



Balance

"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"

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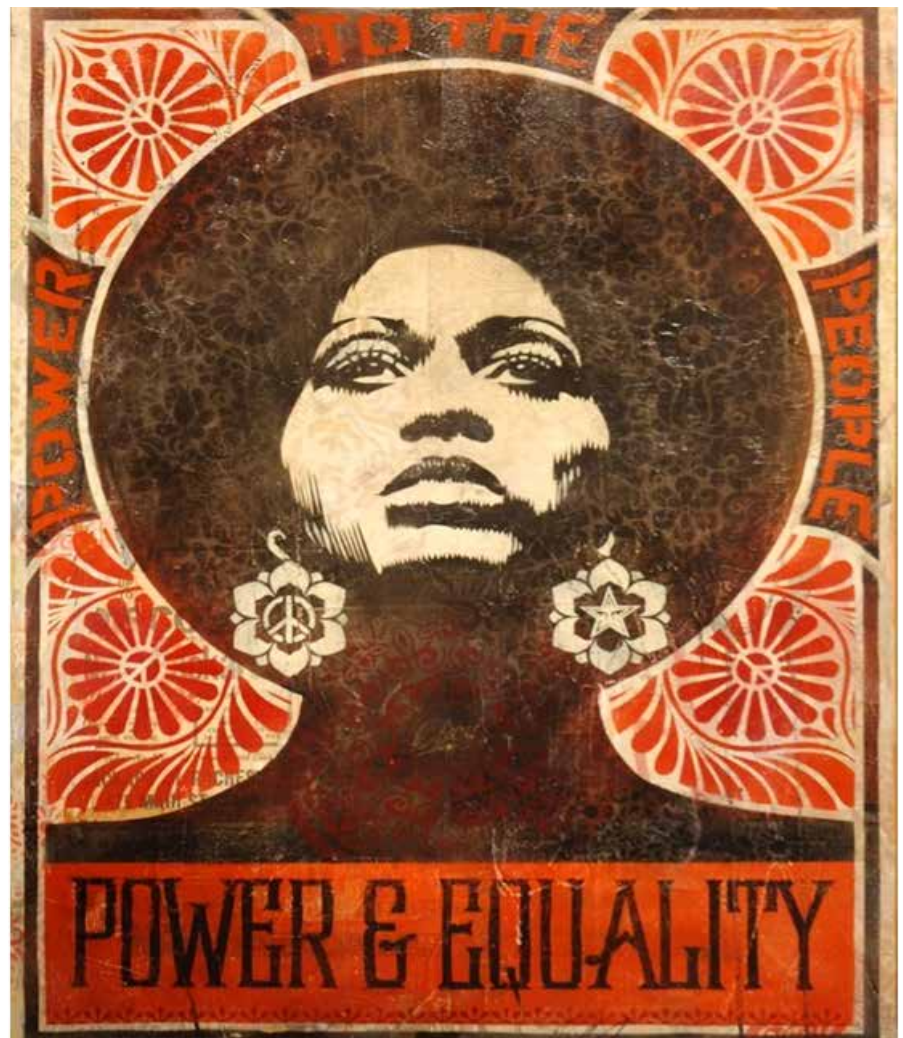
WOMEN in the HOUSE

By **Genevieve Sukhdeo**

IT'S been quite an empowering year for Fiji's women. Not only did 44 aspiring women politicians out of 249 candidates contest the elections, 8 have made it to Parliament. This is Fiji's first national elections in eight years. It would have been wonderful to witness women make up 30 percent of the House, instead of the current 14 percent. However, it is satisfying to know that these women parliamentarians were elected through a voting process. Fiji has a higher regional average than other Pacific islands sitting at 13.4 percent collectively and the rate of women who contested the September 17 elections was at 17 percent, compared to only six per cent in the 2006 elections. Despite the fact that eight women also made it to parliament eight years ago, it was a race comprising of 27 female candidates and 311 male candidates – that's 25 women under six party banners and two independent candidates.

These numbers definitely serve as a testament to the change in cultural and societal mindsets but there is still so much more to be done. Former Minister for Women Dr. Jiko Luveni was sworn in as the country's first female Speaker of the House, while Ro Teimumu Kepa recently took up the reins as the first female Leader of the Opposition. Many of these candidates received immense support within their various party structures with four being chosen for the role of Party President. Roshika Deo from 'Be The Change' and one of two independents racked up more votes than earlier anticipated, performing better than a few of the other political parties.

The Movement has always strongly advocated for a critical mass of women in Parliament. It is our observation that the media both pre and post-elections drew attention to women candidates and women's issues to some extent. The diverse line-up possesses a high level of



Shepard Fairey – Power & Equality

academia, extensive experience in a wide array of fields and a strong skill set. We deem this a positive sign, as an increase in women legislators demands a more 'responsive' approach to the needs of the female constituency. Personally, I am hopeful that this constituency will be further empowered to take up leadership positions

themselves. That after seeing these exemplary women during parliament debates, participating intensely in discussions and shaping public policies for the betterment of all women, it may resonate with them that their political participation is indeed significant.

