



Balance

"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"

August

2014

WOMEN IN POLITICS: Candidate Capacity Strengthening Workshop

"We all belong to a House and that is the House of Parliament" - Dame Carol Kidu

THE Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) organized an exciting five-day workshop, focused on building the capacity of Women candidates and Campaign Managers who are gearing up for the Fiji Elections. The aim of the workshop was to further the knowledge and skill set of these women to assist them in campaigning more effectively, as they seek to win a seat in Parliament. The aim and broad content of the workshop was identified during a one-day consultation held in November 2013 with members of the Women's Forum. The content was inclusive of election campaigning and media skills and the role of Members of Parliament. As such, it was designated as a 'Candidate Capacity Strengthening Workshop'.

During the build-up towards the workshop, the FWF was faced with certain challenges in terms of keeping up with the changing political environment and the adverse weather conditions. This was projected to affect the attendance of participants, especially from rural communities. Initially, the workshop was to be conducted in three separate modules but due to time constraints and the availability of participants, the Co-conveners had to condense the modules to five days of intense training. Invitations were issued to the registered Political Parties namely Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), FijiFirst, Fiji Labour Party (FLP), People's Democratic Party (PDP), 'Be the Change' independent candidate Roshika Deo and the National Federation Party (NFP). All political parties were able to provide us with 5 nominations except for FijiFirst who were still in the process of finalizing its candidacy. The workshop comprised of 30 participants ranging from Women Candidates, Campaign Managers, Party Volunteers and representatives from the Co-conveners of the Fiji Women's Forum.

The lead consultant was Dr Lesley Clark, a former Queensland MP and international trainer, who developed the workshop program and materials with input from Leonie Morgan of EMILY's List, Australia. Dr Clark was also responsible for



By **Losana Tuiraviravi**

the overall facilitation of the workshop. Dame Carol Kidu, former PNG Parliamentarian, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls - Director of FemLINK PACIFIC and staff from the UNDP Pacific office also contributed to the program.

The workshop comprised of 22 individual sessions throughout the 5 days. Topics covered were: Election Rules, Challenges for Women Candidates, Campaign Planning and Organization, Budget, Targeting, Message Development and Delivery, Media Management, Role of Parliament and MP's, as well as ways that women can support each other both pre and post-elections. All sessions were delivered, which were designed to provide an overview of the relevant sections of the Election Decree and Political Parties Decree. The Commission was invited to send a representative

but was unable to do so and FWF could not source an appropriate alternative speaker. The election rules as specified in the Electoral and Political Party Decrees were covered in each of the relevant sessions and all participants were provided with copies of the Decrees.

The program used a wide variety of techniques to maximize engagement of participants including power point presentations, individual and group activities, panel presentations by women MP's and representatives of the media industry, role play and empowering discussions. The Participants Handbook included readings and activities linked to the content of the majority of sessions. Group work was based on political party groupings when appropriate.

The Candidate Capacity Strengthening Workshop organised by the Fiji Women's Forum has achieved its goal: Enhancing the capacity of women candidates to campaign more effectively at the Fiji Elections on 17th September, 2014.

From the Director's desk

Greetings from FWRM!



We've had some changes here at the Movement since our last issue – including a new Balance editor in our recently appointed Communications Officer, Genevieve Sukhdeo. The transition meant that this issue was a little delayed, but we think it's worth the wait! Also joining us this quarter are Menka Goundan and Veena Singh, young women with many years of experience between them.

Looking to the region this quarter, we congratulate Dame Meg Taylor on her recent appointment as the new Secretary General for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Read on for more on this latest regional development in this issue. The Movement commends PIFS for demonstrating their support for Pacific women's leadership. The fact that all three top positions at the Forum are now filled by women is good news and hopefully, an indicator of positive change ahead for Pacific women.

Staying true to our commitment of encouraging and assisting women candidates in the upcoming Fiji elections, our Candidate Capacity Strengthening Workshop – in partnership with the co-conveners of the Fiji Women's Forum – was hailed a success by participants from diverse political backgrounds and party affiliations. Despite the challenges in pulling together the workshop in the current political context, we were able to have five incredibly empowering days with the proposed candidates and party campaign managers. Dame Carol Kidu, the former PNG Parliamentarian, was an inspiring facilitator.

