FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
March 1/2013

UN conference on women: some rights won, but more battles ahead

Commission on Status of Women brought gains, but attitudes need to change on sex workers, identity and domestic violence

By **Rowan Harvey**

IT may not sound like much, but the attempted insertion of the word "recalls" in place of "reaffirms" about previous women's rights agreements by the Holy See in the first line of the proposed draft document set the tone for much of the negotiations at this year's UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Coming in a reference to the ground-breaking 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, it hinted that not all countries represented at the CSW viewed progress made in the past few decades on women's rights as positive. Some had come to the negotiating table with the intention of trying to turn back the clock. The efforts of Iran, Russia, Syria and the Holy See were particularly passionate.

That we have an agreed outcome document from the negotiations at all is cause for celebration. And there were gains that suggest progress in the right direction.

One of the most significant was new text on protection for female human rights defenders – women working and campaigning for women's rights who face violence both because of their work and because of their gender. Unsurprisingly, given the records of rights abuses in many of the countries present, there was push-back on this and its inclusion caused genuine celebration among the activists present, many of whom face backlash and hostility every day.

One of the hardest fought areas in the document was sexual and reproductive rights. This was one of the key rallying points for conservative forces, including anti-choice organisations that piled enormous resources into influencing the process. Hundreds of collective hours were put into combating their efforts by women's organisations, and some progress was made.

Most notable was new language recommending that emergency contraception is provided for women who have been raped, an absolutely vital and humane basic service.

Another striking victory was a call for the development of comprehensive sex education. Often portrayed by opponents as teaching kids to have sex, it is important that countries were able to see past the misinformation and recognise that this is about ensuring young people have the information they need to make informed decisions and protect their health.

If we've learned anything from the process it's that in UN negotiations, semantics matter; language against "child, early and forced" marriage rather than just "child" marriage was an important gain, recognising that in some contexts girls are no longer considered children after their first period, and extending the document to cover tens of thousands of adolescent girls married every year.

There were some losses that tempered the celebrations. We always knew that sexual orientation and gender identity would be hotly contested issues. Unfortunately, this was one of the areas where agreement could not be reached and all references were dropped from the text. Equally worrying, all references to protection for sex workers were dropped. Lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and sex workers are targeted for attack and, however conservative our views, we should at least be able to agree that such violence is serious and unacceptable.

In many ways the CSW was like stepping back in time. Much of the discussion might have been familiar to women campaigning in the 1970s, or even the 1920s. For example, language on "intimate partner violence", which recognises that not all women are married or in relationships formally recognised by the state was struck from the final text.

There was a push towards strengthening "the family" – in this context a traditional concept of family based on marriage between a man and a woman – as the most important unit in society for combating violence, rather than providing support for women as individuals. While families are important, one of the places that women are most likely to face violence is the home and it is vital that they are able to access services tailored to their needs. Fortunately, arguments based on ideology lost out to arguments based on evidence in the final text.

Perhaps the biggest victory came right at the end. Recognising that negotiations were unlikely to finish on time, the CSW chair, Marjon V Kamara, proposed a new draft based on the negotiations to that point – a take it or leave it option. One of her changes was the deletion of a hotly debated paragraph reaffirming

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FWRM's Virisila Buadromo and Shabina Khan at CSW 2013

From the Director's desk

Greetings from FWRM!

In the first quarter of this year, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement undertook many critical activities in an effort to contribute to Fiji's democratisation process. Some of these included, collaborating with the Citizens' Constitutional Forum in organising a Peoples' Constitutional Forum (read more on p.5); and undertaking a series of information sessions with young people who would be voting for the first time in Fiji's elections. This continued our work from the previous year on empowering young people in Fiji's democratisation process (read more on p. 4).

We also joined other Pacific feminists and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocates' to take stock of the progress in SRHR made over the past 20 years by State and non-State actors. The 32 participants at the meeting (who came from diverse backgrounds) critically analyzed, mapped and strategized towards more effective advancement of SRHR in the Pacific region (read more on p.3).

This year also marks the first time for the Movement to partner with the European Union (EU) in funding activities aimed at enhancing the political participation of marginalised women voters (read more on p.10). New donors often have different reporting requirements and as a result some staff at FWRM underwent an audit coaching, facilitated by Ernest and Young. The two-day training involved the staff learning eight modules ranging from internal controls to financial reporting.

