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Here Are The Women (2017): Sulueti Waqa (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/517-here-are-the-women-2017-sulueti-waqa)



By Hannah Hicks



“I am always grateful for (femLINK’s) investment in young women that has helped me grow,” shared Sulueti Waqa, femLINKpacific’s 29 year old Programme Associate: Multimedia.

Originally from Nailaga, Ba, she was brought up by her mother in her village in Nanoko, Tikina Navatusila in the province of Nadroga, Navosa, and it was her mother who invited her to a femLINKpacific consultation at the Ba Senior Citizen’s Centre where she discovered the world of community media – as femLINKpacific was producing radio programmes and conducting a community radio broadcast.

A university student at the time based in Suva, Sulueti was invited to join the ‘Generation Next’ team as by then femLINKpacific had secured funding to support the training and broadcast hours of a core team of volunteers who assisted the organisation prepare for and conduct ‘Women’s Weekend’ radio broadcasts.

She grew through the project, and found a new career pathway which has taken her from the Generation Next project to producer at the Suva community media centre, and now as a Programme Associate based at our Labasa community media centre.

FemTALK89FM, according to Waqa, has given her a voice as a young woman to raise issues that she feels strongly about. It has also empowered her by learning from other women.

“It is a channel of information for other women and a space that allows intergenerational learning,” she said. “(This also) teaches me to accept women of all diversities and breaking the stigma that surrounds the minority groups.”

To enhance her knowledge in her newfound passion of media and information communication technology, she went on to do a course at the Fiji National University on media, journalism and public relations.

Throughout the years, she has also come to develop an affinity with the wider women’s movement – a space that, for her, is about having a network and space to rally women with one voice advocating on women’s issues - be it the access to good, quality roads and other infrastructure, the cost of living and food, better working conditions for women, good maternal health care services or simply access to clean drinking water.

“It is also networking with other women’s group and organisations for a stronger voice,” Waqa continued. “Policy change to favour women and also stronger voice to advocate for women’s issues that will improve the overall statues of women.”

Finding this peace, she continued, occurs when resources at home aren’t enough to cater for all the needs in the family, therefore leading to conflict and violence.

“Security for me as a young woman is when I am educated or even have sufficient information to address the issue,” Waqa highlighted. “It is having enough income to look after the welfare of my family and just having a voice as a woman.”

While she has gone out to find out more and strengthen her body of knowledge, Waqa said that the space offered to her within femLINKpacific has also been a learning space and experience. This includes the Women’s Weather Watch campaign which has increased her understanding the different impacts natural disasters have on women and how it contributes to the increase burden of unpaid care work done by women as well as enhanced her preparation for her family better.

No matter the growth on a personal level, she still sees the systematic challenges for women and their participation in decision making. She believes that it is the lack of information available to women, the lack of empowerment and support from family, as well as the tradition and culture.

Waqa wants to see more women in leadership positions because women would understand women better and know how to address their issues. She also wants to see better governance that is dedicated to transparency and accountability.

“It would also mean the Government having proper consultations with communities when it comes to certain policies that would affect them,” she explained. “It is to see that every bill pass and legislation made or policies should benefit the community and the future generation.”

“Not having their own agenda and creating policies that would only benefit them. Projects and development made should be sustainable.”