

THE DOUBLE PANDEMIC  
CORONAVIRUS

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Let's Silence The Sirens

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP  
UNSCR1325  
femLINKpacific  
MEDIA INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN  
JUNE 2022

# COMMUNITY RADIO TIMES

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TEMALESI LEWAKILA  
TACILEVU WOMEN'S GROUP, SAVUSAVU

## MAY 7: WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY



"Media freedom is important to our communities because individuals generally cannot get sufficient information on their own to make informed decisions on public matters, so they rely on media to provide factual information" - Suliana Nateru, Yaladro Youth Club; femLINKpacific Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network - Tavua

express issues and concerns happening in the community.. - Ana Naivou, Rakiraki Business Woman; femLINKpacific Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network



"Media freedom is important because journalists need to be free from fear of what might happen to them if they speak out openly.. they can freely express issues and concerns happening in the community.."

and knowledge of the taboo topics that we have in our communities. Media plays a crucial role especially in this era with us millennials where we resort more to social media platforms.. - Sapeci Vereivalu, Yavutu Youth, Koronobu; femLINKpacific Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network, Ba



"Media freedom is important to shine the light on issues that are usually swept under the rug in our homes and communities. So that people have a better insight and knowledge of the taboo topics that we have in our communities. Media plays a crucial role especially in this era with us millennials where we resort more to social media platforms.."

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## in a multiple crisis, where are the girls?



by Luisa Tuilau

Rural women in Vanua Levu have outlined that their personal safety was their biggest worry during the waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal safety was at the top of their list of concerns, followed by their mental health, their coping mechanism and ability to see their friends, as well as the obligations on them to care for others. Physical health was the fifth priority of their concerns. The women were asked 'What concerned you most during COVID-19 pandemic?' and the responses were as follows:-

- My safety = 71.13%;
- My mental health = 38.73%;
- Ability to see friends = 36.62%;
- Caring responsibilities = 30.28%;
- My physical health = 29.58%.

Seventy-four of the participants were from the ages of 14 to 35 years old, and were also school girls and tertiary students. These young women highlighted that issues emerging that were of concern to them included peer pressure, home tasks and community tasks, child abuse (from disciplinary methods to physical and verbal abuse) and attempted rape and sexual abuse.

These responses were obtained late last year from the five (5) intergenerational dialogues, that were conducted in the three provinces of Bua, Macuata and Cakaudrove to assess the gender inequalities faced by school girls, and young women during this "double pandemic" - a term coined by the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) to reflect their on-going struggle with tropical cyclones and to COVID-19 pandemic (a crisis within a crisis). 161 mothers, daughters, LGBTQI, and persons with disabilities gathered in their localities to share their struggles with oppressive cultural and religious norms, policies, and inadequate resources.

Issues raised by these participants speak to their intersectional struggles from personal to political. The participants shared that in some parts of their communities they had witnessed an increase in physical abuse, verbal abuse and sexual harassment in the homes.

The female students struggled with the Ministry of Education's directives on online learning as their geographical locations had limited to no access to mobile networks. Purchasing recharge cards for mobile data was financially draining for parents and guardians. Students faced a variety of issues in online learning, with limited access to laptops, smartphones and recharge cards so they were not able to stay on track and most have been lagging behind because of not having access to resources that will enable them to keep up with their school assignments and projects. Furthermore, worksheets proved to be a challenge for some school girls, parents and guardians as written work activities and terminologies were difficult to understand and with limited access to school resources and school teachers in rural communities, the progression and motivation to complete worksheet tasks dropped drastically.

"I can definitely relate to this, having a year six student studying about Metamorphism is a bit too much for them to understand.. this biological process in animals and plants, of course, metamorphism is a big word in itself and having these primary students trying to understand how it works and functions is a bit too much and this results in them losing hope in doing their worksheets because of the amount of things not yet being taught to them"

- Taufa Dominiko, Savusavu Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network





## Diverse Rural Women and the Name Change Law



by Luisa Tuilau

The theme for the month of March convening was 'Diverse Women Shaping Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow' which also marked International Women's Day. In March, femLINKpacific conducted a survey, with 129 participants, of whom were women and girls sharing their perspectives on the upcoming elections. The breakdown of the participants: 60 - Western division, 45 central division, and 24 women leaders from the northern division.

