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# Here Are The Women - Pacific (2017): Ann Sharon Pakoa (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/529-here-are-the-women-2017-ann-sharon-pakoa)



by Hannah Hicks



“It is important for the young girls and women to be part of decision making because it will affect their lives and the lives of next generation,” highlights Ann Sharon Pakoa, Communication and Public Relations Officer of the Vanuatu Young Women for Change (VYWC).

She is a graduate of the University of the South Pacific in Management and Economics, newly graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Commerce.

The 22 year old is the eldest of two girls who first got involved with VYWC before it was formed - helping and following her aunt.

She was the young shadow of Anne Pakoa, founder of the organisation, giving out free medicine and establishing small clinics.

“I would say I am born into it,” she told me, smiling. “You don’t have to cross the sea to see that someone is being deprived of

their rights.”

“It could be (your) neighbour or (your) local community.”

She realized her passion for advocacy when she noticed social issues, like child negligence, violence against women, women being deprived of their rights, even young girls being ignored in their local community and knew she had to do something.

“Even if it means cooking for the young boys and girls that clean up the river side voluntarily, with only one pot of rice and soup, and waiting for it to be eaten and later cooking the next lot while they wait”, she shared. “This is what (made) me passionate to be part of VYWC, the heart to help and make a difference even in the smallest scale.”

She believes that women and young girls need to be engaged in active participation in all levels of decision making, as well as ensuring equal representation of women in these decision making spaces.

“By giving the women the opportunity to have a say in issues that matter in their lives, from the grassroots level – up,” she outlined. “For instance at the national level, discussions around income tax, joining the world trade organization, and even increasing the minimum wage rate.”

Pakoa attended femLINKpacific’s ‘Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection’ regional consultation last week and found it an empowering and energising experience.

She hoped to apply learnings from the convening to her local community work.

The three day consultation was a reminder in particular of the role media and information communication technology (ICT) plays.

She in particular was struck by the use of simple messages through SMS or Viber, including for disaster preparedness, as well as the development of comic books.

“Women’s Weather Watch and (HEROWINS) would be useful in our country,” she explained. “Data is cheaper for young women in Vanuatu... and with the comic book, it will be easy for those who cannot read to understand.”

Pakoa also hopes to be more inclusive of women and girls with disabilities in the work VYWC convenes to amplify active participation of women of all diversities, reaffirming the need for women to have a space in the local community, provincial level and national level, where women can speak up and participate to prevent, protect and prepare.

“The enjoyable part about this (consultation) is just sitting down and listening to the conversation and insightful thoughts that are being shared by women who have experienced working with local communities,” she shared. “They have done lot of change (at) their level.”

“(I am) thinking of how I can follow their steps and be a change in my (own) local community.”