FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
April 2023

"Women suffer from a confidence gender gap which makes them reluctant to proactively seek leadership. Investing in building women's confidence and leadership at the various levels of the pipeline that feeds national leadership is critical - whether that is at the level of community, local council, NGOs, public administration, or corporate and SOE Boards, it is critical. This is where women sharpen their political skills and build their confidence." - International human rights lawyer/FWRM co-founder Imrana Jalal.

Representatives of various allies and institutions at the "Perceptions of Leadership in Fiji" report launch at Southern Cross Hotel. © FWRM

Equal representation of women in leadership spaces: Why should it matter?

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership spaces all around the world. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) continues to lobby for equal participation and representation of women in all leadership spaces, and this goes on to include women in business (formal and informal/ SMEs), politics, education, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), health and others.

We must ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at **all** levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.

Statistics show that women in the Pacific share that leadership starts from their homes at an early age. It becomes extremely important to consider such roles when planning initiatives for women leaders. When women are actively engaged in leadership bodies, there is room for inclusiveness; it becomes more representative and diverse views are considered.

The proportion of women in leadership roles varies considerably by country, organisation type, and sector. The Cook Islands, Palau, Samoa, and Tuvalu stand out as having higher proportions of women directors and CEOs than most countries in the region.

In 2022, the study by FWRM on 'Perceptions Study of Leadership in Fiji' based on the views of 906 Fijians across the country found that issues that limited women's access to leadership spaces included:

- **Gender stigmatisation**
- **Existing traditional status quo, and**
- **Culture.**

It was conducted to gauge people's perceptions of leadership in Fiji and serve as a key document that provided a better understanding of preferred leadership styles.

The key findings of the research highlight that gender stigmatisation (41%), existing traditional status quo and culture (34%) were the main reasons that limit a woman's chance of becoming a leader. About 53 per cent of the survey respondents agreed that culture influences leadership styles and perceptions in Fiji. The study also showed that 35 per cent of the survey respondents

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From the Executive Director's desk

Namaste, Bula Vinaka and greetings from the Fiji Women's Rights Movement!

We are thrilled to have begun the year with anticipation towards major upcoming events after lockdowns and national restrictions were fully lifted post the COVID-19 pandemic. We are thankful that our partners, supporters and friends have been there for us and helped us implement our activities over the past months despite the limitations experienced from the restrictions.

And what we have been thrilled about most of all, has been the election of a new government in November 2022 after 16 years! The elections was The theme of this newsletter is 'I, Us, We: The Power of Coming Together' highlighting the revolutionary impact of women and girls coming together to advocate for and fight against patriarchy and all forms of gender discrimination and aligning with this theme we organised two major events in March and May.

One of the major highlights this year was the launch of our groundbreaking research report "Beyond 33%: The Economic Empowerment of Fiji Women and Girls" in March.

FWRM commissioned Professor Wadan Narsey to put together a comprehensive analysis of the situation of women and girls in Fiji that focused on paid work, unpaid household work and leisure time activities. According to the report, females currently only comprise 34 percent of the Fiji Labour Force while males are at 66 percent. The report outlines the many inequities that women and girls face in the economy in paid work (formal and informal sectors), unpaid household work and in the use of leisure time. The research was based on official data sources such as the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Fiji Revenue and Customs Services and Fiji National Provident Fund.

As is organised every year, this year in March we put together the largest recorded gathering of the If Women Stop the World Stops concert marking International Women's Day. The annual free concert included more than two hundred participants from more than 20 organisations who were invited to join the symbolic strike event.

We acknowledge the solidarity shown by our sister organisations and partners who attended the event who also used the platform to share their experiences and demand for more effort towards removing discrimination against women and girls and called out violence in all its forms.

In May, the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum was held and although a bumper edition of Balance will be released later this year, I would like to mention here that after national lockdowns and international travel restrictions, it was an amazing occasion to see, meet and hear from our Pacific sisters who converged in Suva for the event.

FWRM was part of the Working Group that organised the forum and we are proud to have been able to have over 150 women's and human rights defenders and activists who came from sixteen of the Pacific to share their experiences, strategies and advocacy towards the recognition of women's rights in the region. We acknowledge our partners who helped support the event.

Our team also oganised the inaugural Let's Talk Period festival where the FWRM GIRLS Programme convened a Deaf girl-led space with other hearing girls in the Western Division for the first time ever. The festival was supported by the Australian Government as part of the Pacific Menstrual Health Network in partnership with Water Aid Australia and the Deaf girls are cohort supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and the International Women's Development Agency.