The survey results indicated a significant number of participants had issues with transportation, change of personal details, and filling out the registration form when it came to updating their Voter ID Cards. In 2021, some changes were made to the Electoral law and the Interpretation Act now requires Fiji citizens who had registered as a voter under a different name to re-register to vote under their birth-certificate names. This law meant that the majority of married women that have registered as voters under their husband's name will have to either a) change their birth certificate name to their spouse's surname or b) change all other sources of identification to their birth name including certificates and passport details. Some of the women leaders had mixed reactions to the changing of the names, some married participants had used their birth certificate name for all documentation while some married women had used their husband's name. Some responses behind using the husband's name varied for most of these married women, as one of the women stated, "My birth certificate name is a linkage to my heritage. And I want to only use my husband surname in my voter id. All other ids I have, have my husband's name. Even my passport. Immigration has made my passport easy. It should be the same as voter card. Accessing the JP is difficult here in Sigatoka to verify the people through statutory declaration."

In 2021, seven women filed a constitutional challenge against the Electoral Registration of Voters Amendment Act and the Interpretation Act on the grounds of sex, gender, and marital status discrimination. According to (FijiVillage, 2021), these women leaders stated that these laws were discriminatory towards them and violates the social and cultural identity of married Fijian women.

**In the meantime, the women highlighted that their top priority issue for anyone representing them in parliament was to be about women and girls' access to justice and decision-making spaces.** For the Western Division, the other equally important issues were education, health security, economic empowerment, and infrastructure whereas the Central Division was economic empowerment, health security, water and sanitation, and education. In the North Division the issues were education, economic empowerment, health, water and sanitation.



## Women's Human Security First - Political Security (Access to Voting)

### Make Our Rights to Register and Vote Count – rural women with disabilities



by Patrina Agnes Tawake

WITH, thirty (30) diverse women, femLINKpacific launched its first ever Sigatoka rural women convening that was held for two days – Wednesday, 2nd March and ended on Thursday (3rd March) at the Coral Coast, with the theme, "Rural Women Shaping Peace and Recovery Better-Women's deliberation through perseverance, resilience within COVID19 and other crises" Central in the conversations, was the ability of rural women to exercise their constitutional right to vote in Fiji's upcoming general election, including in particular ensuring registration and voting rights for women with disabilities in rural and remote areas. The Nadroga Navosa Branch for Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) representative, Amelia Bai Kiti mentioned that many persons with disabilities are left at home and do not make it to the polling venues to vote because of their disability, and many that arrive at polling venues are the ones that vote because transport is provided.

*"As a person with disabilities of Nadroga, I just want to bring this matter up to PLEASE, the Fijian Elections Office to reach out to villages and communities so that older people and disabled people can vote"*

- Amelia Bai Kiti, FDPF, Nadroga / Navosa



*"We Must Make the Vote of Persons with Disabilities, Count,"* emphasized Kiti. femlinkpacific Executive Director, Susan Naisara emphasized the importance of grassroots' womens groups such as the Sigatoka network of femLINKpacific, to share information and help other women be able to exercise their constitutional right to register and vote and decide for themselves the leaders that they want. She also outlined the low rates of national representation by women in the Pacific compared to other regions in the world, and the high rates of violence. *"Inclusiveness should be a number one priority across all local and community-levels. It is our*

*responsibility to look out for one another",* Tavaita Valerau who is part of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama in Serua, reiterated that the Election Office was in her village two days ago and they only needed the name that is on your Birth Certificate and not your husbands' name. **Meanwhile feedback from a recent femLINKpacific Regional in Women Leadership Meeting Consultation also revealed that some spouses insisted on having their name to be included to their wife's name, in any change.** More information on how this could be done and without any necessary fees or expenses, was an issue that emerged.

## Rural Women Spaces - Critical to Ending Violence Against Women



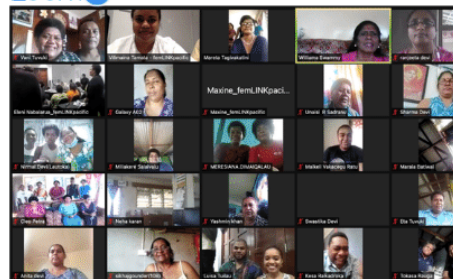
by Maxine Tuwila Lesivou

OVER fifty (50) diverse women leaders that are members of femLINKpacific's Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network (RWLCMN) took part in the first Hybrid National Convening for the year.