Also in June, I was fortunate enough to attend the 2nd Asia Pacific Feminist Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand (pg.3) along with hundreds of other feminists and global allies. My fellow feminists from neighbouring Pacific island countries also attended and our combined voices made for a powerful presence! Despite incredible diversity across the Asia Pacific region, we shared many similar challenges, ideas and experiences.

From the richness in cultural diversity abroad to diversity at home, in this issue we also highlight the IDAHOT Family Fun Day (pg4). To mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, people from all walks of life converged at My Suva Park to make a bold statement against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

There have also been some sad moments this quarter, and we pay tribute to Moushmi Narain (pg.6), a member of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum Alumni (ELFA) and Fiji Young Women's Forum participant who tragically passed away after a long battle with illness. Moushmi was a brilliant young woman who did not let her disabilities hold her back in any way. Her vibrant spirit, intelligence and her work as a broadcaster with femLINK pacific enabled Moushmi to touch the hearts and minds of all who knew her.

Not everyone living with disability is able to enjoy a life of fulfillment and dignity as Moushmi did. Countless stories of ill-treatment and discrimination are all too familiar. FWRM is committed to addressing discrimination in all its forms, and so accepted the invitation to be part of the Convention of the Rights of Persons living with Disability (CRPD) Ratification Focus Group to discuss action and recognition of those rights through the international human rights system.

So do take the time to read and reflect on these articles, which are just some of the stories captured in this edition. As always, if you have any feedback, drop us a line at info@fwrn.org.fj.

Enjoy!

In solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo.

Transitions

By Genevieve Sukhdeo



We bid farewell to **Shazia Usman** who contributed immensely

to the development of FWRM's work over

the past eight years. Shazia first joined FWRM as an intern during the 2006 elections period to assist in research and became a member of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni a year later. She served as FWRM's Communications Officer from October 2010 to May 2014 and led the following significant projects:

- Oversaw the production of FWRM's organisational video and Herstory publication in commemoration of its 25th anniversary. She also led the project honoring FWRM's 25 Women Human Rights Defenders awardees.
- Devised a national media campaign under the 'My Constitution Must Include Me' project (radio, television commercials and online advocacy). This included the 'I Am Voting' project (radio, television commercials and online advocacy, as well as radio talk back shows)
- The production of the Temporary Special Measures (TSM) and Constituent Assembly Booklet, TSM television commercial and 12 issues of FWRM's quarterly newsletter Balance.
- She was also responsible for the production and implementation of a Gender, Human Rights and Media toolkit, which was undertaken by an external consultant. Shazia now joins Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development as its new Communications Officer:

"I loved being part of FWRM for the last 8 years and will of course continue to be part of the women's movement through my work with Pacific Women and through my own activism. My work at FWRM has nurtured the feminist in me and has greatly contributed to my career. I look forward to the continued solidarity".

We wish you all the very best Shazia!

Welcome

The latest additions to FWRM's staff include a new Young Women's Officer, a Research Officer and a new Communications Officer.

Veena Singh

Veena has worked as the Programme Director at FemlinkPacific and was also the Regional Liaison Officer for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict Pacific (GPPAC) Network. She has been heavily involved in the areas of Children's Rights, Women's Rights, Community Development, UNSCR1325 (Women, Peace and Security), Conflict Prevention and Peace Building. Veena has continued to be a dedicated child rights and women's rights advocate and in the past has volunteered and worked with a number of organizations including Save the Children Fiji and the Fiji Red Cross. She possesses an immense passion on the work carried out on issues relating to the Trafficking of Persons. She joins our vibrant Young women In Leadership Programme as its Young Women's Officer and will play an integral role in driving our young feminist movement.

