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# Here Are The Women (2017): Jai Mati (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the- women/487-here-are-the-women-2017-jai- mati)



by Hannah Hicks



"One challenge is that women are not always recognized in their leadership role and (are told that) their place is always in the kitchen."

Those were the words of 59 year old Jai Mati from Vuqele, Tavua. She is the President of Vuqele Multiracial Women's Club, Assistant President of Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Nari Sabha's Tavua branch.

Alongside her leadership roles and apart from being a social worker, there is hardly a dull moment for Mati.

She spends her time sewing, doing backyard gardening, looking after her chickens and goats, and tending to her sugarcane field with the help of her son because, as she explained, hiring laborers is too expensive since yield from their harvests have dropped.

The rising cost of living and struggling environment is just one of the reasons for a very long year for Mati and her family. Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston destroyed their home last February. Last June, during femLINKpacific's first FemTALK89FM suitcase radio broadcast since TC Winston, Mati shared that her family had still been living without power.

Despite the slow recovery, it did not stop her from leading the preparedness of Vuqele as tropical depression (TD) 04F approached.

“My house is still under construction and I'm worried what will happen in the next few days,” she shared last December. “(But) I hear the sound in my community of people fixing their houses.”

Peace to Mati is feeling safe and secure at all times, being free from all forms of violence as well as to have full access to security - that is ensuring that she has food, health, economic and environment security, which she acknowledges is her right as a rural woman.

“I was in a restaurant when Fane came,” she shared, reflecting on her first encounter with femLINKpacific 5 years ago. “She wanted to record my voice and when she put the (tape recorder) on, I (felt) excited.”

“I could (only) say one or two words then (but) now I can talk. I'm very much empowered and I can talk to anyone. As a rural woman leader, I have learnt a lot ... such as women's peace and security, about CEDAW, national policies, and Women's Weather Watch and Beijing Platform for Action...that really empowered and educated me a lot.”

Mati believes that there's a need for a strong women's movement because women play so many roles in their families and communities and understand more about the issues - issues that most of them encounter daily.

She sees it as an opportunity to claim that space and hold those at decision making levels accountable, whether it is at the district, local or national level.

Mati also accredits her personal development to being on the community radio network, FemTALK8FM, as she's had the opportunity to participate in radio broadcasts as well as appear on Radio With Pictures which allowed her to address issues that affect her family and community.

“I believe that community radio is a platform for us rural women to come together, to share information and find recommendations to the issues addressed,” she explained. “I was also able to participate in Radio with Pictures which I believe the issues addressed is being heard at national level.”

But the work does not end when the issue is mentioned. Mati still wants to see equal participation and representation of both men and women at all levels of decision making that is at the district, local, national and international level.

“I want the ladies not to sit back,” she said during Radio with Pictures. “Come and voice out so your voice can be heard!”

Using her voice, Mati continues to emphasise a need for at least 30% representation of women in decision making at all levels. She also wants to see the government of the day focus on addressing the issues faced in rural and remote communities, especially issues faced by women and children.