the 28th to the 30th of August, marked another historic moment in Fiji's history and the her-story of the women's movement with the inaugural National Women's Convention. The convention closed with the adoption of an outcome statement (<http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/actions/policy-documents/584-creating-a-better-future-inaugural-national-women-s-convention-outcomes-statement>) expressing a political vision.

"Forums like this don't come around every day," said Adi Finau Tabakucoro, President of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama, during the closing of the 3-day convention. "I am glad I have had opportunities through this forum to interact with our diversity and our differences and the thread of women, knowledge, qualities and strengths that we all represent here."

"The 3 days have been a demonstration of what a powerful group of women leaders from Fiji can discuss and decide as actions for

themselves and for all those they represent," added Nalini Singh, Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. "The inaugural Fiji Women's National Convention is not (going to) be a one off either. The Convention has galvanised both the Forums and the women leaders that together we can create the change we see for ourselves and Fiji."

Co-convened by The Fiji Women's Forum and the Fiji Young Women's Forum, the National Convention was an opportunity to discuss effective implementation of Fiji's 2013 Constitution in relation to diverse needs of women and develop key strategies and recommendations to government and all other stakeholders to address limitations faced by women, in advancement of gender equality and universal human rights.

"The convention demonstrates the commitment and ability of the co-convenors to bring women and young women of all diversities of Fiji society to come together to discuss, deliberate and adopt an outcomes statement that reflects how to bring gender equality and women's human rights into Fiji's political processes," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

"The fact that women leaders demand accountability of the Constitution and related governance systems sends a clear message including to us as the Fiji Women's Forum co-convenors to ensure women across Fiji have access to information in order to confidently engage in political processes," continued Singh. The National Convention brought together representatives of diverse constituencies from across Fiji and upholding the qualities of women's leadership building on the rich tradition of activism of Fijian women throughout our national history.

This includes a commitment to collaborative leadership with young

women throughout the country, which can build on the her-story of women's participation in political spaces including social movements.

Coinciding with the National Convention, the Fiji Young Women's Forum convened a half day preparatory meeting as well as end the week with the 4th Fiji Young Women's Forum.

"Young women need their own space so that they can also be part of decision-making processes," explained Audrey Seru, Management Collective member of Diverse Voices and Action for Equality. "Having this half day meeting is important as this will encourage our diverse young women to speak during the National Convention. It's not easy to speak up... (so) creating these spaces will strengthen and motivate our young women to speak in an intergenerational space's and disrupt the patriarchal spaces."

The Fiji Women's Forum is co-convened by Soqosoqo Vakamarama Taukei, National Council of Women, femLINKpacific & Fiji Women's Rights Movement. The Fiji Young Women's Forum is co-convened by young women for young women with Diverse Voices and Action for Equality Fiji (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA), and femLINKpacific's Programme Associates.

The Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum National Convention and the 4th Fiji Young Women's Forum is supported by the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition, United Kingdom's Magna Carta Fund, Conciliation Resources and the European Union through the DUA Project.

For more: <http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/actions/archive/583-the-fiji-women-s-forum-and-fiji-young-women-s-forum-national-convention-the-4th-fiji-young-women-s-forum>

About The Fiji Women's Forum

The Fiji Women's Forum's first national consultation on women's participation in national democratic processes 12th April 2012 was a historical moment in Fiji bringing together women from rich and diverse backgrounds – women living with disabilities and living with HIV, as well as different faiths, cultures, sexualities, gender identities, ages, demographics and opinions.

While The Fiji Women's Forum was initially formed to bring together diverse women's groups towards the shared aim of increasing women's participation in leadership - in particular focusing on women's participation in Fiji's national elections - which was held in September 2014, the co-convenors have since convened four more forums with the purpose of:

- Securing and supporting the full participation of women in all levels of decision-making
- Engaging more women in the development and political processes of Fiji
 - Bringing attention to the diverse needs and concerns of women by facilitating appropriate responses and communicating this to a wider audience.

The four national forums enabled a diversity of women to mobilize in large numbers and implement civic education in collaboration with other women. Women participated in the constitution making process at different levels and degrees allowing for their voices and experiences to be included in the democratization process and the 5th Women's Forum held in April 2015 specifically focused on women in local governance.

About the Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF)

FYWF builds on the intergenerational The Fiji Women's Forum, which was first convened in 2012, as well as the rich tradition of activism and feminism by Fijian women throughout our national her-story. The mission of FYWF is to increase and progress young women's political leadership in an effective, meaningful and inclusive participation in Fiji's communities, legislative bodies and national process. FYWF is built on the guiding principles of mutual respect, active participation, transparency and good governance, accountability, gender sensitivity, respect and appreciation for human rights and diversity.