At the end of March, we took time out of our busy schedules for an Organisational Development Retreat facilitated by Australian consultant, Owen Tilbury. The retreat aimed to up-skill FWRM staff in strategies for dealing with change, in analysing different personality styles and how to work best with all personalities, and in the concepts of 'situational leadership'.

Staff used the 'change model' introduced by Mr Tilbury to analyse the changes to the organisational structure currently being undertaken by FWRM, and as such teams analysed the 'vision' 'drivers' and 'plans' for change as well as the 'barriers' to this change. This analysis produced some practical action points to be followed up by the team and provided a useful model to analyse various change processes in our work.

The part of the retreat that staff found the most interesting and useful was the training around personality styles. The consultant introduced the team to the DISC Behavioural Style Model which helps people to quickly analyse a person's personality by considering where they sit on two scales; Fast Paced/ Slower Paced and Task-Oriented/People Oriented. Depending on one's position on each of these two axes, you can roughly categorize a person into one of four categories: "D"- Dominance, Directing, "I" – Influencing, Interacting, "S" Steadiness, Stable, or "C" – Compliant, Cautious. Once you have categorised yourself and others it is easier to understand how each personality style prefers to interact and therefore enhance your communication and working relationship with that individual according to their preferred style and needs.

We also bid farewell to our Women's Forum Coordinator Vosita Lenisaurua this quarter. We wish her well in her future endeavours.

Also take some time out to read our Lookout! section (back page) where we give details on how you can join our Young Women's Library.

These are just some of the stories captured in this edition. As always, if you have any feedback, send it to info@fwrm.org.fj

Enjoy this edition!

In solidarity,

Virisila Buadromo

YWLP team grows

By **Shazia Usman**

IN the first quarter of the year, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement welcomed two new staff members on board to assist in the elimination of all forms of discrimination young women and girls.

Maraia Vakatalai-Tabunakawai joins the Movement as its new GIRLS Officer. GIRLS – Grow Inspire Relate Lead Succeed – is a component of the FWRM's Young Women in Leadership Programme (YWLP), empowering girls between the ages of 10 and 14.

Maraia is currently undertaking post-graduate studies in psychology at the University of the South Pacific. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in applied psychology and sociology from the same university in 2008.

From 2008 to 2012 she was working with the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council at the Ministry of Education as a Project Assistant Information, Research and Evaluation Officer.

"I have been involved in advocating for children's health and safety with the Fiji schools by promoting child protection particularly the relationship between drugs and substance abuse with child abuse issues into an annual in-school campaign, the No Drugs Stop Child Abuse campaign, which started in 2008 and has been gaining momentum every year," she said.

Maraia is also a graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum project and has been affiliated with the feminist Movement since 2007.

"I am very excited to work with such a vibrant young team and look forward to empowering girls in Fiji!"

Joining Maraia in the YWLP team is another ELF graduate, who, in our opinion, is one of the most passionate young feminists in the Movement.

As one of FWRM's new Project Support Officers, Mamta Chand, brings a lot of commitment and energy to the role. She has been part of FWRM's activities as a volunteer and supporter since 2004.

"I strongly believe in advocating for women's human rights and working at FWRM will provide me with the skills, resources, empowerment, knowledge and inspiration to further aspire in addressing the gender bias existing in our society," she said.

Mamta has previously worked with the Citizens Constitutional Forum, Marie Stopes International Pacific and UN Women.

Both Maraia and Mamta join Filomena Tuivanualevu and Bronwyn Tilbury in FWRM's YWLP team.

They can be contacted via email: maraia@fwrm.org.fj and mamta@fwrm.org.fj

Maraia and Mamta

Re-framing, Re-articulating and Re-energizing SRHR in the Pacific

By **Virisila Buadromo**

PACIFIC feminists, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocates call on the Papua New Guinea State to urgently repeal the Sorcery Act. This call also extends to the immediate and full investigation and prosecution of all criminal cases to prevent further torture and extrajudicial killing of women and girls under the guise of eliminating witchcraft and sorcery.