Photograph courtesy artisttheestate UK





Greetings from FWRM! Welcome to our first issue of Balance in Fiji's new democratic space after 8 long years. FWRM with our partners in the Fiji Women's Forum worked tirelessly to engage women and girls in Fiji's democratization. It was not an easy journey but on September 17th, 8 women were elected to Parliament. They make up 16% of

the House of Representatives and while this is a small gain, there is still so much more that we need to do. (Please read our analysis.)

Our GIRLS programme performed to a jam-packed house after almost seven months rehearsing. The 28 girls, aged between 10 and 12, came from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds developed, scripted,

and acted in an original play, "A Series of Unfortunate Events." The powerful play addressed issues of child abuse, sexism and bullying, with the empowering message that knowledge is power. This programme continues to inspire the girls, their families, friends and all of us at FWRM. Great effort GIRLS – YOU ROCK!

These last three months globally has been focused on the review of the Beijing Platform of Action and the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. There is a short piece talking about FWRM's role on the CSO steering committee on the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing +20. This November conference will be convened as part of the regional review process feeding into the global dialogue to be held in 2015. Again, FWRM will be playing a small part in this process. Also read an article from one of our staff on the SIDS conference in Samoa!

We have also brought back our self-care column – here we will be focusing on the different ways to "decompress" and de-brief. We at FWRM encourage and support wellness practices, as a strategy for the sustainability of the women's movement. We strongly advocate the idea of "leading by example" by leading a lifestyle that consists of a balance between the human rights line of work and self-care. So we encourage our readers to send us tips to feature in this column.

These are just some of the tantalizing morsels on offer in this quarter's publication. I have had a wonderful time being part of this publication and FWRM – I have enjoyed being a contributor, a reader, a critic, and a supporter. This is my last Balance as the Executive Director – to our readers – thank you for your support, to FWRM – ma'lo for the opportunity. This publication is only going to get better!

In solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo



Transitions

By **Genevieve Sukhdeo**

Shabina Khan

AFTER seven years of dedicated service to the movement, we farewell one of our colleagues, Shabina Khan. Shabina was a Human Rights Training Officer with our Gender & Transitional Justice programme and one of our longest serving staff members. Joining UN Women as a National Co-ordinator for one of their projects, she leaves with extensive experience in the field and played a

significant role in our Voter Awareness sessions in the lead-up to elections. Known for her adventurous spirit, chic fashion sense and love of rock music, Shabina will definitely be missed here at the office! We wish her all the very best with her future endeavours, both personal and professional.

Good luck Shabina!



The initial phase of these projects in the lead-up to Fiji's Elections was supported by the European Union.



Supported by the European Union

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My Guide to Voting

By **Mamta Chand**

ONE of the critical outcomes of the Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) was the publication of the 'My Guide to Voting'. As the name suggests, this booklet was designed and developed by young women for young women to meaningfully and actively participate in Fiji's 2014 democratization process. Without young women's full effective engagement in national elections, democracy cannot be achieved. Hence, the motivation to empower their participation. Young women firmly consider "Personal is Political," consequently creating visibility in the election process. This has been positively extensive with the slogan "nothing about us without us!"

Early 2014, saw the development of MG2V where content provided by young women in the Northern, Western and Central divisions were collated. The MG2V journey has been a challenging but exciting process for the Young Women In Leadership team. Due to time constraints, 5000 books were printed in late July but with the overwhelming demand for the guide, 2,600 copies were printed in early August! By the second week of September, 100% of MG2V was distributed. The guide was designed with the objective of choosing one's personal elections journey by selecting a page number and either moving forward or backward. At the end, after one decides to vote, a personal "My Election Plan" is provided to assist the voter on September 17th. Voters were enthusiastically encouraged to access their right to vote.

FYWF co-conveners and participants along with FWRM's wider networks within the Fiji Women's Forum, saw a rapid and successful outreach of MG2V. Apart from the Central, Western, Eastern and Northern parts of the country, the guide has been distributed to Rotuma, Taveuni, Koro Island, Rabi, Levuka and Lakeba.

The MG2V has been well-received not only by young women (18-35yrs) which was the initial target group, but also by elderly women, men and boys. They perceived the guide to be interesting, as well as informative regarding the elections and women's participation. Upon further inspection, they commented that it was easy to understand and relatable to the Fijian context. Whilst talking about the significance of young women's participation, we observed an enormous amount of support in addressing challenges of Fiji's young women.