The festival called out for more open discussions on girls' and women's menstrual health and hygiene; urgently required if we are to address issues around women's reproductive health. The cohort of Deaf girls who also attend Gospel School of the Deaf, are Menstrual Health trainers who designed and facilitated the festival held as a build-up to the World Menstrual Hygiene Day that is annually commemorated on May 28.

Celebrations were the order of the day on July 14 as an unanimous vote was passed in Parliament for an amendment to the Interpretation Act that removes the requirement for women to put their spouse's surname on their birth certificate. The name change law disproportionately affected a vast majority of married women in Fiji. The Interpretation (Amendment) Bill 2023 removes these amendments that were made in 2021 through the Interpretation (Amendment) Act 2021 which was challenged by omen led by FWRM and sister organisation, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

The government also acknowledged the fight by the women who challenged the law in the High Court for their courage and determination to stand up for all women affected.

There have been staff changes and transitions through this year and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hardworking team at FWRM for the work undertaken – staff and interns who have contributed to our work, the Governance Board and our Trustees for their never ending support.

Once again, we are grateful to our donors and funding agencies that make our work possible and look forward to more collaboration and shared visions of an equitable Fijian society for our women and girls. Enjoy reading!

In Solidarity,
Nalini Singh

Beginning with board appointments, prioritising women's participation in leadership spaces can substantially progress gender parity for Fiji's population. Image: FWRM © FWRM

Fiji's boardrooms: Striving for equality and progress through improved women's representation

In the wake of recent leadership changes at the national level in Fiji, there is an optimistic outlook for a significant increase in women's presence in leadership positions, particularly on governance boards.

FWRM strongly believes that by prioritising women's leadership in all spaces, beginning with board appointments, can make substantial progress in achieving gender parity for half the population.

It is crucial to clarify that the objective is not merely to attain an overall 30% representation of women on boards but rather to **ensure that each individual board achieves a 30% representation of women.** This approach recognizes the importance of meaningful participation and equal opportunities for women in decision-making processes across various sectors.

To provide full disclosure, we emphasize that the Fiji Women's Rights Movement managed to obtain confirmed data on 27 out of the 38 state-owned enterprises. Unfortunately, some of the websites related to these entities are outdated; however, recent media articles and the government's official page have played a crucial role in providing transparency of information.

As a result, a significant portion of the data for the research has been acquired through these articles and pages. Despite this challenge, we conducted a swift update to assess the advancement or decline of women's representation on boards in Fiji.

We have observed that several entities are currently sharing details about their newly appointed board members and chairs. However, the information provided below is based on the data collected by FWRM during the past few months. FWRM also strongly reiterates the government's commitment to promoting gender diversity and ensuring women's representation on all boards. We eagerly anticipate a significant transformation that embraces inclusivity and brings about meaningful change by incorporating women into leadership roles.

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felt that support from loved ones is essential and may increase a woman's chance of becoming a leader.

This study capturing views of both males and females hopes to change perceptions and contribute to helping other organisations and institutions on such issues.

Now, we must commit to gender parity in leadership.

There must be an implementation of laws and regulations that guarantee a safe and open environment for women's participation and leadership—investing in and developing public services and programs that enable women to succeed as leaders and promote and support women's organisations and movements. These recommendations serve as key pillars for fostering women's empowerment and achieving greater gender equity in leadership.

From Page 1

Unfulfilled promises: Women's representation on State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) Boards in Fiji still below 30%

After two years and with the data on hand, there appears to be little change in the representation of women in leadership positions, particularly on State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) boards. The updated research conducted in 2023 reveals that women's representation on boards remains stagnant at 20%.

As a further demonstration of the limited participation of women in Fiji's leadership, only 2 of 38 Board Chair positions are held by women or 5%. The underrepresentation of women in chair positions in Fiji is attributed to societal norms, gender biases, limited access to professional development, discriminatory practices in recruitment, and cultural expectations around family responsibilities.

Of the 211 members out of the 38 enterprises, indigenous Fijians Comprise 95 (45%), the percentage for Indian Fijians has dropped to 38% from 53%, and other ethnic groups is at 17%, increasing by 1% from 2022. Some 3 or 8% of boards have no indigenous Fijian participation at all, and 7 or 18 % have less than 30% indigenous Fijian participation. In comparison, the number of Boards with no Indian- Fijian participation is 4 of 38 or only 11%, and the number of Boards with less than 30% Indian-Fijian participation is 9 of 38 or 24%. In commercial entities, indigenous Fijians are somewhat more poorly represented. (2023 - Indo-Fijian board numbers decreased from 53% to 38%, a flagrant lack of ethnic diversity).

By actively promoting and supporting the inclusion of women in board positions, Fiji can harness the diverse perspectives, talents, and expertise that women bring to the table. This inclusive approach will foster better governance, enhance organizational effectiveness, and ultimately contribute to a more equitable and prosperous society.

