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The E - MegaZine bulletin of femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women

# The Thirteen 25 Report

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Fem'LINKPACIFIC coordinates the Pacific Regional Women's Media Network on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

We are also the Pacific Regional Secretariat and Media Focal Point for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), the Pacific focal point for the GEAR Campaign and the Global Media Monitoring Project (2009).

FemLINKPACIFIC is a member of the National Council of Women Fiji, NGO Coalition on Human Rights (Fiji), Fiji Media Watch, World Association of Christian Communicators and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).

We also contribute to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders which is a coalition of women's groups and other civil society organizations directly involved in advocacy and action for the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 including the supporting resolutions 1888 and 1889 at the local, national, regional and international levels. The GNWP serves to consolidate and strengthen our efforts in bridging the gap between policy discussions at the international level and action for policy implementation on the ground. It is a platform enabling members to share information, experiences and strategies in ways that will enhance both their individual and collective outreach and impact.

*We wish to acknowledge the contribution of our development partners: AUSAID (Suva and Canberra), the British High Commission (Suva), Global Fund for Women, International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), NZAID, World Women's Day of Prayer (German Committee), UNDP Pacific Centre, US Embassy (Suva), World Association of Christian Communicators*

## Keeping Thirteen 25 In Check

We are off to a fairly good start as part of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of UNSCR1325. As we say, things are definitely 'getting into gear' especially in the year that we will review the 10 year implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325.

The recent appointment of Margot Wallström of Sweden as the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has come fairly swiftly following the September 2009 request by the Security Council to appoint a Special Representative to provide coherent and strategic leadership to address sexual violence in armed conflict.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office has joined forces with a network of over a dozen other UN entities to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and respond effectively to the needs of survivors. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in response to calls from women's groups, rape survivors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), formed the inter-agency network known as UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2008. The network brings together experts on various issues, including peacekeeping, HIV/AIDS and human rights, to help stop rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-ridden countries.

According to the IPS News, Assistant-Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support Judy Cheng-Hopkins said joining the network will help the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) cross-reference with 12 other UN entities and close the gap on how to prevent the scourge of sexual violence in conflict and better help survivors: "Women are entitled to full and equal participation in all Peacebuilding processes, and there is a need to address the impact of sexual violence on their capacity to participate," she stated.

Her office was set up to support the efforts of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which was established in 2005 to help struggling States avoid slipping back into war and chaos. There are currently four countries on its agenda – Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic (CAR). In addition to support from the PBC, countries can also avail themselves of financial assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund to jump-start rebuilding projects.

Efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence have been reflected in the work of both bodies. For example, the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the CAR, adopted last May, includes important commitments for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, including the provision of human rights training for security forces, as well as identification and support to victims of violence.

In addition, the Peacebuilding Fund currently funds 12 projects to support women affected by conflict, including in Liberia, where it supports the improvement of prosecution services targeting crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, among other things.

So who is Margot Wallström?

Ms. Wallström has been a long-time advocate of the rights and needs of women throughout her political career -- first as Swedish Minister and later as Environment Commissioner and Vice-President of the European Commission. Since her appointment to the European Commission in 1999, she has been actively engaged in promoting the participation of women in peace- and security-related issues, most notably the injustice and violence faced by women during armed conflict.

Since 2007, she has served as Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders Ministerial Initiative, where she actively promoted the appointment of women to positions of responsibility. She also played a leadership role in raising awareness about the urgency to implement United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008).

Ms. Wallström has had a long career in politics, which began when she served as a Member of the Swedish Parliament from 1979 until 1985. Her ministerial career began in 1988 when she was appointed Minister of Civil Affairs, responsible for consumer, women and youth matters. She subsequently assumed the position of Minister of Culture, and then Minister of Social Affairs.

In 1998, she retired from Swedish politics to become Executive Vice-President of Worldview Global Media, a non-governmental organization based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 2004, when the Barroso Commission took office, she was appointed first Vice-President responsible for Inter-Institutional Relations and Communication.

She has received several honorary doctorates and awards for her work on sustainable development and climate change, and has also done extensive work to endorse a European Union-Africa partnership on renewable energy, and to champion equal opportunities. She was also co-founder of the European Union inter-institutional group of women and a key supporter of the 50-50 Campaign for Democracy by the European Women's Lobby, where she worked to promote a more gender-balanced European Union. Ms. Wallström's other distinctions include being voted "Commissioner of the Year" by the European Voice newspaper in 2002.