The MG2V itself was the recipient of positive comments on its attractive use of colour, 'easy to

grasp' content and local illustrations. From the important definitions, access to information, good leaders and a brief

on party manifestos, it enabled readers to gain a thorough comprehension of the voting process. More importantly, young women's values were addressed as they became more confident in linking political manifestos to their beliefs. Upon reading the Fiji Young Women's Declaration (FYWF-D) 2014, young women were able to understand the rationale of the manifesto. Through the lobby of the FYWF-D, the challenges of young women are to be made visible on the national agenda via political manifesto and through various national/regional and international forums.

The *My Guide to Voting* was a great initiative in the lead-up to the 2014 elections. However, the journey is only just beginning. All young women leaders have the responsibility to continue the amazing political journey in addressing and putting young women's challenges on the national agenda.

Citizenship Rights Training (Phase 2)

By **Alanieta Velulu**

In 2012, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement was awarded a European Union (EIDHR) grant for a project titled Enhancing the political participation of Marginalised Women Voters. The overall objective of the action was to increase the political participation of women, particularly women from minority and marginalised groups, in national democratic processes.

In 2013 and early 2014, FWRM implemented Phase 1 of its Citizenship Rights Training which included;

- i. 8 trainings in the Central, Western, Eastern and Northern Divisions targeting specifically Indo Fijian women and young women. A Citizenship Rights Guidebook for Women in Fiji was developed and utilised in the 8 trainings. The training content included:
 - What is elections and why elections?
 - Role of candidates in elections
 - What are manifestos?
 - Characteristics of good and bad leaders
 - Importance of voting and why women should vote
 - How can women make decisions on whom to vote for?

- Holding elected leaders accountable
- ii. A Media campaign which utilized television and radio commercials and radio talk back shows on Communications Fiji Limited and the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, as well as the use of FWRM's social media pages such as Facebook and You Tube
- iii. Media monitoring of mainstream media stakeholders and their portrayal of women's political participation

The release of the Elections Decree on 28th March, 2014 provided significant electoral information from voting to how votes would be counted. Whilst there are several implications of Section 115, the Movement continued with its preparatory plans for Phase 2 of the project.

Continuing from Phase 1, Phase 2 focused on how elections would be conducted in accordance to the Electoral Decree 2014 and how votes would translate to seats in Parliament. Our Phase 2 training which concentrated on "How to Make a Valid Vote" and the

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G.I.R.L.S “A Series of Unfortunate Events – Fiji Style”

In mid August, we staged a grand public performance called “A Series of Unfortunate Events – Fiji Style” at the USP ICT Theatre Centre. The night was packed with excitement, as we witnessed around 550 people from diverse backgrounds arrive to watch our GIRLS perform. GIRLS (Grow Inspire Relate Lead & Succeed) is a two-year theatre programme for young girl leaders between the ages of 10 to 12 years.

The play’s concept was created using stories shared by the girls, involving a series of disasters. Early this year, the girls were asked to share their individual experiences on being treated differently because of their gender. They were asked to consider different situations such as their home environment, schools and respective communities. The play showcased the main characters in difficult situations facing discrimination, bullying, peer pressure, child abuse, and other factors that discourage and demean them. Despite these unfortunate events, the GIRLS share their messages and stories on ways in which they can triumph against the odds. The script reflects their voice based on their storytelling and the production was intended to empower others.

At the end of their performance, the GIRLS produced some practical messages to the audience. They want to

By **Lillian Delana**

live in a peaceful world without violence, and they desire that any and all forms of discrimination be rejected. The GIRLS ended the night by singing to a Pharrell William’s song titled “Happy” where they emphasised that because they are girls they need to be respected. This song was developed to indicate that the knowledge imparted to these courageous young ladies have inspired them to speak out about inequality and injustice.

The FWRM GIRLS team has been meeting for the past five months, conducting theatre development based activities to develop the girls’ ability to voice their issues in a healthy way. The group of vibrant 28 GIRL leaders have been involved in non- competitive theatre games, yoga, interactive exercises, personal story-telling, song, dance, as well as art and scriptwriting. This has enabled them to feel comfortable working and interacting with one other and in their home environment. The project engages them in creative arts to build their confidence, while also incorporating themes based on feminism and human rights.

The GIRLS are preparing for the 16 days of Activism in



November where they will be performing the same play in different schools throughout the wider community. An informed and empowered girl is better able to exercise agency over her own life, to be an actor rather than a recipient of rights and services and to become a visible and active member of society.

Beyoncé’s VMA performance was the feminist moment I’ve been waiting for

Behold one of the most powerful pop-culture messages of my lifetime

I’M old-ish, and it’s been a while since I’ve watched the Video Music Awards. I’m not saying that the last time I tuned in to the full broadcast was to watch Madonna hump the stage in a synthetic wedding dress, but it might have been within a decade of that.

On Monday morning I woke to images of Beyoncé, striking a dramatic pose—dressed as the world’s most beautiful disco ball—in front of the word “FEMINIST” and felt like an excited kid all over again. Or rather, an excited kid in a far more thrilling pop culture universe than the one I was an actual kid in.