FWRM stands firm in its commitment to advocating for women's leadership and encourages the government and relevant stakeholders to seize this opportunity to create real change by increasing women's representation on boards and empowering them to make impactful contributions at all levels of decision-making.

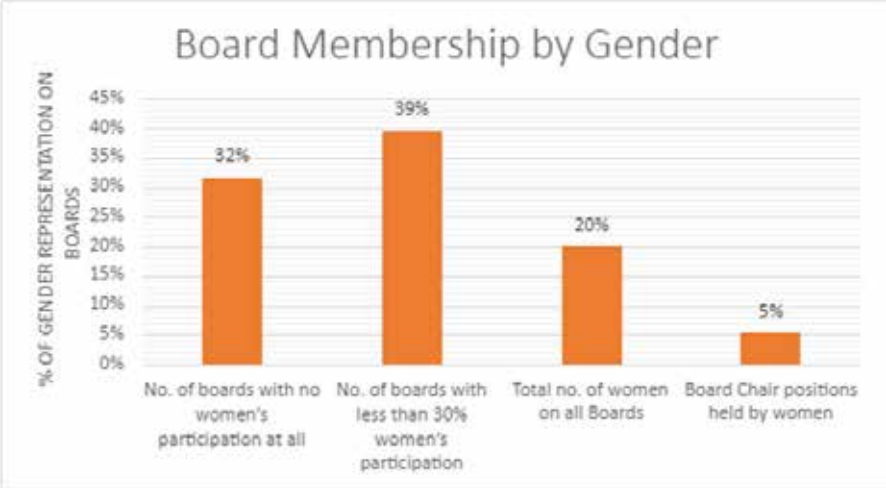

Figure 1: Board membership by sex/gender

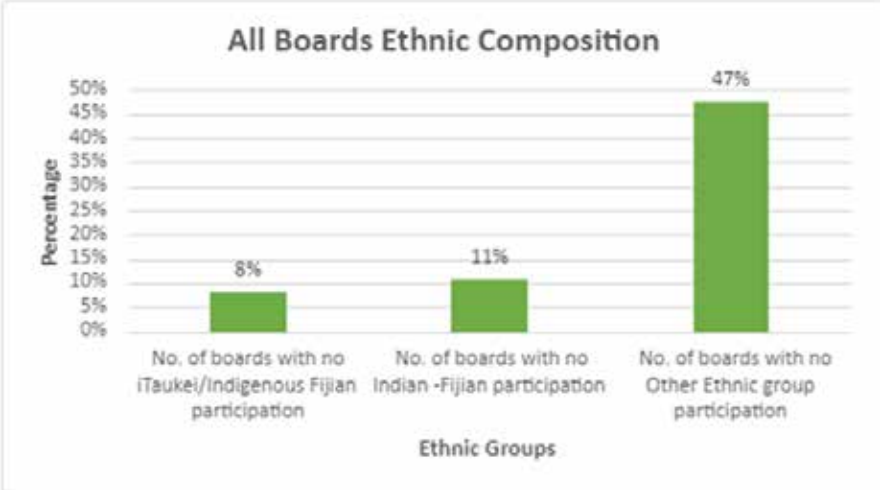

Figure 2: Board membership by ethnic composition

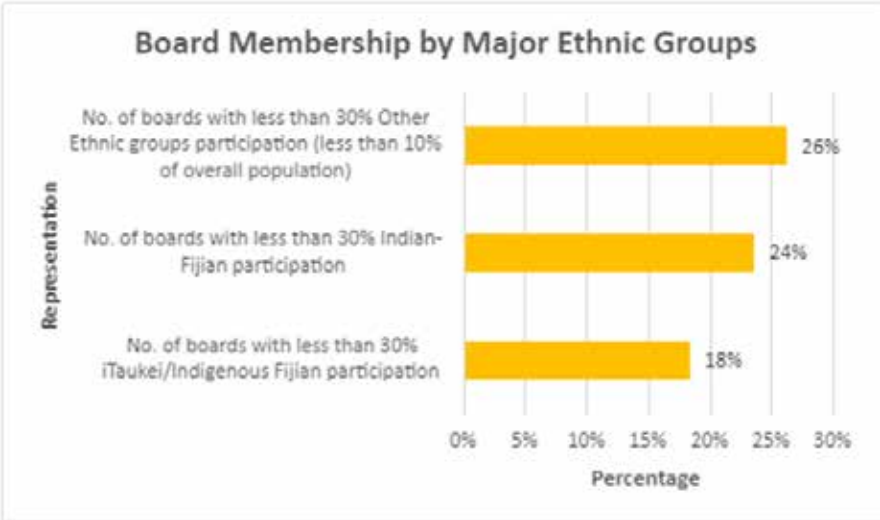

Figure 2: Board membership by major ethnic goups

From Page 3

Women and girls living in rural Fiji continue to face structural barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights. © FWRM