Menka Goundan

With significant experience in the area of peace building and research, Menka joins FWRM as one of its two Research Officers within the Gender and Transitional Justice team. Menka is very familiar with the work of the Movement through the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance and has enjoyed a stint as a delegate of the Human Rights Committee. She is also part of the Women's Peacebuilding Leadership Programme convened by the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding and most recently, attended the Pacific Research Colloquium at the State Society and Governance in Melanesia Programme at the Australian National University. Her varied experience in research and peacebuilding along with her prior employment at the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding as a Documenter and later Research Officer, make her a valuable asset to the team here at FWRM. *cont'd on page 5*



Genevieve Sukhdeo, Veena Singh and Menka Goundan



Large Pacific Presence at the 2nd Asia Pacific Feminist Forum

What a fantastic experience! That was the general consensus from the Pacific delegation who attended the second Asia Pacific Feminist Forum, organised by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in Chiang Mai, Thailand last May. The two and a half day event brought together nearly 300 feminists from 30 countries of the five sub-regions of Asia and the Pacific, as well as global allies. Women who were young and young at heart represented the Pacific. We came from Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu. We were part of the activists, lawyers, academics and women human rights defenders working on the multiple struggles of women in this region. We gathered to collectively share and strategise to shape movements, and to imagine different social, political and economic structures.

The forum kicked off with an evening of performances that showcased the diversity of expression and inspiration that goes into feminist activism. Participants visited a round of sites within the venue where they were treated to a rap about domestic worker's rights, a song about indigenous women's plight, a heart monologue on violence against women, a community mandala and a rousing dance. One of the performers was the Co-ordinator of the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni, Tavai Bale. Her spoken word performance was based on her experience as a young lesbian i-Taukei feminist in Fiji. It was a powerful performance that made the Pacific representatives very proud.

The Pacific representatives also had another opportunity to share the realities of women and girls from our region. From Bougainville's Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, Helen Hakena, one of the co-founders talked about how the suffering

Feminist Forum

By **Virisila Buadromo**

and victimisation of women as a result of the civil war and degradation of their environment inspired her to start a movement to protest against violence against women and to restore peace to Bougainville. She also shared that even though peace may have been restored, there continues to be challenges to women's participation in nation building.

All the speakers agreed that women should be united in their efforts and fight together for their legal rights. Women's movements are continuing their struggle and their links with national, sub regional, regional and global networks need to be strengthened so that they work cohesively.

One Filipina feminist, Vernie Yocogan Diano who was also a panelist during the APFF commented that, *"There is no shortcut to building movements. We have to go through the process of mobilising and strengthening women by raising awareness and building capacities so that they can make informed choices and collectively achieve a lot. Establishing linkages/partnerships with other networks/movements and sharing resources and ideas is important because women united can never be defeated."*

The APFF had simultaneous eye opening workshops led by women from around the region. There was a huge range of subjects, highlighting the vast scope of what feminists are trying to accomplish on a grassroots level in Asia and the Pacific. Some

of the most profound statements came from voices that are often left out of the picture entirely, including women with disabilities and sex workers. These two very different groups had surprisingly similar things to say about their marginalised positions, not only within the general population but also within the feminist movement.

"Society has turned sex into a bad, weird thing," says Liz Hilton, American spokesperson for the Thai sex worker rights group Empower. "It tries to keep groups of women separate, the good girls versus the bad girls. That's what we're trying to change."

The three Thai sex workers sitting at the table beside her nod their heads. This particular workshop is primarily a Q&A session entitled 'Why Good Girls Go Bad', designed to transcend one of the most age-old internal divides of the feminist movement: Sex Work. The women at the table are in the process of creating a new model for their much maligned occupation by becoming their own agents, via a unique Chiang Mai venture called Can Do Bar, the only bar in Thailand owned and operated by sex workers themselves. At the same time, they're trying to erase the stigma and the misconceptions that so often accompany sex work.

The final day of the APFF was an opportunity for participants to dream and plan for what needs to be done in the future. For the 12 Pacific Islanders, we talked about the need to have a similar space in the region to bolster the Pacific feminist movement by bringing women together and finding a sense of solidarity and common belief in the midst of so many diverse issues. FWRM has taken on this call to organize a Pacific Feminist Festival in 2016 to celebrate our 30th birthday. Watch this space as we share how we can.



Family Fun Day OUT to Mark IDAHOT

This year's 'International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia' (IDAHOT) was marked with a Family Fun Day OUT at My Suva Park, on Saturday 7th June, 2014.

The daily struggle that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) communities encounter in their endeavours for equality, dignity and humanity would not be as substantial if not for the firm and unwavering support of their loved ones - families (chosen and biological), partners and friends. Hence, the Family Fun Day OUT to celebrate the tenacious work of our brothers and sisters within the LGBTIQ movement and pay tribute to the lives lost due

By **Kris Prasad**

to homophobia and transphobia.