She has received numerous awards on rights, as well as environmental and European issues, including the Monismanien Award for Freedom of Speech (2009) and the Göteborg Award on Sustainable Development. Born in 1954, Ms. Wallström is married and has two children.

## Spotlight on Beijing "Plus" 15

### 'Looking at Our World through Women's Eyes'

*By Sharon Bhagwan Rolls and Kalpana Prasad*

In September 1995, UN member states adopted the Beijing Platform for Action. It is a catalytic agenda for the advancement and empowerment of women which built on United Nations, governments and women's NGO collaboration including CEDAW.

1975 which was designated the UN Year for Women was also the year the UN hosted the first conference for women. Throughout the ensuing "decade for women" was a hive of activism in action for women's human rights.

The decade for women culminated with the formulation and adoption of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies adopted in 1985. It was a ten year action plan which drew on conferences, discussions, debates and interventions, from Mexico to Rio, from Vienna to Copenhagen and building on the foundation of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The movement for gender equality across the world has defined developments, its movements has continued to remind governments, United Nations and communities alike, that women's issues are global and universal and that by addressing and eliminating discriminatory practices and policies in all spheres of life, economy, education, health, environment, media, within institutions, and in the community and family life, women can truly enjoy life as we should.

The road from Beijing with the plan of action is a concrete action for the United Nations and governments to take action to protect and promote the human rights of women and the girl child as an integral part of universal human rights, to eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women, to remove the obstacles of women's participation in public life and decision making at all levels including family life, to eliminate all forms of violence against women, to ensure equal access for the girl child and women to education and health services, to promote economic autonomy or independence for women and ensure their access to productive resources and to encourage an equitable sharing of family responsibilities.

The road to Beijing + 15, the next Commission of the Status of Women which begins at the UN on March 1 has taken femLINKPACIFIC "on the road and on the mat" in consultation and conversations with women in rural communities in Ba, Nadi and Savusavu and Labasa.

Our findings are in addition to the viewpoints raised by members of local women's groups in Nausori during the 2009 16 days campaign through community radio. Their voices were loud and clear endorsing the need to Commit - Act and Demand an end to violence not just by government agencies but community and faith based groups as well!

Our final rural consultation was on January 23rd. 20 women and young women met with us at the Anglican Church Hall and reflected on the theme of the 1995 NGO Forum in Huairou, 'Looking at the world through women's eyes' to identify priority issues.

So what are the critical areas of concern which these local women leaders see the top 3 priority issues for them from the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action?

14 women chose Education and Training as the top priority. Many noted that this was the empowerment platform many rural women needed to be able to actively address other critical issues of concern - from unemployment to under representation in decision making.

"When women and girls are not educated and trained, they do not know how to cope with poverty due to unemployment and do not know how to overcome this situation. I think the government should address this issue by holding special educational programs for women in the village grass-roots level to ensure that women know what to do and how to overcome the problem of poverty", said Anshu Parvina Rakesh, who is the President of the Labasa/Taveuni Association of Anglican Women in Labasa.

She also linked the priority with Women and the Media: "Education and training will empower the local rural women to speak out and make our issues more visible so that policy makers know that these are the concerns that affect us and this is what should be addressed at the national level".

For Elenoa Sanegar, the President of The Melanesian Women's group in Labasa governments must prioritize rural women empowerment:

"As a woman living in the rural area, I believe that governments should educate more women, so that we can learn and get jobs to help our community and I believe that women should get an equal opportunity at education compared to men and boys", she said.

Education was also the centre of attention of an earlier consultation with the Arya Mahila Samaj of Labasa:

"The time has gone when women were told to stay at home while the opportunity for education was given only to the men and boys. Girls should be given an equal opportunity for education and training as well" Prem Lata Bhan told us.

Women's Economic Security is addressed in two critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action - as Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy. But poverty stands out as daily barrier to women enjoying the life they deserve to enjoy.

Throughout our consultations from Ba to Nadi, Savusavu to Labasa, women's financial and economic burden bore by the rising cost of living resonated in conversations.