The singer, who will be 33 next week, was performing at the end of the annual awards ceremony, just before receiving the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard award. She sang a 16-minute medley, and ten minutes in, the words from Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TEDx Talk “We Should All Be Feminists”—which Beyoncé sampled in her 2013 song “Flawless”—began to pop up on the screen while Adichie’s voice said them aloud.

“We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are,” said/read Adichie. “We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, “You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you will threaten the man.” It culminated with Adichie’s definition of feminist—“The person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes”—and the shimmering figure of Beyoncé sliding straight out in front of the word, all lit up.

It was a thing of slick, exhilarating beauty. A thing that was, yes, so trivial and packaged that it really should, I realize, be truly meaningless in this summer of real-world, non-staged, non-shimmery police brutality and restricted rights and horrifying incivility. And yet, despite its superfluity, there it was, the most powerful, and certainly the most highly polished pop-culture message of my lifetime: that attention to gender inequity is alive,

By **Rebecca Traister**

revived, and that it is powered today by a broader, more diverse, more youthful and far glossier energy than it has been in the past four decades.

And no, that doesn’t mean that Beyoncé Knowles is the single face of feminism, or that she stands in any more sufficiently than any of feminism’s other flawed messengers, past or present. But she’s sending a signal, and the fact that that signal is coming from *inside* the house, the entertainment industry - hell, the fact that Beyoncé herself is arguably the most powerful person *in* that house - means something that we should all be paying attention to.

These days, as online feminism swells and roils with internal disagreements, it’s easy to forget that not too long ago, there was *no* online feminism. We forget that not too long ago, a few major women’s organizations were toying with the idea of abandoning the word “feminism,” not because of its complicated history with regard to inclusion and women of color, but because it turned off too many young women. Not too long ago, the Daily Beast was releasing polling proclaiming feminist “a dirty word.”

Sunday night, Beyoncé put the word in lights and did not simply use her own voice and body to define it, but turned to another woman’s work as her source. This is a big deal. Having just reread *Backlash*—the book that brilliantly captured the dimly antifeminist political and pop cultural environment in which I was a young person—I couldn’t help but think that the book’s author, Susan Faludi, must be plotting. Though she’s always struck me as sort of Eeyoreish, so maybe she, like other critics—both on the left and the right—are underwhelmed by Beyoncé’s feminist credentials: the fact that she presents herself, or allows herself to be



presented, in a terrifically feminized, sexualized way; that her career is inherently capitalist in nature; that “Drunk in Love,” performed with her husband Jay-Z, includes the troubling lyric, “Eat the cake, Anna Mae,” a reference to Ike Turner’s abuse of Tina Turner, one of Beyoncé’s most formidable forerunners.

To this kind of discussion, I say: Yes, by all means, argue about sex positivity and objectification and the presentation of female erotic power! Pay attention to the way that those on the right work to dismantle women’s claim to power bit by bit, and to those progressives who validly question the inconsistencies and complicated contexts from which Beyoncé’s messages emerge, just as we should question the inconsistencies and complicated contexts from which other contemporary popular feminist voices, from Lena Dunham’s to Sheryl Sandberg’s to Tina Fey’s, have emerged. Bey’s Sunday night performance took place at an event that last year spat up Robin Thicke

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Moce Viri!

After 13 years of determined leadership and wisdom, we farewell our Executive Director, the "Queen of Everything", team member of Democracy Defenders and friend Virisila Buadromo. During my short time here, I have come to respect and admire this strong-willed lady for her refreshing honesty, intelligence, sense of humour and directness.

Viri is truly an inspiration to women and young feminists everywhere. The longest serving head of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, we applaud her for her passion and commitment in upholding the values of feminism, human rights and democracy. As this is her last Balance issue with us, we felt it only fitting to include a couple of touching tribute messages from her friends and fellow feminists, Imrana Jalal and Gina Hong Lee.



Tribute To Viri

By **Imrana Jalal**

FWRM founder

I have known Virisila for over 15 years. I knew of her first as a radio journalist. She always interested me, as someone who had not reached her full promise in that profession, as noble as the Fourth Estate is. We actively headhunted her to apply as ED for FWRM. We needed a person to be able to communicate FWRM's vision to the public, and Viri appeared to me, to be capable of doing that. She was young, youthful, smart, and had a joyful and charming personality. Gina and I also had a personal agenda of wanting a more youthful persona for FWRM, so that it could attract more young women. History has proven us right, at least in that regard!

