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# Here Are The Women - Pacific (2017): Lisa Horiwapu (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/527-here-are-the-women-pacific-2017-lisa-horiwapu)



by Sian Rolls



"The idea (for the rural women's media network) came up after we were trying in the past trying to get stories from the women and the usual thing that they threw at our faces was we don't know how to tell our stories constructively or that would be good for the people to listen to," outlined Lisa Horiwapu.

It was this gap – in information as well as the continued perceptions that reinforce it – that led women like Horiwapu in the Solomon Islands to establish Vois Blong Mere Solomon (VBMS) in 2002. The organisation was also birthed out of need given the issues that remained after the conflict in the Solomon Islands – conflict that broke out when Horiwapu was on air.

"When the crisis started, I was sitting in the studio doing the early morning show and then the militants came in," she reflected last week. "I was heavily pregnant with my third son."

"They (the militants) came in and then stopped the whole operations and they told me to, well, just turn the radio off. I was

like, 'what's happening'... they came in and you see people holding guns and then immediately I knew it would restrict our

work or the freedom of media that we used to enjoy. Immediately, I left the (the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation) because I was also worried for my children.”

But she didn't stay out of the media for long and today VBMS continues to use radio programmes to tell women's stories in order to create awareness on the status of women and to bring an end to the daily injustice women face including poverty and violence.

Taking to the airwaves is both tactical and practical. Printed literature targeting women's information needs is limited and in many rural areas non-existent; in addition, the 20% literacy rate of Solomon Islands women further disadvantages women's access to information.

“Our main issues (that we raise through VMBS's work) are women's political participation and also domestic violence,” Horiwapu explained, speaking to Radio Australia. “But there are others like women's economic empowerment.”

“We have women talking about the environment, they're talking about health, they're talking about sanitation, and they're talking about issues like food security. Rural women have plenty to say, but have needed some help in getting their stories out effectively.”

These issues deeply resonate with the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 adopted in October 2000, which provided an opportunity to connect VBMS and femLINKpacific in 2006.

“(Before), I didn't know what peace and security was,” Horiwapu shared in 2015. “Later on, when I joined the femLINKpacific network and then as they began to explain things about what is peace and security, I kind of found that I have been practicing that in my life as a woman in my work and also in my family.”

“That's the reason why I say peace and security to me is my life. I was the first regional correspondent for femLINK in the Solomons and then I think one or two years break from femLINK and now I'm back again.”

Given her experience in the media in the Solomon Islands – a field she has been active in my entire 25 years of life – Horiwapu also sees the gaps that need to be addressed to improve the representation of women in stories as well as their participation as journalists and other media practitioners.

“During my time, I (see) how the media grew especially how women and media and along the way encouraging the young ones, the young women, to be part of the media family,” she said. “At the moment, we have lots of women working in the media now although we still have issues around women managing media houses and all that.”

“Apart from that, at the moment, one of our issues is trying to make the media cover lots of women's stories which is one of our main agendas and the start of the Vois team, we are also doing training for the mainstream media especially in trying to encourage them to write women's stories. Not only that but be gender sensitive.”

At the end of the day, Horiwapu's vision is a media that acts not just to continue to manifest and feed imbalanced power, but be a partner to the gender equality movement no matter the gender of the journalist; the change must reach the women in all their communities.

“Rural women must benefit from gender equality initiatives and be specifically considered in all planning and budgeting processes,” she stressed in 2013. “Traditionally, women are peace-makers but don't they need protection when faced with violence?”

“Don't they need a space in the decision making level when things are negotiated for the country's good? Don't they need to negotiate a good refugee camp site just to be near a water source, lest be they become targets of further victimisation? Don't they deserve respect or dignity as mothers of the nation? These I believe already makes one wonder why 1325 or women, peace and security shouldn't be a resolution women of the Solomon Islands be dancing to. It caters for everything a women needs, protection or security, dignity and decision making. 1325 has all the rights of women which are, of course, just human rights protected.”

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