"I really hope that the government addresses this issue as poverty is affecting the enjoyment of the basic human rights for our rural women. Poverty is not an issue on its own, it is worsened by the economic crisis in the country and policies such as the devaluation of our dollar, while the prices of goods and services are rising, the salary of the people of our country remains the same, and worsened by unemployment", retired teacher Nanise Qalica told us in Labasa. As a widow, forced to retire, has added to the struggle of ensuring her youngest child completes high school. Women's poverty is also about women skipping meals to feed their families 50 year old Taina of Nadamole Village in Savusavu reminded us: "Sometimes we only have bele and rourou (dalo leaves) for breakfast, lunch and dinner because we don't have money to afford fish or tinned fish".

Women's human rights, Power and decision making, health, violence against women and women and the media also were identified as priority issues which must be addressed during the CSW meeting.

It is anticipated that the outcome statement by governments will be adopted during the first week of CSW and Angela Prasad of Nasea, Labasa who now knows there will be a two week meeting at the UN addressing the status of the women of the world hopes that women like her are not forgotten by policy makers, not just at the UN but more importantly at local government level when decisions most affecting them are made. Taina from Nadamole Village agrees:

"The women of our village have tried to raise our concerns to the district and provincial levels and also to the women's interest office but nothing has been done about our issues and we do not know what to do next".

Simple and effective information and communication channels and the democratization of decision making processes can help women like Taina and Angela contribute to decision making about the critical areas of concern that matter the most to them.

## ***Preparation for CSW New York 2010***

By Emele Morgan

In preparation for the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in mid February in New York, agencies of the United Nations have been facilitating on-line panel discussions that raise the important questions relating to women and gender issues. These on-line discussions is providing a forum for individuals, groups and networks that are not able to attend CSW contribute to the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcomes of the twenty-third special Session of the General Assembly (2000).

Some of these discussions include:

1. Women and the Economy – moderated by World Bank.
2. Women and the Environment – moderated by United Nations Environment Programme, with United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UNEP with UN HABITAT)
3. Women and Health – moderated by World Health Organization, with Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.(WHO with UNAIDS)
4. Women in Power and Decision-Making – moderated by United Nations Development Fund for Women.
5. Women and Poverty – moderated by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

To kick off the discussions on women and poverty, UNDP as moderator offered these questions:

- How has poverty and vulnerability of women changed in your country or region since 1995, when the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted?
- What key programmes and policies have been implemented to reduce poverty and vulnerability of women?
- Are there any other factors that make women more vulnerable, for example to the recent economic crisis?
- In your country or region, is poverty, hunger and employment data (MDG 1 targets) disaggregated by sex? Is it widely available and analyzed (e.g. from household surveys, administrative data, censuses and other sources)?
- What needs to be done to improve the availability of this data and gender analysis of poverty?
- Is this data and analysis used to inform public policies?
- Does the civil society use it to advocate for or to monitor these policies?
- What needs to be done to improve the use of this data and analysis in policy-making?

It is questions like these that form the basis of the programmes that femLINKPACIFIC runs.

Last year for example we began gathering statistics through our monthly Women's Household and Income Surveys in Ba, Nadi, Labasa, Savusavu and Nausori as well as in the greater Suva area. This survey has been further developed later in the year to include statistics on women's access to information communication technology and address section J of the Beijing Platform for Action. This data is in addition to our stories that are collected from women in farms and settlements, villages and small towns around the country which is used to inform public policy through our quarterly policy documents.

A few months ago, I was faced with an interesting question: what is policy? What exactly is policy?

In light of the important upcoming event for women around the world I have decided to end this article by demystifying the meaning of 'policy'. For us everyday people, the best way to understand the word 'policy' is that it can be viewed as a 'commitment' made by an organization or country.

It can also be viewed as 'intentions' that organizations or states set themselves through recommendations from interested parties, who can also be referred to as 'stakeholders'. I hope CSW (2010) continues to capture the essence of the important issues relating to not only women's development, but also Human Development.



*A Women's Moment:  
femLINKPACIFIC's Rural  
Consultation in Nadi, January  
2010*



## **Yes We CANZ Get into Next GEAR!**

The Australian and New Zealand Governments together with their Canadian counterparts remain committed to the to the United Nations System-Wide Coherence including the Comprehensive Proposal on the Composite Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

According to a "CANZ" group statement delivered at the UN General Assembly Launch of the 2010 System Wide Coherence Process (February 4), the "GEAR" recommendations go a long way in addressing many of the practical questions and concerns raised by delegations last year and stressing that no UN Member State can claim to have reached full equality between women and men, girls and boys, a situation that hinders progress in all societies.

