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# Here Are The Women (2017): Williamama Swamy (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/490-here-are-the-women-2017-williamama-swamy)



By Frances Tawake



“Women’s participation at all levels of decision making is the key to a sustainable development in the country because a woman knows best what the real need of her home and community (is),” outlined Williamama Swamy.

A retired teacher and a Justice of the Peace (JP), Swamy has been the National President of TISI Sangam Women’s Wing in Fiji since 2009.

“My interest in joining the women’s movement came about when I was teaching,” she reflected. “I see the mother’s struggle to send their children to school daily with proper meal.”

“I felt that there is a greater need to help these women.”

This is a sentiment she also expressed in femLINK’s 2011 Here Are The Women.

“It is hard on women to provide for their families, particularly where there is so much unemployment and if some of the difficulties are not overcome it will lead to social problems,” Swamy said.

Upon retirement, she started to be more active in community work, assisting women in accessing opportunities and resources. Her experiences also led her to participate in femLINKpacific's consultations at district, divisional and national level since 2006 – a space where she has seen herself and other women in all their diversities grow.

“The women have developed (personally),” Swamy explained in 2015. “They have become very confident to talk and relate their matters and I see the culture of silence is broken.”

“When they come, they talk about the different groups and the multi-culturalism. Now, women of all cultures can meet and relate their affairs there are no restrictions any more. By meeting with (other women), we can communicate with them (and) women can get involved.”

Swamy has also seen the importance of not just meeting to share issues, but also to affirm each other's leadership. She believes that these spaces are important as they foster, through an inclusive and creative information and communication space, a shift from reaction to prevention of conflict through address the development needs of women as a key player in local communities.

This past year, she has seen the power of women as leaders in their response and analysis after Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston. But, as a rural woman leader from Nadi, resilience has always been high on the agenda due to the area's flood prone nature.

“A disaster awareness team should meet with the district council once a month to talk and survey areas so that there is more interaction with communities and data collection about families so they can be given appropriate help in emergencies,” she recommended in 2011. “Young and retired people should be asked to actively involve themselves and women should be represented on the different groups and boards from village and community to district and national levels, and also regional and international level.”

As she looks to the future, Swamy is certain that when women in all their diversities work together, they will be able to create and influence positive change.

“Women are natural leaders,” she concluded. “We learn to do things step by step and we always give consideration to the views and the needs of the people around us which I feel is really important.”