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Here Are The Women (2017): Frances Tawake (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/521-here-are-the-women-2017-frances-tawake)



by Alisia Evans



“As a young woman... coming from a family with a lot of boys, I have contributed to a lot of changes at home - especially when it comes to my brothers and the views they have about women,” reflects Frances Tawake, Programme Associate: Network Coordination at femLINKpacific.”

Her journey with the organisation began in 2009 when she was nominated by Susana Evening to represent the Lami Parish of the Catholic Women's League for the 'Generation Next' project - a 3 year flagship programme that equipped more than 50 out of school young women in Suva and Labasa with the technical broadcast and production skills to discuss and communicate important issues that impacted their peace and security.

“The first time I heard myself on the radio, it was quite interesting,” Tawake recalled of her early days on femLINK's community radio station FemTALK89FM. “I never had a chance to speak on the radio before and so I became the broadcaster and

the producer of my own story.”

“I felt that the story it was telling that day wasn't only for me... (but) influencing and empowering other people.”

She also has taken what she learns through the organisation home.

“As a young person growing up in the Fijian community, you don’t see a young person...stand up and talk,” Tawake explained. “So, when I saw myself doing that, I saw that I could represent a whole community.”

From community radio volunteer to her role today within and as team leader of femLINK’s Young Women’s Leadership Team, Tawake is now responsible for coordinating a network of 30 correspondents from 7 countries including Bougainville, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Her role in femLINK has changed and grown over the last 8 years yet her passion for amplifying the voices of rural women and marginalised women through community media has never diminished.

“(Our work) has a lot of impact,” Tawake highlighted. “We are giving the women an opportunity to talk about their issues (and) we are asking them to give their recommendation.

“That is one of the greatest things that femLINK is doing...recognising the women as the agents of change in their different communities and empowering them to utilise their leadership skills (through community media).”

Since her early days with femLINK, she has had to come to terms with our country’s political realities and how it has impacted the identity and roles of young girls in Fiji.

It is the long-lasting impacts of Fiji’s political instability that Tawake sees as a persistent barrier to supporting women’s voice and freedom of expression in rural communities.

“They have a fear in them to talk about the issues they are facing,” she explained. “When someone is in power...and then someone else comes in, they forget about the plans that the person before them had.”

“That (lack of accountability) is a challenge Fiji is facing at the moment.”

Overcoming that deep-rooted fear will take time.

“For now we are doing a great job,” Tawake affirmed. “For us, it’s (about using) a peaceful approach - communicating and working with decision makers and also with the government at national and local level... to find entry points to make a shift in women’s leadership and participation at all levels of decision-making.”