Rural women in leadership: The challenges of women-led groups in rural settings

The 2018 session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women reached a strong consensus on ways and means of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

The "agreed conclusions" adopted by the Commission at its sixty-second session set out steps necessary to overcome persistent inequalities, discrimination and barriers faced by women and girls living in rural areas and put forth concrete measures to lift all rural women and girls out of poverty and to ensure the realisation of their rights, well-being, and resilience.

Recognising the significance of including the perspectives of rural women and girls, their empowerment emerged as a top priority theme. It emphasises the importance of ensuring their equal participation in the entire process, encompassing the design, implementation, follow-up, and evaluation of policies and activities that directly impact their livelihoods, well-being, and resilience.

Further, the agreed conclusions demanded that women and their organisations, and girl- and youth-led organisations, are fully, safely, and actively able to participate in the decision-making process, policies and institutions at all levels, including local and self-governing bodies such as community and village councils, and in political parties and other organisations.

The total population of Fiji stands at 884 887, with 50.7 per cent men and 49.3 per cent women. Nearly half of the total population (44 per cent) resides in rural areas. II Fijian rural women and girls play a significant role in agriculture, food security and nutrition, land and natural resource management, building climate resilience, political achievements of women, eradicating rural poverty and unpaid and domestic care work.

Despite the crucial roles rural women and girls play in ensuring food and nutrition security, eradicating rural poverty, and improving the well-being of their families, they continue to face serious challenges as a result of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination that deny them equitable access to opportunities, resources, assets and services.

Five years later from CSW 62, **women and girls living in rural Fiji continue to face structural barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights**, which are often inadequate or insufficiently addressed in laws, policies, budgets, investments, and interventions at all levels across the country.

These barriers are compounded when women are excluded from leadership and decision-making, leading to underrepresentation in local and national institutions and governance mechanisms, which leads to their diminished voice, agency, and decision-making power.

Traditional Fijian community structures often do not allow for women to play an active role indecision-making, particularly in rural areas.

Other challenges facing Fijian women living in rural include sexual and gender-based violence: "lack of opportunities and spaces for women, especially in rural and remote communities, to be educated and be able to shift power and dismantle hierarchy, policies not being inclusive to encourage equality and gender justice, not enough support and resourcing in place to develop leadership capacities of rural women as well as lack of coherence between global commitments to our national laws and lack of monitoring to ensure there is inclusivity and gender balance at all levels."

FWRM convened a three-day workshop on Fijian Women's Access to Justice – Know your Rights Community Leaders Workshop in Nadi recently. The training brought together 15 rural women leaders, representing 9 community-based partners from the northern and western division. © FWRM

Strengthening the collective voice, leadership and decision-making of all rural women and girls

According to UN Women, women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. However, data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off.

Fiji's progress in increasing the participation of women in leadership remains uneven. Data shows that women are still underrepresented in many leadership spaces in Fiji. Despite the ambitions of gender equality, Fiji's progress against these global and national targets remains challenging. Fiji does not have any temporary special measures to support women in leadership. Globally, Fiji is ranked 106 out of 189 in the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) database and stands above all other states in the Pacific region.

Due to a lack of data on rural women in leadership, it cannot be established how many rural women in Fiji are in leadership roles and the positions that they hold in their respective constituencies except for those who have been advisory counsellors.

According to femLINKpacific, even in this role, a number of local-level women leaders in Fiji had not been reappointed as district advisory councillors or councillors for their communities.

Women play a significant role in rural development. The historical exclusion of women's voices as well as traditional structures and religion, continues to limit women from participating in decision-making and leadership, especially in rural settings. The consensus among feminists and other progressives is that women are deficient in agency.

The reason they're deficient, feminists and progressives tell us, is because oppressive patriarchal systems and brutish, insensitive men sideline women from decision-making -- even within their own lives.

Despite some gains in women's rights in Fiji, laws remain weak in regulating control over resources and family matters, such as inheritance, land ownership, and protection against violence.

Social norms can prevail over laws or incomes to the detriment of gender equality. They can inhibit women's collective agency by limiting their political roles or access to positions of power, contributing to the under-representation of women in rural leadership.

To counter these challenges more, better data is needed to measure progress and to hold governments and development agencies to account and ensure that women's leadership is prioritised for development and the barriers to leadership faced by women are well-researched and documented not only in Fiji but the Pacific region.

