FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
June 2020

Women's Global Strike:

The importance of Feminism and Activism during COVID-19

By Maryann Lockington

WHO knew that when women human rights defenders amplified the call for a Women's Global Strike in 2020 that it would be at the dawn of a pandemic that harshly emphasised why it was needed?

On International Women's Day (8 March) in Fiji, over 200 people from across the country gathered at the Sukuna Park in Suva in solidarity with the Women's Global Strike. The chants reverberated across the city, "If women stop, the world stops!"

This took place just when the world was slowing to a stop and the global community braced itself for the onslaught of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. COVID-19 may feel unprecedented and indiscriminately infectious but, as it is in times of disaster and crisis, women, children, LGBTQI, gender non-conforming people, people living with disabilities, the poor and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected.[1]

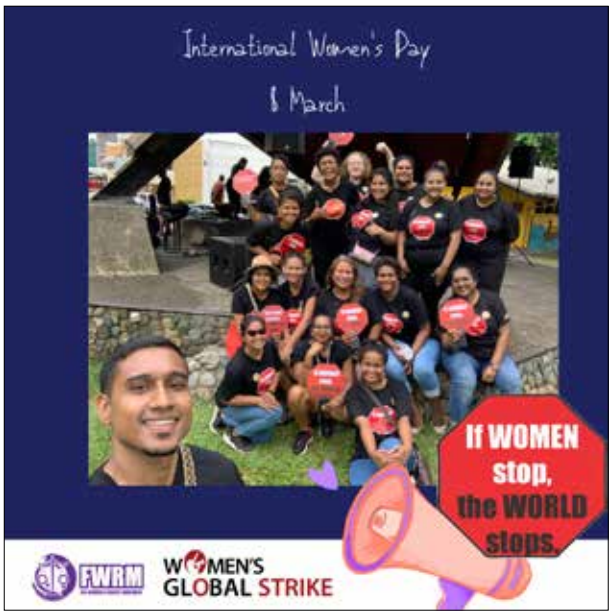
Within Fiji and the Pacific context, feminists recognise the multiple intersecting forms of patriarchy, long-standing and unequal gendered power relations and emerging processes of oppression. This was echoed throughout the groundbreaking Pacific Feminist Charter for Change, which was endorsed at the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum in 2016. Pacific feminists recognise the specific challenge of the geographic location of the region, geopolitical histories and the contemporary manifestations of the global economic south.[1] In 2019, the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum took place and in strengthening the commitment towards solidarity, the Pacific Feminist Action Plan was endorsed to map the way forward. The momentum could be felt globally, as 2020 drew closer.

2020 is a pivotal year for the women's movement around the world, marking the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The call for a Women's Global Strike was initiated by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and led by feminists and women human rights defenders endorsing a shared political statement.[2] In summary, it has been 25 years since Beijing yet progress has been painfully slow for women's human rights and gender equality and intersectional issues continue to deepen.[2] The global shifting politics and rise of conservative ideologies sparked rhetoric that endangered human rights and freedom. Feminists knew that COVID-19 would be devastating for women's human rights. It would decelerate progress even more and exacerbate the already intersectional, entrenched and pervasive inequalities that exist.

Solidarity, resistance and revolution, the theme of the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, was relevant now more than ever. FWRM joined the call for the Women's Global Strike in late 2019 and together with its partners organised the "If Women Stop, the World Stops" Concert on March 8 as a symbolic solidarity action. Within our realities of manoeuvring through restrictions on public assembly and protest, innovative activism was needed. This would be an echoing sentiment for the next few months, as advocacy and activism shifted online to keep with social distancing protocols. If not for the COVID-19, at least half a million women from Asia and the Pacific would have been on the streets, mobilising and marching.[3]

In Fiji, women and girls continue to face significant forms of violence and discrimination. The Balancing the Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice Research Report 2017 revealed that for every 9 out of 10 sexual offence cases (rape and attempted rape; indecent assault; child sexual abuse) reported to the Fiji Police, women and girls were the victim/survivors.[4] COVID-19 and the related social distancing and lockdown protocols is an enabling environment

Cont'd on page 3



FWRM staff at the Women's Global Strike concert for International Women's Day in Suva. Image: FWRM.

1 Fwrm.org.fj. 2016. *Pacific Feminist Charter For Change*. [online] Available at: <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/PFF/PFF-Charter-Final-2Dec2016.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2020].#

2 Womensglobalstrike.com. 2019. *Our Political Statement Calling For A Women'S Global Strike On 8 March 2020 – Women'S Global Strike*. [online] Available at: <https://womensglobalstrike.com/our-political-statement/english/> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

3 Womensglobalstrike.com. 2020. *Press Release: Over 200,000 Women In Asia And The Pacific Join Women'S Global Strike – Women'S Global Strike*. [online] Available at: <https://womensglobalstrike.com/latest-news/press-release-over-200000-women-in-asia-and-the-pacific-join-womens-global-strike/?preview=true> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

4 Fwrm.org.fj. 2017. *Balancing The Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access To Justice Research*. [online] Available at: <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/fwrm2017/publications/analysis/Balancing-the-Scales-Report_FINAL-Digital.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

Greetings from FWRM!

IT HAS been a whirlwind of events since the last issue of Balance. This issue is being published at an interesting time, as the majority of production work has been by staff and contributors working remotely from home for almost three months while the world struggles against an unprecedented crisis - the COVID-19 pandemic.

FWRM's feminist motto of "Insist, Persist, Resist, Exist" has been crucial during these trying times, steering months of innovative thinking, strategising, mobilising and strengthening partnerships to improve and defend women's human rights and gender equality.

2019 16 Days of Activism

Fresh off of the excitement from 2019's 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, there has been an echoing resolve to strengthen solidarity, resistance and revolution towards a better reality for Pacific women and girls. This was mapped out in the action plan and as the 16 Days of Activism approached, an ongoing reflection from FWRM was the need to document feminist experiences and herstory of solidarity actions, protests and marches that brought about change. The "Activism" in 16 Days of Activism needed to be strengthened and human rights needed to be EVERYBODY's business - not just the responsibility of those of us working within the movement.

Tragically, a measles epidemic in Samoa that infected thousands and killed over 80 people had the rest of the region taking serious precautions. Public gatherings were disallowed and FWRM, as the NGO Coalition on Human Rights (NGOCHR) secretariat, needed to re-organise - how do we approach activism at a time like this? The Annual Human Rights march was cancelled and instead, the NGOCHR hosted a virtual rally that had over 5,000 viewers joining the call for everyone to be a human rights defender.

Women's Global Strike

With the rise of conservative and regressive influence and ideologies globally, women human rights defenders are more threatened, making it all the more crucial to amplify these issues. In Fiji, we saw a disturbing rise in domestic violence and sexual violence cases against women and girls. Over 30 years of feminist activism, advocacy and research has made significant gains for women's rights but the reality of women's rights and gender equality has remained grim.

For this reason, FWRM joined the call for a Women's Global Strike (WGS) on International Women's Day, 8 March, 2020 in recognition of its roots in feminist herstory and the power of solidarity action and strikes. As 2019 came to an end, momentum and anticipation towards 2020 mounted as a pivotal moment in the women's movement. 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). It was also the five-year milestone for the Sustainable Development Goals. 2020 would be the year for a strengthened call to catalyse gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere.

Recognising the existing challenges of Fiji's political context on strikes, FWRM decided to host a concert on Friday, 6 March 2020. FWRM staff were officially on strike, with the office closed for business for the day. The concert brought together over 200 women across Fiji and we heard from long-time feminists, trade unionists, activists and advocates about the different solidarity actions they had been part of and which have helped shape today's human rights movement in Fiji.

This issue of Balance was initially inspired by these stories and we had hoped to document these experiences, especially since many of them have shaped and contributed to the progress of the human rights movement we have today. However, with the recent developments, we have adjusted the focus to also include feminist solidarity during the COVID-19 crisis.

COVID-19

It was in December last year when the new Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (commonly known as COVID-19) was discovered in China. By the beginning of 2020, it had become a global threat, spreading across the world and affecting millions.

By the first week of May, hundreds of thousands had reportedly died and over 3 million people had been infected with COVID-19. Fiji declared its first case on 19 March and this later increased to 18 cases. At the time of this writing, a majority of patients had recovered with less than four cases remaining.

In light of this pandemic, FWRM put in place measures to ensure staff safety while organisational processes continued. In observing official notices and government advisories, there was office closure during the nation-wide lockdown. When this was lifted, movement was still limited to essential staff only, as everyone was encouraged to work from home. Programmes were scaled down and revised for all outreach activities.

The pandemic has shed a devastating light on the inequalities and systematic barriers that we have continuously fought against for decades and generations. Women and girls are at risk because of the lack of access to health services, decent work, justice and other essential services. In addition, gender-based violence has been further amplified by the pandemic.

These are troubling times. Around the world, human rights and fundamental freedoms are being curtailed in the name of national security and public safety. It has also been a time for strengthening solidarity and being grateful for the partnerships and allies we have. We recognise that this is a time where global solidarity has been the most extraordinary, with the circumstances igniting more innovation in our advocacy, activism and feminism.

We welcome readers to this crossroad in time to reflect on the stories and experiences being shared here. As much as the past few months have been "out of the norm", it has also shown us how detrimental the "norm" has been for women and girls, marginalised and minority communities as well as for our environment.

This Balance issue celebrates the herstory of feminist and human rights activism and is part of our continuous efforts to collect and document stories of feminists' sustaining solidarity, resistance and revolution, particularly during the times of COVID-19.

Thank you.
In solidarity,
Nalini Singh
Executive Director

Staff Movement

IN FEBRUARY 2020, FWRM welcomed Bernice Lata into its Gender & Transitional Justice team as the Legal Rights Officer. A lawyer by profession, Bernice comes with experience in litigation and advocacy, having worked at the Legal Aid Commission and Consumer Council of Fiji.

In the past year, FWRM has also farewelled some of its long-serving staff members including Team Leader of the Intergenerational Women in Leadership programme (IWLP) Maraia Tabunakawai and Human Rights Training Officer, Alanieta Velulu, both of whom joined the team in 2013.

Maraia started at FWRM as the GIRLS Officer, working with the pioneering cohort of the Grow Inspire Relate Lead Succeed (GIRLS) programme, now an integral component under IWLP (formerly Young Women in Leadership programme or YWLP). Prior to joining, she was no stranger to the women's rights movement having graduated from FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum programme as a feminist and advocate. A year later, she transitioned into her new role as Team Leader YWLP and under her leadership, the programme evolved over the next six years with its life-cycle approach of engaging with girls, young women, women and ageing women. The programme became the IWLP we know today, with two cohorts of GIRLS graduating under her leadership, the sixth cohort of the Emerging Leaders Forum and the establishment of the new GIRLS Club.

Maraia oversaw the growth of her team and partnerships within the continuously changing context and leadership of the Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum. Thank you, Maraia, for your seven years of contribution to the IWLP and FWRM. We wish her well in her new opportunity and future endeavours.

Alanieta left FWRM in 2019 after working six years with FWRM's Gender & Transitional Justice team as the Human Rights Training Officer. A lawyer, she joined in 2013 and contributed to majority of the human rights training work and research. As part of the team, Alanieta had a keen interest in women and children's rights, becoming an outspoken feminist and human rights defender. She was involved with the European Union-funded citizenship rights awareness campaign and was later part of the team that saw the completion of the EU research project, Balancing the Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice. We are grateful for her contribution towards FWRM and look forward to working with her in future.

