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# Here Are The Women (2017): Titaku Tabuariki (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/513-here-are-the-women-2017-titaku-tabuariki)



by Sian Rolls



"Most of the time, the women in my village often dealt with their own situations," Titaku Tabuariki told the Fiji Times (<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=313190>) during femLINKpacific's Northern Division Consultation in July of 2015. "We women, we need to seek assistance because most of the time, we do face the same thing over and over again."

It is this drive to change the way things were done, to create real change, at the core of the work that the 58 year old President of the Buakonikai Women's Group has close to her heart.

Tabuariki used that drive to reach out to femLINKpacific in 2015 (/index.php/en/actions/policy-documents/465-femlinkpacific-annual-programme-report-2015) from the isolated island of Rabi – to find information to uplift the women of her community and her island.

"I thought that maybe I could contact (femLINKpacific) they could help us through advocacy on women's issues and what we can

do when faced with certain issues," she said.

At the time, Tabuariki terms as a district advisory councillor has ended but her passion for her community was still burning bright.

“I (wanted) to get involved with the women again,” she told me last week during femLINKpacific’s Northern Division Consultation. “I’m glad they (responded) so I really enjoyed coming to these consultations and I’ve learned a lot and I’m trying to motivate the women so they can come and join too.”

“As a leader, now as I’m trying to motivate the women. We call for a meeting and... sometimes they don’t turn up. They speak English - they understand, but they can’t voice it, they can’t talk.”

These challenges are deeply rooted in patriarchal culture and systems of governance in the community.

“(The women) were thinking the only place is in home – kitchen and also they’re not recognized too by the men,” she explained in October of 2016. “We have to help our women to come up to be recognized in all the meetings like the village meetings to local government.”

Tabuariki has since broken the mould as a leader from her community – giving visibility not just to the women of Rabi when she appears on programmes like Radio with Pictures on Fiji Television, but to her whole community

“‘We really excited and happy’ (they said),” shared Tabuariki, referring to men on Rabi as well as her extended family. “I said, ‘why?’”

“‘Because we saw first time the Rabi lady on the TV. Some discussions on TV, only, like, other races but we are proud you’re on the TV too’.”

Attending district and divisional consultations as a member of femLINKpacific’s women leader’s network has also meant that not only are the issues of women like her documented, but a space is opened up to learn from other women across the Northern Division.

“I’ve learned a lot from other women leaders, from different groups,” she reflected. “It is empower me so I go back again and I try to empower my women again.”

“To be a good leader I should be seen to have a good quality in leadership, to be humble and honest, be respectful and supportive, be able to communicate well with the members, also be dedicated to activities allocated by the groups. Also to develop them to become better leaders and to expose themselves and not staying in the kitchen all their lives, in uplifting their standard of living they have to attend workshops and meetings.”

Being connected to more women, including through femLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch network, has also enhanced her access to information in general as well as in times of disaster.

“(Women’s) Weather Watch is important to us and my community,” “It is important to us, especially us (on) Rabi – we right far away, we don’t have TV... not all of us have radio, only how many houses can afford.”

“Even me, I don’t have a radio and TV. We don’t have a newspaper too. If it’s just a cyclone warning, we get it from other families. From Suva or Savusavu. We feel safe if we are prepared, if we have enough information – to prepare food, clothes and even our houses...to have the shutters ready.”

She also sees the opportunity for enhanced networking and connection as a sharing space for other women from Rabi as well – Tabuariki is a believer in intergenerational learning and sharing.

“As a women leader, I want to see that the women know how to preserve the food because food (is) damaged during cyclones and in natural disasters so I want the women to know how to preserve food for long period,” she highlighted. “By interacting the old women and the young women during the meeting so they can pass on what they experience and know how to preserve food.”

“The old women have to talk to the young women.”

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