The call was made at an inaugural gathering of a broad and diverse coalition of women and trans* people working in the area of SRHR, gender, erotic, economic, ecological justice and political transformation from Chuuk Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

"We demand that States and regional and global institutions make a concerted effect to ensure that the seriousness and frequency of these crimes are acknowledged and those official responses are immediate, strong and effective," said Noelene Nabulivou, on behalf of the co-conveners of the gathering.

The four-day meeting in Nadi from February 12-15th saw 32 participants take stock of the progress in SRHR made over the past 20 years by State and non-State actors. Participants also critically analyzed, mapped and strategized towards more effective advancement of SRHR in the Pacific region.

Pacific women and their communities are today confronted by an onslaught of complex and interlinked challenges that affect our ability to access our sexual and reproductive health and rights.

"We are motivated by the realities of extremely high levels of sexual and gender based violence; exceptionally high rates of sexually transmitted infections including Chlamydia, and also the low and stagnant level of women parliamentary representatives across the Pacific, to urgently call for a re-framing of analysis; re-articulation of SRHR strategies and re-energizing of the Pacific SRHR movement," said Nabulivou.

"Pacific women and trans* advocates in Nadi last week clearly stated that bodily integrity and autonomy is at the core of all work on SRHR, elimination of sexual and gender based violence, and toward gender equality advancement in the region. Participants called for the international adoption of sexual rights as human rights and reaffirmed the protection and promotion of reproductive rights as human rights. They also affirmed that the rights of women and girls must not be bargained away by governments when they negotiate financial, trade, environmental and climate change agreements. All State policy must therefore, include recognition of women's critical roles within our states and societies", she said.

On the final day of the meeting, the participants met with key allies from UN agencies, regional and global development and human rights institutions, to strategize on ways to take this Call forward.

The co-conveners look forward to building a stronger and wider coalition on this important work by Pacific women and trans* feminists, and wider allies.

This regional meeting was co-convened by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN); Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM); Diverse Voices and Action for Equality[1] (DIVA); and Pacific Youth Council (PYC).

The organisers also recently presented on the SRHR meeting outcomes and plans at the Pacific Gender and Development Network Regional meeting on April 29 2013, and there are plans for a pre-meeting workshop at the Pacific Women Ministers Triennial Meeting in October 2013, implicitly advancing young women and gender equality leadership in the region, and organised by the Pacific Young Women's Alliance (Secretariat: FWRM, Lead organiser); DAWN, DIVA and others.

Representatives from the emerging coalition will also be engaged where possible in the global coalition work on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Beyond 2014. FWRM's programme director, Tara Chetty is also currently writing a baseline advocacy document on SRHR in the region, as a DAWN led initiative to support women's movements in the Pacific, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa to mobilise in the lead-up to the 2014 ICPD review, including Pacific regional activities such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific meeting on ICPD in October 2013, and global advocacy.

1 The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance was established in November, 2011 by organisations involved in the development of the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy (2011). The Alliance is a network of global and regional civil society and UN agencies in the Pacific committed to sharing resources, good practice and information and working collaboratively on projects to develop the leadership of young Pacific Island women.

Participants at the meeting

YOUTH DECIDE

By **Neomai Maravuakula**

THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) began the year with a series of information sessions with young people who would be voting for the first time in Fiji's 2014 elections. This continued the Movement's work from the previous year on empowering young people towards Fiji's democratisation process. This initial work included assisting young people to make their submissions to the Fiji Constitution Commission. FWRM organised three information sessions in the Central, Western and Northern Divisions - this was the first citizenship rights information session offered by any organisation in Fiji for young people.

Participants spent the day learning about Fiji's constitutional process with a brief history of the country's past constitutions. Discussions also centered on Fiji's past electoral systems of First Past the Post and the Alternative Voting System. A significant amount of time was spent in understanding the Proportional Representation System, which is anticipated to be Fiji's next electoral system.

The session was very interactive with video's, music and creative exercises during which young people were able to share their views of the types of leadership they would like in Fiji. In addition they also raised their concerns of the process not being inclusive of young people, especially since a big portion of Fiji's population will be voting for the first time. Other's shared the challenges that they faced when trying to register under the Electronic Voter Registration system. In the three Divisions there were similar sentiments being shared by young people - *"who do I vote for? Do I have to vote at all?* – were some of the questions raised.

Participants were asked to think of the great change that they could bring for Fiji if all young people voted in the elections. In addition, sessions also included participants discussing current issues they were facing in their Divisions, nationally and also what issues did they want the new government elected in 2014 to address.