Activities led by rural women can be considered as social innovation, an opportunity to create social value. **In addition to being an economic support for their families and generating the development of local economies, the benefit that rural women bring involves their communities for the resolution of problems present in them**.

In this sense, rural women deserve to be recognised as leaders and agents of change, and provisions need to be put in place that will unequivocally demonstrate governments' and development agencies' concern for and commitment to uplifting our rural women leaders to thrive personally and professionally.

Women show up in numbers to attend *If Women Stop, the World Stops* Concert

More than 200 women's human rights defenders and advocates showed up at the Fiji Museum to join the 2023 "If Women Stop, the world stops" concert marking International Women's Day and spoke out against all types of gender injustices.

Dancing and music led by veteran Laisa Vulakoro, Georgina Ledua, Etta Gonerogo and others marked the annual event as representatives of different organisations took the stand to talk about their issues and call for action, specifically on the focus of the event – the recognition of unpaid care work by women and girls.

Experiences were shared and speakers also called out gender discrimination, climate justice issues, violence against women and girls and other barriers to women in the country.

The day was also used to highlight and acknowledge the contributions of women to their families and communities. The concert is a solidarity action that both celebrates the significant contributions of women to our society and protests against the disturbing realities of violence and discrimination that women and girls face in Fiji, the Pacific and globally.

FWRM is proud of the flagship event which has now become an event that local women's and human rights groups are eager to attend. The free entertainment provided for those attending by mostly local female musicians, also using the platform to showcase their talents, is a huge drawcard to the concert. The event also fosters solidarity amongst local human and social justice advocates as more and more people join the event each year, this year being the largest number since the concerts began in 2020.

FWRM joined the Women's Global Strike global campaign in August 2019 and organised a solidarity action in the form of a concert on 6th March, 2020. The call for a global feminist strike action was initiated by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). The concert is now held annually and continues the global strike campaign.

Under the theme, "If women stop, the world stops", the Women's Global Strike calls women from every corner of the world to stop or slow down their formal or care work and come together to demand women's human rights. The global event commemorates International Women's Day which is celebrated on March 8.

Women of all diversities showed up in solidarity with the If Women Stop, the World Stops concert. © FWRM

Women's political participation

As we witness the dawn of a new political era, it is crucial that we acknowledge the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the courageous women who have stepped onto our national political platform.

Despite comprising 49.3% of Fiji's population, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions across various levels in Fiji.

Women Parliamentarians

To address this disparity and promote greater women's participation in decision-making roles, The Fiji Women's Forum has developed and introduced a toolkit designed to assist candidates in designing successful campaigns.

The toolkit provides valuable guidance on various aspects of election preparation, including voter mobilization, public speaking, and fundraising throughout the entire campaign process. Participants engage in a three-day workshop at the Women in Politics workshop, specifically tailored for aspiring candidates and campaign managers.

In 2022, the Fiji Women's Forum organized two Women in Politics workshops, resulting in an impressive 55% of the total participants running for the general elections.

"Out of the 56 female nominees, a total of 287 male candidates contested the 2022 election, marking a significant increase compared to 2018, when there were 56 female candidates and 179 male candidates." – Radio New Zealand.

Below are insights from women who participated in the 2022 General Elections, sharing their experiences and perspectives on campaign management:

What factors contributed to the effectiveness of your electoral campaign?

Facts and research need to be ready, and how you can use them. You cannot walk in and criticize other parties; people want to know what you have to offer. What can you do? Don't waste your time, be precise, and talk about what you came to do. Focus on the issues and go for it.

Premila Singh

Have the consent of your party so you can be aware of the electoral laws.
Media training should be done on what to say, etc. It will be a long journey, and I am glad that you have started off here. More women in politics are needed!

Rosy Akbar

Be prepared, do your research. Voters will read. They will remember. Your integrity counts.

Tanya Waqanika

What were your strategies in organizing and mobilising voters?

People talking about me means I am worth their time to be talked about. No matter how good you do, you will still be criticized – ignore and have positivity – the sun will shine again.

Premila Singh

Speak on statistics, and be careful of what you do as you become a public figure. You have one shot to convince the people! Own that room, create PowerPoint presentations, etc.

Tanya Waqanika

Men will be treated differently than women. Show them what you can do in a reasonable manner.

Rosy Akbar

Young women's political participation

When examining the role of women in political spaces, it is crucial to recognize the significance of young women. According to statistics from the 2022 Fiji Elections Office, women under the age of 40 make up approximately 25% of all registered voters [2]. Their voices are invaluable for comprehensive development, as their needs often reflect those of their communities in this new era.