Additionally, FWRM had the opportunity to host interns and welcomed Shayal Nand and Talei Caucau who are supporting the work of the GTJ and Communications team, respectively. We also thank FWRM member Swaran Lal for volunteering her time and expertise with the team last year. Through its partnership with Insight Global Education programme, FWRM was able to host international interns who worked with the teams for a three-month period. Thank you, Melissa Hickey and Sarina Gibson, for your tremendous support to the Communications team.

Women's Global Strike

From page 1

for family and domestic violence. Over 84 per cent of lesbians, bisexual and transgender masculine and gender non-conforming people in Fiji have experienced intimate partner violence, while two out of three young LBT people aged 18-19 years have experienced homelessness due to their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC). A 2019 study indicates that 82 of the 645 respondents have been sexually abused because of their SOGIESC, and of those, 52 of the 630 had been sexually abused by a family member.[5]

The home is not safe for many and as mobility was severely restricted, this placed victims/survivors into the hands of their abusers and limited their access to support and services.

Occupations systematically entrenched with gender stereotypes of carers and emotional support was needed now more than ever which placed women on the frontlines as health care workers, humanitarian aid and as part of the essential service industries combatting the pandemic. Despite a gradual shift in the gender balance of the health workforce, women still tend to belong to lower cadres of health workers, are under-represented in positions of leadership, are over-represented in unskilled and unpaid work, and earn less than men.[6]

Women still lack access to safe and decent work. According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2017, there is a significant gender gap in the labour force participation rates - it stands at 76.4 per cent for males and 37.4 per cent for females. The unemployment rate stands at 2.9 per cent for males and 7.8 per cent for females and persons engaged in paid and unpaid work stands at 234,059 for males and 106,680 for females.[7] In addition to this, women do 14 hours of unpaid household work per week more than men.[8]

There is a gender disparity and this is exacerbated by gender-based violence in the workplace. In Fiji, 1 in 5 women experiences sexual harassment in the workplace.[9]

Women's leadership across the world has been appreciated and phenomenal such as New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden who reacted quickly and effectively to eradicate COVID-19 in her country.[10] Despite obviously competent women leaders, women are still significantly underrepresented in leadership with only 25 per cent representation in parliament globally[11] and 8.8 per cent in the Pacific.[12]

Throughout the pandemic, there has been a lot more focus on women and gender as the vast inequalities across all realms become more obvious. Feminists and human rights defenders are raising awareness and mobilising innovatively (virtually) to combat the threat to human rights. Global solidarity has been key, as FWRM joined its partners regionally and globally to promote and emphasise a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach to combat COVID-19. FWRM is working closely with diverse partners across all sectors of the community to support relief and recovery efforts. This includes coordinating the Fiji CSO Alliance for COVID-19 Humanitarian Response with partners such as Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji, Citizen's Constitutional Forum (CCF), the Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP), femLINKpacific and Rainbow Pride Foundation. There has been engagement with the government to highlight the gendered impacts of COVID-19 such as work with Fiji's Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation through the COVID-19 Response Gender Working group.

COVID-19 has been disastrous for the world, having taken thousands of lives and causing widespread turmoil to people's livelihoods. The world has been forced to reflect on its unsustainable practices. The Women's Global Strike called for governments to meet its obligations towards women's human rights and gender equality and the severity of the impacts of COVID-19, unfortunately, has been a consequence of these failed promises. In a way, it was a moment to acknowledge women and girls' contributions to society and what would happen, if really, women stopped. If women stopped, the world would have stopped.

5 Fwrm.org.fj. 2020. *Gendered Impacts Of COVID-19 On Women In Fiji*. [online] Available at: <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/Gender_and_COVID_Guidance_Note_-_Rapid_Gender_Analysis.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

6 Shannon, G., Minckas, N., Tan, D. et al. Feminisation of the health workforce and wage conditions of health professions: an exploratory analysis. Hum Resour Health 17, 72 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-019-0406-0

7 Fwrm.org.fj. 2019. Fact Sheet One: Social Protection Schemes In Fiji. [online] Available at: <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/FWRM_Factsheet_1_Social_Protection_Schemes_in_Fiji.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

8 Narsey, W., 2013. *Fiji Women And Men And Work And Leisure*. Suva: Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

9 Fwrm.org.fj. 2016. *Sexual Harassment Of Women In The Workplace In Fiji 2016 Follow Up Study*. [online] Available at: <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/fwrm2017/publications/analysis/FWRM-Public-Copy-MG-050916.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

10 Taub, A., 2020. *Why Are Women-Led Nations Doing Better With Covid-19?*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/world/coronavirus-women-leaders.html> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

11 Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2019. *Gender Equality*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

12 Pacific Women in Politics. 2020. *National Women Mps*. [online] Available at: <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/> [Accessed 9 June 2020].

Violence against women during humanitarian crisis situations.

Understanding Causes of Violence

By Artika Singh and Nalini Singh

VAW as a Global Epidemic:

Violence against women (VAW) is a global health problem of epidemic proportions.[1] The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)[2] provides that VAW shall be understood to encompass, but not limited to, the following:

a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

This article will focus on understanding the root causes of VAW and explore factors that exacerbate it during humanitarian crisis situations.

Humanitarian Crises – includes man-made conflicts, natural disasters and pandemics.[3]

Gravity of the Issue:

According to a 2017 factsheet by World Health Organisation (WHO), global estimates indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. This is corroborated with the FWCC study "Somebody's Life, Everybody's business, National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011)" which states that 71% of women have been physically and/or sexually abused by either a partner or non-partner since they turned 15.[4] Violence against women is a violation of women's fundamental human rights. These rights include[5]:

- The right to life
- The right not to be tortured or treated in an inhuman and degrading way
- The right to respect for private and family life (including the right to physical and psychological integrity)
- The right not to be discriminated against.

Additionally, VAW is the least reported in terms of human rights violations.[6] This not only reflects on the gravity of VAW but also makes one wonder why do we have this issue?

Considering this epidemic is universal and, like diseases, does not discriminate its victims. The victims/survivors and perpetrators can be from various ethnic backgrounds, socio economic status, have different levels of education and belong to marginalised as well as non-marginalised communities.

Naming the Root Cause of VAW:

What then is the cause of VAW? The answer to this question is patriarchy![7] Although this answer is simple, it is also complex. Let's not underestimate this one word, it is powerful and has ensured that power is managed and maintained through generations.

An article published by the Asian Pacific Institute on gender-based violence states that the "historical nature of gender-based violence confirms that it is not an unfortunate aberration but systemically entrenched in culture and society, reinforced and powered by patriarchy".[8]

Simply put, patriarchy is a system for maintaining the status quo of power relying on forms of oppression such as violence to perpetuate inequality. We do not need to look too far to understand this system. A quick glance into our own lives, be it our families, work or even society can assist us in identifying the entrenched system. In Indo- Fijian families, there usually exists a preference for sons over daughters where the birth of a daughter is pitied while the birth of a boy is an occasion to celebrate. The girl child is taught to uphold traditional gender norms by learning how to cook and clean whereas her brother isn't taught to clean up after himself, or the numerous "rules" a young woman is made to follow to maintain the honour of her family while her brother is free to live his life on his own terms. Sadly, at some point in time most women have been made to feel inferior by society.

At this point, you may ask, what does this have to do with VAW? This, in fact, sets the foundation of inequality between the genders in our community. It perpetuates that men are superior and thus have more power in our society. So, how is power maintained? It is done through upholding traditional gender norms. By allocating certain roles to men such as being the provider of the family, being the decision maker and by simply associating this with more significance over the roles women play in being the nurturers, carers and by carrying out unpaid care work. This diminishes the position of women in the society to sub-ordinates and rejects that women and men should be equal. Thus, strengthening the inequality between men and women in our societies.

One would argue, that these roles have been carried out for generations however, it is crucial to unpack the belief system to question where the power lies and who it benefits. An article

1 Violence against women: a 'global health problem of epidemic proportions' 2013 World Health Organization https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/en/
2 A/RES/48/104
3 Protecting human rights in humanitarian crises, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HumanitarianAction/Pages/Crises.aspx
4 Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business, National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A Survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji.
5 VAWG is a Human Rights issue, End Violence Against Women https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/about/vawg-is-a-human-rights-issue/
6 Violence Against Women Factsheet, 2017 World Health Organization https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women
7 Background documentation for 61st Session of the General Assembly Item 60(a) on advancement of women, Secretary –General's study on violence against women Forthcoming as document A/61/122/Add.1 https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/violenceagainstwomenstudydoc.pdf
8 Patriarchy & Power, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/our-analysis/patriarchy-power/

Human rights activists march in Suva last year at the beginning of the 16 days of activism to stop Violence against women. Image: FWRM

by OXFAM titled "Ten harmful beliefs that perpetuate violence against women and girls" provides that harmful social norms contribute to gender inequality. Some of these harmful beliefs include: women must be submissive to male family members in all aspects of her life, men are expected to exercise coercive control, men have the right to discipline women for 'incorrect' behaviour to name a few [9]. The sheer idea that women ought to get punished for not behaving in a correct manner and that men have the right to discipline women has birthed and nurtured the epidemic of VAW.

Pause and Reflect Moment:

Dear reader, at this juncture we urge you to take a moment and reflect on some of your own belief systems and draw linkages with how it perpetuates inequality and ultimately leads to VAW.

In a "Facts and figures: Humanitarian action" the UN Women[10] provided the following key information: as with all humanitarian emergencies, women and girls are among the most vulnerable. Women and girls face a significantly increased risk of unwanted pregnancy, gender-based violence, STIs and maternal mortality. Now that you have some understanding of the root cause of VAW, it should not come as a surprise that VAW increases during crisis situations.

However, let's delve a bit deeper into understanding why this is so. Jennifer First, a Disaster Mental Health Program Manager from University of Missouri shed light on this issue, stating that disasters affect changes in interpersonal relationships; that is, there is an increased aggressive manner in which conflicts are resolved or affects the relationship between intimate partners due to strained communications. In such situations, there are also increases in stressors such as financial disruptions, unemployment and housing changes. Additionally, it is important to note that in situations where VAW already exists, crisis situation exacerbates and is worsened due to the lack of access to social and family support systems. [11]

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Post Disaster in Fiji

- February 2016: TC Winston hit Fiji. There was an increase in the number of incidents of rape and sexual offences for the next two months. 37 counts of rape and sexual offences were recorded in February and this increased to 53 and 57 counts in March and April respectively.
- April 2018: Cyclones Josie and Keni hit Fiji. 19 counts of rape and sexual offences were recorded in April and this increased to 29 counts in May and 37 in June.
- January 2019: Cyclone Mona hit Fiji. 15 counts of rape and sexual offences were recorded in January and this increased to 43 counts in February and 58 in March.

(Data source: Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions Fiji)

COVID-19 and VAW:

Currently, the world is reeling from COVID-19. It is unfortunate that this too has led to a rise in VAW, particularly where measures such as lockdowns and social isolations have been implemented. This is because confinement is fostering the tension and strain due to reasons such as economic and personal security, health and money worries.[12]

Fortunately, unlike COVID-19, this epidemic of VAW has a cure. The cure is to dismantle the root cause of VAW. Gender inequality and discrimination perpetuated by patriarchy must be dismantled.

