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# Here Are The Women (2017): Sera Waqalevu (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/489-here-are-the-women-2017-sera-waqalevu)



By Sulueti Waqa



“The top priority thing is that the changing of the mindset of women,” highlighted Sera Waqalevu, past president and current treasurer of the Naqai Women’s Group. “When women have the proper mindset... everything is going to fall into place.”

A familiar face at the Labasa Community Media Centre, Waqalevu is an inspiration to many of the other leaders in our women leaders network.

She hails from Karoko District in Tunuloa in the province of Cakaudrove and married into Naqai Village. A mother of 6, she is not only active within the village women’s group - she is a preacher, youth counsellor and a member of a church committee.

In her many roles, she is constantly trying to influence change and, through the community media process and the district, divisional and national consultations she has attended, she continues to inform herself, her family and her community.

Currently, Waqalevu is working with the women in her community to upgrade their community hall, that serves as an evacuation centre, with a toilet and bathroom that is accessible and safe for all.

“Women always suffer more in times of disaster (but femLINKpacific’s) Women’s Weather Watch is a great help by building women’s resilience and disaster awareness in our communities,” she said.

Through Women’s Weather Watch, information about the weather is disseminated to femLINK’s network of rural women leaders. This kind of information sharing is critical as she believes that early warning systems enable women and their communities to prepare – even more so as Naqai itself is a low lying area close to the Labasa river that is prone to flooding.

Aside from improving their preparation for and response to disaster, the women in Waqalevu’s community are also building economic resilience through collaborating on an income generating project. Recently, they bought kitchen utensils and are hired to cater during events.

Despite the leadership of women like her, Waqalevu stressed that there is still a need to address the barriers to full and equal participation.

“The challenges for women is the lack of education, the cultural barrier and lack of empowerment,” she explained. “The types of mindset women have (is also a barrier).”

Waqalevu believes that with investment in women in all their diversities, including young women, society will be able to make these challenges a thing of the past.

“Women (should) be educated, empowered to raise their voice at all levels of decision making - from local to divisional to national level,” she continued. “Women are first responders and they’re active and their role covers all aspects of life.”

Waqalevu knows that her recommendations are not something new – in fact, it is the need for increased political will to translate promises into action for women at the grassroots level.

“There should be an accountability and commitment to women’s human rights conventions and UNSCR 1325,” she underscored. “(To have) good governance is to involve more women in decision making, in our government.”