



5th Fiji Young Women's Forum 2018 Declaration

Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision making in Fiji, including formal and informal governance processes. As a result women including young women do not have equal influence over policy decisions that affect our lives. While the country prepares itself for the next General Election in 2018, it is critical that the voices of young women are heard throughout Fiji's development cycle.

Young women are not a homogenous group. We face multiple forms of discrimination because of our gender, age, race, religion, disability¹, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, location as well as social and economic status.

The Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) aims to create safe and inclusive spaces for all young women to increase and progress their political leadership through meaningful and effective participation in Fiji's communities, decision making bodies and national processes. The FYWF is convened by Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA) and femLINKpacific. Support is provided by Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) as Secretariat.

The forum builds on the initial Fiji Young Women's Forum of 2013 and the rich tradition of activism and feminism by Fijian women throughout our national herstory and is committed to representing young women throughout the country. We recognise the work of the many women who have gone before us and the gains that they have made for young women today. We acknowledge and respect the rich herstory of women's participation in political spaces including social movements and we call for more recognition of this hard fraught journey.

The 5th Forum brought together 19 diverse young women leaders and activists aged 18–35 years from Vanua Levu over 3 days to discuss barriers and strategies to young women's meaningful participation and representation in Fiji's local and national governance processes.

¹ Including psychosocial disability

We, young Fijian women leaders, including transwomen, young women with disabilities, young women of both religious and non-religious beliefs, young lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer and intersex women, aspiring young women politicians, young women sex workers, rural young women, young women mental health consumers *and young women in all our diversities*, affirm our power as implementers and contributors of positive change, decision makers, partners and leaders of today and the future. Our strength is in our numbers and in our diversity.

This declaration below represents the voices of these young women. It captures our lived realities and calls for immediate action to the following demands:

YOUNG WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

We acknowledge our lack of voice at home, in communities including in traditional structures such as land owning units as well as the work place. Lack of financial independence, limited economic opportunities, as well as educational qualifications also affects our autonomy to confidently engage in decision making in these spaces.

Recommendations:

- FYWF strongly recommends the inclusion of young women in all our diversities within formal and informal decision making spaces.
- Awareness training and capacity building workshops including leadership programmes must reach us in our communities.
- We must have access to mentoring, coaching and accompaniment strategies to support young women to realise their human rights including freedom of speech and expression.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Our economic security is linked to structural and systematic barriers such as access to equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work.

We also recognise that employers do not take into consideration the health needs and wellbeing of diverse young women.

Due to its unregulated nature, it is important to recognise that young women working in the formal and informal sector in Fiji often cannot easily access social security provisions including Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) as well as paid maternity leave.

Recommendations:

We call upon the State as well as trade unions, the national employment centre and community leaders to recognise and support young women's labour force participation including:

- Providing adequate resources to ensure young women have access to educational opportunities to support their professional development in the work place
- Collaboration between private sector, government and women's rights organisations in terms of addressing gender inequality and social norms in the workplace including occupational health and safety issues, sexual harassment and formalising grievance processes
- There is a need for employers to take into account the needs of young women with different forms of disabilities and provide a disability inclusive environment such as the installation of Job Access with Speech (JAWS)

INFRASTRUCTURE

We raised issues in terms of accessing basic services including:

- Poor road and drainage conditions resulting in flooding
- Poor and irregular public transportation services including accessibility of bus services and technical maintenance issues related to e-ticketing systems in rural and remote communities
- High cost of maritime transportation as well as a lack of safety equipment, non-compliance of safety regulation by boat operators and shipping companies
- Insufficient water supplies including the provision of water trucks into communities, as well as a lack of communication by the Fiji Water Authority on water cuts which impact the ability of community members to practice good sanitation and hygiene
- Geographical location for communities is a barrier to connect to the electricity grid

Recommendations:

- The State and service providers must recognise and support the voice of young women to be able to address these issues through consultative processes including consultations in communities and villages
- 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.

HEALTH

We identified several barriers to accessing adequately resourced health services including:

- Lack of health practitioners including well-trained doctors and nurses to provide quality health services
- Discrimination by health practitioners in terms of gender, race and disability
- Lack of prescription drugs, ambulance and other equipment in health centres and hospitals

- Poor sanitary and hygiene conditions of health centres
- Language barriers
- Long waiting times
- Channels for complaints are not accessible to the needs of the public particularly for persons living with disabilities

Recommendations:

- Greater collaboration between women's rights organisations and health practitioners through gender sensitisation workshops and trainings highlighting the connections between women's rights and access to quality health services including sexual, reproductive health and rights
- Young women must be supported to work with community leaders to undergo basic emergency first aid training
- Budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Health must reflect and be responsive to the needs of rural, remote, maritime and urban communities in terms of accessing health services

Background:

FYWF builds on the intergenerational The Fiji Women's Forum, which was first convened in 2012, as well as the rich tradition of activism and feminism by Fijian women throughout our national herstory. The mission of FYWF is to increase and progress young women's political leadership in an effective, meaningful and inclusive participation in Fiji's communities, legislative bodies and national process. FYWF is built on the guiding principles of mutual respect, active participation, transparency and good governance, accountability, gender sensitivity, respect and appreciation for human rights and diversity.

FYWF has successfully convened four national forums with a combined total of over 100 young diverse women. These young women actively participated in the lead up to Fiji's 2014 national elections in their local communities. These included nationwide distribution and awareness of the My Guide to Voting (young women's voter guide) and the forum declaration to political parties and other stakeholders. Following the first national forum (November 2013), FYWF noted the importance of State obligation and accountability to translate gender equality, transparency and human rights into legislation, policy and budget allocations. This process is critical for young women to be able to not only understand their needs reflected in the policies but at the same time the State is fulfilling its responsibilities.

For more information contact:

*Alisia Evans alisia@femlinkpacific.com
Tima Tamoi timatamoi30@gmail.com
Chandra Fisi'iahi fj.alumni.elf@gmail.com
Mamta Chand mamta@fwrn.org.fj*