It was evident that information such as this was greatly needed by young people in Fiji. In each of the Divisions that FWRM carried out the sessions, there was overwhelming interest. In Labasa, FWRM saw 76 young people attending the information session - the biggest number of participants that attended the information session.

FWRM also spent the time in these Divisions to visit communities that the Movement had earlier assisted in the submission making process, to share the same message with young people who were unable to attend the information session. It was another opportunity for FWRM to visit communities which are mainly excluded when information is disseminated. It was clear that more information sessions are needed so that people are prepared to participate in the electoral process.

FWRM will also be carrying out more awareness sessions in the coming months to prepare women for the 2014 elections.

UN conference on women: some rights won, but more battles ahead

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the sovereign right of each country to implement CSW recommendations "consistent with national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of its people". This paragraph sent a dangerous signal that women's rights are optional and provided a get-out clause for unsupportive governments. It was a huge relief to many to see it removed.

The outcome could have been much worse. As delegates return home, thoughts are already turning to the battle ahead. Next year's topic – the agenda for development when the millennium goals expire in 2015 – proved contentious this year, with attempts to introduce progressive language struck down as quickly as they were proposed. This is essentially new territory for the CSW and, if this year was anything to go by, we're going to have to fight every step of the way. With the future of half the world at stake, we cannot afford not to.

Rowan Harvey is women's rights advocacy adviser for ActionAid UK.
Source: http://www.guardian.co.uk

Peoples' Constitutional Forum

By **Shazia Usman**

IN March 20-22 this year, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, in collaboration with the Citizens' Constitutional Forum, hosted the Peoples' Constitutional Forum in Lami.

Made up of a diverse group of 45 leaders and thinkers from around Fiji, the Forum was an open space for discussion, debate and negotiation on constitutional content. Representatives included members of churches and religious groups, proposed political parties, trade unions, rural networks, universities, women's groups, human rights organisations, youth groups, LGBTQI[1] groups, networks of persons with disability, the private sector, and people living with HIV. Members of the public also participated in the discussions through an open gallery and by interacting with the online live streaming of discussions and debates.

Below is a brief excerpt from the Forum Outcome Document:

We examined the 2012 Commission's draft Constitution, previous Fiji Constitutions and had a brief overview of the proposed State draft of 2013. We agreed on many points, but also respected the diverse opinions of this People's Forum. These are [some of] the outcomes of our discussions:

Electoral Systems

There was consensus that:

- The electoral system, and the community as a whole, should actively encourage and support women's representation in parliament. There was a strong view that this should be achieved by constitutional provisions implementing a closed, "zipped" list proportional representation (PR) system.
- There must be comprehensive civic education conducted throughout Fiji to ensure that all constituents understand how the electoral system works.

An overwhelming number of participants:

- Preferred a closed list PR system, because it forced constituents to focus on the policies of a party, rather than the personality of an individual candidate.
- Supported any electoral system that moved away from race-based voting. There was some concern that an open list PR system proposed under the Government Draft would lead to voting along race and gender lines, and a strong belief that this was less likely to occur with a closed list.
- Supported electoral divisions based on North, Central, East and West Divisions, as they felt that these "mapped onto" existing development structures and delivery mechanisms (which the old system had been at odds with).

Some participants expressed:

- Support for temporary, special measures to ensure youth representation in parliament.
- Concerns that the abolition of communal voting fractured traditional Fijian ways, whilst others argued that communal voting had never worked, because it did not pass the democratic test (which was expressed as being three elections without a coup).
- Concerns that a list proportional representation system would create a disconnection between constituents and representatives, particularly for those people in rural areas. However, others were of the view that changes in local representation were a necessary sacrifice that had to be made to move away from race-based politics.
- The view that a positive outcome of a proportional representation system was that it encouraged political parties to appeal to a cross-section of society.

