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‘Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’ (/index.php/en/actions/archive/492-celebrating-resilience-and-defining-economic-security)

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femLINKpacific statement – 6th February (2/2017)

In the lead up to the Commission on the Status of Women in March, femLINKpacific starts a series of divisional consultations ahead of a national convening with the focus, ‘Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’.

“This is an opportunity to meet as women leaders who participate in our monthly district level convenings, or belong to ally and partner organisations, to not just discuss development priorities but consider the priorities in the context of human security as well as disaster preparedness and response,” explained Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

The 3 consultations will bring together 80 women leaders in all their diversities – including rural women, young women, women of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression and women living with disabilities - representing more than 4320 other rural women through their groups, clubs and networks.

The Women’s Human Security First consultations will continue to discuss recovery since Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston while also contextualising recommendations for the National Development Plan made before the category five cyclone.

“In 2016, a lot of our focus was on the immediate and medium-term response and recovery following TC Winston,” added Bhagwan Rolls. “While there were also changes to the national budget cycle as well, the women leaders from across Fiji highlighted the inter-linkages between women’s human security priorities and the DRR and humanitarian agenda.”

“Over the next three weeks, women leaders will be communicating policy recommendations that they see as critical for their communities and district; recommendations that are not only defined and informed by women’s lived realities, but also by existing government commitments such as the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Women’s Plan of Action (2010-2019) and the National Gender Policy (2014).”

Women leaders will also fine tune messaging before producing 18 episodes of femLINKpacific’s web series and FemTALK89FM radio programme, Radio with Pictures in the Field.

The divisional consultations will also provide a space to launch and screen ‘Beyond Books and Bags: Making Education Safe For All’, a femLINKpacific documentary produced with assistance from UN Women, in association with the 16 Days of Activism campaign. The documentary discusses safe access to education for women, especially young women, since TC Winston.

The 3 consultations also coincide with femLINKpacific’s month-long commemoration of World Radio Day – this year, marking the theme ‘Radio is You’. While FemTALK89FM in Suva and Labasa will continue regular broadcast hours, FemTALK89FM will also be on air in Nadi on the 17th of February for a suitcase radio broadcast.

The divisional consultations, supported by the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) and ActionAid Australia, will be held from the 7th to the 9th of February in Suva, the 14th to the 16th of February in Lautoka, and the 21st to the 23rd of February in Labasa.

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Planning from the community level up

femLINKpacific statement – 7th February (3/2017)

“My issue is her safety with the rape and sexual abuse coming up,” said Chandra Fisiiahi, representing the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni, as she gestured to her 16 month old daughter.

Speaking as femLINKpacific’s Central Division Consultation got underway, Fisiiahi was one of the 20 women leaders in all their diversities, representing more than 33,000 other women including rural women, young women, women living with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE).

“I need a safe environment,” shared Laniana Serukalou, representing the Fiji Disabled People’s Federation (FDPF) women’s network. “My biggest issue is isolation, discrimination.”

“Sometimes I feel that I am left out.”

While outlining women’s systematic exclusion, the women reaffirmed their own leadership as they mapped out development priorities from the family level up.

Their initial discussions of human security issues at the community, district and divisional levels revealed that health and personal insecurities were the most common in the room – this included the women leaders highlighting the lack of maintenance of hospitals and markets. The need for infrastructural development, such as better roads, footpaths and streetlights, and the high incidence of unemployment, school dropouts and crime were also raised during today’s discussions.

“(When) there is not streetlights, no road humps, it’s really dangerous to walk along the road at night,” said Akesa Lewamotu, representing the Suva Market Vendors Association.

“The issue of employment is there and some of the family are not well provided with their everyday consumption,” outlined Nanise Cakaunitabua, Assistant Leader of the Nausori Village Soqosoqo Vakamarama and President of the Rewa Sub Division Community Health Workers. “Another issue coming out is the school dropouts.”

“Maybe because of this unemployment they can’t send their children to higher school.”

Women leaders were also concerned about the limits of security services, in particular the lack of resources allocated to the police relative to the size of the communities that they are required to serve such as densely populated areas like Nasinu.

