



Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Fijian Women



fem LINKpacific MEDIA INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

December 2022

@femlinkpacific

COMMUNITY RADIO TIMES



STRENGTHENING VOICES OF DIVERSE FIJIAN WOMEN

REGIONAL. LEARNINGS AND POLICY CONVERSATIONS



VANI CATANASIGA
Executive Director
Fiji Council of Social Services

The call is that we need to confront our fears and go into those spaces... If you want transformation, then you've got to engage the system.



ENDER RENCE
Researcher
Solomon Islands

If the system stops us, we have to create our own systems.



ALUMECI BILITAKI
Mama Ashie Project,
Fiji

We want the enforcement of Temporary Special Measures, 40% of seats to be given to women in parliament.



What's inside ?

- WOMEN'S WEATHER WATCH
- PINKTOBER
- 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM
- FOOD SECURITY
- FIJI WOMEN IN POLITICS
- #THURSDAYSINBLACK





Editor's note

This has been an amazing year of implementing activities with the support of the femLINKpacific diverse rural women leaders who have been part of our 23 year herstory. Acknowledging funders who believed in our moving feminist media work which made it all possible to sustain ongoing safe and enabling spaces we hold with agenda centered on critical areas of women in leadership, disaster preparedness, our ongoing work on WWW, diverse women's health and our ongoing commitment on the SGBV and the yearly commemoration of the #16days of activism.

Our Women in Leadership work came at an opportune time as we prepare for the 2022 Fiji General Elections. Diverse rural women leaders mentored on their civic and democratic rights and were encouraged to turn up in numbers and exercise it on December 14.

We equally acknowledge our coalition partnerships on Human Rights, We Rise Coalition and the Fiji Women's and Young Women's Forum that supported National events such as the Fiji Women in Politics Training and mentorship, Intergenerational Dialogue that enabled a space of intergenerational learning and mentorship and of course our first ever National Feminist Forum that convened more than 80 women and human rights defenders in Fiji coming together to embrace collective power of our movements, movement building and the achievement of an Outcomes Document that encapsulates direct key demands to influence structural and systematic change.

We recognise each and every femLINK feminist media team members for all their continuous efforts and commitment to both our internal and external work. It's been a big year of supporting diverse rural women to know their democratic rights and responsibilities and to turn up in numbers to vote.

We look forward to more breakthrough work ahead of us. Thank you again for reading through our feminist media newspaper. **(Maria Nailevu, Programmes Manager and Acting Co-Lead)**

National Convening - Strengthening Voices of Fijian Women

The Women in Leadership workshop was convened from 29 June to 1 July 2022. The Convening was a face-to-face event, first after COVID-19 with over 60 diverse rural women leaders from our 13 Districts, reflecting the various voices of the diverse rural women and girls towards recognition and equality. The theme of the Convening "Through Transformative Media, Strengthening Policy Pathways and Voice and Visibility of Fijian Women" reaffirms that women's voices need recognition via policy pathways to strengthen their visibility in wider spaces.

The National Convening is implemented in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (Forum Secretariat) with funding from the European Union through Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building Facility (TECCBUF). Under KRA4 of the TECCBUF, the programme supports the strengthening of the participation of NSAs and CSOs to participate more effectively in regional policy making, development and implementation processes.

Some of the key achievements of the National Convening included budget submission, an increased in our media productions, distribution of humanitarian relief through food and stationary vouchers and an Outcomes Document reflecting the challenges and calls to action.

This is also supported by the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition





Nausori Rural Women Leaders Convene - With the Young Men.



Nausori Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN), district convening around the theme of The Critical Importance of Women's Health within Women's Peace, Security and Resilience.

In a first for our diverse rural women convening, male youths from Nausori also joined the convening.

Discussing together women's well-being, and the health security issues, as well as resilience, the convening recognized the:

- High need for more advocacy on Pinktober and the importance of outreach and word by mouth or sharing/talking about it, to your friends, and the community, so they are able to advocate further on breast cancer awareness.
- Importance of disaster preparedness and prevention, to also shine the spotlight on recovery.
- The needs of the disability community so that are always included in decision making. Often, plans and protocols are conducted without their inputs and hence leads to more issues - not only for them but for others around them.
- Conversations on having village headmen engaged in improving their information and coordination efforts and to support communities on being trained on implementing a community database.



Rural Women Leaders Focus on Health Security and Resilience.



26 women leaders, young women and youth reps from 13 communities and villages attended the rural women leaders community media network in Tavua.

Participants included women leaders, community health workers, district advisory councillors, youth leaders and women representing people with disabilities.