How can we do this? The UN Secretary –General offered the following solution: "Gender equality is a question of power; power that has been jealously guarded by men for millennia. It is about an abuse of power that is damaging our communities, our economies, our environment, our relationship and our health." He further added that "we must urgently transform and redistribute power, if we are to safeguard our future and our planet".[13]

Although challenging, dismantling belief systems held for generations will take time but it is not impossible. You can start small by treating women as equal humans, sharing household chores, participating in unpaid care work, lending your hand and most importantly, speaking out against discriminatory practices against women. We can all help by knowing that violence is never the answer to our problems and our behaviour must change to reflect this.

9 Ten harmful beliefs that perpetuate violence against women and girls, OXFAM International https://www.oxfam.org/en/ten-harmful-beliefs-perpetuate-violence-against-women-and-girls
10 Facts and figures: Humanitarian action, UN Women https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures
11 Protecting women and girls from violence in disasters, 2017 Prevention Web https://www.preventionweb.net/experts/oped/view/56044
12 Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic, 2020 UN Women https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic
13 Make this the century of women's equality: UN chief 2020 UN Newshttps://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1058271

Women in Leadership

- *The importance of women in leadership and women's contribution to national response and decision making*

AS THE world grapples with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it is the women who stand out for their leadership during these troubling developments.

While the crisis has served to highlight the outstanding leadership by some female heads of state, government and parliament members, women continue to be astoundingly underrepresented in decision-making spaces across all levels of society. As of February 2019, women make up only 24.3 percent of parliaments around the world, a very slow increase from 11.3 percent in 1995[1]. As of June 2019, 11 women are serving as Heads of State and 12 as Heads of Government[2].

Women leaders around the world have contributed invaluably to the fight against COVID-19 and successfully displayed resilience during this time of crisis from across the Nordic countries, Asia and Oceania. This is despite the fact women account for only 7 percent of heads of state[3].

What the women leaders had in common was the quick response to the outbreak. There was no underestimating the continuously growing impact of the novel coronavirus and just how deadly it could be. So many women leaders acted first and made the bold and unpopular call to shut down life as we knew it in the face of an invisible enemy.

As global leaders focussed on the threat of the pandemic, the crisis was a test to political leadership all over the world with leaders reacting differently to it. German Chancellor Angela Merkel embraced science. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro rejected it. U.S. President Donald Trump's daily briefings were a circuslike spectacle, while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held no regular briefings at all, even as he locks down 1.3 billion people[4].

Taiwan was one of the first countries to close its borders early this year and one of the first to ban the export of surgical masks[5]. President of Taiwan, Honourable Tsai Ing-wen, made a bold decision and quickly responded to the outbreak.

1 https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2019-03/women-in-politics-2019
2 file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/IPU_FemmesEnPolitique_2019_EN.pdf
3 https://www.statista.com/statistics/1058345/countries-with-women-highest-position-executive-power-since-1960/
4 https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/04/jacinda-ardern-new-zealand-leadership-coronavirus/610237/
5 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/13/how-taiwan-is-containing-coronavirus-despite-diplomatic-isolation-by-china

While women are not adequately represented at national leadership levels, they are leading the response across all sectors from the Ministry of Women to National Women's Organisation to local women's groups in mobilising ways to provide support to women and girls.

By Losana Tuiraviravi

With a population of 23.60 million[6] people, Taiwan has recorded 6 deaths to date compared with Australia which has a population of 24.98 million[7] and has recorded 88 deaths as of 29th April, 2020. Taiwan has managed to keep its COVID-19 death toll in a singular digit.

As we bring the experience closer to the Oceania region, one of the most compelling leaderships ever to prove of women's leadership abilities is Honourable Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand. The mosque attack in the greater Christchurch area in 2019 was deemed as one of the darkest days in the history of New Zealand and occurred during her leadership. Ardern led her country in comfort and respect; later calling for and implementing changes to gun laws. She continued her exemplary display of leadership during the COVID-19 outbreak in NZ; her leadership style being one of empathy in a crisis. She took decisive action by introducing early restrictions to help stamp out the worst of the virus. With a population of close to 5 million, NZ recorded 19 deaths as of 30th April, 2020[8].

In Fiji, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) is working closely with non-government women's organisation to collect data on violence against women and girls from local communities. Violence against women is prevalent in the Pacific and an increase in violence against women has been recorded in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

6 https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population/
7 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/
8 https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases

While women are not adequately represented at national leadership levels, they are leading the response across all sectors from the from the Ministry of Women to national women's organisations to local women's groups in mobilising ways to provide support to women and girls. In addition to the COVID-19 crisis, Fiji was also faced with the impact of Tropical Cyclone Harold. This did not stop women's groups and organisations from looking at the wellbeing of women and girls in affected communities. From supporting single mothers and families affected by COVID-19 and TC Harold to advocating the strengthening of policies that protect the lives of women in times of crises.

COVID-19 has forced communities to recognise the inequalities/barriers that exist and how the system benefits men but impacts women and girls. COVID-19 has proven that no matter the level of crises a country or community experiences, there is resilience among women leaders who display empathy towards their communities and the people they serve.

Women are compassionate leaders who care for the wellbeing of their people despite the many challenges encountered. COVID-19 has highlighted the success and value of women's leadership and representation in times of crisis. It also reminds us why equal representation of gender matters.

A Rambling blog about Feminist Leadership in the time of COVID-19

By Imrana Jalal

I HAVE been in physical isolation for 10 weeks now, only going out for some groceries, fresh vegetables and medicine. Fortunately groceries and wine can be delivered in the Washington DC area! Of those 10 weeks, my spouse Tu Saki has been with me for 4 weeks, visiting from Seoul, South Korea. Those were the best 4 weeks.

I weep for the millions who have lost jobs, for those parents who can no longer afford to put a decent meal on the table, for those women, who are now subjected to increased beatings in their homes due to isolation and economic stress, and for the children who are being abused in such times of increased vulnerability. I realise that I live a privileged and advantaged existence at the moment, notwithstanding my physical isolation.

Today is 14th May in DC, the 33rd anniversary of the first military coup d'état in Fiji. This year has reminded me of those weeks in curfew at home in Suva, following the military coups d'état of 1987, 2000 (quasi-military) and 2006. Coups are bad for us regardless of their justification. The first one set my beloved Fiji on an inevitable course from which there has been no return. The coup cycle phenomena has taught us this – if the powerful usurpers are not punished, if the courts of law are not independent, and there is a compliant population, it will provide an incentive to others to grab power unlawfully, and the coup cycle will be repeated and repeated, and repeated continuously. As it has done.

The year 1987, witnessed a tragedy of gargantuan proportions for which we are paying the price 30 plus years later- the tragic loss of the rule of law, for rule by law, the militarization of the legislature, police force and the civil service, the solidifying of military dominance whether direct or indirect in all democratic institutions; the control of the media and the acceptance by the young that the "big tough guy "is what was needed for strong leadership and economic prosperity. Frankly "guys" have done a pretty poor job of it, not just in Fiji, but seemingly the world over. The leadership of women has generally been better in the time of covid-19, as we have seen in the likes of Jacinta Ardern of New Zealand and Angela Merkel in Germany, incidentally both feminists. If there was ever a time for feminist leadership, it is now. It is a shame that we have very few feminists willing to throw their hats in the ring, for seats in the legislature. Why should they when the patriarchal legislature is so hostile to women, in a very gender-specific way, as evidenced by events in Fiji, Samoa and elsewhere?

So how has the current pandemic worsened gender inequality, in the same way it did during the aftermath of the coups d'tat in Fiji? What do the coups and the pandemic have in common for women? The news is not good. For one, domestic violence drastically increased in Fiji after the coups. Fiji has amongst the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV) at 64% in the world, and there is no reason to believe it should lessen when men and families are under economic stress. We know for a fact that GBV increases during times of stress and from our experience after the Fiji coups, and that men frequently take out their anger and frustration on those most vulnerable in the home, women and children

You can also be certain that women's time poverty will worsen now, as their domestic burden increases, as it did after the Fiji coups. Admittedly, this is often mitigated by economic class status, but generally the work of supervising children, cleaning, cooking and taking care of the ill and elderly falls disproportionately on women. The gender gap in work between men and women, is between 3- 5 hours in Fiji, with women doing considerably more unpaid work then men. Despite doing 52% of all work (paid and unpaid work) in the economy, women receive only 27% of all income earned and they work an average of 31% more hours per week than men. One can only imagine how much more unpaid work women are doing as a result of the pandemic, as they did in the aftermath of the Fiji coups.

We know for a fact that in the USA women have lost more jobs relative to men and their participation has been drastically reduced in the work force owing to the pandemic. It would be interesting to see the sex-disaggregated data of the job losses in Fiji as a result of the pandemic. Until the pandemic women's labor force participation rate in Fiji was a meagre 33% according to the World Bank.

I am not saying at all that only women suffered during the coups or now during the pandemic, but that the existing gender inequalities were greatly exacerbated, as it will now.

Never has there been a greater need for feminist leadership, as there is now, in the time of covid-19. Generally typical male leadership in Fiji has been patriarchal, magnifying racial tensions, rooted in bullying, and reinforced by cronies with deep pockets. It has served Fiji poorly. Feminist leadership would be inclusive and consensus building. It would seek to build alliances across political party lines and across diverse groups. It would put aside petty racial diatribes and look at the good qualities in all the ethnic groups. It would not seek to grab power at any cost, and would give way to others with better skills, education and experiences. It would be gender-inclusive. A great example of this type of leadership, started by women is "Barter for Better Fiji" which was created in response to significant falls in employment due to coronavirus. The page now has more than 100,000 members, cushioning some of the pain of the virus.

Imrana Jalal seen here during a march against violence in her earlier days of activism in Suva. Image: FWRM

Listening to GIRLS and Young Women during the COVID-19 pandemic

Members of the FWRM GIRLS Programme at a recent retreat. Image: FWRM

By **Emeli Anise and Mamta Chand**

GENDER plays an important role in times of crisis and the response measures designed to address crises.

While the recent Tropical Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 situation have exacerbated gender inequality and negatively impacted the safety and security of girls and women, documenting the lived realities is an important approach to influencing policymakers to include girls and young women's perspectives during a crisis. This approach guides policymakers in designing policies that are meaningful and relative to girls and young women's lived experiences.

Our society places a lot of importance on gender roles that have dictated our cultural and traditional structures. During a Rapid Assessment conducted in Yemen by CARE international, a young woman was quoted saying, "The woman is the person who has everything thrown on her head and absorbs all the shocks"[1]. This quote implies how girls and young women bear the brunt of the negative impacts of disasters whether it be armed conflict, a pandemic or natural disaster.

In mid-March this year, the global scare dressed as COVID-19 reached our shores; forcing the restriction of movement and confinement of girls and young women in their homes. For some, home is not the safe haven it is meant to be. Instead, it is the very place where young women and girls are subjected and exposed to gender-based violence.

