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Here Are The Women (2017): Vani Tuvuki (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the- women/484-here-are-the-women-2017- vani-tuvuki)



by Sian Rolls



“I feel like a real leader, thinking about all these recommendations,” said Vani Tuvuki in December of 2015 during a western divisional consultation on women, peace and security during the 16 Days of Activism. “We are capable women, tough women.”

“The day we become silent of anything and everything, that’s the day our day will end. We cannot be silent.”

Born in Tavua and leader of the Koronubu Women’s Fellowship in Ba, 43 year old Tuvuki is a breast cancer survivor, a former teacher, and counsellor, a certified lay pastor and community advocate on gender awareness, and ending child abuse and domestic violence.

Tuvuki has been a constant, strong voice through FemTALK89FM and femLINKpacific’s other media initiatives – continuously amplifying the call for equality in leadership and decision making and underscoring the challenges that exist to achieving it.

“Some of the barriers would be the mindset of people out there who still think that women’s place is at home, that women are (incapable),” highlighted Tuvuki during femLINKpacific’s 3rd National Women’s Human Security First consultation last October. “They’re not heard maybe because they’re a woman.”

“They’re pushed away, they’re told to wait aside. So those are some of the barriers that women are facing.”

Tuvuki has continued to raise this issue consistently, at district, divisional and national level.

“Women have been stigmatised because of age and marital status,” she said late last year during a district consultation in Ba. “For example, if they are old and they can’t attend workshops (or) if they are over 55, their education is not good... those kind of stigma.”

But, despite the challenges, Tuvuki is fiercely passionately about the recognition of women leaders – women in all their diversities already creating a change in their communities.

“First of all, women leaders should be recognized for the great job that they're doing,” she stressed. “Maybe they're not seen there in district levels, maybe they're not seen nationally... so for them to be recognized is for men and community to help support women leaders in the community.”

“They need guidance from the district level and the government of the day (because) they are voicing out not just their concerns but (also) for those women that cannot come out. What women need is to be supported and for them to be heard... not to be suppressed (and) not to be pushed away. (So, the) information that women need is... on legislation, policies, women’s human rights.”

Information in times of disaster is just as critical. Koronubu is large settlement and many residents depend on their farms. After TC Winston, there was much to learn and Tuvuki has shared some of the ways forward – change that cannot be done alone.

“Disaster preparedness could be improved by giving us accurate information,” she stressed. “Looking at the past disaster we had, which was TC Winston, information that was given to the community was not accurate.”

“For example, in our area we were warned of flooding but then came category 5 and people went up to higher mountains and higher places to get away from the flooding. But then they were caught up by strong winds and the heavy rains.”

At the same time, in her community, information is hard to come by.

“The only way we get information was sharing information within the women groups or the church congregation,” she explained. “In most times, I give out the information I get from femLINKpacific in the Women’s Weather Watch.”

According to Tuvuki, members of her community now look to her as a leader to bridge the information gap – something that proved highly effective during Tropical Depression (TD) 04F.

“The news that we got here was from femLINKpacific, the text message - we had Women's Weather Watch,” she said in a telephone interview during the tropical depression. “We are grateful for that and we've started collecting water, we started buying food stocks - rice, flour, salad oil, sugar - and also we've also cut down our cassava plant since there was a little bit of wind.”

“Those living in low-lying areas, they've packed their things and shifted to the evacuation centre. Mainly the food stuff we are able to stock at the moment.”

Tuvuki’s example is just one that exemplifies the possibilities when women in all their diversities are invested in – investments that she wants to see reach not only women like her, but all women.

“In Koronubu, some (of the women) are working in the fields picking bhindi and some of them are bundling up the bhaji to take to the market,” she shared last year. “These women work hard.”

“Those of us that are fortunate enough to be attending consultations and trainings and awareness programs, we are fortunate enough that we are here. We go back in our communities and then we’re going and give out the information, share out the information to the women in our area... and not only women and girls, (but the) men too. We have started sharing messages to them (from) consultations, trainings, awareness that we had attended.”

In her own way, Vani Tuvuki is leading and making the change she wants to see in her community for all, including women, in all their diversities. Coming from Koronubu, re-invigorating the sugarcane industry is also high on her agenda as a community leader.

“As women in Koronubu... they’re cane farmers and labourers too,” she said during the third season of Radio With Pictures last year. “The more they try and go out and try put food on the table and take care of their farms, the more they get into the safety risk.”

Unfortunately, the decision making when it comes to the sugar sector of the agricultural economy is heavily male dominated – including with recent appointments earlier this month.

“There (should) be a Fiji Sugarcane Women’s Growers Council to elect leaders, women leaders, into this council because they will be the one looking after the welfare of women farmers and labourers,” Tuvuki recommended.

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