The event was organised by queer, transgender, feminist and human rights networks - Haus of Kameleon, Drodrologi Movement and the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni and involved activities for children, games, music, creative expressions, a treasure hunt and a peace vigil. Despite an earlier postponement due to bad weather, the event was well attended with almost 120 people taking part with their diverse families and friends.

The 'International Day Against Homophobia

and Transphobia' was created in 2004 to focus the attention of policymakers, opinion leaders, social movements, the public and the media on the stigma, violence and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ people globally.

The date of May 17th was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. The organizers hope to build upon the success of the recent collaboration with events already in the pipeline for 'Pride Month' in 2015. Stay tuned!

Language is Powerful

I am a logophile. No, that does not mean I file logs, though it would make sense if you are using modern English. Logophile is derived from the Greek word logos for 'speech' and the word phile which stands for 'friend, lover'.

My condition as a logophile must be the reason that I get irritated when I hear people refer to all lawyers as the 'fraternity' or when I read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and see the words 'him', 'brotherhood' and 'his'. There is a term for this irritation 'Male as Default'. This is the alienating result from usage of our everyday language, where the assumption is that your audience is male and thus you get references similar to the ones listed above.

This is why I get bothered when one of the largest banks in Fiji airs an advertisement that tells clients, when you die, your wife should have something to help her when you're gone. Is this because the bank thinks that women are not engaged in paid employment in Fiji? Or does this bank not want women as clients?

Aside from blatant corporate bias, the political arena is also soaked with misogyny. A candidate is quoted as saying "It's very important for me that my Indo-Fijian brothers endorse my party..." Is it because he wants only men's votes? Is it because he does not think women's votes matter because women do not matter?? Or rather, that once men endorse his party, the patriarchal system will ensure that women will vote for them just because the men said so?

By **Angelyn Singh**

Another politician mentions in one of the local dailies "...which will allow the ordinary worker to educate his children," "...I am also giving him dignity as a human being" "...to allow him to carry out his responsibilities," ... "would develop a nation of strong men who would be the perfect role models for their children." Well, that's quite a mouthful! Let us review, only men are ordinary workers? Only men can have dignity and responsibilities and only strong men can be perfect role models? I'm pretty sure certain cultures entertain violence because of so called strong men but that is another conversation.

Do politicians think that women don't vote? Or read the papers? You may be thinking, what's the big deal? It's the old Indian saying, *kamti bolo jasti samjho* (read between the lines, don't be literal!)

The big deal is erasure. Erasure is excluding groups of people in what you say, write and think. For example, I went to a Hare Krishna wedding and they announced that all the matajis (mothers) and bacheys (children) may queue for food. I am not a mother so does that mean I should wait till they ask women who don't have children to be announced?

In addition to erasure, we have normalization of stereotypes. We have a toothpaste ad campaign on

TV called "You first mommy," where a mother tells us about how her kid is learning to brush and mothers should brush with their children. Fantastic but this makes me ask "Don't fathers brush their teeth?" Why are we showing only mothers as nurturers and caregivers? Where are the men? If the woman was a solo parent then fine, clearly she's the one to teach her child to brush. Where's the representation of other family members helping with the childrearing? If it is not too much of a stretch, perhaps we can look at certain lyrics of songs where men are being referred to as King or Man while we have singers referring to women as girl, baby and princess. An example is the song 'Punk Rock Princess' by 'Something Corporate'. The lyrics in question are: If you could be my punk rock princess, I would be your garage band king. The power differential is amazing. While the singer (a man can be a king) the (young) woman he is wooing can only be his princess and not his equal (king).

Bottom line: Using gendered male as default language is old-fashioned, erasure, heterosexist, stereotypical and downright lazy! There is no point in lumping everyone into a blanket statement when we are all unique individuals with our own identity.