Fiji's Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA), Mereseini Vuniwaqa, in her speech a month ago at the launch of the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls, said, "Fijian women and girls experience violence and abuse at the hands of men they know – often in their own homes and often repeatedly, sometimes over many years, if not a lifetime."[2]

Under the current circumstances and directives to stay home, girls and young women not only have to cope with the pressures of keeping up to date with academic studies and working remotely but are also experiencing the strain on social relations as families face uncertain economic crisis due to unexpected loss of paid employment. The experience of stress and animosity escalates the risks of gender-based violence. The sudden closure of schools, universities, and non-essential workforce; and the introduction of travel restrictions increases the domestic care burdens on girls and young women and has resulted in a spike of domestic violence.

In a joint press release on May 5th, 2020 by the MWCPA, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), Medical Services Pacific (MSP) and the UN Women, the honourable Minister Vuniwaqa once again highlighted that a total of 527 calls were made to the national domestic violence helpline in April 2020 where 54% were calls related to domestic violence and 30% to COVID-19[3].

In turn, FWRM's Intergenerational Women's Leadership Programme (IWLP) has begun work on capturing the experiences of girls and young women during COVID-19. The aim is to influence a positive approach to girls and young women's safety and security during this period. Critical to bridging the gender inequalities, it should be the primary work of all stakeholders to ensure girls and young women are safe during these times and are receiving timely and efficient resources to keep up with school and their professional priorities.

Initial work on this indicates that there is an additional burden placed on girls to not only perform academically from a remote setting (outside school) but also carry out household chores that are dictated by gender norms.

Two adolescent girls who responded to this phase of work shared that they were not aware of COVID-19 nor did they fully understand the word "pandemic". The key priority for them was school work and admittedly, they agreed there was some degree of relief that exams were postponed but they were also worried about how the school routine would now look like.

The girls are in their final year of primary school and are more anxious about how school entrance exams will now be conducted.

Girls' rights to education have been a priority of the work by IWLP. While girls are trying to catch up academically, they are also trying to cope with the pandemic and what they must do to keep themselves and their families safe. Girls are also indicating that they are missing school and are negotiating gender roles at home which differ from that of their brothers. In addition to this, girls have also indicated that information on the COVID-19 situation seems more suited for the understanding of adults and is not child-friendly. Recommendations are that this must be addressed to ensure girls, and children in general, are also kept informed about the current situation in Fiji.

"I think I know what's going on. I know we have to wash our hands with soap and water and stay at least 2 metres from the others and try to stay indoors a lot. But I also wish I knew how this whole thing began, especially here in Fiji. Now I'm hearing the news and see they are getting better but I feel there's too much information for me. Maybe as part of our school work online they should share this type of news."

Young women continue to reiterate that the COVID-19 situation does not look at intersectionality, like age and gender, and everyone is at risk. The anxiety and fear are shouldered by the family as well the country and the firm belief is to follow the directive of government officials.

"The pandemic is affecting everyone around the world in various ways every day. We will succeed and that success will belong to every one of us. Better days will return and we will be with our families and friends again. We will all meet. We all are tackling this virus and I want to reassure you that if we remain reunited and resolute, we will overcome it."

In saying this, young women are grateful to essential service providers including health workers, police officers, supermarket staff and vegetable vendors who continue to assist communities.

The team is now working to compile recommendations form girls and young women who have been part of the FWRM and IWLP work through the GIRLS Programme, the Fiji National University (FNU) Young Women in Leadership work and the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA). These recommendations include: calling on the government to allocate more resources towards national domestic violence helplines and the children's helpline; resourcing an educational system that allows flexible learning for all and will not financially burden families.

1 CARE Int. Empowering Women and girls affected by Crisis (is a quote from community member during a rapid gender analysis in Yamen). Accessed: https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Empowering_women_and_girls_affected_by_crises.pdf

2 Vuniwaqa, M (2020) "National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls "; published by the Fiji Sun. Accessed: https://fijisun.com.fj/2020/02/20/fijis-national-action-plan-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls-vuniwaqa/

3 Fiji MWCPA (2020). " Responding to Gender Based Violence and Child Welfare calls during COVID19 " https://www.facebook.com/Ministry-of-Women-Children-and-Poverty-Alleviation-Fiji-323584101328302/

Human Rights and Accountability during the COVID-19 Response

ACCOUNTABILITY, as a principle of good governance, provides that governments are answerable for their decisions or actions that impact the public. [1] It is also the foundation of the human rights framework which captures the system of norms and practices that govern the relationship between the individual and the State.

The Human Rights standards set out rights and freedoms which everyone is entitled to by the virtue of being human and this corresponds with the duties of those who exercise power. As such, accountability, in terms of human rights, is the relationship shared by the government with those affected by their decisions and actions.[2]

When governments overstep their boundaries or use crises as an excuse to violate human rights, it is important for civil society groups and human rights defenders to speak up. In Fiji, in the absence of a strong and independent national human rights institution, other groups must step up to fill the void. One such group that has consistently called for government accountability on human rights issues is the Fiji NGO Coalition on Human Rights (NGOCHR). The NGOCHR was formed on 10 December 1998, on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR).[3]

The main objectives of the NGOCHR are to promote respect for the rights and freedoms contained in the UDHR and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, within civil society, the public, and the State. Additionally, the NGOCHR also works to identify areas where human rights abuses occur, raise awareness, make submissions to relevant organisations (national, regional and international), work closely with relevant organisations and strategic partners to address such abuses and finally, to network and share information within the Coalition.[4]

Currently, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) is the Chair and Secretariat of the NGOCHR. Other members include the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Citizens' Constitutional Forum, femLINK Pacific, Social Empowerment and Education Programme, and Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji. Pacific Network on Globalisation and Haus of Khameleon are observers.

Since the announcement of Fiji's first COVID-19 case on 19 March, FWRM, as Chair and Secretariat, has been closely monitoring the situation and working overtime to highlight key human rights concerns that have emerged during this crisis.

The NGOCHR has employed four key strategies to ensure that the rights of Fijians are respected and protected. These include:

Human rights defenders during Fiji's Human Rights Day virtual rally in 2019 held at the FWRM office. Image: FWRM

By **Artika Singh** and **Kris Prasad**

i. Urgent Press Releases

The Coalition has released five statements related to the State's COVID-19 response. These included the issue of victim-blaming of COVID-19 patients (joint statement with Rainbow Pride Foundation); concerns over uniformed and armed Republic of Fiji Military Forces soldiers during the Lautoka lockdown; concerns over the high number of arrests and risks; condemnation of excessive force and brutality against detainees; and the call for a human rights-based approach for the COVID-19 response.[5]

ii. Monitoring of Arrests and Detentions

The Coalition, on a daily basis, keeps track and monitors cases of arrests. These include those charged for their social media posts for allegedly spreading malicious information under the Public Order Act and those charged for breaching several orders under the Public Health Act such as breaching curfew orders and quarantine/isolation orders.

iii. Engaging with the National Human Rights Institution

The Coalition has written to the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (HRADC) Commissioners and the Director highlighting human rights violations and calling for action.

iv. Working on write-ups and papers

The Coalition, apart from issuing press releases, is also writing papers, recording the human rights violations.

The work of the Coalition at this stage is far from complete however, it will continue working to ensure Government is accountable and that the human rights of Fijians are upheld even during these unprecedented times.

Internationally, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has called on governments to ensure human rights are not violated under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures.[6]

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres also released a policy brief on COVID-19 and human rights, calling on governments to be transparent, responsive, and accountable, and to respond proportionately to immediate threats while protecting human rights and the rule of law. The Secretary-General reminded governments that the threat is the virus, not people.[7]

Whilst as a nation we stand in the face of the adversity that is COVID-19, we must ensure that the rights of the people of Fiji are upheld and are not compromised at any cost, particularly when we proudly claim that we are a democratic nation.

1 Ibid
2 Who Will be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2013 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/WhoWillBeAccountable.pdf
3 Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 2020. *NGO Coalition On Human Rights.* [Online] Available at: http://www.fijiwomen.com/research/current-research/ngo-coalition-on-human-rights/
4 A Memorandum of Understanding between members of the NGO Coalition on Human Rights page 2
5 NGOCHR, 2020 Media Releases http://www.fwrm.org.fj/news/media-releases
6 OHCHR, 2020. *COVID-19: Exceptional measures should not be cover for human rights abuses and violations – Bachelet.* [Online] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25828&LangID=E
7 OHCHR, 2020. *We are all in this together: UNSG delivers policy brief on COVID-19 and human rights.* [Online] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/UNSG_HumanRights_COVID19.aspx

Feminist perspectives and analysis on solidarity actions during COVID-19 against human rights concerns and violations

By Neha Gupta and Ya Gan

SINCE the national lockdown started in Sri Lanka on 20 March, Kala has been staying at home with her three children while continuing her work at the Center for Women's Research (CENWOR). Food and other necessities have become more and more difficult to access; at the same time, she's dealing with a large number of requests for help for survival from the communities the organisation works with. Local authorities have also asked them to facilitate crisis management.

Kala is not the only one finding herself with a heavier workload during this pandemic. Eni and Dolores who work as migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong told us that many domestic workers in the city are denied their rest time during holidays in the name of the social distancing policy, and defying that can mean the termination of their contract - the source of livelihood for not only themselves but also their family members back home. As a result, many migrant domestic workers end up overworked, losing the right to leisure time with no suitable accommodation in employers' homes, their workplaces.

These are not just Kala, Eni, or Dolores's stories. This is the reality of millions of women across Asia and the Pacific today. Their stories emerged from a survey conducted by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) with our members and partners across the region, which also allowed us to observe major trends and themes.

The coronavirus can infect any human body, but the chances of being infected, as well as the impacts of policy responses on people's lives, vary drastically from one group to another. Almost every country in our region has implemented policies restricting movement, and responses to our survey suggest that women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation are among the hardest hit. Measures affecting mobility have meant that people who depend on daily income and do not have the privilege to work from home, the majority of whom are women, are losing their livelihoods. This includes daily wagers, small business owners, sex workers, farmers, and many more. Immobility and confinement to domestic spaces also mean women and girls are facing increasing care work burden as well as higher risks of domestic violence with fewer tools to deal with abusers.

Militarism and authoritarianism are on the rise in the name of COVID-19 response. Several countries, namely Fiji, Philippines, China, and India, have seen this trend. For example, in the Philippines and India, there has been clear State abuse, violence, and harassment against those violating curfews and/or quarantine rules.

The president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, even openly encouraged soldiers to shoot people dead in such situations. In India, COVID-19 response has been coloured with religious fundamentalism, with Muslims being vilified for spreading the disease. CSOs are concerned that the vitriol and systemic Islamophobia will further marginalise the community which is suffering socio-economically.

Deep structural inequality is a key reason why states across both regions have been able to get away with violating the rights of women and communities. It is undeniable that peoples' movements are facing unprecedented challenges, with limited mobility and a looming global recession that can threaten access to funding. Many traditional methods of mobilising and organising have become practically impossible, while the communities our members and partners work with are struggling to cope with ever-increasing challenges with shrinking income and uncertain futures.

To challenge the power structures that are solidifying during the COIVD-19 pandemic, we need a feminist response that takes into account the lived realities of women in all their diversities and other genders, who continue to be pushed to the margins. We need cross-movement solidarity, community care, community-based solutions rooted in feminist organising and sustained advocacy to shift power back to the people.