The statement reiterated that the UN member states have a collective duty to address the current constraints of the UN's institutional arrangements that have resulted from an ad hoc process over several decades and this requires the United Nations to have a strong entity with a universal focus and with the most senior leadership to support the normative processes, gender mainstreaming throughout the system and operational work to support all countries under their ownership and priorities:

"CANZ looks forward to making swift progress in operationalizing the new entity. We expect early recruitment of the new Under-Secretary General through an open and transparent process, and would encourage Member States to submit nominations to the Secretary-General. In this year's process on System-Wide Coherence, we expect to arrive at high-level decisions to operationalise the entity that will be followed by further decisions by the entity's governing bodies to be decided by Member States, as has been the practice when creating other UN organizations."

Meanwhile, at the same according to an IPS report (by Thalif Dean) while the CANZ statement took an encouraging tone, the European Union (EU) has urged Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to "urgently" speed up the creation of the proposed new U.N. agency for women.

The proposal for a "gender entity" was recommended by a high-level panel back in 2006 and approved by the 192-member General Assembly last year:

"If this decision is further delayed, the current gender agencies will be kept in limbo and unable to deliver for women around the world," warned Ambassador Juan Antonio Yanez-Barnuevo of Spain, current chair of the 27-member EU.

The proposal calls for the consolidation of four existing U.N. "gender agencies" - the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) - under a single new U.N. body to be headed by an under-secretary-general. The secretary-general has proposed that UNIFEM and INSTRAW be "abolished" and their existing mandates and assets be transferred, along with that of OSAGI and DAW, into the new "composite entity".

Addressing delegates Thursday, Ambassador Yanez-Barnuevo said the EU was calling on the secretary-general "to urgently advance" the process of appointing the new under-secretary-general of the composite entity.

The new U.N. official, he said, should be in "a position to lead the organisation through the changes required to have a strong U.N. entity focused on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women."

According to U.N. sources, the secretary-general is likely to name a woman USG to head the gender entity - possibly before the next meeting of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), scheduled to take place Mar. 1-12.

If the General Assembly endorses Ban's proposal, the new entity will have an annual budget of about 500 million dollars: 125 million dollars for basic support capacity at the country, regional and headquarters level, and 375 million dollars for country-specific U.N. programmatic support. In contrast, the 2008 funding available to the four existing gender entities was 6.2 million dollars from the regular budget of the United Nations and 218.5 million dollars from voluntary contributions.

But the new figure of 500 million dollars still falls far short of a demand made by an international coalition of women's organisations campaigning under the banner Gender Equality Architecture Reform Campaign (GEAR) which has called for a start-up of 1.0 billion dollars.

IPS also reported that in a 25-page report, Ban has spelled out in greater detail the new infrastructure, its functions, composition of staff and sources of funding. The composite entity will be a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and report to the Assembly through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The Commission on the Status of Women will play a crucial role in guiding its work and an executive board will oversee its operational activities. The composite entity will also be the centre of the gender equality architecture of the United Nations system, "which comprises the capacities of the whole system working for gender equality and women's empowerment."

Making a strong case for the new body, the report says that gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society.

Women lack access to decent work and continue to face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. In too many cases, the report points out, they are denied access to basic education and health care: "Some 500,000 women and girls still die every year in pregnancy and childbirth," the report says.

And women in all parts of the world are not able to exercise their human rights and they suffer violence and discrimination.

Women are underrepresented in political processes and decision-making in all areas: "Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are inextricably linked to poverty eradication and human development, and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals," it says. These goals, including poverty and hunger reduction, will not be met by the 2015 deadline unless women and girls are empowered.

In his report, the secretary-general also says that "grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations", the composite entity will work for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women; and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security. Placing women's rights at the centre of all its efforts, it will also "lead and coordinate United Nations system efforts to ensure that commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action throughout the world".

Additionally, it will provide strong and coherent leadership in support of member states' priorities and efforts, building effective partnerships with civil society and other relevant actors. The report also says that UNIFEM currently has a presence in more than 80 countries, "where it responds to the greatest needs".