As they focussed on the theme, women continued to address the issues affecting them and their communities, when it comes to women's health issue, disaster preparedness and women peace and security.

Issues addressed included:-

1. Access to information.
2. Women's access to health services.
3. Lack of Awareness.

4. Infrastructure issue
5. Economic Issue - financial
6. Less representation of women at DRR Committee's.
7. Access to evacuation centres.
8. Frequent weather updates

As the Tavua network also observed Pinktober and Breast Cancer Awareness this month, they were also joined by the Ministry of Health staff from the Tavua Sub-Divisional Hospital, who came to create awareness and speak to the women about breast cancer.

The women's health security issues were emphasised, including the importance of their health, importance of having regular check ups, pap-smear check ups, etc.



August 9th: World Day of Indigenous Peoples

The Role of Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge



Mrs Lanieta Matavesi
Nadroga/Navosa Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network

"Always Promote, Maintain and Share the advantages of the Traditional Knowledge to everyone under your leadership"

Lami and Sigatoka

Rural Women Leaders Survey

1 Lami and Sigatoka participants background

- From the community high level visitation, 10 diverse women were interviewed.
- These women were between the ages of 23 and 77 years old.
- These were tertiary students, single mothers, parents grandmothers and guardians
- The average number of persons in a household is 8 with 4 females and 3 males
- This survey showed that most of the family members were between the ages of 12- 18 and 19 - 35. These were primary, second and tertiary students and single mothers.

2 SOME OF THE FINDINGS

Majority of the 10 participants were engaged in farming and fishing activities and represented locations prone to flooding. The cycle of disasters has destroyed their homes, farms and disrupted their source of income yearly.



Cycle of Disasters and Economic challenges

A consistent concern shared by all the participants was the challenges they faced with economic security; parents and guardians were concerned with the high cost of food and transportation in addition, the lack of employment opportunities and employment generating initiatives. The youth participants were concerned with TSLs debts, school dropouts, unemployment, high-priced dignity items and lack of investment in the informal sector.

Resources & Support System

The Lami and Sigatoka locations were the newest network branch in the Women's Weather Watch platform - some feedbacks from the participants:

- Co-sharing and co-learning on disaster preparedness and community post-disaster actions with diverse women from over 10 districts across Fiji
- Amplification of struggle and safe space for empowerment
- Mapping of key stakeholders from grassroots communities to policy decision making spaces and justice pathways.



Building Community Resilience to Climate Change

We are a feminist media organisation. femLINKpacific works with diverse women in rural and remote communities, amplifying challenges and strategies from women with their unique perspective on leadership, climate change and Violence against women and girls.

In early August, femLINKpacific was in Nadroga / Navosa to meet with women doing work in their communities!

femLINKpacific recently visited Kessy Tamani, a member of the Yadua Womens Club and now our newly launched Sigatoka network of Rural Women Leaders. Keresi shares how the active #WomensWeatherWatch keeps her informed of national news relevant to her community work and people with disabilities. This activity is supported by the European Union in the Pacific and the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition.



Two of our diverse rural women leaders from the Lami and Nadroga/Navosa Women's Weather Watch (WWW) networks, Sophie and Sereana, joined our young women broadcasters, Patrina and Bulou in having a dialogue on the resilience in disasters in this stakeholders workshop on Building Community Resilience to Climate Change - funded by the European Union in the Pacific .

Access to information and meaningfully including diverse young women in planning out disaster and risk reduction plans, are central to resilience and sustainable development.

Forging Pathways to Womens Resilience to Disasters (WRD).

femLINKpacific's Womens Weather Watch (WWW) Stakeholder Dialogue: Forging Pathways to Womens Resilience to Disasters (WRD).

A day of bringing in the new diverse rural women leaders networks of Nadroga/Navosa, and Lami, and connecting and seeing the entry points of collaboration and engagement, in supporting the WWW and #Fijian women's resilience to disasters.

We thank the Fiji NDMO, Fiji Council Of Social Services (FCOSS) Pacific Community, SPC, Suva and partners and allies. Rotary Pacific Water for Life Foundation

Funded by the European Union through the 'Building Community Resilience to Climate Change through Civil Society Action (CRCC Project).'





