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# Here Are The Women (2017): Adi Vasulevu (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the- women/480-here-are-the-women-2017-adi- vasulevu)



By Hannah Hicks



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

Her involvement in the movement began as a young woman witnessing the first state conflict that happened in the history of this country and its violent effect first of all, the coup of 1987 and then the coup 2000.

To her, this gave rise and revelation to the existing ethnic and political divide and the state power structure at that time, as was a clear realization for her that then built her interests.

Vasulevu also shared the painful experiences of journeying with women who were faced with domestic violence not only here in Fiji but across the Pacific.

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

"The question for me was 'what can we do together to create rebuild positive opportunity, encourage safe space, and contribute

to build peace, safety and security and, most of all, what can I do to contribute?"

The flames of her inspiration were further fed when she first met Sharon Bhagwan Rolls in 2000 - a time when interested individuals were mobilising and key members of civil society and faith based organisations seeking strategies for peaceful

interventions. She then began her work with femLINKpacific in 2004 with the communication and peacebuilding tools based in Labasa for the Northern Division.

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

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

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

One role she plays actively is as a communicator through femLINKpacific's community radio network.

"What the radio has taught me (is that) I can be the speaker as well as a listener," Vasulevu shared. "Both are important and responsible roles."

Vasulevu also stressed the role community radio has when it comes to being a medium for peacebuilding.

"Being the convener and one that has journeyed with femLINKpacific's community radio from its genesis... has helped widened my perspective and develop my work in view of peacebuilding and communication," she explained.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

women.

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

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

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

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

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