The U.N.'s capacity to respond, however, has been far below country demand for support and expertise. In the first phase of the establishment of the composite entity, Ban says, emphasis could be placed on maintaining a minimum basic presence in those 80 countries, as well as deploying teams in the six United Nations regional operational support centres to provide core services in countries where the composite entity does not have a physical presence. A total of approximately 760 staff would be needed for the start-up capacity in those 80 countries, including 600 national staff, compared with the current total of 196 field staff.

*About the GEAR Campaign:*

*The Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign, a network comprised of more than 300 women's, human rights, and social justice groups from around the world has been actively engaged in the process of working to reform the United Nations gender equality architecture over the past four years. The GEAR team has met regularly with UN officials and Member States, provided substantive input to the various documents prepared by the UN Secretariat, and coordinated civil society participation in the process.*

*In this context, the GEAR Campaign welcomed the September 14, 2009 General Assembly's decision to support the consolidation of the existing four UN gender equality entities into a composite women's entity (Resolution 63/311) and its request for a comprehensive proposal outlining key organizational arrangements for the new women's entity. We are pleased that, in response to this General Assembly request, the Secretary-General has now produced the report including organizational recommendations for the new entity, for consideration by Member states during this 64<sup>th</sup> session of the GA.*

*The "Comprehensive proposal for the composite gender equality entity" moves the process forward and addresses many of the key issues that are critical for the launch of the new women's entity. We support the Secretary-General's report as a guideline for taking action to set up the entity. However, it does not adequately address several important issues related to country level operational capacity, long term funding for the entity, civil society participation, and the timeline for the appointment of the Under Secretary-General.*

## Earlier Story: What's In a Name?

*By Sharon Bhagwan Rolls*

The campaign for the UN Gender Equality Architecture Reform continues. In fact it has probably intensified since the September 2009 General Assembly resolution which paved the way for setting up a composite UN entity to advance women's human rights and gender equality commitments.

Here in the Pacific we have been talking about putting the Pacific into GEAR, Getting into GEAR, and the Next GEAR in our attempt to ensure that this new UN entity is "much closer" to the Pacific region and the priorities of Pacific member states, in particular the much needed institutional or technical support including financial resources, to get into "Top Gear" on women's human rights and gender equality.

*So where are we now?* Since September the GEAR campaign working group has been following up on the implementation of the GA resolution and there is a checklist of issues to follow up on including a stronger definition of country operational capacity, identifying the need for strong civil society participation, and making clear that the budget needs to increase over time.

The goal for the GEAR Working Group is to get both get these points in the resolution and in what the UN understand it is to do when the agency is created. The next stage after a resolution will be working with the UN at national,

regional and global levels on how that gets built into the structure.

The GEAR working group has been checking in with regional focal points on possible names for this new entity. According to Charlotte Bunch, the UN Deputy Secretary General's office is narrowing in on possible names to suggest for the entity when they present the paper to the General Assembly. Of course government's calls still change it, but they have invited feedback from the GEAR working group.

"So far, all we have said definitely is that we want the word "women" in it and they agree with that," says Bunch. The name they are proposing is "UN Office for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality" or the reverse order "for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment".

"Apparently the legal office of the UN had told them it could not be called Organization" or "Agency" as those are technical terms used other ways in the UN and we all do not want "entity", she adds, "It will have a Fund as part of it but as a hybrid, it is more than just a Fund which eliminates that name. I asked about "High Commissioner" and she said that the OHCHR says people do not understand that term and is asking to be changed to UN Human Rights, modelled after UN AIDS."

With the proposed term, the short brand name proposed would then be \*UN Women\*. Thus overall may then be known as "UN Women"

Interesting that there is actually a UN Radio programme titled "UN Women".

Right now the GEAR campaign working group seems comfortable that the name proposed would include women, but a number of us

are also stressing the need to ensure that that addressing and changing gender relations in terms of empowerment is actually a critical part of what we want a new entity to have skill in and that should be reflected in the name.

So get ready for a new name on the UN scene soon and it just might be "UN Office for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality" aka "UN Women"



Turning GEAR commitment into action for the Asian-Pacific region: Charlotte Bunch and Dr. Patricia Licuanan.

## **Linking Human Development and Human Security to Women's Human Rights Commitments and UNSCR 1325**

*By Sharon Bhagwan Rolls and Kalpana Prasad*

"We have been struggling as women, it seems all our lives. We struggled to provide for our families during our youth, when our husbands spent their wages on alcohol but Sister Bali gave us a chance to be part of the centre and sell the vegetables that we grow, rather than go out and rely on social welfare."