PINKTOBER

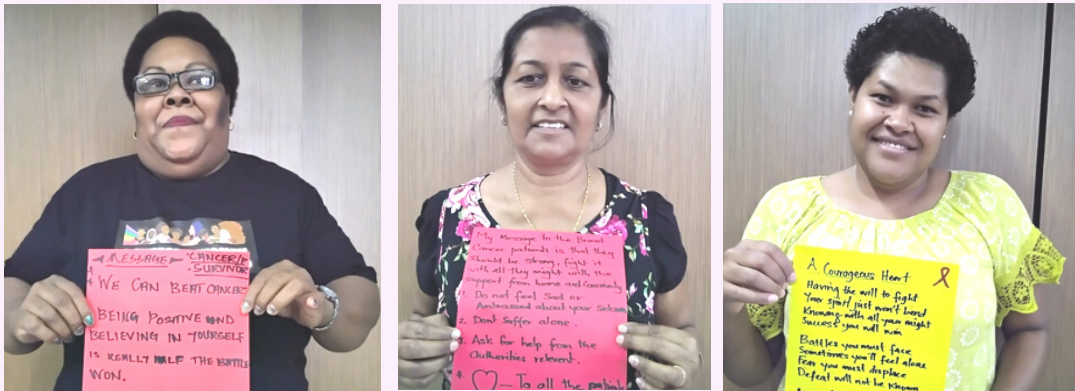


Nadroga/Navosa rural women leaders focus on health security and resilience.

Fifteen diverse rural women leaders came together today in Sigatoka for their first district convening after their network launch early this year.

The agenda had a specific emphasis on Pinktober 2022 with a discussion on the importance of health security and the need for more attention on women's health given that breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death for women in Fiji.

Through activism, participants wrote messages of hope for breast cancer survivors and patients which are intended for sharing with the Fiji Cancer Society.



Some of the challenges shared included the lack of awareness on breast cancer and pap-smear and the stigma associated with obtaining medical results.

As the country heads towards the cyclone season, the discussion also centred on disaster awareness and preparedness and how the network could collectively improve Fijian Women's Weather Watch (WWW) preparedness and response.



Diverse rural women leaders share their messages of hope for our breast cancer patients and survivors



Diverse rural women's network continues to share their message of hope, strength and love for all the breast cancer patients and survivors in Fiji.

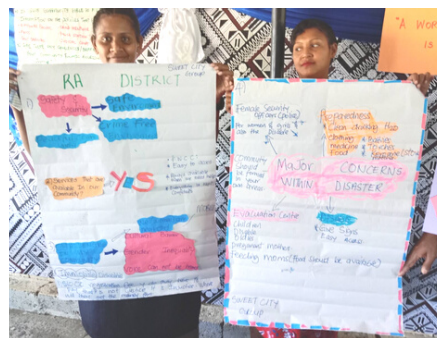
Let's encourage our community, families including male family members to visit the nearest health center for breast and prostate cancer and pap-smear test. Remember, early diagnosis can save your life. Prevention is better than cure.



Call us on 3324 960 or email admin@fijicancer.com.fj for help or further information.

#16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

16DAYS CAMPAIGN on Ending VAWG



In our moving work in the area of women, peace and security, femLINK remains committed to the commemoration of the #16Days of Activism that is observed on Nov 25 to December 10 by all women and human rights defenders in Fiji and globally. Last year, we changed our modality by having 4 merged Divisional Convening early as we head towards our 2022 Fiji General Elections on December 14. The change is to ensure that femLINK team and the rural women leaders network in our 13 Districts are safe in their homes comes election and also to have enough time to encourage them to turn up in high numbers and exercise their democratic right to vote.

29 women, young women, youth representatives, women representing people with disability and the LGBTIQ members from Tavua, Ba and Rakiraki District. The participants represented more than 20 communities from 5000 households with more than 10,000 population.

As we discussed the theme for this year's 16days campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, the participants continue to highlight the challenges and barriers that they face everyday, the impact of Covid 19 pandemic have really increased Violence within the homes.

When it comes to access to information that are available, the participants highlighted that -

"Most services are available, but victims do not make use of it" Unaisi Bakewa - Disability rep, Tavua. **"When we have access to clean drinking water, better road conditions, having street lights in villages & community, being able to 3 meals in a day and live in a safe community that is safety and security"** Sapeci Vereivalu- Youth rep, Ba.

"We can END Violence if it occurs tell somebody or else it's too late"- Losana Cakausesese, Badrau Ba.

"We can all help STOP Violence against women in our everyday lives, by speaking out, by discussing the issues on social media in public and at home"

"Violence Against Women is a serious Issue and increasing everyday, but today women know their Rights, I can say that without a woman the World does not exist, women are powerful in all aspects of life" Maikeli Vakacegu Ratu - youth rep, Rakiraki.



"One of the biggest barrier in reporting violence and human rights violations is finance and transportation challenge. Its harder for women to report because of our reality on transport hardships and for some of us we have to pay for fuel. That for many instance, limits our effort in getting justice served and perpetrators held accountable" - **Fulori Tagivetaua, Nabouwalu, Vanua Levu**

29 rural women leaders community media network member from Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka met together in Nadi for the 16Days Campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. Participants included rural women leaders, young women, youth reps, people with Disability and the LGBTIQ members representing faith based group, youth groups and their women's club.