**"ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN A CRISIS CONTEXT** was the theme for this Convening to end the month of January and to start off the month of February. Women leaders from various organisations, clubs and networks presented their views on the first, second and third wave of COVID-19 and the need for more information with response to Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) during the pandemic. Speaking to women leaders, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Shelter Manager/ National Helpline Coordinator, Ilisapeci Veibuli said that the meeting was important and she acknowledged the critical effort and support that women leaders have been providing amongst its members in responding to VAWG even with the increasing number of Domestic Violence cases.

*"During this pandemic, it (Domestic Violence Helpline) really does ensure that our women, survivors of violence and children's voices are heard... The Helpline recorded an increase in Domestic Violence during the pandemic, however, there were also an increase in women leaders*

*accessing it in reporting these DV cases. I would also like to acknowledge the critical support that you all have in ending VAWG and it's important that we educate our communities in changing their mindsets towards VAWG."* said Veibuli



*"Women that go through violence needs to be placed in safe homes so they don't have to be further stigmatized.*

*We need to identify community advocates in communities that will be able to assist these women in times of crisis especially now during the pandemic and there's an increasing number of cases",* said Vani Tuvuki, who is the



Koronubu Women's Fellowship leader and Ba District Council of Social Services (DCOSS) President. Bonita Qio the coordinator for Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network (PRAN) shared the same sentiment saying that majority of perpetrators are in our homes. *"From my own personal observation, I see that it is us in our own families/ households are perpetrators and we condone this type of behaviors. We need to stop being a hypocrite and start reporting these violence in our homes so we lessen the number of cases of domestic violence. We need to change our mindsets for the betterment of our future generations."* Communities represented included District Advisory Councilors (DAC), members of the LGBTIQ + community, Marama-ni-koro's, Women living with disability, young women, members of the District Council of Social Services (DCOSS) and community health care workers.

## Editors Note



**Susan Naisara,**  
Executive Director,  
femLINKpacific

**W**e're back with our Community Radio Times (CRT), bringing to you in full colour and a new design, the voices of diverse women from Fiji, as well as women of the Pacific Region. The past two years over 2020 and 2021 were our most challenging years as we dealt with a global pandemic, severe natural disasters and a climate crisis, and experienced the set-backs in the status of women with the under-representation of women being seen as the biggest challenge to gender equality in the region.

With this, we conducted a gender equality assessment in the Northern Division of Fiji, focussing on access to education over the height of the pandemic in the 3rd quarter of last year, and found that personal security topped the concerns of the diverse rural women and girls that participated in the survey across the three provinces in Bua, Macuata and Cakaudrove. Young women's concerns around their well-being during a time of lockdowns, the increase in teenage pregnancies and the usage of tobacco, alcohol and drugs were also issues of concern as they tried to access their online learning and education.

We also conducted women in leadership convenings and learning events over the past few months, kicking off with a regional learning event with Vanuatu Young Women for Change (VYWC) in November last year, and having women in national politics, joining through on a panel discussion. Then in Fiji, we took to the districts to create spaces and conversations on leadership, women's representation and the key issues that the national representatives should consider. Fiji and Papua New Guinea are having national general elections in the next coming months and our coalitions such as the Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) and the Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) have been busy too with mobilising and movement building, helping potential female candidates learn the basics of campaigning, lessons of the past elections and networking and engaging with stakeholders, resource people and the Fijian Elections Office (FEO). Women successfully participating in elections and having their voices heard as well as making their votes count, is critical to the growth and development of any democracy. *Welcome again to reading through our feminist media newspaper.*

## Melanesian Women Leaders Call for Leaders to Prioritise Human Security Issues



by Vilimaina Tamata

Diverse rural women in Vanuatu and Fiji have called for direct empowerment of themselves including training with feminist media tools so that they can be the voice for themselves and their communities on issues that need to be addressed on the national agenda. The fourty rural women leaders in Fiji and Vanuatu, members of femLINKpacific's regional preparedness modality, "Women's Weather Watch" (WWW), also spoke about the work that they would do, should they be elected into national parliament, re-emphasising the critical importance of having their voices captured in decision-making.

**"IF I WAS ELECTED IN PARLIAMENT, MY PRIORITY WOULD BE THE SAFEGUARDING OF OUR HUMAN SECURITIES. THESE ARE INTERLINKED. IT WOULD MAKE LIFE EASIER AS OUR ISSUES ARE RISING BECAUSE CERTAIN HUMAN SECURITIES ARE NOT MET."**

- outlined Vani Tuvuki of the Koronubu Women's Club, Ba.