In the face of these challenges, APWLD members and partners have not been silent. Our strong sisters have been providing vital support to local communities; from information distribution, to direct relief packages, to innovative solutions such as neighbourhood resource exchange systems, connecting mental health professionals with people in need, and mobilising youth to raise awareness. Most importantly, they are finding ways to hold the government accountable in areas including public health, social protection, and women's participation in decision-making processes.

In our survey, our members and partners felt that we can overcome the challenges using multiple interconnected strategies, starting with an intersectionality analysis to map differentiated impacts of vulnerable groups already affected by intersecting power of globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarism and patriarchy. Also of importance is the continuous monitoring and documenting of situations in the community, including human rights violations and building collective actions to expose and address the issue.

"There is need for Asia-Pacific-wide advocacy for general and specific demands, and we should implement them as soon as possible to not only foster solidarity but also to uplift the morale of women region-wide who may feel isolated and helpless due to the narratives of governments and corporations," noted Cristina Palabay from Karapatan, Philippines.

We are at a crucial point where we need to ensure all messages, measures and policies in tackling the pandemic are gender-sensitive and responsive. Our members suggested that we can achieve this by ensuring women, in all their diversities, and other genders are given space to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes at all levels, and that gender budgeting is done at both local and national levels for any fiscal response to COVID-19.

Most importantly, the very structure that keeps women and other genders out of these processes need to be dismantled. The pandemic has shown that neoliberal capitalism is prolonging and escalating the multiple crises caused by COVID-19 and the only solution is Development Justice. A future where we aim to reduce inequalities, redistribute wealth and achieve human rights can be achieved if we redefine economies that work for the people, stop prioritising corporate wealth over human rights, move away from unsustainable fossil fuels towards climate justice and environmental justice, and listen to and implement the needs of our communities. Only then can we transition to a just and equitable system. An immediate step for governments can be providing sustained and long-term economic relief for the most marginalised, and ensuring universal access to public services and universal social protection.

A long and arduous path lies ahead to achieve this new roadmap that we envision. But it can be achieved with our most powerful weapons - solidarity and community organising. Across the world, movements are leading by example on what feminist solidarity and community care in times of COVID-19 look like. An APWLD statement points out that the COVID-19 crisis 'requires a global-level collective action and coordinated response to overturn the current dominant rules, and rewrite one that is feminist, based on the principles of human rights, historical responsibility, accountability, international cooperation and solidarity.' While a newly launched Feminist Response website, that APWLD has participated in building, states that 'Human rights and their fundamental principles, including the principles of universality, inalienability, interdependence, indivisibility, equality, non-discrimination, non-derogation and accountability, must guide all actions taken in response to COVID-19'.

As large feminist networks, we must express solidarity and amplify it, and support communities in their efforts to organise. It is our duty to ensure that women from the Global South are at the front and centre in every decision-making process that impacts and changes their lives, and challenge every human rights violation that suppresses their voice during this pandemic and beyond.

Neha Gupta is the Information and Communications officer at APWLD.

Ya Gan is a programme associate for APWLD's Grounding the Global programme. Both of them are part of APWLD's COVID-19 response team.

A global pandemic and a tropical cyclone – Reflections from the Fiji Women's Fund

By Michelle Reddy and Erica Lee

SINCE December last year, nations around the world have been battling the aggressive spread of acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19. As of 30 April, the World Health Organisation reported that nearly 3.2 million people had been infected and 228,000 deaths recorded. With no known vaccination available, governments scrambled to contain its spread by implementing policies such as lockdowns, social distancing, closure of non-essential businesses, movement restrictions, and the closure of schools. Fiji's first detected COVID-19 case was announced on 19 March[1], followed by government-imposed restrictions: a lockdown of Lautoka City, nightly curfews (10pm – 5am and later, 8pm – 5am), and the suspension of all operations deemed unessential. Within two weeks of the Government's announcement, global cases soared, and international borders quickly shut down to contain and prevent the spread. Further restrictions were imposed by the Fijian Government upon the detection of cluster cases in Suva and Labasa.

Three women's human rights organisations in Fiji warned that COVID-19-imposed precautionary measures such as the lockdown could lead to a heightened risk of gender-based violence as women are confined indoors with their abusers. They called on the Fijian Government and authorities to prioritise may be survivors of violence[2]. Already annually, around 64% of women and 84% of LGBTQI[3] in Fiji experience some form of violence or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner.

Exacerbating the impact of COVID-19, Fiji experienced a category 4 tropical cyclone which caused widespread flooding in low lying areas, damage to properties, one recorded death, and food security issues. While proper assessments are still underway, the Fijian Government estimates damage to be valued at more than USD11 million[4].

Research shows that humanitarian crises most often affect women, girls, and gender non-conforming people disproportionally. Pre-existing gender inequality and discrimination tend to be further aggravated due to sudden shifts in gender roles and relations. Gendered social norms affect women's and girls' ability to make decisions, to propose solutions, and to lead, constraining women's lives and choices. In addition, they affect the ability of households and wider communities to recover from crises[5]. Women's sources of income have become increasingly precarious and they have noticeably seen an increase in care duties especially with Fiji schools not expected to reopen until June 30.

In this current context, women's funds around the world are stepping up to stand with and support women through the crises. Women's funds are mechanisms that support the women's movement with a range of resources to advance women's and girl's rights. The Fiji Women's Fund, an initiative of the Australian Government is one of only two women's funds based and operating in the Pacific. In the wake of COVID-19 and TC Harold, the Fund has provided the following support to its grantee partners:

- Granting no-cost extensions: Activities in relation to awareness-raising and generation, advocacy and lobby, capacity development, meetings, and public events were heavily affected by the lockdowns and curfews. In discussions with our grantee partners, a six-month extension was granted which the Fund will revisit later in the year given the uncertainty and severity of the pandemic.
- Supporting core organisational costs: Since the pandemic is testing the sustainability of social movements especially that of the women's movement in Fiji, the survival of women's groups, networks and organisations is key and central to strengthening the resilience of such movements. We have been increasingly receiving and supporting the following requests:
  - Provision of psychosocial support for staff.
  - Ongoing support for staff salaries and payment of office rent.
- Supporting new ways of working: The lockdown and mandatory self-isolation in March – April led to grantee partners adopting new strategies for communicating and linking with the communities they work in. This meant new information technology and communication costs such as mobile talk time recharge, internet connection for staff and community members.
- Supporting emergency relief: The Fund's current grant mechanism is not tailored for emergency relief. However, the Fund worked with grantee partners where possible to redirect funding to support emergency relief. The Fund also supported grantee partners to mobilise both monetary and non-monetary support from other sister funds such as the Urgent Action Fund Asia and the Pacific, donors, and individuals.

"From our above intervention and observing other sister funds, we have documented some lessons learned:

- The need to review our current grant mechanism to include a dedicated flexible grant that is directed specifically for emergency or crisis situations: Many women's funds around the world have this mechanism in place allowing them to respond quickly without obliging their grantee to reprioritise their workplans to the crises.
- Support the gathering and sharing of critical information: The Fund, whilst not on cluster groups such as the Fiji National Disaster Management Office, has grantee partners and allies such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji NGO Coalition on Human Rights, UN Women, DIVA for Equality, Medical Services Pacific, Adventist Development Relief Agency Fiji and others who can use the information gathered and analysis to share with relevant ministries and agencies to guide its decisions and strategic assistance.
- Coordinating and managing multi-sectoral expectations: Whilst there is value in working with our grantee partners to adapt their strategies to address a pandemic and natural disaster, there is value in being still, listening to the lived experiences of our grantee partners and the communities they serve. While generally smaller groups are assumed to be more agile and adaptable, our observations are showing us that this ability to adapt and adjust has taken longer for smaller women's groups and networks, especially in rural and remote areas.

In the coming months, the Fund will be focused on documenting and sharing the stories and experiences of our grantee partners. We hope that in doing so, we will draw attention to the importance and value of funding the Fiji women's movement and the need for funding to be flexible and adaptive, especially for a country prone to yearly natural disasters.

Michelle Reddy is a Pacific women's rights feminist activist. For over 10 years, she has worked in the area of gender equality and human rights in Fiji and the Pacific. Having worked in previous leadership positions at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding and Leadership FIJI and Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, Michelle now leads one of the very few women's funds in the Pacific region: Fiji Women's Fund.

Erica Lee is a strategic communications specialist with over 14 years of experience. Currently, Erica is the Communications Officer at the Fiji Women's Fund and has held similar roles at the UN Capital Development Fund, Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisaton, Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Fiji Human Rights Commission. Erica is also a Board member of the Rotary Club of Suva East.

1 https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/Speeches/PM-BAINIMARAMA%E2%80%99S-STATEMENT-ON-THE-FIRST-COVID-19-C
2 http://www.fwrm.org.fj/news/media-releases/67-all-category/news/press-releases/567-women-s-human-rights-groups-risk-of-rise-in-domestic-violence-cases-during-covid-19-pandemic
3 https://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-Fiji-Infographic.pdf
4 https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/414748/fiji-still-counting-cost-of-cyclone-harold
5 http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/7/the-effect-of-gender-equalityprogramming-on-humanitarian-outcomes

COVID-19: Reflections and the herstory of FWRM solidarity actions

By Mamta Chand and Kris Prasad

AN iconic piece of merchandise in FWRM's collection is a photo postcard from 1986 featuring some of our founding members. Alefina Vuki, Shamima Ali, Imrana Jalal and Penny Moore are seen holding placards preparing for Fiji's first major anti-rape campaign. At the time, FWRM collective members had come together to organise against discriminatory rape laws and the harsh treatment of rape victims. As part of the campaign, 5000 signatures were collected and after a historic march for women's rights through the streets of Suva, the petition was presented to the Minister for Justice (FWRM, 2012).

The 1986 anti-rape campaign is one of the many forms of activism and organising in FWRM's rich 34-year herstory (FWRM, 2012). As a feminist organisation committed to feminism, democracy and human rights, we have led and joined several protests and solidarity actions.

While many marches and protests have been organised with all the necessary paperwork and permits such as the NGO Coalition on Human Rights' (NGOCHR), annual march for International Human Rights Day and Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's (FWCC) Reclaim the Night march for International Women's Day, there have been other political protests organised without permits or formal approval. These protests discussed below would not have received formal approval from the authorities as they would be seen as "anti-government" or against the interests of the State's foreign policies.

In September 2013, FWRM staff members among others were arrested outside Government House for peacefully protesting the assent to the new Constitution. The protesters held placards and banners and believed that the new constitution was unjust and did not reflect the views of 7,000 people who made submissions on it. 14 people were taken in for questioning to the CID office in Toorak (Radio New Zealand, 2013). This was in the early days of Facebook Live so protesters used the feature to broadcast the arrests and detainment on social media. Supporters amplified our posts and we were released without charge by lunchtime.

Later that year, another group of protestors including NGOCHR members were arrested for having a meal near the Fiji Revenue Customs Authority building, wearing t-shirts calling on the government to make the budget public. The protesters were released the same afternoon after questioning (Langford, 2013). Similar to the Constitution protest, the budget protest, although a peaceful demonstration, did not have an approved permit as per the requirements under the Public Order Act. Peaceful protests are considered a hallmark of all functioning democracies and international human rights groups have consistently called on the Fiji Government to crack down on torture, not protests (Amnesty International, 2017).