Human Rights

There was strong support for inclusion in the Bill of Rights for:

- Language, without limitation, to ensure that human rights are never infringed, even in a state of emergency. In particular, the right to life and freedom from torture are non-derogable rights, even in a state of emergency.
- Freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and this right should be expanded upon.
- Women's rights, beyond the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex
- The right to civic education in schools as part of the right to education
- Rights for those with physical and mental disabilities, and there must be resources to enforce these rights.
- Social and economic rights and the right to environment as contained in the Commission draft.
- Right to bodily integrity and the right to exercise control over one's own body as contained in the commission draft
- Protection for all human rights defenders
- Rights compliant with international human rights conventions
- Rights to apply between individuals, as well as between individuals and the state, and there must be mechanisms to enforce these horizontal rights.

Asela Naisara and Roshika Deo at the Forum

Most expressed a need for implementation and enforcement mechanisms, including:

- The Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman and enforcement agencies must be adequately resourced, and have powers to prevent or compel the state to act.
- Access to courts and strong penalties for those that infringe on Human Rights.
- Legislative implementation of rights, such as the right to freedom of information.

Many supported civic education, expressing:

- A need for more work on civic education on human rights and responsibilities, and to educate communities about how individual rights can coexist with community rights.
- That citizens must be active and hold government accountable.

Some suggested that:

- Some entity must review existing decrees for conflict with the constitution and human rights during a specified time frame.

The full document can be assessed on www.fwrm.org.fj

1 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex

Girls

~ Grow Inspire Relate Lead Succeed~

By **Maraia Vakatalai-Tabunakawai**

THE Fiji Women's Movement (FWRM) launched its yearlong GIRLS Theatre programme on International Women's Day (IWD) this year.

The programme kickstarted with two soccer trainings at the Pacific Theological College in February and March and was officially launched at a friendly socccer match between the girls on IWD at the Vodafone Arena. During the launch, FWRM welcomed 27 enthusiastic young girls between the ages of 10-12 years who had been selected to take part in the GIRLS Theatre programme.

According to FWRM's Executive Director Virisila Buadromo, the programme aims to "conduct theatre-based activities to develop young girls' ability to voice their issues".

"Grow, inspire, relate, lead and succeed is not just the name of the GIRLS programme but also the core values it's built on. We will instill these values in all the activities we do to raise the girls' awareness of human rights, feminism and gender," she said.

The programme fits into the wider FWRM's Young Women and Leadership Programme's theme of Political Participation and Awareness by encouraging young girls to express their opinions and thoughts from an early age, based on the theory that if they can express themselves about the things that matter to them when they are girls, they will go on to be articulate advocates for their rights when they are women.

The GIRLS programme has undoubtedly allowed FWRM to access a broader audience of the girls' friends and relatives.

A few fathers, for example, were very keen to have their daughters participate in the GIRLS programme. When asked for their thoughts on why they wanted their daughters to take part and what they hoped for their daughters' future, dad Serupepeli Vueta shared: "I just want her [Iliseva] to be a role model in the family, in the community and the country...right now in Fiji, for small girls, what we are hearing, in the news, in the newspapers, it's shocking news..for her to join this particular programme, it will to develop her skills, and give her confidence in the community and Fiji as a whole".

Another dad, Pavendra Shankar shared: "It's not just being part of a classroom; I'd like her [Akansha] to be a total character, be out there with the team, enjoying with the other girls and see what's out there rather than just sitting in the classroom... her future is open. For her at the moment, she's got various choices, once she mingles with other team members; she'll probably have a better idea of what's in her future".

Dad, Robert Wolfgram also shared: "It's something she [Lanieta] wanted to do. And so I think as a father its my job to give my children and my daughter every opportunity to discover what they're good at. And if she's good at this, I am happy. I want her to be happy and successful at whatever she does, so this [GIRLS programme] sounds great because it's encouraging young women in Fiji and young women in the Pacific generally. I think Lanieta, needs to come out and show us, express to us what it is that's in her; her potential, so this is a great beginning for her".

During the yearlong programme, FWRM in partnership with Women's Action for Change (WAC) will work to build on the young girls' abilities to express themselves. The theatre rehearsals has been scheduled for six months culminating in a theatre production in August.

The young girls come from a diverse socioeconomic background and while some were selected from an open application process, others were nominated by their schools.

GIRLS!
THEATRE PRODUCTION
Grow
Inspire
Relate
Lead
Succeed
Empowering

One Billion Rising

One in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in their lifetime

By **Roshika Deo**

IT all started in mid-September last year when I met Kamla Bhasin[1] in Nepal and attended the launch of the One Billion Rising South East Asia.