Having said that, as Board Chair, I had a fight on my hands at Board level. Viri was my chosen candidate right from after the interview. The final short list was two dynamic and personable young women, the other candidate, an already well-regarded lawyer and environmentalist. It was the longest board meeting ever, up to that time, as a majority was against Viri's appointment and unequivocally in favour of the lawyer. Some on the Board saw Viri as smart and personable, but a party girl and "social butterfly" nevertheless, lacking

in substance. I personally liked the party girl bit about her, being a bit of a "social butterfly" myself! Interesting how one is perceived as so mono-dimensional - as if enjoying parties and the good

life prevents one from also being a thinking woman. In my view, the best leaders are the ones who embrace life, and love life, in its many facets. I recall many years ago being referred to as a "social butterfly" by a very prominent politician, and a "lipstick feminist" by another feminist! History will be the judge. On the Board in favour of Viri, I belonged to a minority of about 3. After many arguments, voting rounds, and debates we finally got a majority vote, I think by one.

Viri will be happy to know that almost every one of those Board Members has since said, that Viri was the perfect choice. Some have personally and magnanimously expressed to me their sincere admiration for how Viri has conducted herself at FWRM, and how she has enriched FWRM's reputation and standing. Viri has fulfilled her promise in every way that I can think of. Whoever would have thought for instance that Viri would go from where she was, to eventually addressing distinguished Ministers of State, government officials and international experts at CEDAW in New York and the Human Rights Council in Geneva?! I don't think Viri was a feminist when she joined FWRM, but she has evolved into a dynamic feminist and human rights advocate. Viri has read widely and worked hard to fulfill the role expected of her. She has grown from every major crisis that FWRM has encountered.

Virisila is a passionate and award-winning women's

human rights defender with high levels of personal integrity and personal honesty. She is a hard working, strategic, overall performer, manager and leader. Through her leadership, Virisila has enhanced FWRM's profile and reputation and has lead it over the last decade to being a pre-eminent feminist and human rights organisation on the local scene, regionally and internationally. Virisila has worked hard to build relationships with other NGO's, States, and stakeholders in Fiji, the region and internationally, resulting in successful local and international campaigns, thereby establishing FWRM as a strategic partner of choice.

FWRM will stumble and falter temporarily, when Viri leaves, but it is a strong organisation and it will survive as it has before. The best testimony to good leadership is leaving behind a strong and sustainable organisation. I must say that FWRM has been extremely fortunate in its selection of Heads/Directors from the very first appointee, Peni Moore, to Viri. It is hard to think of a local NGO that has been this lucky, actually. We have had extraordinary women who have provided important strategic leadership for their times and each was absolutely right for their time. I have absolutely no regrets about being part of a recruitment panel employing each of them. These include Penelope Moore, Vani Dulaki, Praveen Sharma, Gina Hong Lee, Rajjeli Nicoll and Virisila Buadromo.

Viri, I wish you well in all your future endeavours my "sistha". I know you need to move on. You will be a great loss to FWRM but I know you will always have a place in your heart for it, and us. Go with our blessings sistha dear, but don't stray too far...

When Virisila first came to FWRM, I was skeptical about her suitability as the CEO of FWRM as she had no NGO sector experience. She had a corporate sector communications background. However, what she lacked in sector experience she made up for it by her keenness to learn. As the Head of FWRM for the last 13 years, Viri is an outstanding leader that we are proud of. I have observed and witnessed Viri's excellent strength as a feminist leader. Her strongest character is her resilience and tenacity. She is committed to justice and in building a better world for women. Despite the many obstacles

By **Gina Hong Lee**

Former board member FWRM

and personal attacks during the course of her tenure, she has bounced back stronger with a deeper resolve to the feminist cause.

One key highlight of Viri's time at FWRM is her ability to form networks and build partnerships. This is evident in her strategic role in the Fiji Women's Forum in forming and supporting a coalition to mobilize for

women's political empowerment. Viri's strategic direction and coalition building contributed to the effective alliance in fostering women leadership and increasing women's voice and participation.

We pay tribute to Viri as she ends her tenure at FWRM as the longest serving CEO. WE are honoured that she has committed such a long time in this role. We won't say farewell because we know Viri will continue to support FWRM. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.



Civil Society plan to Review 20 years of Beijing Platform for Action

A broad coalition of feminist and women's rights networks, constituencies and allies are preparing for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) regional and global review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A CSO Steering Committee of 16 organisations including regional networks, constituency based groups including Indigenous, migrant, women with disabilities, youth, LBT women, sub-regional representatives, and groups with specific expertise on women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights groups has formed to guide preparations.

The committee was created to ensure Asia Pacific civil society has an audible and influential role in reviewing progress and demanding genuine, accountable and binding processes to finally deliver on the promises made 20 years ago by governments.

The committee will collaborate to facilitate a Civil Society Forum to be held in Bangkok on the 15th and 16th of November 2014, prior to the UN ESCAP Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review. They will also provide substantive input to the regional and global stock-taking reports, liaise with UN Agencies, and ensure regional voices impact on the subsequent global processes of review.