Eighty-five per cent of the women believed that "personal security" is the most important priority to them. Personal security for the women have revolved around their perceptions of how safe they felt in their homes and in their communities, with violence being a key factor in the experience. A similar percentage of 85 per cent, also believed that politicians should prioritise the issues of women and girls. Education also topped the priority issue for the regional women, with 76 % outlining that the education of women and girls needed to be addressed as well.

The Nivan rural women leaders of Vanuatu, also want their elected representatives to lobby for better health services including more hospitals and community resources. These also included more clinics to be set up in the center of their communities & outer islands, to cater for the marginalized and vulnerable groups i.e. people with disabilities. The rural women leaders in Vanuatu and Fiji also recommended that Pacific Island Governments re-look at gender commitments and to consider deployment of the Ministry of Women representatives into other ministerial arms as gender officers, as they would provide guidance surrounding gender inclusion in projects.



Regional diverse participants in Vanuatu who zoom'd in to the convening in Fiji.

In addition to recommendations to governments, the women outlined that national leaders need to assess how women in rural communities can be better resourced and provided opportunities for economic empowerment. The women convened for the first regional convening for the year, focusing on "Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Pacific Women for Leadership and Ending the Violence".



**71%**  
of participants believe that government should focus on community security

"They are the most vulnerable in the community and sometimes their issues are swept under the carpet"  
- Ana Nalivou, Rakiraki

"Mainstream media should empower women to participate"  
- Tima Lalokulua, Nadi

**76%**  
of participants also think education needs to be addressed

**85%**  
of participants believe that politicians should push for women and girl's issues

**66%**  
of participants believe they need assistance with narrating women's stories in the media

In Fiji, increased prices of basic food items has been a concern, with people still recovering from job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Economic and food security have become the key human security issues for low-income households, not able to cope with the increase in food prices, and therefore opting for low quality foods at cheaper prices.

At the time of the regional meeting, a single kilogram of sugar costs \$3.05 FJD and the minimum wage rate, as passed by Parliament as of April 01, 2022 is \$3.01 FJD – therefore workers on minimum wage will have to work 2 hours in order to be able to afford a kilogram of sugar.

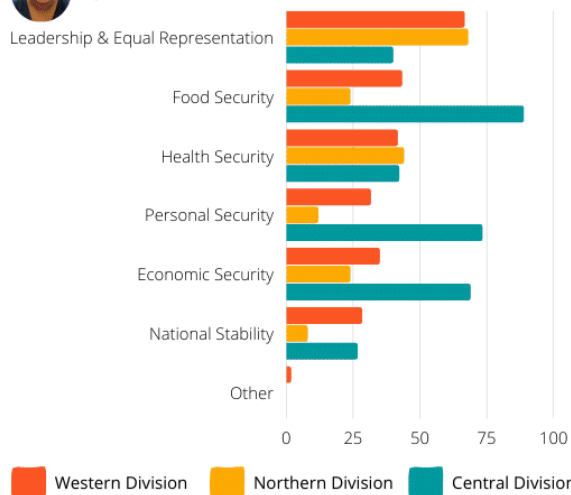
Women leaders in Vanuatu reported on how they have been facing their first wave and the impacts of the pandemic. These have included job losses, reduced pay and reduced hours. The Nivan rural women leaders, called for better health services and employment opportunities reporting that a single face mask costs 150 to 200 vatu, which is too expensive for homes, especially with large families. Women have had to resort to risky means of income such as sex work due to the loss of income brought on by the COVID19 Pandemic. Recommendations around the economic human security are towards opportunities for unemployed mothers to sell their produce, food stalls to compensate for finances lost due to the COVID restricted places such as kava bars, etc. The women also recommended that face masks be made free-of-charge, hand sanitizers and hygiene resources also, to be subsidized by the Vanuatu government. The regional convening was one of a number of regional events bringing diverse rural women from the region to collaborate and engage so as to participate more effectively in regional policy making, development and implementation.



# FIJI GENERAL ELECTION 2022 SNIPPETS: Food Security Tops Central Division, Leadership A Concern in Others.



by Vilimaina Tamata



This data was collected in a survey method by femLINKpacific and represents data collected from the Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network across the Western Division (Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Nadi, Lautoka), Northern Division (Bua, Savusavu and Labasa) and the Central Division (Lami and Nausori).

While 'Food Security' is a top concern from the Central Division, 'Leadership and Equal Representation' is the top concern from both the Western and Northern Divisions. These indicate that women see their issues at communal level being directly affected by the type of leadership and representation they're exposed to and at national level. Women's representation for political security is a fundamental pre-requisite for gender equality and genuine democracy.