Bearing in mind the political context and restrictions on freedom of assembly, we have had to be creative in organising protests and demonstrations on human rights issues. Last year alone, the NGOCHR had three solidarity actions for West Papua. In September there was a lunchtime protest at FWCC's compound in solidarity with West Papua. This is after Fiji Police had been pressuring FWCC and the Pacific Conference of Churches to remove the Morning Star flags from their properties. Conveniently, the FWCC office is directly opposite the tower that hosts the office of the Indonesian Embassy in Suva. In October, NGOCHR members and allies strolled in pairs from Citizens' Constitutional Forum to FWCC office at lunchtime to express solidarity and support for West Papua (Turaga, 2019).

Finally, in December, a small gathering was held at FWCC to mark the Global Flag Raising Day for West Papua in solidarity with West Papuans and their struggle for freedom (Cava, 2019). In all instances, police officers arrived on FWCC premises to monitor the protest and left after briefly questioning staff. As the FWCC building is on private property, any gatherings on site cannot be considered a public gathering or procession as per the Public Order Act, therefore the protesters were not doing anything illegal and could not be arrested.

With or without permits, marches, protests and demonstrations are a fundamental part of any democracy. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on social gatherings and physical distancing, protests and demonstrations of any kind are not possible. It may be many months before we can gather to protest on an issue. This is the reality in Fiji and almost everywhere else in the world currently under restricted movement or quarantine. However, social media can play an important role in amplifying important human rights messages. FWRM, NGOCHR and their members have large social media platforms, and these can be harnessed to continue to spread the importance of human rights, democracy and the rule of law during a global pandemic.

The early years of FWRM with founding members – Alefina Vuki, Shamima Ali, Imrana Jalal and Peni Moore. Image: FWRM

Listen to the women: Reflections from Rise Beyond the Reef

By Janet Lotawa

THERE IS nothing quite like a global pandemic to bring to light inequalities that already exist. The question for us is how will we treat this as an opportunity to help advance the rights of women? Perhaps we need to start with ourselves and organizations. It is time to bless and release what is not working, bring forward what is, and make more room for what could.

What's taking up a lot of space?

The Pacific is covered in foreign development frameworks, not an uncommon issue in the development world. But some elements of those frameworks need to be retired for us to have space and flexibility to show true solidarity with marginalised women right now! Mary Robinson, the first women President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights writes in her latest book Climate Justice, "As high commissioner, I had watched industrialised nations emphasise the importance of civil and political rights while rarely conceding that the right to food, safe water, health, education, and decent work was equally important."

So, first, let us make sure we have listened to women we work with or want to work with before applying for funds for COVID response.

Whose frameworks and needs are we aligning to?

In our partner communities, more people have died or been hospitalised in the last two months from leptospirosis outbreaks and poor water quality than COVID. Being "locked out" of the market started in December when heavy rain washed away river crossing and turned mountain roads into gutters. People can only shelter in places if they have the means to do so. For our partner communities, the copious amounts of billboards, radio and tv ads about COVID and related issues, funded by the aid sector and NGO partners, do not reach them. It is time we stop pretending we are reaching geographically marginalised people by continuing to invest in strategies we know only reach some.

The work of Rise Beyond the Reef

In Fiji – most people understand community, that there is a natural balance or exchange and trusting we can find ways to support each other with other currencies beyond money. This is much of the Pacific way all along, but it is taken a global crisis for us to all be clear about the need to focus on what we know works in this cultural context. Right now, we are expanding our efforts to promote food sovereignty. Not just "security" but focusing more on the issue of "dependency." To start to value traditional foods, to promote traditional medicine, and to return the solesolevaki way of farming by starting with a communal farm "food/seed basket" where communities plant their source material together (to help ensure a higher survival rate) before taking it to their individual farms. The greatest successes we have seen in villages with art and crafts production come from women working together regularly. These groups always produce the highest level of participation, consistent supply, timely delivery, and quality. While tourist the market remains dormant over the next 6-12 months, we are having to shift our focus to where the market remains locally – food, health and wellness products. We are working to strengthen the "Na I likoliko ni Vanua" the land given to women when married into a tribe to help establish her family and food source.

If there is one thing that we have learned about working with rural remote women over the years – the "secret sauce" that helps make partnerships turn out outcomes that check a multitude of boxes on the SDG targets is relationships.

Building relationships

We can only organise those we have relationships with. We have to move at the pace of trust and take time to build relationships. This does not take place through the sort of "listserv activism" we see in the Pacific. We need to stop talking *about* marginalised women and instead talk to them. Spend time in their communities to understand and be willing to make an honest commitment to helping in some way that ticks *their box*.

For the rural remote women, feeling left out is nothing new. The fact that in Fiji, only those who have worked in the formal sector with FNPF accounts have an option for stimulus is not a surprise. Our work ahead is helping to support the women we work with to bring forward their own version of a safety net. To help reinforce the value and resources in their natural environment, their social currencies, and to strengthen the flame of working together - and how that solidarity can illuminate the world beyond just tangible outputs.

Janet Lotawa is the CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of Rise Beyond the Reef

The "secret sauce" of working with remote rural women is 'relationships', according to the author. Image: Rise Beyond The Reef

COVID-19 Pandemic: Reflections of a Trade Unionist

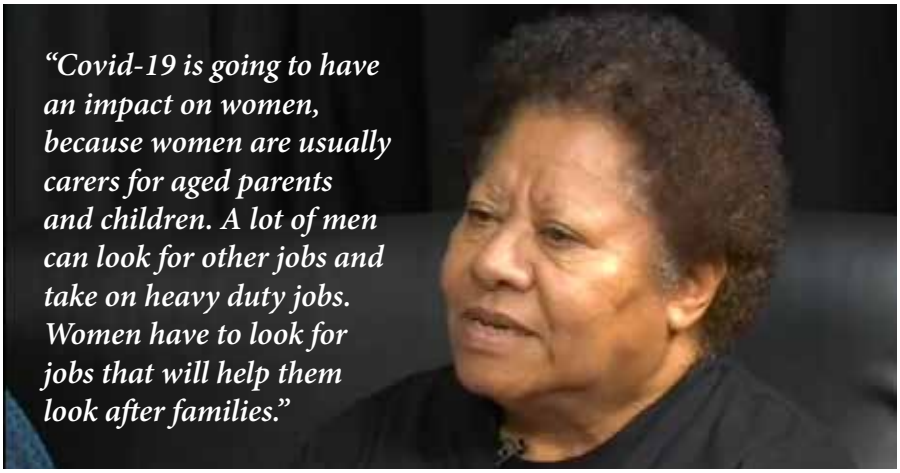
COVID-19 is an unprecedented time for the world. The entire world is on lockdown. Thousands of airports are currently closed, and planes are grounded. Massive cities and towns have been shut down until further notice. The financial impact, of this pandemic, has left families in urgent need of food and other essentials.

During this time, Trade Unions around the world are fighting for worker's rights. In Fiji, the Trade Unions are doing their utmost to help their members. Kuini Lutua is the Project Manager at National Union of Factory and Commercial Workers. She took the time to be interviewed by FWRM for this article. There were no written documents for this pandemic as it is the first of its kind. Kuini says the Union's job is to ensure job security for their members. They hope to make sure workers are not sent home permanently.

Members of the Union come from 40+ companies. So far, a handful of workers were laid off after the lockdowns were put in place. An additional 200 to 500 workers are at risk of being laid off, according to predictions made by the Union. When workers lose their jobs, the Trade Union does its best to find opportunities, for these workers, at other companies.

The Trade Union is formulating plans to provide families with food vouchers as this is the second week of layoffs. The Trade Union is asking to pay employees whatever they are owed. The Trade Union has designed a job map to allocate workers to other jobs and has also reduced its annual subscription by 50 per cent. Many companies are cutting the hours for their workers. A few companies are scaling back their efforts to have four-day workweeks. Other companies have decreased their working days to three days a week.

"In two months, some companies have let go of employees and have terminated employment contracts without adequate warning. These companies have been making huge profits some in millions of dollars. Just in two months of making a loss due to COVID 19, companies are letting go of employees. What about the huge profits that the Companies had made before? Can the shareholders forgo dividends this one-year but don't push the fault on the workers. A good employer will look after its workers in good and bad times because, in the bad times, workers are very vulnerable but it is human nature to remain true to those that help you in bad times. We have to build up our cases and collect relevant data before we can take this up. We want to win cases where our members' employment have been terminated unlawfully," said Ms Lutua.



Kuini Lutua during an interview with Mai TV leading up to the Women's Global Strike concert. Image: Mai TV video

By Talei Caucau

FNPF has become a lifeline during this pandemic. Workers have been visiting FNPF branches, all over Fiji, to collect money. The Trade Union believes the government should provide wage subsidy scheme for workers. The government should do more to help workers around the country. Kuini stresses that families are being affected by unemployment because of this crisis.

The wholesale and retail industry are feeling the effects of the economic downturn. In the wholesale industry, most cashiers are women. Kuini explains,"Covid-19 is going to have an impact on women, because women are usually carers for aged parents and children. A lot of men can look for other jobs and take on heavy duty jobs. Women have to look for jobs that will help them look after families."

The Trade Union is working closely with workers and engaging with companies to ensure workers keep their jobs. Kuini says there are companies that want to let go of their workers even though they have been very profitable over the last few years. Kuini says these companies have received millions of dollars in profit. The Trade Union plans to conduct research and build cases to fight for its workers.

Kuini says the membership for the Trade Union is lower than it should be but there is potential in the workforce to improve. Many workers are scared to join the Union because of how it will affect their jobs. An obstacle the Union faces is raising awareness for workers to join the Union. Many workers do not know they can freely join the Union.

The Trade Union interacts with companies and builds lasting relationships to negotiate on worker's rights. Kuini says many government plans for Covid-19 discuss prevention. She wants to see plans made to combat the virus if it reaches the workplace. Kuini would like to see what kind of measures must be taken if this occurs. Kuini says," We want to see who is responsible for making the health and safety act to cover pandemics. Even our employment laws don't cover pandemics.

"We are gathering information from the ITUC and also our sister unions overseas, the ILO and other counterparts about the best way forward, how to review the current employment policies, how do we protect workers and their families in this type of pandemic crisis. Some form of social security incentives where government can invest in, not just the employment act. The employers federation and government and the Unions must negotiate and dialogue on how can we improve things in the long term," said Ms. Lutua.

This is a new issue in the world. We are liaising with overseas counterparts about how to review the policies—not just the employment act."

Kuini's advice for workers is to join the Trade Union and learn more about their rights. Her advice for the Trade Union is to keep updating members and plan activities to keep members interested in the cause.

Talei is a law student, ardent reader and coffee lover based in Nadi and interning virtually with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement team during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women's Global Strike reflections: Kuini's story

By Talei Caucau

ACTIVISM has proven necessary for human progress.

Kuini was born and raised in Moala, in the village of Keteira in Lau. Her family moved to Suva when she was young to pursue more opportunities. After graduating from Dudley High School, Kuini started her career at Bank of New Zealand and in 1973 joined the Central Monetary Authority, which later became the Fiji Reserve Bank. She had a successful career at the Fiji Reserve Bank; however, she faced many obstacles. Kuini had two children during her time at the Fiji Reserve Bank. With each pregnancy, Kuini was forced to leave her job without compensation. After giving birth, she had to reapply for her former position at the bank.