It was an amazing experience and the energy among the people in the room was incredible.

The chanting, the passion and the solidarity fuelled my desire to continue the One Billion Rising journey to the Pacific, to Fiji.

Back at home, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's Coordinator Shamima Ali, was critical in providing the mentoring and support for the global campaign. In November, the campaign was launched in the Pacific with women and men advocates', part of the Pacific Network for Violence against Women meeting. The campaign was promoted over few months and events were held in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, and a few other Pacific Island countries.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement provided much needed financial support towards the campaign.

A Facebook page was set up to promote and build the momentum towards February 14th, a day which also acknowledges V Day – a global movement to end violence against women. Facebook was critical in terms of mobilising people on the day for the street activism and dancing.

Many events were held before the 14th and on the day to mark the campaign. A couple of months before the V Day, the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA) created awareness in Labasa using creative activism such as arts and dancing.

On the 14th Suva was buzzing with activities with a foray of activities. At peak lunch hour, despite the rain, well over 500 people showed up on the streets of Suva to dance, march, walk and chant on their way to Sukuna Park. At the park, people gathered to express themselves and share messages.

There were two flash mobs held at MHCC and Tappoo City at around 5.30pm. In the evening, ELFA held the first ever theatrical production of the Vagina Monologue in Fiji.

The National Council of Women organised an evening gathering around the kava bowl to mark the event. Pacific Rainbow Advocacy Network in Lautoka held a gathering on the day where they danced to "break the chain". Women activists in Nadi also held gatherings, including dancing and sharing messages on violence against women.

Various media organisations including corporations joined the different events on the day and spoke out against violence against girls and

1 Kamla Bhasin is an Indian feminist and has worked with the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the FAO for over twenty years, and is a well-known gender trainer. She has written extensively on participatory training; on women; and on sustainable development.

One billion women violated is an atrocity

One billion women dancing is a revolution

women. Different non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, including academic institutions, also joined the various events.

The campaign attracted a lot of younger women who used dancing, streaking their hair, flashmobs, and theatre to express themselves and advocate on the issue of violence against girls and women.

Men wore skirts to stand up against victim blaming and to challenge notions of masculinity.

Dancing, singing and street activism has been used as forms of protest around the world by many different cultures for many decades.

There were girls, women, boys and men who came from the interior of Nausori, Tamavua and Wailoku village. One of the women from Tamavua village said that this was the first time she had ever taken part in a street procession and felt so empowered, and she continues to speak against violence against girls and women in her village till today.

One of the things that was evident was that for a few months, violence against girls and women was on everyone's agenda. The campaign highlighted the severity of the issue and brought to the surface many intersectionality concerns.

Globally, one billion people in 207 countries rose on 14th February 2013. This global campaign also created a sense of solidarity among people across borders.

Award-winning playwright, activist, Vagina Monologues and V-Day founder, Eve Ensler said *"One Billion Rising is an appreciation, amplification and an escalation. When One Billion bodies rise and dance on 14 February 2013, we will join in solidarity, purpose and energy and shake the world into a new consciousness. Dancing insists we take up space. It has no set direction but we go there together. It's dangerous, joyous, sexual, holy, disruptive. It breaks the rules. It can happen anywhere at any time with anyone and everyone. It's free. No corporation can control it. It joins us and pushes us to go further. It's contagious and it spreads quickly. It's of the body. It's transcendent."*

This was a beginning of a journey for many people. Some danced on the streets for the first time, some marched for the first time, some used the word vagina for the first time and some changed their behaviour, and some were visible for the first time.

But the advocacy and activism does not end with February 14th, 2013.

The journey continues until we can collectively end violence against girls and women.

I urge everyone that participated to let the sense of empowerment, passion, freedom and solidarity motivate you to continue the activism in your own personal lives and within our communities.

Let us continue changing the attitudes, structures and institutions in our society to end all forms of violence against girls and women.

Enhancing Women's Politcal Participation

By **Roshika Deo**

THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement, as part of its transitional justice work, will be undertaking comprehensive media campaigns and trainings to enhance the political participation of women, particularly women from minority groups, in the upcoming electoral process.

This project aims to increase awareness of citizenship rights among women, particularly among Indofijian and young women. It also aims to increase the effective participation of women in local and national democratic processes in the lead up to and during the proposed national elections in 2014. And lastly, it also aims to foster an enabling media environment for women's political participation.