## 22 March: World Water Day



Commemorating World Water Day, Mrs Mela from Vanuakula Village of Tavua spoke on the importance of clean and running water- sharing the struggles of having unclean water especially during Fiji's Cyclone Season. Each year, femLINKpacific raises public awareness on the significance and sustainability of clean water



## Diverse Rural Women Call for Leaders to Prioritize Access to Education

by Vilimaina Tamata



Diverse participants from rural and remote communities in Tavua at femLINKpacific's Tavua UNSCR 1325 Convening

Twenty-five (25) diverse rural women leaders, members of femLINKpacific's Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network met in March in Tavua's District Convening for the year focusing on "Diverse Women Shaping Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow". Women leaders representing various local groups and organizations presented their views on what authentic leadership looks like and the type of political leadership they are hoping towards the 2022 Fiji General elections. "Supporting one another, women supporting women is essential to achieving gender equality" said Suliana Nateru, a young woman leader member of our Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network.

*"Being a woman leader means being inclusive, some of the qualities are being supportive, encouraging youth, being responsible and hardworking"*

When asked on political leadership, Mrs Vilisi Verebasaga said that a balance of male and female participation in decision making, as well as peoples living with disabilities was crucial to political security, as more than half of Fiji's population are women.



Young mothers in the room also spoke on struggles of access to education with the drastic decrease of the government assisted e-transport top ups which were previously \$98.00 per term, has now dropped to only \$5.00 per term per child. Additionally, children are missing school due to little to no food at home, their parents who lost jobs due to the COVID19 Pandemic are still struggling to provide and are unable to send their children to school, this has been exasperated even further by the drastic increase in prices of sugar and flour.

*"There's many issues here in Tavua, we've been coming across COVID19, come across the floods, twice or thrice, our farms and home gardens have been really disrupted. Some of the families, they were not working, and there's been an increase in food items, like sugar, before we used to buy \$2 a KG, but now its \$2.75, \$2.99. Like the flour, the increase of price of flour from \$12 and \$13 TO \$19, the increase of living is very high"*

says Unaisi Bakewa.

Rural Women Leader of our Tavua Community Media Network, also representing Disabled Peoples Federation and Soqosoqo Vakamarama-iTaukei.

Women leaders further raised concerns with access to Education, as some children go more than a week using the same mask, while other children don't have masks at all. Recommendations from the room, therefore were towards government assistance to provide free resources such as masks, meals, and sufficient e-transport top ups for children in need to enable them to attend classes, otherwise children from impoverished families are further "left behind" with access to education from what has been described as a strenuous learning experience i.e. 2021 virtual learning methods.

*"THEY BLAMED ME FOR WEARING A SKIRT. THEY BLAMED ME BECAUSE I DIDN'T ASK THE DRIVER TO WAIT FOR ME EVEN THOUGH I DID. THEY BLAMED ME FOR ACCEPTING THE ASSIGNMENT."*

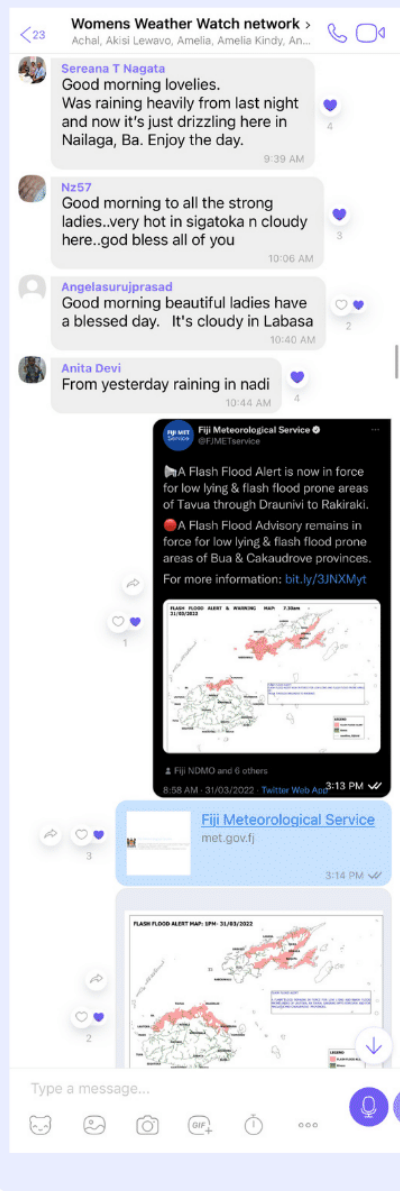
## PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON FEMALE JOURNALISTS: A Fiji Case Study