This is evident, especially with the 2016-2017 annual budgetary allocation of \$131.7m for 837,271 people in the country (2007 census) - \$157.30 per capita for the financial year.

The concerns of under-resourcing were further multiplied by discussion of the high rates of violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence as well as physical and sexual violence against children.

“Often, if a crime is reported, they say it’s the transport where they cannot reach on time,” Gyan Prasad, representing Women’s Information Network (WINET) Fiji. “So, it’s our girls and women that suffer.”

“The consultation will result in a series of local action plans supporting women leaders to develop recommendations and submissions,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

femLINKpacific’s series of consultations, ‘Amplifying Women’s Human Security First: Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’, is supported by the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) and ActionAid Australia.

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Preparedness strategies more vital than ever

femLINKpacific statement – 8th February (4/2017)

"Now is the time for gender and disability inclusive flood plans to ensure protection and human security especially food security," said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director as femLINKpacific produces more Women’s Weather Watch updates from its network of rural women leaders in the western division once again affected by floods in Tavua, Rakiraki, Nadi, and Lautoka while also convening the first of its latest series of divisional consultations. “Given that the country is currently experiencing heavy rains and floods from TD09F, preparedness strategies are now more vital than ever. Now is the time for gender and disability inclusive flood plans to ensure protection and human security especially food security."

"We need to ensure that there is synergy in terms of the national development plans as well as in times of natural disaster. Government must urgently address the under-representation of women where decisions will be made about evacuation plans, food security and recovery plans"

The focus today has been on linking disaster preparedness with the national development process to ensure communities are resilient and secure at all time.

What is also essential is community-centred information and communication systems to reach not just rural and remote communities, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

20 women leaders of all diversities are meeting bringing together the shared experiences of 33,000 other women including rural women, young women, women living with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) from Navua, Lami, Suva, Valelevu, Nakasi/Nasinu and Nausori.

The day focused on building women's human security and development priorities identified in day one and linking these priorities to their Women's Weather Watch experience as well as making connections to disaster risk reduction and the draft National Humanitarian Policy.

The discussions also identified strategies to address personal security issues including through capacity building and training of local and community leaders particularly on disaster committees.

"We as leaders recommend and request the National Disaster Management Committee (DISMAC) to train community leaders and women so we are aware of (the)... major (evacuation) centres we could go to in an event of natural disasters," outlined Kritika Kumar, Youth Coordinator for Women's Information Network Fiji (WINET Fiji).

The inclusion of women of all diversities in decision making structures was also raised.

"We need to support women's role on neighbourhood watch (schemes) including (regarding) the protection of women of all diversities and during the monitoring and reporting of violence and conflicts perpetrated against women (at all times)," added Alan Steve, representative of Youth Champs 4 Mental Health.

The consultation ends tomorrow with the production of femLINKpacific's webseries and radio programme on FemTALK89FM, Radio with Pictures in the Field.

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Beyond the 16 days of activism: New film unveils the inter-generational challenges of access to education

femLINKpacific statement – 9th February (5/2017)

A new film by femLINKpacific communicates resilience and persistence to ensure safe and accessible education for girls, especially in the wake of TC Winston.

"Beyond Books and Bags: Making Education Safe for All' produced by femLINKpacific in collaboration with the Poetry Shop and supported by UN Women Pacific echoes the experiences of mothers and daughters across our Pacific, bridging the rural-urban and generational divide and overcoming violence to secure education," says Executive Producer-Director, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls.

She was speaking at the preview during femLINKpacific's Central Division Consultation which wrapped up in Suva day with 20 women leaders who represented more than 33,000 other women including rural women, young women, women living with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE).

The film, produced during a Mothers and Daughters is centred around Sainiana Lewatu and Artika Devi Kumar who femLINKpacific first met in May 2016 when they spoke nervously about whether they would be able to cope with the pressures of exams in the wake of the destruction caused by TC Winston:

"Sainiana is a very good role model," outlined Kinisimere Saratibau, local administrator at the Communications Department of the Methodist Church of Fiji. "When Sainiana's mother was saying her daughter had to lead... it felt like she was talking to me."

