



Here Are The Women (2017): Jyoti Naidu (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/502-here-are-the-women-2017-jyoti-naidu)



By Sian Rolls



“I love to give ideas and, with many women facing so many problems in our community today, I would love to help these women and show able-bodied people that I can do things normal people are doing,” said Nelam Joytika Naidu, known as Jyoti, President of the Nadi Branch of the Fiji Disabled People’s Federation.

Naidu is a spirited disability advocate, passionate about ensuring that development caters to the needs of all – this means ensuring that infrastructure, education, employment and transport is accessible for persons living with disabilities.

“When employers know you have a disability, you lose the opportunity,” she shared during the production of Radio with Pictures in 2015 (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/femlinkpacific/femtalk-radio-with-pictures-kicks-off-tomorrow/10153501634274295>). “Many places also talk about the OHS and ask us to sign contracts so that if something happens to us in the workplace it’s not their concern.”

“Disability inclusive planning (is also important to) ensuring that all public transport providers do not ignore members of the disability community because of the discounts they get especially for taxi rides,” she explained in 2014 (<https://www.facebook.com/femlinkpacific/posts/10153980624365093>).

Her message has been clear from the time she first got involved with femLINKpacific’s network of women leaders in 2009.

“Most of the people in my community look down on me,” she told the Fiji Sun in 2011 (https://i.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Ffijisun.com.fj%2F2011%2F02%2F09%2Fnaidu-disabled-but-strong-willed%2F&h=ATOII7Sp7S5WROxFzU0hrk4JQGvf5ObbyEPXi8Pmj-bHGzIMVnAEMCsD56hPPzXmvykeY5Hyw5h3_ZDAY5Aon3hE2f5jKyd0p9sVQiU6iK_kkec1zEHyLW7YoapRxWAdTVE7).

“My close family supports me with the work that I am doing.”

“Sometimes, it is even my extended family that says I can’t do this and that’s when words of encouragement from the other women in the group (the femLINKpacific network) help me to stand up for what I believe in. I want to work somewhere and help my other disabled friends and women in my community.”

Naidu believes that there needs to be widespread awareness to not only change the mindset of people when it comes to how they treat persons living with disabilities, but also persons living with disabilities themselves – as the gap that prevents inclusive societies also leaves women living with disabilities behind.

“I always stress in the curriculum should be disability inclusive education, because if you learn from the beginning then you will know better about person with disabilities,” she outlined during an interview with Frances Tawake, femLINKpacific’s Programme Associate: Network Coordination, last September. “Women with disabilities many times they are left behind they are not well educated because of their disability their parents are not sending them to school and they are not able to communicate move around socializing so many times they don’t know about family planning and what contraceptives to use.”

“So, I think we need to create more awareness, empowerment because most of them they become pregnant and they became single mother and, being a person with disabilities, you need more income in to the table to fulfil your needs and wants. Apart from that, if you have a child, it will double the costs you will need someone to look after the child special needs coming so I think that just some of the things that we need to consider.”

Naidu is not only leading the way as an advocate but also in her home and community.

“When I wake up in the morning I help my sister do house work,” she shared last September. “When she is in a rush I help her with the dishes, hanging the clothes, getting it out in the line and then I feed my dog.”

“I also spend more time in the house because I’m interested in music so every week I go to Lautoka to learn music and my music teacher is very inclusive because there are 3 of us who have visually impairment and we learn harmonium there. The other people and children there are able bodied.”

From home, Naidu goes out into the community using the voice she cultivated through her participation at femLINKpacific’s district and divisional consultations as well as community media learning exchanges – the latter provided her with skills to also produce content.

“At first when I went (to the consultations) I was a bit scared,” she reflected in 2015 (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/femlinkpacific/femtalk-look-at-my-abilities-jyoti-naidu/10153222509279295/>). “I didn’t talk much but after coming in, I was taught how to talk how to voice out my opinions.”

“What I enjoy doing (at the femLINKpacific consultations) is raising the issues for my friends with disability. (It) makes me happy because I am raising (my) voice for them not only for myself. I had been listening to stories, bringing it to femLINKpacific but now my colleagues themselves are able to speak out their issues and their voices will be heard. (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/femlinkpacific/femtalk-lama-inclusion-and-development/10153749592514295/>)”

According to Naidu, it is critical to have a civil society movement, including a women’s movement, which provides a safe space for inclusive discussions.

“Persons living with disability are sometimes...not able to express our views in front of many people and then we (feel) isolated so when we work in partnership that’s where we get different people’s views and ideas,” she said in 2015 (https://i.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.femlinkpacific.org.fj%2Fimages%2FPDF%2FPolicy%2FCommunityRadioSoundbytes_5_2015.pdf&h=ATOII7Sp7S5WROxFzU0hrk4JQGvf5ObbyEPXi8Pmj-

bHGzIMVnAEMCsD56hPPzXmvykeY5Hyw5h3_ZDAY5Aon3hE2f5jKyd0p9sVQiU6iK_kkec1zEHyLW7YoapRxWAdTVE7). “I was a person that didn’t usually talk... I just liked to stay with my own group, only the disability group.”

“But after coming to femLINK(pacific) I feel that I have got a say too in my community. We can’t just stay quiet, after hearing other women, how they talk I was very much encouraged I can talk now.”

Naidu has not only been a long-time contributor and occasional producer for FemTALK89FM, femLINKpacific’s community radio network, but has also represented her community on television. According to her, the increased visibility has had a positive effect.

“Many times, when I am on TV and the radio broadcast, plenty times... my family and my friends tell me that I am on TV and, even if I go somewhere, people know this girl was on TV and (as) I am not able to see... they give me way to go,” Naidu shared (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/femlinkpacific/femtalk-look-at-my-abilities-jyoti-naidu/10153222509279295/>). “Even when I go to shops.”

“Before, we found (it) very difficult and we have to look for people to come and help us. But now, people just come down to us, like, they know what we need maybe because I am popular on TV news. I have seen that the issues that are raised on the TV and radio, like many times I have raised the issues of our accessibility and I have seen the impact of it.”

As she continues her work in the community, Naidu is driven by the hope of making a better Fiji – one that is safe, inclusive and accessible.

“Since many of our persons with disability, they are not well, they are sickly and many of them live in poverty... my vision is to give them a better life,” she said. “To teach them to get somewhere, (to) teach them how they can use their skills to earn their income.”

“We’ve got this social welfare allowance but it is not enough because us the persons with disabilities, apart from the basic needs, we need extra.”

[Home \(http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/\)](http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/) | [About Us \(/index.php/en/about-us/mission-vision\)](/index.php/en/about-us/mission-vision) | [Privacy Policy \(/index.php/en/about-us/contact-us\)](/index.php/en/about-us/contact-us) | [Contact Us \(/index.php/en/about-us/contact-us\)](/index.php/en/about-us/contact-us)

Copyright © 2015 femLinkpacific. All rights reserved.