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Here Are The Women (2017): Salome Raqiyawa (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/491-here-are-the-women-2017-salome-raqiyawa)



by Sian Rolls



“We need to recognise the different roles that women play in their leadership roles in the family, village, community, district and national level,” said Salome Raqiyawa, a member of the Nalalawa Women’s Club in Rakiraki. “Women have been the first responders in terms of any natural disaster from preparedness, protection and human security - we have to recommend women to be participating in disaster planning committees at community, district, and divisional level.”

Raqiyawa is an articulate and passionate rural woman leader that has been actively motivated to raise the issues that her community of Nalalawa faces.

Since first appearing in Radio with Pictures in the Field in early 2016, she has been an active player and mobiliser – especially since Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston.

“The area where I come from, (we cannot pick up) the radio stations,” Raqiyawa explained. “So we depend mostly on mobile

to receive information.”

“With that information, I was able to pass it to my family then to community (such as) the village members.”

While she has been actively leading, the time since TC Winston was personally challenging. Her daughter, Viema, is a boarder in Nasinu because Raqiyawa wants to make sure that her daughter gets the educational opportunities that she was not able to have.

“I was double-minded after Winston... it’s why I put her back in boarding school, just because what I face when I grow up,” she reflected last December during an event held in Tavua to discuss the theme of the 16 Days of Activism – ‘Make education safe for all’. “My father couldn’t afford the fees (so I had to stop going to school).”

“I have children now (and) that was one thing in my mind - for all my children to be educated because I know when people are educated, everything is gonna change. Whatever little things I have, at home, I try to support her... especially she’s a girl, she has to learn more, who she is and what she would become in future.”

Raqiyawa knew she wanted her daughter to go to a school outside Rakiraki given the state of the schools closer to home.

“One of the problems that (the students) are facing and needs to be seen now (is) the environment that they are studying in right now - it’s not good,” she outlined last December. “Like most of the school children are still studying in tent, for example where my children are attending school.”

“All of them from year one to year eight they are studying in tent until the end of the third term 2016. Whenever it’s rainfall I’ll expect my two boys to come back with wet clothes, uniform, bags, books and shoes. Sometimes I joke about it - it’s better for people who return from the farm. The way they look because of the environment they are studying in it’s not safe, it’s not healthy.”

As she looks to the future of the country, she sees the need for increased investment in youth, especially young women.

“What we need to see for the safety (of their education) so that they can become something in life even in a social well-being (for) example doctors, teachers, lawyers – to become something in life,” Raqiyawa expressed. “So that when they grow up they need to know to learn to be independent in their life.”

“When they are well-educated...they are able to live a life as a young women or a lady or a women that can support themselves in all areas of life.”

She believes that when they are able to support themselves, the community and country will further develop. At the moment, she knows that it is the circumstances of both men and women that contributes to inequality.

“One of the barriers is that because women are not included,” Raqiyawa outlined during the 3rd National Women’s Human Security First Consultation last October. “Men think of us that we are not capable enough (but) if we include more women - there’s a change.”

“If we can have 30% women involved from community - as we have the turaga-ni-koro, we can also have the marama-ni-koro so that the messages reach women. Women are more secure in conversation with women during disaster and after disasters in sharing their information. If we can also have more advisory councillors (that are) women, (it is) easy for us who come from the community and settlement to go interact with advisory councillor because we can voice our message clearly.”