By Virisila Buadromo

Civil society have stressed the need to focus on accountability and implementation of the Beijing Platform. The promises governments made 20 years ago have not been honored in a holistic and interconnected manner. In 2015, the UN will hold a Global Summit during the September General Assembly where governments are expected to identify priorities from the Beijing Platform for implementation and make specific commitments

to act and to provide the financial and other means of implementation necessary.

In the UN ESCAP Committee on Social Development meeting held in Bangkok on 18-20 August, civil society was able to make several interventions, including during the opening when FWRM's Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo spoke on behalf of the CSOs on accountability.

FWRM is one of the four Pacific members on the CSO steering committee. The others are Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji, Femlink Pacific and the Pacific Youth Council.



Women's Role in Sustainable Development recognised

IN early September, Heads of what's been termed "Small Islands Developing States" (SIDS) according to the UN Conference Paper 167/9 flocked into Samoa's capital, Apia for the 'Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States'. The conference also included civil society stakeholders and was held from September 1st – 4th. The overarching theme of the Third International Conference on SIDS is "The sustainable development of Small Island developing States through genuine and durable partnerships." In respect of this, there were six multi-stakeholder dialogues held in parallel with plenary meetings to facilitate the draft resolution document 223/3 which was also called the 'Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (Samoa Pathway)'.



This was enacted in accordance to affirmation from the Heads of States, on its commitment towards various UN conferences and summits on sustainable development like *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, *Agenda 21* and the *Barbados Programme of Action*. There was also re-affirmation to strategies towards the Millennium Development Goals. Amidst such political discussions, it was pleasant to mark a visibility of women. The group had successfully represented women's significant efforts in the sustainable development process of its states.

The draft resolution paper had dedicated clauses 76-77 on gender equality and women. A notable statement

By Menka Goundan

in the paper was the recognition of "gender equality and women's empowerment and the full realization of human rights for women and girls that have a transformative and multiplier effect on sustainable development and is a driver of economic growth in Small Island Developing States".

The paper further noted that: "Women can be powerful agents of change."

The draft resolution paper also stated supporting efforts of SIDS in this regard, outlining the excerpt below:

- (a) To eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls;
- (b) To integrate a gender perspective in priority areas for sustainable development;
- (c) To strengthen women's economic empowerment and ensure equal access to full and productive employment and decent work;
- (d) To end all forms of violence against women and girls;
- (e) To continue taking measures to ensure women's full, equal and effective participation in all fields and leadership at all levels of decision-making in the public and private sectors through such policies and actions as temporary special measures, as appropriate, and by setting and working to achieve concrete goals, targets and benchmarks;
- (f) To guarantee equal access to good-quality education and health care;
- (g) To ensure in small island developing States the

promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;

- (h) To tackle the structural and socio-economic inequalities and multiple intersecting forms of discrimination that affect women and girls, including those with disabilities, that hinder progress and development;
- (i) To give women equal rights with men to economic resources, including access to, ownership of and control over land and other forms of property, credit, inheritance, natural resources and appropriate new technologies.

Adopted from UN Draft Resolution paper 223/3 pages 20-21/32

Women's active role in sustainable development was also noted in terms of Water and Sanitation, Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustained and sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth with decent work for all.

In respect of human rights, SIDS also recognized the importance of freedom, peace and security and respect for human rights through its affirmation on "the importance of freedom, peace and security, respect for all human rights, including the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, the rule of law, gender equality, women's empowerment, reducing inequalities and the overall commitment to just and democratic societies for development".

In applause for a successful third international conference, the SIDS partners have been able to recognise women as an important part of sustainable development.

For more information on SIDS 2014, log onto www.sids2014.org



The Bees

Author: **Laline Paul**
by **Virisila Buadromo**



Let me just begin by saying I have never been a big fan of bees or hornets. Growing up I was stung several times and it hurt. So when I see or hear a bee – I duck. So how did I get convinced to read a book about those pesky buzzing stinging machines? Well it started after I read an article online that stated, “honey-bees and wild bees are the most important pollinators of many of the fruits and vegetables we eat. Of 100 crop species that provide 90% of our global food supply, 71 are bee-pollinated.”

The same article also pointed out that bees are now caught in the toxic web of our climate crisis. As global warming impacts our climate, changes in plant-flowering times have led to a massive decline in bee colonies. This trouncing is called “colony collapse disorder” (CCD). CCD threatens the health of an important species of bees: honeybees. The decline of these buzzy pollinators could have severe impacts on food production.

Anyway this book is just fascinating and Laline Paull had me hooked from her first sentence. I was swept away by her protagonist Flora 717 who is a bee with problems, right from the start. Her sisters in this batch of lowly sanitation workers emerge modestly: Flora smashes her way out of the pupating cell, in a storm of waxy shrapnel. She’s too big, she’s too dark, and she’s grotesquely ugly. But she’s strong, a quick learner and she can speak, while others of her caste are mute. In no time, she has attracted the attention of an exalted priestess bee, which saves her from summary execution by the deformity police, and finds her “most notable.” Soon, Flora has left her despised origins behind, and is rocketing up through the ranks: feeding the Queen’s hallowed newborns, tending the darling young grubs; encountering the glorious Maleness of the drones, and even, after a display of savage courage, privileged to attend on the Queen herself.