The participants spoke strongly on the challenges/Barriers women face in accessing the services;

- *Access to information & communication.
- *Cultural & Traditional values
- *Lack of confidence due to fear and threat
- *Culture of Silence
- * Village setting - following protocols
- * Individuals are not able to exercise their Rights
- * Lack of Awareness



When it comes to Disaster Response, participants strongly believe the inclusion of women in DRR Management is really important.

"Women are FRONTLINERS, when Disaster happens we must know the process" Lanietta Burasia - SSVM Nadroga/Navosa.

"We need to see more women included in school boards, private sector, government ministries, more women to be advisory counsellor - women need to be included" Julekha Mustapha - Islamic Sisters Network - Nadi.

The diverse rural women leaders convening and movement building are supported by the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition



Voices from the Field - FOOD SECURITY

Women's contribution is often the heart of the conversation when we talk about food security. It is acknowledging women's involvement in the production, preparation, and consumption of food.

This was also the focus of the conversation at the Rural Women Leaders Consultation for October in Labasa. It is acknowledging the vital roles of rural women as we discuss the theme for Rural Women 's Day and World Food Day respectively which is 'cultivating good food for all' and 'safe food today for a healthy tomorrow'.

Reijile Tuinara, a young woman who hails from Tawake Village in Cakaudrove and a student at the University of the South Pacific states that because women despite their background, they are always worried about what to put on the table.

From her experience, women are the ones waking up early in the morning to go to the plantation. Some have small backyard farm at home for the family with all that still tries to cater for other family member wellbeing.

Angela Suruj Prasad, a spiritual leader and member of the Association of Anglican Women also highlighted the importance of investing in women in agriculture.

Recognise that women are equal partner as man in this area of development and therefore should be resourced equally. Majority of women leader in our Labasa network are sugarcane farmers. And one of the issues continuously raised is the lack of labourer and harvesters used to cut their cane cannot access their farm because it was meant for flat place.



Filomena Nasalai, a market vendor at the Labasa market states that this is always a difficult time for them as market vendors since most vegetable is affected. This issue leads less supplies from farmers with high cost of vegetables where they earn less than expected. Tuinara highlights that rural woman play an important role in the safety and security of their families.

"Our families and our community (are) always our main concern. We always try to ensure that there is sufficient food and preservation methods are used such as having seedlings to plant after the disaster to cater for food shortage" Prasad urges the ministry of agriculture to invest in women, provide seedling, training, and farming implements that would enable women to recover during this period. She also highlighted that woman are strategically working in their communities for the betterment of their families.

The Rural Women Leader Consultation brought together 14 women of all diversity. We also acknowledge the partnership of Medical Services Pacific in Labasa as we commemorate pinktober this month. With their expertise, they provided awareness on women's health and wellbeing and provided health checks for the participants.

Apart from our main theme, we also commemorated Pinktober. Remembering those who has passed on from breast cancer and stand with those who have breast cancer as well as provide awareness for women to know the signs and the importance of early detection.



Fiji Women In Politics

In the lead-up to Fiji's General Election, there was a Women in Politics (WIP) workshop this year, organised by The Fiji Womens Forum .

Discussions on elections strategies and experiences, a presentation by the Fijian Elections Office on changes to the electoral laws and a gender and women in politics discussion, were all being discussed.



The Fiji Women's Forum was formed in 2012 in order to bring together diverse women's groups, towards the shared aim of increasing women's participation in leadership. Specifically, they put aside their differences to come together to increase women's participation in the Fiji national elections held in September 2014.

The Fiji Women's Forum is made up of 3 women's organization in Fiji referred to as the co-conveners namely Soqosoqo Vakamarama ITaukei, femLINKpacific and Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

The Women in Politics training is supported by the Pacific-Community-SPC-Human Rights and Social Development (SPC HRSD).

Trauma may happen to you, but it can never define you. Together we can stop violence against women.

-Susana Makitalena,
Holy Rosary Catholic Women's League



REFLECTIONS



Bulou Verebunuya. Suva Broadcaster

Why do women's voices matter in decision making and leadership in Fiji?

Women's voices matter and are important because most of the times our views, opinions and ideas are being left out or brushed off just because we are women's or girl's living in the male dominated society.

Women are passionate, creative and resourceful. They see the nation through a lens of opportunity, they are powerful agents of change, they are authentic and practical, engage in strategic thinking and are minorative and action focused, sociable and work well in diverse environments. They bring different skills, qualities and perspectives to leadership.