FYWF has successfully convened three national forums with a combined

total of over 100 young diverse women. These young women actively participated in the lead up to Fiji's 2014 national elections in their local communities. These included nationwide distribution and awareness of the My Guide to Voting (young women's voter guide) and the forum declaration to political parties and other stakeholders. Following the first national forum (November 2013), FYWF noted the importance of State obligation and accountability to translate gender equality, transparency and human rights into legislation, policy and budget allocations. This process is critical for young women to be able to not only understand their needs reflected in the policies but at the same time the State is fulfilling its responsibilities.

AMPLIFYING YOUNG WOMEN'S VOICES TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN-LED COMMUNITY MEDIA NETWORK

BY SIAN ROLLS

"Women's community radio provides the much needed link for our mothers, daughters and sisters to health, education, transport, weather, gender, policies and services," said Michelle Tevita-Singh. "It is the information needed for women, by women. I urge you all to see that your role is extremely important."

Tevita-Singh was speaking at opening of femLINKpacific's Young Women's Community Radio Learning Exchange supported by

the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition that got underway held in October at the Pacific Community's (SPC) Regional Media Centre in Nabua.

"Broadcasting, particularly radio, is still the most relevant media form," added Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific "We wanted to take the radio to women and on May 24th, 2004, we held our first community radio broadcast. Since femLINKpacific's early days, we have been bringing issues from women via our capital city broadcast hub always with a core group of young women as producers and broadcasters. Today, we have two community media centres and two permanent stations – FemTALK 89FM Suva and Labasa."

The participants at the learning exchange included femLINKpacific's cadre of young women producers and broadcasters for FemTALK 89FM, Suva and Labasa, as well as rural correspondents and representatives of organisational partners including the Citizens Constitutional Forum, SAN Fiji and the women's network of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation.

The three day learning exchange has the participants discussing the role and systems of community media, including community

media personnel, as well as contributing to the development of radio scripts based on the human security analysis of femLINKpacific's community media network of rural women leaders.

"We don't just have the technology – radio, broadcasting – but the community media process with the rural women leaders," explained Bhagwan Rolls. "Across the country, our convenors and correspondents are meeting with 200 women... representing 18,000 to 20,000 other women of all diversities. So, community media is not just who is the listener. We bring the issues of 20,000 women of all diversities onto the airwaves, into the public airwaves. And there are a lot more. And these women have families. So, when they are talking on behalf of their communities, that's who we're bringing out to the airwaves."

The third day of the learning exchange also marked the release of a community radio documentary on disability rights for FemTALK 89FM's Look At My Abilities (LAMA) show.

The documentary will air on FemTALK 89FM in Suva and Labasa as well as be available as a podcast at <https://soundcloud.com/femlinkpacific>

YOUNGER WOMEN'S POLITICAL SECURITY

BY SULUETI WAQA WITH SIAN ROLLS

Ahead of the National Convention co-convoked by The Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum, femLINKpacific's network of Rural Women Leaders have been discussing the barriers they have faced and which young women continue to face despite gender equality commitments and advances in information-communication technology.

It is often a case of double discrimination – age and gender coupled with persistent economic barriers.

Or, simply put, the lack of jobs:

"I know young women (who) have very supportive ideas that can help us to make our way up and also to make way for young women to take up leadership roles in their community," said Eta Tuvuki, a member of the Nalawa tikina Soqosoqo Vakamarama in Ra. "Older women (are also) sharing their knowledge and experience to younger women to learn and have better understanding and perspective of the whole context within the community."

Without a voice, nothing can change.

"For younger woman, some extent of challenges we still have is the cultural barrier at the community level," said Ayesha Nisha, Secretary of the Ra Naari Parishad in Rakiraki.

"Most of the time, issues arise within our family," added Adi Ana Ramatai, President of Soqosoqo Vakamarama Bua. "When our children raised issues... we do not listen."

"They are young, they can't say anything in the family or in the community," continued Camari Dauna, a representative of the Vuya Women's Club. "They can't trust anyone even their family or parents

(so) their voices are not heard - in the community or even in their own family."

There is also the impact of Fiji's political crises - the disruptions caused to education and their political participation:

"Another barrier to political security is with the coup culture and the fear within the younger generation," shared Ramatai. "Maybe they didn't come across the first coup and maybe they heard of what happened and that has brought fear in them."

That is one of the reasons why The Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum are convening a National Convention to discuss inter-generational approaches to support women's political participation, from local to national governance.

"I think it's really great," said Chandra Fisi'iahi, representative of the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni. "We get to witness the exchange of knowledge between the younger women and the aging, we are also in a way making a better and more empowered space for the younger generations of women to grow up in."

"We as the women's movement have very limited spaces to convene in such numbers," outlined Nalini Singh, Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. "This is a unique opportunity for all of us to get together and discuss common issues of interest as well as to strategise the ways forward given that this the pre-national elections period."