This is Paull’s debut novel and it is a tale of mother courage, conflict, and dystopia among social insects. When I was reading the book I kept thinking this is like “Hunger Games” but with furry bees. Like Hunger Games, the book is fast paced and tackles deeply human issues of racism, prejudice, and stolen lives. I especially loved the recreation of bee flight: the foragers like WWI ace pilots, roaring off the landing stage, dodging disaster on every mission; selfless and fantastically brave. Other elements that reminded me of one of my favourite books, Margaret Atwood’s “The Hand Maiden’s Tale” – was the rigid lifetime caste system, the lurid scenes of slaughter when the drones are culled, the gushing crushes on Holy Mother and on Maleness – reflect purely human assumptions about totalitarian states, and gender psychology. Let me not drop any more spoilers but I strongly recommend this read. If nothing else this book will re-affirm the importance of bees to nature and why we need to be informed and help bees survive. Start by taking two simple actions – make your garden a pollinator preserve and invite bees by including flowering plants and of course do not use pesticides. P.S most bees don’t sting, although a few species defend their nest. (Bumblebees are an exception.) Bees generally only use their stingers in defense.

from page 2

“Allocation of Seats” using the D’hondt method was conducted throughout the four divisions starting from the 14th of July and ending on the 12th of September, 2014.

The training methodology used in Phase 1 had to be changed in order to achieve maximum outreach. Hence, it was agreed that for Phase 2, the trainers would need to visit communities and train Phase 1 Participants. The participants were also required to organize training in their communities or with their networks and assist trainers to conduct the training. The simplified kit contained two exercises, including mock voting and the allocation of seats. However, due to the complexity of calculations involved in the allocation of seats, it came in an optional exercise based on one’s education level

and interest within the community.

In total, trainings were conducted in 80 communities while two Voter Education Awareness sessions were held at ANZ House in Kalabu Hub. Over 2000 people from diverse backgrounds attended our various training sessions. From the 2110 participants, 1638 were women both young and old, 467 were men and 5 were trans women. On most community visits, the trainers were required to conduct the training in basic English, Fiji Hindi and iTaukei because the target audience comprised mostly of elderly people with minimal level education. One of the main exercises was to conduct a mock election with fictitious political parties and candidates. This required the participant to choose their candidate by marking the sample ballot paper. The purpose of this exercise was to provide the participants with a sense of what to expect on Election

Half of a Yellow Sun

Directed by **Biyi Bandele**
by **Mike McCahill**



There are reasons to warm to Half of a Yellow Sun, rookie writer-director Biyi Bandele’s adaptation of the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie novel. Adichie’s Orange Prize-winning tale of love and loss, unfolding against the backdrop of a Nigeria caught between independence and civil war, has inspired one of the British film industry’s few recent engagements with the nation’s colonial legacy. What’s more, while streamlining the author’s fragmented narrative, Bandele has taken care to preserve the feminist thrust that sees heroine Olanna (a glowing Thandie Newton) pass from carefree society belle to reluctant domesticity.

Indeed, behind Newton and an impressively forthright Anika Noni Rose as Olanna’s liberated sister Kainene, the men are somewhat eclipsed. As Odenigbo, the womanising intellectual Olanna tumbles for, the newly prominent Chiwetel Ejiofor functions almost as a satellite to the main action, while Joseph Mawle’s weak-willed reporter Richard is forgotten for long stretches. Familiar problems of adaptation soon make themselves apparent: where the book was expansive in its reach, Bandele’s film makes for a rather cramped two hours. Worse, it sometimes appears naggingly detached from the upheavals it is attempting to portray.

Even as mounting tensions set these characters ricocheting around the country – sometimes together, sometimes apart – we’re offered only cursory glimpses of Nigerian life. Shoehorning everybody into sets smothered by late-Sixties finery, Bandele has to cut away to newsreel of soldiers amassing to suggest the storm gathering behind these walls; when the explosions inevitably follow, they go off with an air of cautious containment. A pivotal airport massacre at least allows Ben Onono and Paul Thomson’s thunderous orchestral score to better fit events, though still Bandele holds back on the violence, so as not to perturb the audience.

As a result, nothing quite matches the visceral impact of, say, Terry George’s Hotel Rwanda, which gave its juggling of matters domestic and political a widescreen, Hollywood heft: though Ejiofor puts over Odenigbo’s monologue on his mother’s death as well as we might expect from this much-garlanded performer, a more forceful movie would surely show the tragedy, instead of reporting it second-hand. This may be an issue of scale, and of our producers’ ability to mount this kind of grand, inclusive narrative on an evidently modest budget. Only a film as big as Africa could have done Adichie’s novel full justice; the treatment it gets here, equally honourable and hurried, reduces it to Nigerian soap with BAFTA-level acting.