The University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme  
Fiji Women's Rights Movement  
March 2022

The University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme together with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) conducted and produced a research on the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment on female journalists in Fiji. femLINKpacific Executive Director, Susan Naisara spoke as a panelist at the launch of this Case Study, adding that the recommendations from the Case Study must also engage Government agencies. The key findings of the research revealed that harassment was predominantly verbal, but also very often gestural, physical harassment is fairly common as well. Additionally, respondents predominantly experienced comments about their dress and appearance, besides crude, sexual jokes. Only 40% lodged complaints about sexual harassment that occurred in the workplace, in part due to feelings of embarrassment. Of the cases that were reported, just over 50% resulted in a warning for the offenders, 17% in termination, and 12% in suspensions. Online harassment is an emerging threat in Fiji, with up to 83% of respondents having experienced it one time or another. Online harassment takes place predominantly on Facebook, as identified by nearly half of the respondents. While most offenders of online harassment are largely anonymous, others included news sources or contacts, government officials and political party affiliates. Political and government stories lead to the highest levels of online abuse, followed by stories about race and ethnicity, as well as religion. Most respondents tended to self-censor on social media as a result of online harassment while others refrained from pursuing certain stories. Even the more serious incidents involving physical sexual harassment were dismissed when reported. A respondent, whose statement is mentioned above was attacked by a security guard, she stated that she was actually blamed when she reported the incident. This Case Study can be found on the FWRM website: [www.fwr.org.fj](http://www.fwr.org.fj)

# WOMENS WEATHER WATCH!

femLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch (WWW) is a platform that was created post Tropical Cyclone Winston of 2016, functioning around the concept of Citizen Journalism. It engages close to 500 women in rural and remote communities who are all members of our Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network. This WWW platform whilst initially created for weather watch, has also been an information hub, updating our rural women leaders on announcements from the Fijian Government, especially during the multiple waves of the COVID19 Pandemic, and the women reporting the realities of policies and Government initiatives in their communities. WWW continues to be updated virtually on the Viber platform; femLINKpacific also uses SMS Blast platform with Digicel to update our members on weather forecasts from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services and the Fiji National Disaster Management Office.



## Diverse Young Women for Leadership The Fiji Young Women's Forum

by Vilimaina Tamata



Participants of the recent Fiji Young Womens Forum Central Divisional Dialogue in Suva, that had Minister for Women Rosy Akbar, MP Lenora Qereqeretabua and Roshika Deo as panelists on Women in Politics.

### "WE HAVE SO MANY RECOMMENDATIONS THAT FALL ON DEAF EARS!"

- Alumecei Biliatiki, Mama Ashie Project and femLINKpacific representative to the FYWF

The Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) held their Central Divisional Dialogue at the Southern Cross Hotel in Suva City between 6th – 7th May, concluding the third of their Divisional Dialogues. The theme around the Divisional Dialogues was around "Young Womens Political Participation", FYWF co-convened by femLINKpacific, House of Colours and the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA), brought together diverse young women leaders and activists in the Northern Division, Western and Central Division to discuss barriers and strategies to young women's meaningful participation and representation in Fiji's democratisation process. The outcome of these divisional dialogues is a compact National Declaration calling for national leaders and stakeholders to create policies and implement changes across eight sectors (Education, Economics, Health, Environment, Media, Personal Security, Community and Politics) that will create a safer environment for young women to have their concerns heard and engage in leadership spaces. The recommendations towards the Education Health sector are for the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) and the State to **prioritise young diverse women's access to education by providing more avenues for scholarships for marginalised groups**, including women with disabilities, people of diverse SOGIESC and young women in rural and remote communities. Additionally, the Ministry of Education needs to be able to provide a more holistic quality of education at Primary School level, and FYWF strongly recommend that education on human rights be added to the primary school curriculum via a child friendly methodology, so as to nurture an understanding of equity, equality, inclusivity and diversity.



Sheenal Katarina Ram, a femLINKpacific representative at the FYWF Divisional Dialogue in the West

Recommendations towards the Political Sector are for leaders at all levels to engage and integrate young women of various backgrounds in decision-making spaces. FYWF firmly advocates for a consultation on the use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) for women in politics in order to improve women's representation in Parliament. Approaching 2022 General Elections, women must unite with diverse female leaders.