Language is powerful. If we want people to listen to us and understand what we are saying, it is our responsibility as communicators to reduce the likelihood that the person receiving our message does not misinterpret what we are telling them. Nor should they feel excluded and think that the message is not meant for them. "Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habit. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny." Lao Tzu



Dame Meg Taylor creates history in the Pacific



Dame Meg Taylor

I know I wasn't the only Pacific woman to feel a surge of pride upon hearing of Dame Meg Taylor's appointment. To say that her credentials are impressive would be nothing short of an understatement. Dame Meg Taylor has practised law in Papua New Guinea, served as a member of the Law Reform Commission and was based in Washington DC as an Ambassador for PNG. Accepting the title of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2002, Dame Taylor also held the positions of Vice President, Compliance Adviser Ombudsman for the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) for the World Bank Group up until this year.

Add to that her recent distinguished post and you have an iconic figure that represents an idyllic vision for all Pacific women, particularly young women. A

By Genevieve Sukhdeo

vision that in the not too distant future, we will have increased visibility in legislature to implement law and policy reforms for a positive impact on our lives. Local governments will include women not just as mere observers but major players in the political sphere, heavily involved in national decision making. A vision that maybe one day, legal impediments hindering our political progress will be removed and awareness raised on the significance of gender quality and its links to sustainability. It has already been established that women comprise about fifty percent of Fiji's population. Why then is that number not reflected in Parliament, the Senate, local governing bodies or even large corporations?

That is why I'm celebrating the fact that along with Dame Meg Taylor, the Forum also elected Cristelle Pratt and Andie Fong Toy as their Deputy Secretary Generals. Both women bring with them extensive experience in high level policy analysis, development and programme management. Fong Toy is Deputy Secretary General - Economic Governance and Political & Security Programmes, while Pratt is Deputy Secretary General - Strategic Partnerships &

Coordination, Corporate Services Programmes.

Not only am I ecstatic about the positive influence and change that these three highly skilled and talented women will bring to our side of the hemisphere, I'm excited about the message behind this new development. That regardless of your gender, you can reach the highest echelons of success and be of service to your communities, your country and the region as a whole. I'm celebrating because any young woman reading this can now visualize herself as the next Secretary General, Head of State, Member of Parliament or CEO – and believe that it is well within her reach to do so.



Cristelle Pratt



Andie Fong Toy

CRPD Ratification Focus Group: Creating Spaces for Persons Living with Disabilities

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement enthusiastically accepted the invitation to contribute to the Convention of the Rights of Persons Living with Disability (CRPD) Ratification Research Focus Group. The discussions centred on effective ways the Government of Fiji can take concrete action through ratification. The Rights in this Convention not only recognises but reaffirms that people living with disabilities can enjoy the same human rights as everyone else.

These rights include:

- i. Equality before the law without discrimination
- ii. Freedom from torture
- iii. Freedom from exploitation
- iv. Freedom from violence and abuse
- v. The Right to education
- vi. The Right to participate in political and public life

By Faranise Ratu

and;
vii. The Right to an adequate standard of living.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international treaty that identifies the rights of persons with disabilities and includes the obligation of State parties to the Convention to further the progress of ensuring those rights.

The first step towards this Convention was to sign the treaty which Fiji did, demonstrating her willingness to be included. The second process involving ratification is yet to be achieved. The obligation of States who are part of this Convention is mainly to adopt legislations that aim to promote and protect the rights of person(s) living

with disabilities and policies that would abolish any sort of discrimination.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on 13th December, 2006 and was opened for signatures in 2007. Men and women, both young and old who are living with disabilities, have been waiting four years for their rights to be officially recognized.

To conclude, persons living with disabilities only want to participate fully and effectively in an inclusive society, to be respected, to have equal opportunities, accessibility and to enjoy life without the bondage of discrimination. The Movement happily contributed to this research focus group because we believe that women's rights are human rights and that women living with disabilities are entitled to the same privileges and opportunities that come with those rights.

Transitions from page 2

"I am humbled to join the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to give my work a gendered perspective and focus. With experience in the area of Transitional Justice, the opportunity to work with the Gender and Transitional Justice Team at the Movement is an exciting challenge. I still pledge my commitment to peacebuilding and the rule of law but exploring the gender lens inspired me to join the Movement."