When women have a voices, progress accelerates. Nobody knows the challenges or the solutions better than the people using the services meant for them because women are the first responders.

Women consistently in almost all arenas in our daily lives, have less opportunity to be heard in public spaces, particularly with the respect and social standing men automatically receive. Even when enjoying the most level playing field, women have different experiences of life which can enrich and shift our understanding. Women's perspectives and lives have so long been told as family stories not written into the structures of history.

The benefit of diversity and gender parity in leadership and decision making should not be underestimated. Women are ethical and civic minded. Voice, decision making and leadership are the elements of women empowerment they captured women having the power to express their views, demand and interest. Women's voice, leadership and decision making power may be present at the household, community and national level.

"Evacuation centers are mostly unfriendly to us evacuees. When a woman is being violated in an evacuation center, no one will help because we see it as a "family problem" and not a "me problem" - we need to change this mindset."

Empowered Women Empower Women

#THURSDAYINBLACK #ENDVIOLENCE

Nadroga/Navosa Diverse Women's Messages



"Having our trusted family members and friends around us during a crisis is important so they can help us in finding support and we need to always be prepared during such event"

"When women have this knowledge on preparedness, then we are able to better prepare ourselves and our community in identifying the gaps and influence decision makers in this country in terms of our policies."



Sushma Lal, Assistant President, Ba Naisaba; Ba RWLCMN



Litia Naitanul, President - Rewa Disabled Peoples Organization, Nausori RWLCMN



femLINKpacific with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, remind us all of the work that the global women's movement has committed on the 30th year of the campaign and emphasise the urgency of addressing the root causes of this massive human rights issue, further exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and tropical disasters.

As the women's movement and other human rights groups begin the campaign from the (25th November) on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we need to be aware of the origins of the campaign and why it began, claiming back the space and the spotlight on the different ways violence is faced by women and girls.

We must ensure the space for women to share their experiences and prioritise their needs.

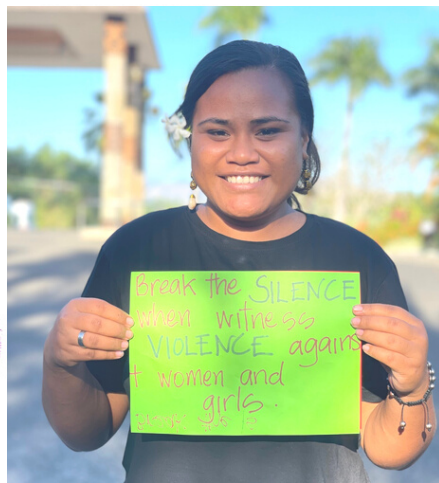


#ThursdaysInBlack



'DISASTER IS UNSTOPPABLE BUT WITH ENOUGH KNOWLEDGE AND PREPAREDNESS, WE CAN SAVE LIVES'

Temalesi Lewakila



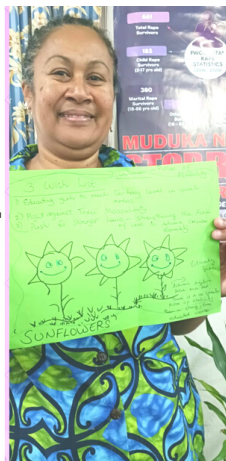
WOMEN - PILLAR OF STABILITY

- *Educate young women in the rural area to reach tertiary level.
- *Fight against toxic masculinity
- *Strengthen rule of law to advance gender equality

A WORLD WITHOUT VIOLENCE IS POSSIBLE"

RUCI TUKANA - Nausori Rural Women
CENTRAL DIVISIONAL CONVENING

#18DAYSOFACTIVISM
#SOMEONESLIFEISEVERYONESBUSINESS
#ELIMINATEVAGW
#FEMINISTMEDIA



FIJI HELPLINES: PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

- National Domestic Violence Helpline 1560
- Child Helpline 1325

☀️ Empower Pacific 7769224 / 6650482

✉️ headoffice@empowerpacific.com

Medical Services Pacific MSP

- Suva Office 3315296
- Suva Clinic 4502907
- Labasa Office 8811308
- Labasa Clinic 4502909
- Lautoka Office 6660595
- Lautoka Clinic 2224595

• Lautoka Counselling Centre 7730010

✉️ bm.lautoka@empowerpacific.com

• Nadi Counselling Centre 7760018

• Suva Counselling Centre 7780015

✉️ bm.suva@empowerpacific.com

• Labasa Counselling Centre 7760017

✉️ bm.labasa@empowerpacific.com

☎️ Toll-free Counselling Helpline 5626



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