"I admire the children for their resilience," reflected Bulou Lavenia Yavala, representing the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei.

Production took place during a Mothers and Daughter dialogue in Tavua as part of the commemoration of the 16 days of activism campaign.

The interviews enabled mothers and daughters to discuss access to education, including the linkages between personal and economic security in the home:

“I think it’s important to keep on the dialogue,” added Vilomena Koroi, Senior Circuit Steward of the Dilkusha Methodist Women’s Fellowship and Manager of the Dilkusha Methodist High School. “The most important this is for mothers to always talk to their daughters” referring to Salome Raqiyawa of the Nalalawa Women’s Group who is a member of femLINKpacific’s rural women leaders network in Rakiraki.

The consultations, ‘Amplifying Women’s Human Security First: Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’, is supported by the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) and ActionAid Australia.

The film which ends with the two girls revealing the results of their exams, will soon be available on femLINKpacific’s YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/user/femlinkpac> (<https://www.youtube.com/user/femlinkpac>).

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Women Leaders of the North Define the Development They Want

femLINKpacific statement – 21st February (6/2017)

“Women are seen as victims but they are the first responders to everything,” stated Mareta Tagivakatini of the Labasa Market Vendors Association. “They have to have a better understanding of where to take (the issues).”

She was speaking during femLINKpacific’s Northern Division Consultation that started today in Labasa. Tagivakatini is one of the 18 women leaders, collectively representing more than 563 other women through their community groups, women’s groups, faith communities and other networks. The consultation is the second divisional consultation held ahead of a national convening with the focus, ‘Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’.

“This is an opportunity to meet as women leaders who participate in our monthly district level convenings, or belong to ally and partner organisations, to not just discuss development priorities but consider the priorities in the context of human security as well as disaster preparedness and response,” explained Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

Today, the women leaders defined their district and divisional priorities including infrastructure, environment security, access to services – including health services – economic security, food security, personal security and access to information.

“Due to the weather change, the food gardens are flooded and there are landslides,” outlined Tabatau Rewi of the Buakonikai Women’s Group on Rabi Island. “The goods from the shops also aren’t enough.”

“We need someone to come to give awareness on planting vegetables that can (survive).”

“Most of the people are relying on the backyard gardening (but there is) no proper drainage,” added Nirmala Sharma of the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Forum and Vanua Levu Arya Mahila Mandal. “The water (goes into) the backyard gardening and it affects the growing and at the moment the price of vegetables is really high and people can’t buy it from the market.”

“When it’s bad road, we can’t get our groceries because of the rainy season,” continued Disavu Daugunu, Secretary of the Tawake Women’s Club. “We can only hire maybe a carrier for \$100 plus – sometimes \$160 - and linked to that is our health.”

“If it’s bad road, it’s hard for our ambulance to reach Tawake. All those from Yasawas, Udu Point come to deliver the sick person in Wainigadaru. I’ve been raising up for 20 years but nothing.”

The poor infrastructure, the most common and pressing development priority, also has implications for access to education.

“(We need) a preschool for the little ones because us as young mothers we don’t have much income,” explained Jojiana Waqanitoga of the Lagi Women’s Club. “We have to struggle to bring our children down to town and we have to leave them with our relatives and go back up the coast so we can provide for them.”

“Since TC Tomas, (which) damaged the preschool, nothing has been changed.”

Also raised was the need to recognise women’s leadership as well as building the capacity of women leaders to better interact with governance systems.

“We are (raising the issues) but we haven’t got any results,” said Rev. Suruj, representing the Association of Anglican Women (AAW) Labasa. “If women are there (in local governance), they will understand the women’s problems.”

“We need more training on that so that ladies are able to take the issues up.”

The consultation continues this week including discussions on recovery since Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston while also contextualising recommendations for the National Development Plan made before the category five cyclone. The women leaders will also feature in the production of femLINKpacific’s web series and FemTALK89FM radio programme, Radio with Pictures in the Field.

The consultations, ‘Amplifying Women’s Human Security First: Celebrating Resilience and Defining Economic Security’, is supported by the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) and ActionAid Australia.

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