Genevieve Sukhdeo

After three enriching years at the Fiji

Broadcasting Corporation, Genevieve has joined the Movement as its new Communications Officer. She was motivated to join the organization after becoming involved with the Fiji Young Women's Forum where she participated as the sole media representative. She has previously worked in several marketing and communications roles including that of a radio personality, television presenter, a production assistant responsible for co-producing a local show, as well as an events and promotions officer. Genevieve volunteered as a Youth Campaign Co-ordinator and Polling Agent during the 2006 General Elections where she learnt a great deal pre and post-elections with other young volunteers. She feels that this along with her other

professional and personal experiences, have prepared her quite well for her new role at FWRM.

"This is an epic move for me personally, as advancing Gender Equality and pushing for the voices of Fiji's young women to be heard is extremely important to me. Joining the Movement is definitely one of life's major highlights! I am so happy to work alongside the brilliant minds and diverse personalities at FWRM, to learn and contribute to the progress of feminism on a national level. It is also my goal to increase our membership drive, promote further brand visibility and enhance awareness of the work we do and why we do it."



Tribute to Moushmi

- ELFA Alumni, FYWF Participant, Young Woman Leader



- all soon to perish at any given time. And on behalf of the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni, it was a pleasure working with her.
Rest in Peace Moushmi.

I knew Moushmi long before I got acquainted with her through our shared civil society network interests. She walked right up to me when we first met, looked me square in the eye, introduced herself, what she was there to do & proceeded to put me through an inquiry whilst still standing, inches off my face. I thought, "What a cute little Indian girl!" I wanted to hug & pinch her as I would a younger sister.

My first impression couldn't have been further from bulls-eye. In the years that I grew to know her, hear of her, work with her, debate with her, perform in activism spaces with her, she morphed into anything but cute & little. She was tough! Her

By **Tavai Bale**

intelligent intimidation was a pleasant surprise & it moved & encouraged me in ways I will never be able to tell her. Anyone who knew her would agree that she was a force of life all on her own, moving against regular trends for sheer rebellion against norms. I liked that ALOT about her. Enabling her environment and situations to suit her & the people she loved, despite living with disabilities that would otherwise, get most people down.

It's characters like Moushmi, that we should all hope life throws at us every once in a while for the sole enrichment of our experiences as human beings

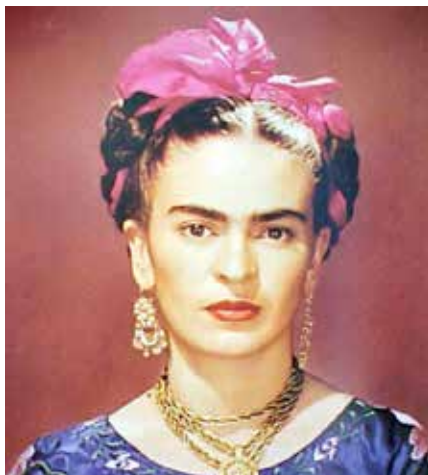
A visit to Casa Azul or the Blue House

"I never painted dreams, I painted my own reality" *Frida Kahlo*

By **Losana Tuiraviravi**

I was part of a group selected to attend a Leaders Network of Action Partners from around the globe under the Oxfam International Youth Partnership that has been running for 10 years. Presently, it is undergoing a transitional phase of being led by Young People that have gone through the Partnership program. This was a five day workshop of intense strategic planning and indentifying its 'Theory of Change' for the partnership program. Amazingly, this workshop was held in Mexico. Now here was a chance for me to visit some great sites I had only read about! After five intensive days of strategizing, a few of us got together in our free time to take a tour around the City. My priority was the Frida Kahlo Museum visit in Coyoacan which is about a 2 hour drive out of the main city centre.

Born as Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y Calderón, she is famously known as Frida Kahlo. Despite unfortunate events that occurred in her life at an early age, she never withdrew her love and passion for art. Just by looking at her artwork and even her fashion sense, you could tell that Frida was a colourful person with a very strong personal outlook. Frida was married to a famous muralist, Diego Rivera. I came to know briefly about this artist in one of our Emerging Leaders Forum 4 sessions on Art and Activism at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. I longed to watch a film based on her life but alas, I was unable to. I compensated by zealously reading about her life instead. The flames were reignited when our former Communications Officer Shazia Usman made me pledge that I'd visit the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico.