At the time, Fiji did not have maternity leave policies in offices around the country. Women who became pregnant were forced to leave their jobs and reapply for the same position after they give birth. These women often had no guarantee that they would be able to return to their workplace after giving birth. Kuini joined the SPSA and participated in the march for women's rights.

This march was conducted in solidarity with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Young Women's Christian Association. After this protest, laws were passed that gave women maternity leave with pay. The new legislation also allowed women to return to their former post after pregnancy. This was her first solidarity action. It left an impression on her conscience. Kuini possesses a lot of empathy. Her objective, in her present career, is to care about people.

Kuini's advice for young women who want to fight for worker's rights is simple: do not give up. She has endured many challenges to be where she is today. Kuini had five children over the course of her illustrious career. She had to work and take care of her family during her time as an undergraduate student. She took 8 years to complete her Bachelor of Arts in Business Studies at the University of the South Pacific. The program included accounting, general business, and sociology.

It did not matter about the external obstacles in her way, Kuini was determined to graduate. In 1999, she graduated with her bachelor's degree. She decided to go further in her pursuit of a higher education and enrol in a Postgraduate diploma in Industrial Relations.

After completing her studies university, Kuini went to Singapore for a course that was set up in part by the trade union. She also went to Australia to complete courses and further her knowledge about trade unions. These experiences gave Kuini insight into how trade unions work overseas. It also developed her strategies for growth of trade unions in Fiji.

In 2001, Kuini became General Secretary of Fiji Nurses Association. She fought for nurse's rights and played a significant role in improving nurse's salaries and working conditions. In 2002, the Fiji School of Nursing walked out of their campus in protest. The school was taking in more students than their budget allowed. The school's budget fit a student body of 120 and they had approximately 200 students. The budget could not cover meals and basic needs of students. Kuini shared, "I didn't quite know what to do as this was the first strike that I was to handle for the association. The permanent secretary for health and the Minister of Health were immediately summoned by the Public Service Commission who were the brokers to meet with F.N.A. to work out a solution. Through talks the Union was able to convince government that the students had valid reasons to take matters into their hands, they had followed all channels of communication and were not heard so they came to the Association for help as a last resort. They also admitted that when government policies change the budget should also change to implement policies correctly. Taking in over 300 students for 3 days was not an easy thing to do but we managed and the students were elated when they won their fight."

In 2007, Kuini led a colossal strike that involved 1,500 nurses in Fiji. In December 2006, Fiji's military coup took place. The objective of the strike was to demand a reversal of the 5 percent wage cut imposed on nurses by the interim government (Sydney Herald, 2007). The strike came at a time when freedom of speech was being trampled on. It was an act of courage and defiance by nurses.

Kuini is the Project Manager at the National Union of Factory and Commercial Workers. She helps workers understand their rights, so they are not taken advantage of by manipulative business practices. Kuini has made her career about helping people. Her actions have inspired workers around the country to join trade unions and fight for their rights in the workplace. Kuini's life is a message of hope for Fijian women that it is never too late to chase your dreams.

Kuini Lutua in the midst of the nurses' strike of 2007 during her term as Fiji Nursing Association General Secretary. Image: Google

The importance of the 16 days campaign against GBV

By Serelisoni Moceica

SAY No to Violence! Say No to Violence against women and girls! Women's rights are human rights!

Every year and with every opportunity, women's and human rights defenders advocate, rally and march to fight against one of the most widespread human rights violations - violence against women and girls. The prevalence of violence against women is such that it has almost become a norm to note that incidences of women battered or murdered frequent the news, both nationally and internationally.

In 1991, as a response to the violence, the 16 days campaign of violence against women was incepted and conceptualised by 23 women's human rights defenders who had converged during the first Women's Global Institute on Women, Violence and Human Rights at the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in New York.[1] Amongst them, our very own, Shamima Ali, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Coordinator and a powerhouse advocate for women's rights in our region.

According to Shamima, the 16 days campaign began as a "fight back" response from women's rights groups and defenders who were concerned with the increase in gender-based violence statistics and called for a global campaign to raise awareness on the issue.

The women decided to start the 16 days campaign on November 25, a date that had already been marked to commemorate the deaths of Dominican sisters Patria Mercedes Mirabal, María Argentina Minerva Mirabal and Antonia María Teresa Mirabal who fought against the dictatorship of the then Dominican ruler Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo's three-decade rule was rife with brutality, murders and injustices against women and human rights. The sisters were assassinated in 1960 under his orders and since 1981, the date of their deaths has been commemorated and is now part of the herstory behind the International Day of Violence Against Women.[2]

Thus was the beginning of the 16 days campaign now marked from November 25 and culminates on December 10, Human Rights Day.

Shamima said the reason behind the 16 days concept was to use the period to highlight and intensify awareness of the rising violations against women and girls globally and even within the local context. "We thought we would put all these issues together and during the 16 days activism we would intensify the campaign on ending all forms of violence against women and girls. Through the media, workshops, and just giving it a lot more visibility while we continue with the work year in and year out. This is the time to raise the profile."

Almost thirty years later, as the statistics continue to rise, the need for heightened awareness and visibility on gender-based violence remains significant. Statistics on global incidences from 2013 estimate that about 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical or intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner during their lifetime.[3] In Fiji, a survey conducted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre found that 64% of women have experienced physical and or sexual violence at the hands of their partners in their lifetime. The same survey also concluded that about 1 in 5 women continued to experience physical violence in their own homes.[4] A total of 10 women died at the hands of those they loved in 2019 alone.[5]

Shamima also grew up exposed to violence and alluded to the harsh reality of women's and girls' experiences in Fiji. "I'm a survivor of violence. My mother is a survivor of violence. There are many women that I've seen growing up that are survivors of violence."

The 16 days campaign is relatable to women everywhere, within our local communities and globally, and more so in today's context with the use of social media and the COVID19 restrictions. Women still face widespread discrimination. Women's anatomies continue to be violated on the internet with the sharing of intimate pictures and videos. Women are also facing violence in their own homes amidst lockdowns and curfews as these restrictions mean victims have nowhere to run. In her interview with Fiji TV's Close Up programme on April 24, 2020, Shamima said more than 700 calls were recorded by FWCC between April 5 and April 17 through the Domestic Violence helpline and phone counselling services compared with the usual of around 60 calls per month.[6]

There is a need to have a heightened level of consciousness of the realities faced by women and this is why the continued visibility on the issue of gender-based violence is paramount. Women's rights organisations continue to speak out on women's issues through press statements, media interviews, research, social media updates, submissions to national committees and also providing gender lenses to laws and legislations that affect half of Fiji's population. Information such as this is also highlighted during the 16 days awareness campaign so everyone is conscious of the work surrounding gender-based violence. It is also important to note that the government also plays a significant role in fighting gender-based violence, and the Fiji Government has made a commendable effort by the being the first Pacific Island Country to develop a National Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls that was launched early this year.[7]

The 16 days campaign against gender-based violence is crucial to the feminist movement. What women ultimately want is a change in attitude and perspectives, availing space for our opinions and issues to be heard and addressed, and most importantly, a stop to the violence. Shamima is torn between the magnitude of what the 16 days campaign has grown into around the world and the realities of what it actually means.

"When we work on eliminating violence against women, the vision is working ourselves out of business one day. 16 days is a very good tool, it's a very good campaign to bring to the forefront but also that's the vision - that one day we won't need to do that; that we've brought an end to all of this. I don't think that's going to happen in my lifetime or your lifetime but that's hopefully the legacy."

Shamima Ali.

1 S. Ali, Personal Communication, November 21, 2019.

2 Charlotte Alter, "The Brutal Triple Murder Behind the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women," Time Magazine (December 2, 2014).https://time.com/3603582/international-day-to-end-violence-against-women/

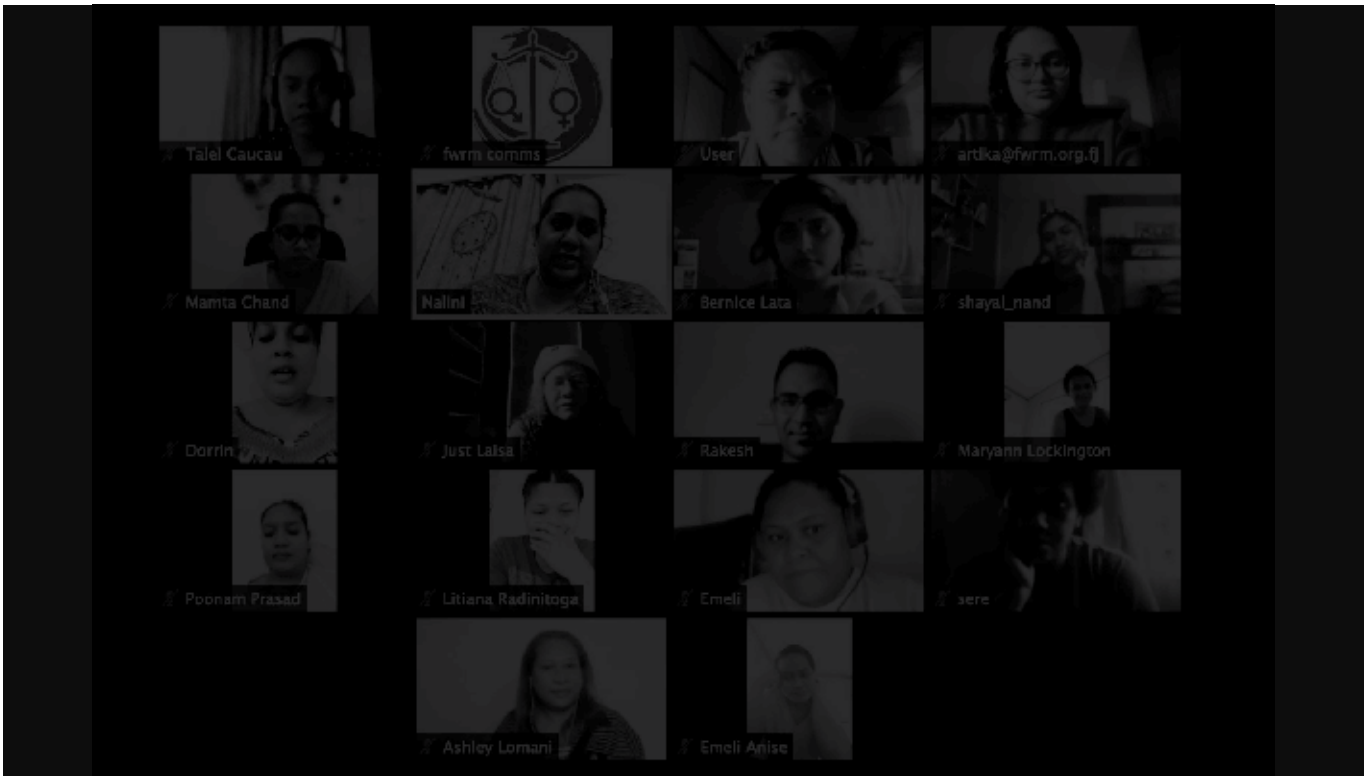
3 World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence

4 Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 2013. National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/11): A Survey Exploring the Prevalence, Incidence and Attitutes to Intimate Partner Violence in Fiji. Suva, Fiji.https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/vaw%20survey/fiji%20vaw%20survey.pdf?vs=313

5 Krishant, N (2020) 10 women died last year due to domestic violence in Fiji. Fiji Village. https://fijivillage.com/news/10-women-died-last-year-due-to-domestic-violence-in-Fiji-rs5k29/

6 Close Up Programme (April 26, 2020). Fiji One TV. https://www.facebook.com/FijiWomen/videos/527042394655926/

7 Fiji Government, Media Centre:Fiji to Develop a National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (January 14, 2020) https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/FIJI-TO-DEVELOP-A-NATIONAL-ACTION-PLAN-TO-PREVENT



The FWRM team "worked from home" to minimize exposure to risks associated with the COVID 19 pandemic. Image: FWRM

FWRM's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Rakesh Prasad and Laisa Bulatale

MORE often, women and girls are the most vulnerable to any local or global crisis. COVID-19 is no exception. However, women always come out strong and stand at the forefront of preparedness, response, and rebuilding after any such crisis. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) together with its staff and partners, worked collectively to this global pandemic to ensure staff safety and at the same time deliver on the commitments made to the donors. FWRM's response has been towards minimizing risks and innovative thinking for redesigning of projects and programmes towards COVID-19 related work.