FYWF calls on Political parties to have quotas for representation for young people as candidates. FYWF urges Political parties to take head of the voices of young diverse women, people living with disabilities and members of the SOGIESC community and women living in the rural and remote communities to create safe spaces that allow for effective communication. FYWF emphasizes the need to increase awareness and training on democratic and electoral processes by targeting young women's groups and conducting door to door surveys on individuals' awareness of democratic and electoral processes. We call on politicians, the Fijian Elections office and Fiji Electoral commission to provide information in the vernacular on political processes; to create an online database portal, so that registered voters can vote in any polling station. Additionally, for them to implement affirmative policies to encourage political participation of people living with disabilities, members of the SOGIESC community and young diverse women.



Participants of the hybrid FYWF Divisional Dialogue in the North Division, other participants and Speakers joined virtually.

Lastly, a third category that was heavily emphasized by the FYWF throughout the dialogues was on personal security, and in this young women leaders urge the Fiji Police Force in collaboration with the Land Transport Authority must develop an online alert system, allowing young women to directly report sexual harassment in public service vehicles, and cyberbullying. Further, FYWF urge the Land Transport Authority to assist in mandating that public service vehicles must clearly showcase toll free helplines for women and children in their vehicles. Moreover, the State must ensure its budgetary processes are in line with the National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action and takes into consideration the needs of rural and remote communities including young women's access to basic services. FYWF is provided secretarial support from the Fiji Womens Rights Movement (FWRM) and will be publishing a youth friendly booklet "My Guide To Voting" that will be handed out to young diverse women in the Northern, Western and Central divisions. FYWF engaged the Fijian Elections Office, Minister for Women Rosy Akbar, MP Lenora Qereqeretabua, Human Rights Activist Roshika Deo and leaders from Civil Society Organizations to speak and participate in panel discussions at the convenings. FYWF activities is supported by the Australian Government through the We Rise Coalition. The FYWF National Declaration can be accessed at the FWRM website: [www.fwrm.org.fj](http://www.fwrm.org.fj)



## Voices from the Field - Women, Peace and Human Security



by Sulueti Waqa

Twenty-seven (27) diverse rural women and young women leaders gathered at the St Thomas Anglican Church Hall in Labasa in March for femLINKpacific's Rural Women Leaders Consultation. The discussion was on the theme of International Women's Day "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow". The participants in line with the theme highlighted their women, peace and human security issues. Mereia Tabuvale from Bulileka, representing Labasa Market Vendors Association in her introduction spoke of the struggles currently faced by market vendors in the Labasa Market. She had been in the market for more than ten years. She left last year and returned beginning of the year; she was shocked to see the increase in prices of items in the market. *"It feels like the prices are going up every day, every week, every month"*. Tabuvale stated this as she highlighted that they are making very limited profit from their sales. Political security was also part of the agenda. There were discussions around what political security meant for the participant. Swatika Sagar from the Vanua Levu Mahila Manda shared that political security for her is having the right to vote and an investment in women's development. Ms Tabuvale shared the same sentiments stating that for market vendors, their political security is knowing the importance and the power of their voice. Keleni Vosatabu, diverse young women representative shared that political security is about freedom of choice. She stated this after reflecting on the laws that are being passed without proper consultation with the communities.



She adds that it is also about accessing justice as young people. Accessing accurate information particularly for rural communities while Fiji prepares itself for election is very important. The need for communities to be informed in order to effectively participate on the process that leads up to the general election. With that in mind, rural women and young women leaders spoke of the way forward. They highlighted what kind of leaders they want. The need for representation of women with a perception that with women in leadership, women's issues will be properly addressed and attended to. **Esther Brown, representing women with disabilities stated the need for leaders to listen to the people and not only during campaign.** *"Quite often this is the case, when they are elected, they totally forget about the people."*, added Esther. The issues that they wished to be addressed is the poor infrastructure. The need for proper road, bridges in remote communities. She adds that **for persons with disabilities, it is about making towns and public services accessible. This could be achieved by building ramps for persons with disabilities.**

There is also a need to look into accessible evacuation centre during times of disasters. 'Accountability' and 'Transparency' were characteristics highlighted as characteristic of authentic leadership by young women in the convening. The twenty seven participants at the Rural Women Leaders consultation were representative from Vunivunivun Multiracial Women Group, Vanua Levu Arya Mahila Mandel, Naleba Mutiracial Women's Group, Navakakuru Women's Club, House of Colors , Labasa Market Vendors Association , Association of Anglican Women , Fiji Early Childhood Education , Diverse Voices for Equality - Fiji (Labasa Hub).