It is worth noting that the median age of the Fijian population is 29.93 years old, and it is noteworthy that the youngest Member of Parliament ever elected in Fiji was 29 years old.

Until the 2022 election, the representation of youth in the parliamentary space has been predominantly male.

To address these disparities, the Fiji Young Women's Forum Divisional Dialogue developed a national declaration outlining the challenges faced by young women in Fiji and the barriers hindering their political participation.

Regarding political security, young women have emphasized the significance of fair representation and the active involvement of women from diverse backgrounds in decision-making spaces.

They have called upon political parties to listen to their voices and adopt affirmative policies, such as implementing quotas for young women candidates, promoting their participation on the national political platform, and fostering effective communication. The Young Women's Forum has also strongly advocated for consulting and implementing Temporary Special Measures in parliament to enhance women's representation.

The national declaration achieved by the Young Women's Forum stands as a remarkable accomplishment, as numerous issues and resolutions outlined in the document were incorporated into the manifestos of several parties that participated in the 2022 general elections.

This convergence marks a significant milestone, highlighting the impact of the forum's advocacy and reinforcing the importance of young women's voices in shaping the political landscape.

Strengthening feminism in the Pacific: Building a movement of fearless oceanic Pacific feminisms

What a revolutionary year 2022 was for the Oceanic Pacific Feminist Movement. The National Feminist Forums as part of the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum was a compelling time for Oceanic women human rights defenders and feminists coming together to strengthen feminism in the Oceanic region.

"Embracing the collective power of our movements".

We all know that the wider Oceanic Pacific have a common challenge, which is the geographical divide and socio-economic realities of 22 developing Island states. We are separated by the world's largest ocean, with islands so distant making physical solidarity difficult resulting in women human rights defenders and feminists feeling isolated. Women human rights defenders and feminists in the Oceanic Pacific is fighting climate justice, which is one of the biggest challenges in the world. We have the lowest rate of women in politics and fighting against the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. With all this, the Oceanic Pacific is extremely unfunded. Pacific feminism experiences a different oppression where access to resources are scarce. Then COVID-19 pandemic came with its negative impact on gender equality. Stories of isolation, lack of care and non-communication continue to pose a serious threat in the Oceanic Pacific region making connections even more distant.

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To address these concerns and build on strengthening a fearless Oceanic Pacific Feminist Movement, the We Rise Coalition1 commissioned a scoping study on how to strengthen a movement intertwined together to bring about Diversity, Inclusion, Engagement and Movement (DIEM) Strategy. The study identified that there is a need to create safe environments and spaces for courageous talanoa that can lead to the wider Oceanic Pacific movement renewing, reviving and restoring itself. Therefore, the 3rd PFF comes at a critical time to create feminist talanoa spaces at the country level and leverage the solidarity at the regional level. For the first time ever the 3rd PFF took a different modality beginning with 11 National Feminist Forums (NFF) happening simultaneously in different countries before coming together for the regional 3rd PFF, which is scheduled for 8-10 May 2023 with the theme "Embracing the collective power of our movements".

To start with, the 3rd PFF Regional WG was set up to ensure inclusion and representation of all three Pacific sub-regions. Working off recommendations from the last PFF and the DIEM study, there was a need for representation from Northern Pacific. Disability and inclusion of the LBT was also a recommendation. To bridge these gaps, the regional WG managed to invite Kiribati Association of NGO (KANGO) representing the Northern Pacific as part of the WG. As well as Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) which is a regional organisation to represent the disability constituencies. With the same approach, all countries that implemented NFF were encouraged to be inclusive and diverse when setting up their Working group.

Then the passion to organise NFF's sparked in September 2022. The thirst to interrupt and be the first country in the Pacific to organise was Papua New Guinea. In the midst of conflict, election-related violence and with the organisers battling cancer, Voice for Change reminded us how resilient Oceanic women are. PNG quickly managed to mobilise their working group and create courageous talanoa reflecting on the country's issues and priorities. Straight after PNG, other countries furthered the momentum from Samoa, New Caledonia, Fiji, Vanuatu, Palau, West Papua, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Solomon and Tonga. The success from all NFF's was ground-breaking. It was powerful to see 549 diverse women and feminists from across 11 Pacific countries come together in solidarity to connect, celebrate, reflect, share power, information, knowledge, skills and discuss country priorities and strategies. This was a testimony to how critical these spaces are for the feminist movement. The NFF's celebrated the different diversity and intersectional in the room from the disability movements to the LBT and young women networks. This is to ensure that we are growing the movement by being diverse and working in solidarity across a broad spectrum of issues. The movement has strong belief in ensuring that there are safe spaces for diverse voices, perspectives, interactions and identities to feel welcome, listen, reflect and learn about the range of lived experiences and values across the Oceanic Pacific. With this aim, all NFF's managed to reach out and work in collaboration with other women rights organisation to form working groups by working collectively to grow the movement.

