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Here Are The Women (2017): Jojana Waqanitoga (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/566-here-are-the-women-2017-jojiana-waqanitoga)



by *Sulueti Waqa*



"First of all, we (women) are the one preparing the family during natural disaster so we should be on the frontline during distribution (and) gathering things during disaster rather than being left on the sideline and men are mostly doing everything."

Jojiana Waqanitoga is a member of the Lagi Young Women's Group.

"Mostly men wouldn't think about young women who have their periods already," she said. "They won't be able to give out sanitary pads and (that is just one reason why) it is very important for (women) to also (be) included."

Lagi Village is 140km away from Labasa Town but because of femLINKpacific's rural outreach every month this young mum has been actively involved in district, divisional and national convening.

It has given her an opportunity to discuss and communicate

peace and humanitarian security priorities.

“(It) is mostly loving one another and having equal rights making Fiji a better country for our young generation,” she explained.

Waqanitoga has also consistently raised issues relating to poor infrastructure and under-developed communications.

As she understands, the poor road condition has severely impacted access to health services for all.

At the same time, in a community like Lagi, getting a phone signal, and thus any access to information, means having to walk up and down the mountains with your fingers crossed.

Problems like these are further exacerbated during natural disaster which is why femLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch is important for young rural women like herself.

“As a young mother, it is great and a useful tool especially SMS,” she said. “It helps us prepare by giving us awareness on what to expect during natural disaster.”

Another major issue that women in Lagi are facing is environmental insecurity including dry spells.

Their sources of water are drying up, meaning that the women – who are traditionally tasked with water collection - have to walk long distances to realise this basic human right.

These challenges mean that women, including young women, have less time to participate in decision making.

“More young women should be in leadership and for them to also think of the rural women who are less educated by putting up workshops and awareness on how they can move forward and not backward,” Waqanitoga recommended.

She believes that this will not only improve conditions for women like herself, but improve the participation of all women in decision making to improve their status in society.

“If they could improve in putting more women in political level, we find it much easier,” she continued.

Waqanitoga believes that increase in the number of women will also improve the overall status of women even including their access to public services.

“If we have an issue from the rural area and when we come down to town to take it up to the different department - for example the issues of road or transportation - we women are often told to wait or come the next day,” she explained. “It keeps on going on like that and they won’t give us a suitable answer.”

These structural changes are not just important to increase numbers, but to realise gender equality – key to good governance in the country as a whole.

“As a young mother, a great leader should have qualities of honesty and to also see that men and women are equally treated,” Waqanitoga summed up. “(It is) also to see into our younger children that they are well looked after and to be secured.”