A scoping research has been carried out nationally to determine the current level of awareness of citizenship rights amongst women and young women and also to determine how they currently receive information and how they would prefer to receive information. The field work was carried out over a month and the results are currently being synthesized and will be shared at a later date. The results will be used to develop an awareness raising campaign and trainings.

If women are empowered, as citizens and leaders to participate in national democratic process, they can have a say in the decisions that affect their livelihoods and communities and potentially disrupt the conflict cycle prevalent in Fiji. Furthermore with the Pacific having the lowest representation of women in parliament (about 3%) it is critical that women are able to actively participation in national political processes.

This project is funded by the European Union.

If women are empowered, as citizens and leaders to participate in national democratic process, they can have a say in the decisions that affect their livelihoods and communities and potentially disrupt the conflict cycle prevalent in Fiji.

Tiny Beautiful Things

Book Review by **Viv Groskop**

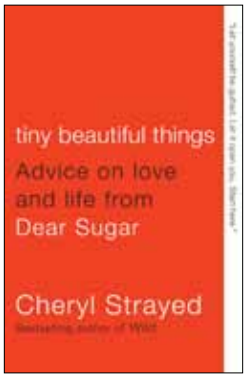

Image courtesy of: www.lifewithbooks.com

CHERYL Strayed is already something of a phenomenon in the US, where her hiking memoir, Wild, held the No 1 spot on the New York Times bestseller list for seven consecutive weeks last year. Oprah Winfrey restarted her book club on the strength of the book and Reese Witherspoon optioned it for film before it was even published. Nick Hornby is writing the screenplay.

Before all this furore, though, Strayed was quietly beavering away as agony aunt "Dear Sugar" on the literary website The Rumpus. Her (now discontinued) column went viral after a reader asked a simple question: "Dear Sugar, WTF? WTF? WTF? I'm asking this question as it applies to everything every day." Sugar's reply was extraordinary. Breezily, matter of factly, and without a trace of self-pity, she wrote back referencing the fact that she was sexually abused by her grandfather as a child. Her message? Get over yourself. "Ask better questions. The fuck is your life. Answer it."

If this is already making you bristle, you will not like this book. In fact readers of a particularly British sensibility will hate it with a passion, with its casual therapy-speak and frequent mentions of withholding and enabling. As for me, I couldn't bring myself to stop reading it. It made me laugh out loud and it made me gasp with disbelief. However great the writing – and the writing is addictively, breathtakingly great – you do have the sense of entering a quasi-literary version of The Jeremy Kyle Show. But I didn't have too much of a problem with that.

There's a lot of compassion and hard-won wisdom here and a lot of straight talking to people who are trying to convince themselves to do very stupid things (like hold out for a man who is evidently in love with another woman or spend a "happy family Christmas" with a drug-addicted brother who has already tried to attack his parents).

This is Sugar talking to a 26-year-old novelist with writer's block who is crippled with envy: "We get the work done on the ground level. And the kindest thing I can do for you is to tell you to get your ass on the floor." To a woman destroyed by her husband's infidelity: "A terrible thing happened to you, but you mustn't let it define your life."

The majority of her replies could be prefaced with the words "I've been there". In that sense this collection also reads like a memoir: although all the replies were written anonymously (Strayed "came out" as Sugar last year) we get a very real sense of a complicated, painful life behind the advice.

Sugar is a great agony aunt because she never judges anyone. She knows she could just as easily be them. As she says to a father of four addicted to painkillers whose business is falling apart: "I've never been in a humiliating situation when I wasn't shocked by all the 'normal' people who were also in the very same humiliating position. We're horny, ass-saving, ego-driven drug fiends, among other, more noble things."

This book is also a rather wonderful portrait of digital, anonymous America. Sugar used to receive thousands of emails: she simply replied to those that interested her the most. So the questions are always fascinatingly worded and often strange. They reveal a world full of self-obsessed, fractured, self-deprecating people who just want to do the right thing. Maybe that's a very American way to be. Sugar would argue it's just a definition of humankind: "The story of human intimacy is one of constantly allowing ourselves to see those we love most deeply in a new, more fractured light. Look hard. Risk that."