"This is an opportunity to bring women's leadership together to progress feminist values and principles," added Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "We must ensure that when we talk about women, we are talking from a human rights and peacebuilding approach that is inclusive of women of all diversities including rural women, women with disabilities, LGBT, young and older women."

For femLINKpacific, the Rural Women Leaders network and the use of community media, in particular community radio, has been a powerful tool of bringing women of all diversities together.

It has continued an intergenerational dialogue where younger women and older women envision the best way forward:

"(It) is about involving younger women in decision-making," explained Kiran Chandra, representing the Ra Naari Parishad. "We have to involve older ladies to share their experience, information and pass them to the younger ones. This is for sharing of information and experience."

"We invite young women to participate more (to) increase their participation so that they can be empowered," added Tuvuki. "Since the voting age has gone down from 21 to 18, I think the Education Ministry has to set up a curriculum in schools to cater for these 18 years who are eligible to this voting system in Fiji." And where young women have opportunities, they need to capitalise on them:

"Nowadays, the young women are allowed to voice out their opinions and there are a lot of pocket meetings which they are allowed to attend," stressed Nila Rao, an advisory councillor for Caulasi in Rakiraki. "They have got a lot of freedom and equal rights. They know their rights now so they can access to these information. There are a lot of political parties which they can support and vote for nowadays."

Therefore, sharing knowledge and experience is vital to enhance the participation of young women. Giving them space to raise their concern and also access to information would further empower them to participate.

"Young women need their own space so that they can also be part of decision-making processes," explained Audrey Seru, Management Collective member of Diverse Voices & Action for Equality. "It's not easy to speak up... (so) creating these spaces will strengthen and motivate our young women to speak in an intergenerational space and disrupt the patriarchal spaces."

WOMEN - STAND UP AND TAKE OWNERSHIP OF LEADERSHIP SPACES

BY SIAN ROLLS

"What we (want) as young women (is) an approach that works for us – a consultative dialogue approach," said Bonita Qio of the Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network. "We can come to dialogue." Qio was one of four panellists during the opening of The Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum National Convention.

The three day event was an intergenerational space to bringing

close to 100 women from across all sectors of society including representatives from various groups such as young women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ and ageing women addressing the priority themes of the 2013 Fijian Constitution and women's political participation:

"No political involvement is easy," shared Priscilla Singh, a former local government official. "During my term, I had huge difficulty. I was the only woman in a 20 member council when I was first elected. I went in as an idealist, thinking I was going to change the world. It doesn't happen that way when 19 men around you don't get the female perspective."

"There is still a lot of barriers we face as women... structural barriers and cultural barriers," said Hon. Salote Radrodro, an opposition member of parliament. "It is important for women to be in parliament. We women see things differently. In terms of governance, we women – as caretakers, nurturers and bankers in our families – have (an) appreciation of good governance. If there are more of us in parliament, we will have a louder voice."

"I have kept chipping away, I did not budge when they said that

women's place are in the kitchen," continued Singh. "There is an old guard (but) perseverance is key and you have to be resilient. There will never be quick results."

The participants, while being well aware of the daunting task to bring about reforms of the 2013 Constitution, were reminded that they should not lose sight of the aim to increase the representation of women in parliament, as well as local government:

"We need to recognise our constitution rights, our political rights... whatever rights are covered in the bill of rights (are for) a democratic approach," emphasised Qio. "A democratic approach is a consultative approach."

"Many times we hear women saying politics is very dirty... we don't want to go there," continued Singh. "What's dirty about wanting your rights? I think we would bring better decorum to the august house of parliament. If we want to really achieve our objectives, and by being dignified about it, we can still do it. It is not about yelling and screaming. Politics is about our everyday experiences and so we must participate."

YOUNG WOMEN ENVISION THE FUTURE

VIA THE FIJI YOUNG WOMEN'S FORUM: PRESS RELEASE

44 young women leaders of all diversities, following the National Convention and during their fourth Forum, adopted a vision document outlining the future they want to see realised in Fiji, available online: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/fiji-young-womens-forum/a-vision-of-the-future-fyw4/503414633329065/> "The 4th Forum was a space where young women from diverse backgrounds could address the gaps that exist with relation to young women's political participation, agency, advocacy and awareness," said Kele Gavid, a participant from the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA). "It was a key opportunity for young women to bridge the divide and pull resources and networks into

collaborative work. It's crucial that young women's representation at multi-level forums is encouraged."

"The 4th Forum was a great space for young women to extend their knowledge on how we should see each other as women with diverse issues regardless of our SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sexual characteristics)," added Audrey Seru of Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality. "Having the 4th Forum after the first ever National Convention was one way of addressing and discussing more on gaps and challenges, especially from a young women's perspective."

