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Here Are The Women (2017): Bonita Qio (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/501-here-are-the-women-2017-bonita-qio)



By Frances Tawake



'Be the change you want to see in the world today' is the mantra that Bonita Qio lives by.

Putting the words into practice, the amazing active trans woman is Coordinator of the Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network (PRAN) – an organisation based in Lautoka for women of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression including transwomen and sex workers.

Aside from her role as Coordinator, the former Priscilla Queen wears many hats. Qio is an Executive member of the Lautoka District Youth Council, a member of the Rainbow Fiji Coalition and a youth worker with the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Originally from Ra, Qio is one of the core group of women leaders who participate at femLINKpacific's consultations at district, divisional and national level.

This is an opportunity to bring the perspectives of transwomen into the inter-generational and rural-urban dialogues with women leaders and government officials.

For Qio, her work is not only about raising the experiences of the communities she represents. Her ethic is deeply rooted in outreach and grass root action. After Tropical Cyclone Winston hit the country, 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. It was this work as well as participating in femLINKpacific's Women's Human Security First: Women's Weather Watch consultations that formed her notions and ideas when it comes to peace and security in humanitarian crises.

“Security is the protection of one's self with regards to laws, voices, representation, issues and agenda regardless of our disability, gender orientation, religion, identity, race, ideas and issues, (while) peace guarantees love, comfort, representation, accountability, good governance, access to service and democracy in the absence of violence, segregation, conflict, homophobia and the many forms of discrimination.”

As a young rural woman leader, she firmly believes that inclusive development means ensuring equality for each and every individual - regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity as well as age and experience.

“I have seen less participation of young women,” she noted. “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.”

But this representation is far from being achieved – from the community to the national level – and while Qio wants to see the gaps addressed, she stresses that leadership is about serving everyone regardless of one person's sexual orientation and gender identity.

She wants to see a decision making system that is free from discrimination – one that will look after the elderly and children, ensuring that the needs of everyone are met regardless of where they come from.

“There are eligible individuals in my community that are fit to take up leadership roles,” Qio outlined. “All they need is empowerment and spaces to utilise our skills.”