It was inspiring to see the commitment from each country building and sustaining women's collective power through movements. The first ever NFF's have also provided a space to reflect and speak on what feminism means in each country context. What is the narrative for the Oceanic Pacific given our unique causes and complexities? It was clear that you do not have to be a feminist to create changes within families, communities, government and society. The Oceanic narrative is finding the common ground by continuing and doing the change that is needed. This was strongly reflected on all outcome statements across the region. Shaping these talanoa have showed fearless feminists creating a strong environment and safe spaces for courageous discourse that will lead to strengthening feminism in the Pacific.

Evidently, such a space as this has fostered excitement in carrying forward women and girls' human rights. The different talanoa at the national level will consolidate the voices into the regional PFF space and collectively work together to amplify into the global spaces. The 11 NFF's has provided a start, but there is a need for further collaboration to frame a strong, vibrant and resilient movement building in accelerating gender equality both at the national and regional level. The creation of NFF's has laid a new foundation for collaboration and stronger ground for movement building.

What an exciting time for the Pacific. The wider revolution will happen when NFF's move to other geographical areas in our Oceanic Pacific. For now, watch us at the 3rd PFF in May as we embrace the collective power of our movements.

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National Feminist Forums as part of the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum

Women's rugby here to stay

The Fijiana National 15s side emerged victorious in the 2022 Oceania Rugby Women's Championship, solidifying their dominance in the region. ©Fiji Rugby

Throughout history, gender roles and norms have posed challenges for young women participating in sports like rugby and soccer.

Fortunately, women's rugby has emerged as a powerful force on and off the field, challenging stereotypes and proving that women deserve a place in the sports world. They exhibit passion, strength, power, and persistence in pursuing their goals.

Although rugby is known for its toughness and physicality, it's essential to acknowledge that both men and women can recover from bruises, showcasing their shared ability to endure the demands of sports.

In Fiji, a gradual but determined progress is underway as girls and young women embrace traditionally male-dominated sports, breaking societal barriers with enthusiasm and leadership.

The hashtags #WomeninSports, #WomeninRugby, and #WomenCandoAnything have taken social media by storm, celebrating the achievements of Fiji's Fijiana Sevens and Rooster Chicken Fijiana 15s teams.

Despite numerous challenges and prevailing stereotypes, women's rugby in Fiji has made remarkable strides, with the media highlighting the stories of these female players. They've overcome hard work, sacrifices, criticism, and financial constraints to pursue their beloved sport.

In a society that typically views women as caregivers confined to the home, women's rugby defies this perception, proving that women are capable of anything. They can excel in all areas of life.

Women's rugby is not merely a display of physical strength and athleticism; it acts as a catalyst for social change. Through the game, women empower their communities, foster resilience, and promote unity.

Efforts towards gender equality have significantly increased awareness of women's participation and contributions in all sectors of development, driving the growth of Fiji.

In 2022, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) ran a series of advertisements focusing on three critical areas: women in leadership, women and unpaid care work, and women in sports. The campaign aimed to raise awareness about the everyday inequalities women face in society.

According to FWRM's statistics, women's participation in sports remains alarmingly low, with only 22% of women dedicating time to sports compared to men, who spend twice as much time engaged in sports activities. These figures highlight the unequal treatment of women and girls in sports.

However, there is hope for change, and what better way to initiate it than with women taking the lead on the rugby field.

Women in rugby have achieved significant milestones, such as the Fijiana 7s team winning their first-ever bronze medal at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. The Rooster

Only 22% of women dedicate time to sports compared to men. ©Fiji Rugby

Chicken Fijiana Drua team made an impressive debut by winning the 2022 Super Women's Championship in Australia, marking a historic moment in the tournament. Additionally, the Fijiana National 15s side emerged victorious in the 2022 Oceania Rugby Women's Championship, solidifying their dominance in the region. Notably, their commendable ninth-place finish at the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand last year speaks volumes about these women's outstanding achievements.

While rugby holds a revered status in Fiji, it has long been dominated by male counterparts. However, a positive shift is now occurring, with more attention and inclusion being directed towards women's participation in local rugby competitions. This signifies growth, commitment, and a significant step in the right direction, as all stakeholders embrace the need for progress.

Women's rugby in Fiji has set a new record, inspiring generations of young girls who finally see sports heroes who look just like them.

The love for the game, nurtured from a young age, has been the driving force behind the passion of many women playing rugby. With a dedicated fan base that extends beyond Fiji to the Pacific and the world, women's rugby in Fiji is poised for a prosperous future, destined to achieve even greater milestones. There is no doubt that women's rugby has firmly established itself and is here to stay.