"We look forward to progressing the outcomes of the National Convention and the vision put forward at the fourth Forum especially through our community media network," continued Alisia Evans, a Programme Associate at femLINKpacific. "If we want women of all diversities to participate, including young women, as well as engage and influence the development cycle, they must be supported to meet as leaders and provided information, communication and resources."

The document has been developed in light of the recently adopted outcome statement from the first National Convention, available online: http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/images/PDF/Policy/TheFWFFYWF_NationalConvention_OutcomeStatement.pdf Co-convoked by The Fiji Women's Forum and the Fiji Young Women's Forum, the National Convention was an opportunity to discuss effective implementation of Fiji's 2013 Constitution in relation to diverse needs of women and develop key strategies and recommendations to government and all other stakeholders to address limitations faced by women, in advancement of gender equality and universal human rights.

Her Excellency Melanie Hopkins, British High Commissioner, said the UK is pleased to support the fourth Fiji Young Women's Forum as a platform to develop and strengthen young women's political leadership roles. She hoped the participants were able to engage in meaningful discussions on the participation of women in political processes, an area which the UK remains committed to supporting.

WOMEN'S WEATHER WATCH GOES REGIONAL

PRESS RELEASE - 8th december 2017 www.goesreghi

A regional women's radio campaign has been promoting gender inclusive disaster risk reduction and recovery in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

It's all part of femLINKpacific's regional Women's Weather Watch network supported by the Australian Government, ActionAid Australia and the International Women's Development Agency.

"This campaign is bridging the gender gaps in disaster preparedness messages that are traditionally heard this time of the year," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "It also demonstrates the vital role of radio in communicating to communities. We are also looking forward to producing our first regional HEROWINS comic book in 2018."

The messages were developed through our regional women-led community media network, including partner organisations the Talitha Project, Vanuatu Young Women for Change, Vois Blong Mere Solomons, Transcend Oceania and members of the Shifting the Power Coalition, in particular the Pacific Disability Forum.

femLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch is an interoperable information and communication platform that amplifies the voices of our network of women leaders, campaigning for the inclusion of women in all aspects of disaster preparation, management and rehabilitation through community media.

The implementation of the Women's Weather Watch platform at a regional level also amplifies women's humanitarian priorities through a commitment made to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

For the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, femLINK also dedicated more than 500 community radio hours in Suva and Labasa as well as produced Instagram, Twitter and SMS messages during its second Women's Weather Watch National Consultation 2017.



YOUNG WOMEN BROADCASTERS - PROUD OF 89FM LABASA EXPANSION

BY SULUETI WAQA

"As a young woman, the community radio is a very important tool for me to use to advocate on gender equality, raise (the) issues of women and marginalised groups and, most importantly, give the voice to the voiceless," shared Alumita Davelevu, the broadcaster that hosts the afternoon show. "I find it interesting, informative, sometimes emotional and very empowering listening to women voicing their issues and recommendations on air." FemTALK 89FM is the only radio station based in Labasa launched

in November 2011. As of this month, the station is doubling its time on air extending transmission from its Labasa Community Media Centre in the town centre for listeners within the 10 kilometre radius which is the current reach with the 100 watt transmitter of the "suitcase radio" station.

"This is what is possible when you invest in women-led media initiatives," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific. "We appreciate the support from DFAT via the We Rise Coalition and in our Women's Weather Watch programme. It is enabling us to have the broadcast infrastructure including the community media centre, broadcast personnel and production of radio programmes during our monthly district convenings so that women leaders can claim the space of the radio airwaves to discuss their issues especially when they are not represented in decision-making processes. Government officials can easily tune into the station to hear what women have to say from communities across Vanua Levu as well as from the western and central division."

The investment has opened new spaces of engagement for

women like Davelevu – who recently joined the team ahead of the expansion.

It also reaffirms to young women that they are able to lead, like Kinisimere Ceyaqalo.

"Through the training offered by femLINKpacific for young producers and broadcasters, I was able to master the techniques and skills of broadcasting," said Ceyaqalo, the morning show host who joined femLINKpacific in 2014. "Now, I am more vocal, more informed and more empowered."

Lucille Chute, programme assistant based at the femLINKpacific Community Media Centre in Labasa, shared just how far she'd seen the community radio network come as one of the young women who were part of the first team of broadcasters in 2011.

"It is a delight that we have extended our broadcast hours from 9am to 5pm where we will have an abundant of women's stories and documentaries from around Fiji, the Pacific and the world being heard on our community suitcase radio," she explained. "This for me, as young woman, means being informed, educated, liberated."



A publication of femLINKpacific, the operators of FemTALK89FM Fiji and the Pacific's first mobile women's suitcase radio station.

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