The visit to the famous Museo Frida Kahlo (Casa Azul) was amazing! Lines of tourists and locals stretched as far as the eye could see as we awaited entrance to the home of Frida and Diego. Before making our grand entrance, we had to undergo a very strict security check before entering the Museum. My first visit was to the gallery of the famous painter with all her majestic artwork ranging from Self Portrait with thorn necklace and hummingbird, Two Fridas, Little Deer to name a few that even included explanations on her colour palettes used in all her paintings. I then moved on to more of her interesting handiwork on display and her bedroom containing the clothes she wore in her last days which were laid out on her bed. We continued to the rest of the Rivera's house which displayed their cutlery, plates, cups and other private family treasures before journeying into Diego Rivera's room and the kitchen.

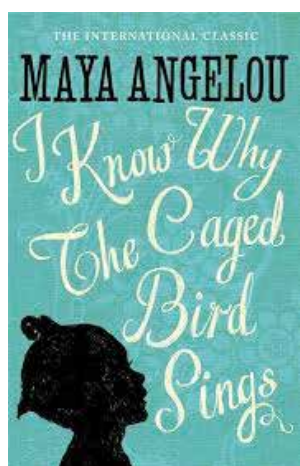
Another separate building held displays of Frida Kahlo's dresses, shoes, jewellery and her accessories. The tour guide informed us that they had recently opened displays of her dresses and accessories to the public as it was displayed in a separate location. So I was fortunate to have seen her entire wardrobe! Interestingly, we came across some of her corsets and these were inspired by some well-known designers who interpreted her creations into their designs.

After viewing the galleries right up to their own home, you will feel just how powerful Frida's art is. Each of her artwork speaks volumes of what she was going through, what she felt and how she sees things around her. This visit has been memorable for me and every single second well used at viewing the Rivera's La Casa. For anyone planning to visit Mexico, don't forget to visit Coyoacan!

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Author: **Maya Angelou**
 Review by **Anita Sethi**

The caged bird “sings of freedom”, writes Maya Angelou in her poem “Caged Bird” – a poignant recurring image throughout her work, as she eloquently explores the struggle to become liberated from the shackles of racism and misogyny.



This evocative first volume of her six books of autobiography, originally published in 1969 (1984 in the UK), vividly depicts Angelou’s “tender years” from the ages of three to 16, partly in the American south during the depression-wracked 1930s,

while also offering timeless insights into the empowering quality of books.

The painful sense of being unwanted haunts her early childhood, for when Maya (then known as Marguerite) is three and her brother Bailey four they are sent to the “musty little town” of segregated Stamps, Arkansas wearing tags on their wrists addressed to “To whom it may concern”, dispatched by their parents in California who had decided to end their “calamitous marriage”. Living with their grandmother, “Momma”, who owns a general merchandise store, and Uncle Willie, they suffer racist incidents both in the store and on the streets – nowhere feels safe. Sent to live with her mother, Maya endures the trauma of rape by her mother’s lover Mr. Freeman (“a breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart”). After Freeman is murdered, she stops speaking, frightened of words.

Angelou finds her voice and a love of language and books through the help of Mrs. Bertha Flowers who, writes Angelou, “has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be”. The memoir’s absorbing emotional arc traces Angelou’s growth from inferiority complex to confidence, finding the strength to tackle “the puzzle of inequality and hate” and be hired as the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco thanks to her “honeycomb of determination”.

Challenging societal structures, Angelou also succeeds in altering literary structures, experimenting with the capabilities of memoir – indeed; her editor had dared her to “write an autobiography as literature”. Told with a winning combination of wit and wisdom, this is a paean to the powers of storytelling to build bridges across divides, and heal what has been damaged.

Excerpted from <http://www.theguardian.com>

The Fault In Our Stars

Review by **Christy Lemire**

It should be agonizing, this tale of doomed love between cancer-stricken teens. It should be passionate, engrossing, suspenseful, something—even unabashed melodrama would have been appropriate, given the subject matter.

Instead, the film version of the best-selling novel “The Fault in Our Stars” feels emotionally inert, despite its many moments that are meant to put a lump in our throats. Perhaps it’s trying so hard to bludgeon us over the head and make us feel deeply that the result is numbing instead. There’s something just off about it for the vast majority of the time—an awkwardness to the staging, framing and pacing in director Josh Boone’s adaptation of author John Green’s tear-jerking, young adult phenomenon, and a need to spell everything out.