## Preparedness for Response



by Maxine Tuwila Lesivou

femLINKpacific concluded its Western District Consultation with Tavua. Fifteen (15) diverse rural women leaders attended the convening from various groups, clubs and communities. The discussion was mainly around disaster preparedness and response specifically for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Speaking on Friday, Hetali said:

***"DURING THIS PANDEMIC, THERE'S AN INCREASING NUMBER OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES IN MY COMMUNITY. WOMEN AREN'T ABLE TO ACCESS THE SERVICES BECAUSE OF FEAR - WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR THESE SITUATIONS DURING DISASTER PERIODS BECAUSE IT WILL DEFINITELY INCREASE"***



She added that in previous crisis, women aren't able to get help and support since evacuation centers weren't always friendly. *"Evacuation centers are mostly unfriendly to us evacuees. When a woman is being violated in an evacuation center, no one will help because we see it as a "family problem" and not a "me problem" - we need to change this mindset."*



***"WEATHER WARNING MESSAGES NEEDS TO BE CLEAR AND ACCURATE AND IT NEEDS TO BE COMMUNICATED ACROSS NOT ONLY THROUGH TEXTS MESSAGES. THE LANGUAGE USED SHOULD BE SIMPLE SO ORDINARY CITIZENS CAN UNDERSTAND AND PREPARE OURSELVES. WHEN THE MEDIA SAYS CATEGORY 5 CYCLONE, THEY NEED TO SIMPLIFY THE INFORMATION SO WE KNOW. THEY NEED TO MAKE IT CLEAR BECAUSE THE NEXT TIME, IT'S IMPORTANT TO PREPARE."***

The women leaders acknowledged femLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch platforms for providing relevant information on what is needed and required for ordinary citizens. WWW is an inter-operable communication platform developed initially for early warning communication to women specifically for women in the rural areas.

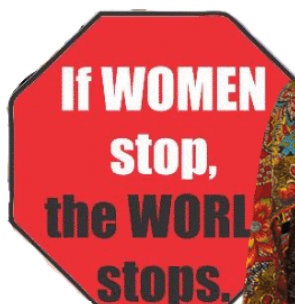


## REFLECTION: CLIMATE CHANGE



by Yvonne Nainovou

Climate change is a serious issue that many of us are taking lightly. I believe that people need to be more informed of what's happening; where we are at with climate change; what we are doing that is contributing to climate change and what we can do to help reduce carbon emission into the atmosphere or help reduce loss and damages. The government is part of the climate change movement but are they really walking the talk? Or is it all for political purposes! The presentation that was made during the training made me realize that Climate Change is a reality RIGHT NOW and not just something you only hear about because there are people that are actually experiencing the worst of this issue. We have developing countries that are suffering the consequences contributed by the developed countries. We have the North Countries exploiting resources with less returns to the South Countries and this cause environmental damages and disasters. There is inequity and inequality between and within countries. There are targets made by the members of the COP26 to achieve by 2050 but are they really committing to that goal? Traditional science is vital for climate survival so we need to know and share traditional science that our fore-fathers have once relied on for their survival so that we too may be able to survive during this crisis. We have women that come out during consultations and talk about the issues that they face due to changing weather patterns such as drought and rising sea-levels but what can be done about this? Teach the women about traditional science; the early science that indicates a particular season that is coming so that people can be well prepared. We need to table these issues into national levels as real life experiences from women in rural and remote communities and therefore, government must move towards resolving these issues. There is also a huge concern with gender when it comes to climate change. Violence increases during this time not only at home but in evacuation centres, women and children are exposed to more vulnerability, vulnerable groups (LGBTQI, Sex workers, and disability) are exposed to discrimination and violence especially at the evacuation centers, heteronormative/patriarchal system that further discriminates vulnerable groups, and unhealed traumas that people experience during these crisis.



*"I am calling for all our solidarity-all of us here and all of you out there-to look beyond the content, and look beyond the pen and laptop-and to reach out to women that are struggling on their own, in their own world, as they write about us and our stories-and yet we DO NOT LISTEN and hear their story. I am calling for an end to the bias that's faced by the women in our newsroom-women in the media" - Susan Naisara, Executive Director, femLINKpacific at this years International Women's Day in Suva.*