Day and for them to practice casting a valid vote.

For the mock voting exercise, there were 5 political parties and 2 independent candidates, totalling 27 candidates. 11 of these were women. A total of 1788 votes were cast during the mock exercise with 346 invalid votes and 1442 valid votes. This made for an excellent outcome considering that it was a new system which participants were unfamiliar with. From the 1442 total valid votes cast, 862 votes were for women candidates.

The general feedback was positive and the training achieved its main purpose which was to clear doubts and confusion amongst our target group. Furthermore, we observed participants felt more confident once we informed them about the requirements and what to expect during Election Day.

About us

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.

Join us

YES! I want to support the
Fiji Women's Rights Movement

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Self-Care: Prioritise 'Me-Time'

By **Genevieve Sukhdeo**

Caring for your self. It should be an easy enough feat since we live in a progressive society, complete with all the latest gizmos and gadgets. So it shouldn't be too hard to relax, right? Wrong. American psychologist Laura Tirello points out on mental health blog *YourTango* that many people find it tiring to do just that. According to Tirello, she has observed many people 'forcing' self-care into their routine, forgetting that it should be a fun activity or hobby that brings you happiness.

She adds, "The interesting thing is that self-care is the fun stuff. My definition of self-care is letting yourself do whatever you want to do... Self-care only works when you listen to your body, and do what you want without resistance. For me, I've learned to do what I want to do in the moment... why? Because in that moment, my body is telling me it needs a break. My mind is probably overwhelmed with thoughts, and trying to do work at that moment would be highly unproductive. And when I do what I want in the moment, when I sit down to work, everything gets done in a much easier way. Because now I'm relaxed, I'm not resisting anything. My mind is free to produce what it really wants, and my body feels good."

As a feminist NGO and as women's human rights defenders, we often find ourselves overwhelmed and

in need of rejuvenation. So it's no surprise that FWRM zealously believes in the practice of self-care! Every Tuesday at 4pm sharp, we shut down and switch off from anything remotely work related. We head to the gym, eat a scrumptious meal (a very popular choice I might add), watch a movie, read or go for a walk. Ironically, Tuesday is considered the most productive day of the week, so it makes sense that we would pick this particular day to have self-care.

A couple of weeks ago, my more 'athletically inclined' colleagues, Kris, Alanieta, Lillian and Virisila, ran 10 kilometres in the Suva Marathon. In the lead up to the event, they actually went through the whole ritual of following a proper diet and exercise programme! Personally, this doesn't appeal to me as a form of relaxation... BUT it works for them and countless other people who find physical challenges therapeutic.

We'd like to encourage you to start/continue caring for your inner and outer selves. Better still, feel free to go one step further (no pun intended) by sending in your stories, tips or photos to be featured in our *Balance*. Hopefully, we might just start a ripple effect and inspire other readers to look after their minds, souls and bodies. So email your contributions to genevieve@fwr.org.fj or tweet me @GenSukhdeo. I look forward to being enlightened on your positive affirmations... or adventures, if you prefer an adrenaline rush!

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spanking a twerking Miley Cyrus; even Adichie's smart and succinct definition of feminism came from a TED Talk: a *TED Talk*. In feminism and liberalism, the wry lesson of *Some Like It Hot* pertains: *Nobody's perfect*. No individual can competently represent all the people who look to her (or him) to see their own experiences or perspectives reflected. And that's fine, and fine to point out.

But in the analysis, let's not wholly lose what remains exciting: the fact that more high-profile women are embracing the language, ideas, and symbolism of feminism, and that they're doing it from their places within the power structure, not just from outside of it. It's that unusual positioning that makes them problematic, of course—how can multi-millionaire businesswoman and performers adequately give voice to the inequities faced by women around the world? But it is also symptomatic of something unprecedented, the still-too-few but ever-more-numerous women climbing high within structures that have always been just for boys, and

refusing to part with the outside identities that would have barred them from those structures just decades earlier.

On MTV's news site, the post-VMA headline was "Beyonce's 2014 VMA Performance: Fearless, Feminist, Flawless, Family Time." In my day, those words would never, ever have been strung together.

So yeah, it's manufactured stage-craft and she's rich and they're corporate, but in a business in which performance *is* the business, this one was broadcast to twelve million adoring fans. And it showed a woman of color as a sexually confident, high-octane talent and as a powerful business woman, as an adoring mother and an equal partner ("don't think I'm just his little wife") to a man who called her "the greatest living entertainer" as he was handing her, her little spaceman statuette and carrying their kid.

That this is what a woman looks like when she defines herself as a feminist in 2014, tells us that its steadily-published obituaries to the contrary, the women's movement is not only thriving, but expanding. Bow down.