STAFF TRANSITIONS & APPOINTMENTS

Mala Burman

The new Executive Officer post was newly created with new staff member Mala Burman taking up the post.

She graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce with a double major in Management and Human Resources Management and Industrial Relations. Mala has worked in various organisations within the public and private sector and also with different NGO's.

Sanjeshni Reddy

Sanjeshni joins the movement as our new GIRLS Programme officer (GPO).

She comes in with a teaching background of 15 years and has also worked in the private sector. She previously worked with GIZ in their Accelerating Climate Education for the Pacific Program for 3 years as a Project Officer before taking up this post. She is passionate about empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills that enables them to become better individuals and members of society.

Emeli Anise

Emile has transitioned into her new role as Team Leader for Intergenerational Women in Leadership Programme (IWLP).

Emeli has been our GIRLS Programme officer since 2018 and has been committed to civil-society work since 2012 with a background in children's rights, women's rights and disaster risk reduction. We wish her the very best in her new role.

Nirmal Prasad

Nirmal is the newly appointed Team Leader Finance and Administration (FAM).

He graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of the South Pacific and is currently pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Professional Accounting. He has experience in finance having worked in the private sector. He is also a part-time radio announcer at a local radio station. His hobbies include traveling, socializing, listening to music and spending time with love ones.

Georgina Young

Gina joins the movement as the new Administration and Programme Assistant.

She has a background in Tourism as well as in the NGO sector. She is passionate about Human Rights, Climate and Social Justice.

Leanda Gonevinaka:

Leanda has been appointed as the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum- Project Support Officer. She joins us with a background in tourism, project management and community and youth development.

Ala-Cassandra Singh

Ala has been appointed as our our new Human Rights Training Officer under the Gender and Transitional Justice (GTJ) programme team.

Ala is an advocate for women's rights and a human rights activist with a passion for feminism and cultural intellectual property. She has a Bachelor of Laws (LLB), as well as a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP) from the University of Fiji and is awaiting admission to the Bar. She also has work experience in research and analysis of legal policy. She graduated as part of the Emerging Leaders Forum's 7th Cohort in 2021 and is now a Co-Convener for the Fiji Young Women's Forum.

Dorrin Irvin

Dorrin has been appointed as our new Programme Officer for the Young Women's Programme.

Dorrin graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Human Resource Management and Employment Relations and Tourism Management from the University of the South Pacific, and she is also pursuing her Postgraduate Certificate studies at USP in Gender and Feminism. She has a keen interest in learning more about the women's movement and the fight for women's freedom from discrimination.

TRIBUTES

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement was deeply saddened with the news of the sudden passing of one of our longest serving and dedicated consultants, Nemani Lui.

Nemani over the years has worked for the movement designing most of our publications including our Annual Reports, Balance newsletters and other research reports.

FWRM is saddened by his passing, and it was an absolute privilege to have worked with Nemani whose patience and commitment to get the work done will surely be missed.

FWRM sends their deepest condolences to all his loved ones.

Rest in Power and with all our love Nemani.

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: _____

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From the Editor's Desk

Greetings all! Thank you for reading this issue of Balance.

This Balance newsletter is published under the theme Challenges and Perceptions of Women in Leadership. We have a range of topics that relate to the overall theme – from research, capturing activity details and sports. The theme of the newsletter reflects on the overall lack of women in leadership positions and decision-making spaces.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of all the authors and the guidance of the Balance Committee. This publication would not have been possible without the team at FWRM. Your support is always appreciated.

We welcome any suggestions from our members, friends and allies towards strengthening the newsletter so please feel free to contact us. Until the next Balance and in solidarity!

Serelisoni Moceica
Communications Officer

BALANCE TEAM

Communications Oficer:
Serelisoni Moceica

Communications Support Officer:
Mere Satakala

Executive Director:
Nalini Singh

Balance Committee
Kalisito Biaukula
Timaima Qereqeretabua
Shayal Nand

Feminfocus

- **Keep a lookout for the latest research on the Sexual Harassment of Female Journalists in Fiji that will be published soon!**
- **Our Annual Report will be out soon. This is sent out to membership and networks. Hard copies can also be requested from our office.**
- **The next FWRM Grow.Inspire.Rleate.Lead.Succeed Theatre Performance is in the pipeline. We will update our social media platforms as soon as details are confirmed.**
- **Our Feminist's for People Vaccine Campaign which began in 2021 continues. The campaign brings the unique perspective of feminists from the Global South and our partners and allies in the North to challenge the causes and consequences of extreme inequalities in access to medicines**