So much of what worked on the page—and made Green’s writing so lively and engaging—gets lost in translation and feels uncomfortably precocious when actual people actually say his words out loud. (Screenwriters Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber, who also wrote the romantic charmers “(500) Days of Summer” and “The Spectacular Now,” remained very faithful to the book, which should make the core tween/teen fan base happy. Okay? Okay.)



There’s a specificity to Green’s language; his characters are hyper-verbal, self-aware and fiercely biting in the tradition of “Heathers” and “Clueless.” They know all too well that pop culture depicts cancer—especially young people with cancer—in a mawkish manner that they refuse to accept as they regard their own conditions. But while the flip, jaunty verbosity they use as a shield produces some pleasingly acerbic humor, it often feels forced and false in this setting.

Still, Shailene Woodley’s abiding, disarming naturalism consistently keeps you engaged. She just doesn’t hit a false note. Following winning turns in the indie dramas “The Descendants” and “The Spectacular Now,” and the blockbuster “Divergent,” Woodley continues to cement her accessible and likable on-screen persona. Her work is so strong; it makes you wish she had a better performance to play off of to create the sparky chemistry at the heart of this story.

Woodley stars as Hazel Grace Lancaster, a 16-year-old Indianapolis girl who’s diagnosed with cancer at 13. It weakens her lungs, forcing her to drag an oxygen tank behind her wherever she goes and to stop to rest after climbing a flight of stairs. While her situation looked bleak a few years ago, participation in a new drug trial has prolonged her life for an indefinite amount of time. Her parents (Laura Dern and Sam Trammell, with whom she shares some lovely, honest moments) try not to hover over their daughter as she attempts to maintain some vague semblance of teenage life, and they even share her fondness for using dark humor to defuse difficult moments.

Mom insists that Hazel attends weekly cancer support group meetings (where comedian Mike Birbiglia is the amusingly earnest leader). There, she meets the handsome and equally loquacious Augustus Waters (Ansel Elgort, who coincidentally played Woodley’s brother earlier this year in “Divergent”). A former high school basketball star, Augustus lost his right leg below the knee to the disease and now walks with a prosthetic. In Hazel, he immediately recognizes a kindred spirit: a quick-witted smart-ass who can’t take any of the feel-good platitudes seriously.

While Woodley navigates the complexity of Green’s dialogue with ease, Elgort seems stiff and uncomfortable by comparison. His character is meant to be a bit pompous and formal in the beginning but instead comes off as nervous, and even seems to be rushing or slurring his lines at times. Elgort is boyishly handsome (in a way that’s distractingly reminiscent of “Love Story”-era Ryan O’Neal, actually) but never quite radiates the charisma required to keep up with Woodley. Their pairing feels like a missed opportunity.

Hazel and Augustus’ shared love of reading inspires a trip to Amsterdam to seek out the reclusive writer of Hazel’s favorite novel, the fictitious “An Imperial Affliction,” which also happens to be about a young woman living with cancer. Willem Dafoe brings a jolt of creepiness to the role of the alcohol-addled author, a rare sensation in a film that too often feels tidy. Their visit also sets the stage for the oddest scene of all (in both the book and the film) when Hazel and Augustus share their first kiss before an applauding crowd of tourists in the attic of Anne Frank’s house. Yeesh.

Yet we know this bliss can’t last. And so “The Fault in Our Stars” descends into major hanky territory with an overpowering assist from a nearly omnipresent soundtrack of wistful alt-rock tunes that tell us what to feel, and when, and how much. (I will happily admit to having tears stream down my face during the third act of Green’s book but, alas, did not get choked up here.)

Theoretically, these iconoclasts wouldn’t want their story to be told in such obvious and heavy-handed fashion. To borrow their favorite line from Hazel’s favorite book: “Pain demands to be felt.”

Excerpted from <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>

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The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural non-governmental organisation committed to removing discrimination against women through institutional reforms and attitudinal changes.

By means of core programmes and innovative approaches, FWRM practices and promotes feminism, democracy, good governance and human rights. We strive to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders in Fiji, indigenous and locally-born women. The FWRM vision is for the women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities and to live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multiculturalism and human rights prevail.

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