Before the COVID-19 had reached Fiji, FWRM had started with the forward thinking and risk assessment processes with staff. All precautionary measures implemented by FWRM during the early stages of COVID 19 crisis, was carefully planned out with all staff. At the core of planning, was ensuring staff wellbeing was prioritised. FWRM made it a point to ensure that each staff was comfortable with the measures and actions that the organisation was intending to take in response to the pandemic developing in-country. The aggressive spread around the world triggered the warning to be prepared. The following steps were immediately planned and taken to minimize staff exposure to the deadly pandemic:

- Staff Risk Assessment – a staff risk assessment was quickly carried out whereby risk factors with each staff were identified and noted. Staff with recent overseas travel history were identified as high risk. At the same time, detailed contact tracing were also done for each staff to determine the level of risk and exposure of working in the same office.
- Preparedness Plan – the outcome of the risk assessment had called for immediate preparedness action plan. This included official internal staff advisories in line with Ministry of Health and World Health Organization (WHO) advisories and providing staff with basic disinfection hand sanitizers, masks and gloves.
- Action Plan – staff were immediately given with the option to work from home to ensure contact exposure risks are minimized. Majority of the staff opted to work from home whilst some continued to come to office but followed strict preventative procedures such as maintaining social distancing. Also, taking into account that many of the planned activities will be affected, the FWRM team started thinking on innovative activities for COVID-19 related work to continue delivering to the donor commitments.

The Governance Board, donors, members and partners were continuously updated on the planning and implementation of the above. This has been an evolving process where the strategies and action plans were updated in line with Government advisories and requirements. The entire process has emerged in the following ways:

- Enabling support mechanisms to ensure that staff are able to work from home with minimum disruptions to outputs. This included appropriate resourcing as well as enhancing means of communications.
- Reorganizing of organizational processes has been the other major area of work that has helped FWRM to sustain in these difficult times.

From the outset, FWRM has done well in managing the challenges posed by COVID-19 through institutionalizing safety and risk assessment of staff, redesigning projects and activities, and establishing easier ways of communications. The pandemic only reinforces the importance of the work FWRM and its partners do but sheds light on its current process and flexibility to adapt. There is always work to be done and as COVID-19 has shown, it may not always follow process. This is a moment to reflect, find new areas of work, new ways of working in current areas of work towards improving women's human rights and gender equality.

Image: YWCA Papua New Guinea

REST IN POWER, *Juli Dugdale*

By Diane Goodwillie

IN JANUARY 2020, the Australian Government made Juli Dugdale a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of her 'significant service to young women through leadership development organisations'. As Australian friend Jane Alver reflected, Juli "left an army of leaders inspired and developed to continue her work… Sometimes people come into our lives, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same".

Young women who gathered at the 2019 YWCA World Council stated: "Juli practiced intergenerational leadership in such a natural way that she fluidly moved between the roles of advisor, peer, follower, and leader. Her principles of feminist leadership were embedded in her every decision and action. She championed the cause. She supported young women as leaders. She quietly challenged what needs to be changed. Juli is an example of feminist intergenerational leadership."

On a personal note, Naomi Woyengu, a young PNG woman and Pacific Rise Up! co-ordinator,said: "The name Juli is synonymous to the words 'Young Women's Leadership'. She helped shape my life, my career, my passion and has inspired me to emulate her style of shared intergenerational leadership that is truly bold and transformative. When I grow up, I want to be like Juli."

The YWCA is a far-flung family, complete with strong and weak members strung together from more than 100 countries. It is a membership organisation that works collaboratively with many sister organisations including FWRM for the enhancement of women's rights. YWCA bodies in the Pacific (Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Samoa) have had an ongoing commitment to young women's empowerment since the early 1960s.

In 2008, following in the steps of the World YWCA's first young women advisor, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (now Executive Director, UN Women), Juli Dugdale was hired by the World YWCA as Asia-Pacific Director with a focus on empowering young women. Having organised the 2003 World YWCA Conference, with experience in Scotland and Australia, Juli had a vision and conviction to transform young women's leadership and introduce inter-generational leadership where young women's skills and knowledge were valued, elevated and respected.

Rise Up!, the groundbreaking Solomon Islands YWCA programme, provided a vehicle and soon similar programmes spread around the world with the help of funding from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Juli's inspired nurturing. The Rise Up! manual, a guide for young women's transformative leadership, copyrighted in 2017 and is extremely useful for those working in women's human rights and especially FWRM's ELF and GIRL programmes.

My late partner, Ruth Lechte, and I mentored Juli when she first started with the World YWCA. In many ways, she was carrying on the work started in the Pacific by Ruth, Anne Walker and Amelia Rokotuivuna in the 1960s.

Juli died on 12 August 2019. A month before she passed, I received my last email from her. Her praise for Ruth and my work seems insignificant to her legacy: "Health-wise I'm on the last few pages but I'm in a good spiritual space. It means I will see Ruth before you. You were always a champion for me and kept me on my toes! Stay well and happy Di."

The World YWCA stated: "Juli Dugdale, YWCA leader and bright light to many, passed away in Geneva, with her partner Colin by her side. She understood the transformative effect when young women recognised their human rights, the effect it had not only on individual lives, but on the collective good of the YWCA. Juli 'walked the talk' to make sure that young women had access to platforms and processes to help make gender equality possible. As Juli traveled the globe, she planted and nurtured so many leaders – shared her radiance – and we now each carry her legacy in our special way… Juli was a force of good within our movement and transformed the lives of hundreds of women, and especially young women, around the world."

I echo the thoughts of Caroline Lambert, former Executive Officer of YWCA Australia: "Rest in love and power, dear one, held now in the stardust of our becoming, and in the hearts of those you've left behind."

Image: Asia Pacific Women in Law and Development (APWLD)

FWRM TRIBUTE TO

PROFESSOR *Virada Somswadi* (1947 – 2020)

By Imrana Jalal, Nalini Singh and Serelisoni Moceica

FWRM is saddened to learn of the passing of a strong and powerful women's human rights defender and advocate, dearest Professor Virada Somswadi.

Professor Virada was a passionate activist and widely respected in the movement - an inspiration to many of us who had the opportunity to meet her. Her articles on gendered ideologies and women's experiences is a huge part of her work and commitment to promoting women's human rights.

We are hugely indebted to her visions and dedication as a feminist and as a founder of Asia Pacific Women in Law and Development (APWLD) of which FWRM is a member.

> *"I have known Virada for over 30 years and her dedication to the global women's movement never waned. She is held in high respect by feminists on every continent. She was instrumental in founding APWLD and making it stronger as well as closely working with us on developing the Feminist Legal Theory and Practice training which has led to so many groundbreaking women's rights cases in the courts of law. She will be missed by us." – Imrana Jalal (FWRM founding member)*

FWRM sends our deepest sympathies to Professor Virada's family and loved ones who are in our thoughts during this difficult time.

We honour Virada's life and work and in solidarity, continue the advocacy for women's human rights that she leaves behind.

Rest In Power, Virada.

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

ANNUAL FEE:

Waged - $10 • Organisation - $30

Non-waged/Student - $5

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Ph: _____

Email: _____

Fiji Women's Rights Movement
Ph: (679) 3313156 Fax: 331 3466
website: www.fwrm.org.fj
Email: info@fwrm.org.fj
Mail: GPO Box 14194, Suva, Fiji Is

- www.facebook.com/FWRM1
- @fwrm1

From the Editor's desk

Hi everyone!

In light of the recent developments with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we hope to bring you an issue of Balance that meaningfully captured the stories, reflections and work of Pacific and Fijian women human rights defenders and feminists during this period. We hope you have enjoyed reading these stories and we would like to acknowledge the guest writers who took time out to be part of this.

For this issue of Balance, we initially hoped to focus on the power of solidarity actions and document some of our herstory of strikes and protests. We had just come out of the exciting and powerful 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, followed by months of organised solidarity actions and marches from FWRM and partners including climate justice rallies, marches against violence against women, the human rights day rally and the Women's Global Strike. There was a momentum to demand change and as 2020 was an important year for women, we wanted to capture this in Balance. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, we decided to instead focus on this moment and the global solidarity, resistance and revolution led by feminists and women human rights defenders.

On behalf of the Balance Committee, I would like to acknowledge all those who continue to follow this newsletter and the work that FWRM is doing. I would also like to acknowledge the FWRM staff and contributors who have made this publication possible. I'd also like to thank the interns that have been working with the Communications team the past few months including, Sarina Gibson from the Global Insight Education programme who has had to return to Canada because of COVID-19. I'd also like to thank Talei Caucau who applied to intern with FWRM virtually from Nadi and has been supporting the work of the Communications team. Thank you to the Balance Committee who worked around tight schedules, deadlines and competing priorities to bring out this publication to our followers and readers. We look forward to the next Balance and will continue to identify ways to strengthen our newsletter. We also welcome any feedback or queries on Balance.

Please do contact info@fwrm.org.fj.

Thank you.

In solidarity,

Maryann Lockington

Communications Officer

BALANCE TEAM

Communications Officer: **Maryann Lockington**

Communications Support Officer: **Serelisoni Moceica**

Programme Executive Director **Nalini Singh**

Balance Committee
Artika Singh
Poonam Prasad
Emeli Anise

Graphic Designer: **Nemani Lui**

Content editor: **Swaran Lal**

Copy editor: **Samantha Rina**

Feminfocus

As these are unprecedented times, FWRM has been working at different fronts of this pandemic with partners to address emerging women's human rights issues and existing issues that are being magnified during this crisis. As part of its access to justice work, FWRM is carrying out a media campaign to raise awareness about violence against women and girls during COVID-19. The media campaign includes a television advert broadcast nation-wide on the two primary free-to-air channels through Fiji Television and FBCTV. Additionally, radio adverts in English, i-Taukei and Fiji Hindi were broadcast across FBC and CFL radio stations.

FWRM's Intergenerational Women in Leadership programme team are developing a paper on young women's experiences of online tertiary education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be released soon and circulated on the FWRM website and social media.

FWRM's Gender and Transitional Justice programme team are working on two pieces of research on; women's access to justice during COVID-19 and women's economic status during COVID-19. The two research pieces are supported by the We Rise Coalition through the Australian Government.