Excerpted from http://www.guardian.co.uk/books

GIRL RISING: The Missing Part of the Conversation

Film Review by **Tabby Biddle**

WHY educate girls? If you educate girls, goes one argument, you'll break the cycle of poverty in your country in one generation. And, goes another argument, if you educate girls, you'll increase your GDP. Thirdly, goes another argument, you'll gain economic and social progress in your country through a new cadre of educated women. These are all good reasons, but it feels like something major is missing from this conversation.

What about educating girls simply for the reason of honoring them as human beings?

Image courtesy of: www.nyacknewsandviews.com

This has been on my mind since earlier this week I attended a screening of GIRL RISING, an advocacy documentary focused on the power of educating girls. Over 200 of us gathered at the Laemmle Music Hall Theater in Los Angeles - women and girls from ages 7 to 90 (and about a dozen men) -- to support our belief that every girl should have an opportunity to be educated. The evening was co-hosted by GWEN (Global Women's Empowerment Network) and Million Mamas Movement, two outstanding organisations committed to the safety, health and well-being of women and girls.

If you don't know about the film already, it tells the story of nine girls from nine different countries who face major obstacles to getting an education, including child slavery, arranged marriages, sexual violence, poverty and other heartbreaking injustices that are unfortunately so common for girls around the world. However, despite these obstacles, these courageous girls are committed to getting an education. Through their determination, will and strength of spirit, each girl overcomes her obstacles and gets to school. As a result, she inspires change within her community and ultimately, her country.

While I loved the film in many respects (and certainly for its intention), I found myself disappointed that a portion of the film felt like it was perpetuating the same conversation that has been going on in the development community - that if you educate a girl, you will increase your country's GDP - and so this is the best reason to do it.

While I understand that this may be the only way to reach the ears of many who are currently in power, my hope is that we can begin to talk about the best reason for educating girls: because they are human beings.

Let's turn this situation around for a moment. Imagine that all girls had an opportunity to be educated. Boys were kept home to do the housework while their sisters went to school. Boys were sold into slavery by their parents while their sisters were in school. Boys were arranged into a marriage as early as age 7, while their sisters were in school. Boys were trafficked for sex while their sisters attended school. Then all of a sudden we have a lightbulb moment realizing that if we educate the boys, we could increase our economic position. And so we decide this is a good idea, all without the mention or acknowledgement of boys as human beings - as deserving as girls.

Kind of strange, huh?

In my view the intrinsic human goodness and "beingness" of girls is being overlooked in the rationale for educating girls. It seems to be on the sideline, while the economic aspect is center stage. This feels backwards to me. Shouldn't the value of a human life be center stage?

This being said, I understand that the GDP argument makes the issue quantifiable and it's easier to make policy when backed by numbers. Making policy based on human dignity can be more challenging, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it.

The more I think about this, the more I see that the denial of girls' education and the overall oppression of women and girls is based on the prevalent religious premise that the ultimate authority and supreme being is a male god.

Now some of you may jump at me and say that God to you is genderless or that you don't believe in the biblical God, or that you don't believe in God in general. I hear you on this. But the truth is that so many of us have internalized the maleness of God from our language. Over and over, "God" is referred to as He.

I think what many people don't realize is that the Goddess, in her beautiful feminine form, was the supreme deity for 25,000 years before the male "God" that we know today. The Goddess was worshipped the world over, as evidenced by archeologists, anthropologists and historians. These were advanced societies with law, government, written language, agriculture and architecture. During this time, women and girls social status was completely different than what we see today. They were the landowners, the food providers, and legal authorities. They were wise, valiant and powerful leaders. They were educated.

The violent invasions of the Indo-Europeans, which started around 4000 B.C., turned this social structure upside down. These were male warriors who brought with them a belief in male deities and a patriarchal system. Their customs and laws were developed in direct response to eliminate Goddess worship. Eventually the Bible was written to codify the "law of the land."

My hope is that we begin to become aware of the historical and political origins of our current default to male authority and understand that life was not always that way. Until we can call God Mother as well as Father, Daughter as well as Son, an unconscious undervaluing of women and girls will continue among both women and men alike.

Isn't it time we remember the Goddess? Then maybe we can remember the intrinsic value of women and girls and we won't have to justify educating girls in the name of economic growth.

Excerpted from http://www.huffingtonpost.com

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.

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