That was how we were greeted as we arrived at the Ba Senior Citizens Centre to commence our first rural Women, Peace and Human Security Consultation in 2010 on Wednesday 13 January. They had come from Yalelevu and Namosau. They had come from Wailadi, Varandoli, Vatulaulau, Nukuloa, Mangroru and Tauveqaveqa. Some travelling more than 14 kilometres to be part of the first monthly Peace and Human Security discussion which femLINKPACIFIC will be convening every month in partnership with the Ba Senior Citizens' Centre (BSCC):

"The purpose of the monthly consultations is to enable the seniors to be actively involved in identifying and articulating their human security and development priorities, as a way to support their advocacy for the type of assistance they need in their own community" says Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, the Executive Director of femLINKPACIFIC, "This will compliment the monthly radio programmes which will be documented in Ba through our women's media network which is also based here at the Centre. We are also conducting a monthly women's household and income survey. Similar activities are being organized through our women's media network members in Nadi, Nausori, Labasa, and Savusavu and also in the capital city. This will enable femLINKPACIFIC to be able to regularly provide not only the stories about women's peace and security issues, but the data or the evidence to assist in ensuring that development programmes are actually contributing to peace and security."

The information is then linked to existing policy commitments through the production of regular Women, Peace and Human Security reports which are presented to policy makers.

femLINKPACIFIC focal points and correspondents are trained to conduct interviews for the organizations community radio station, facilitate consultations and are women recognized in their home town as community workers, as well of course as being mothers, neighbours, wives, work colleagues, and friends. Far from appearing in a local area as a 'stranger' requiring answers to many sensitive questions, our network members live in these rural areas amongst the women whose stories they document on a weekly basis with tape recorders, cameras, and a pen, speaking the same language and dialect:

“Using community media we are able to demonstrate the link between women’s human rights and commitments to women in decision making, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and CEDAW, for example, and the daily struggles in women’s lives, which becomes the basis for our advocacy for change. To ensure human security is defined and understood from a women’s perspective and that if we would like to pave the way for the political empowerment of women, then it is critical that we address addressing poverty, violence and maternal health issues so that women have the social and economic climate to be able to be active participants in the political arena. So this work is also about working to enable political security from the local to the national level.”

### **Economic Security is Key for Seniors’ Food and Health Security**

Every week at least 50 women and a few men attend the weekly programme organized at Fiji’s only centre established for seniors in Ba just over 10 years. It is the legacy of the late (nursing) Sister Satya Bali. These weekly meetings are a time of fellowship, fun and an important forum for discussion and action.

Transport costs, remain a critical concern for the seniors as 70 year old Pritam Singh highlighted. Mr. Singh, who is a retired farmer, wishes for the return of the senior citizens bus fare discount, which had previously assisted the members of this local community enjoy mobility and boost their sense of community. Most of the seniors pay bus fare prices which range from \$2 to \$5 just to attend the weekly meetings at the Seniors Centre which is for most, the only opportunity for an outing and recreation.

But bus fare discounts is also more than just about access to recreation. As one women shared, the reality is many cannot even afford the return fare to and from the Ba Mission Hospital and so she, like others, walks sometimes for half an hour under the hot sun to the hospital because they simply do not have the money.

Food Security for the seniors means something completely different from the food security of younger family members, but too often despite having special dietary requirements, they have no choice but to share the regular family meals, resulting in high cholesterol problems:

“Our children have different tastes and needs as compared to us. We cannot eat fatty foods and meat and need more vegetables, but because we cannot buy what we would like to have cooked for us, we have no choice to eat whatever is served at home,” Pritam Singh told us.

While there is an option to grow their own vegetables, as many of the members of the BSCC do, we were reminded that the impact of Cyclone Mick, as well as the limited access to land for vegetable gardens, especially in the informal settlements means, the inability to even have the opportunity to grow their own vegetables, but then they still have to buy their weekly groceries and according to Monica Latchman, a retired nursing sister, many of the women, including those with the advantage of social welfare assistance, cannot afford to buy nutritious food items.

"The prices for groceries are really high and the vegetable prices are also rising constantly due to other factors such as the natural disasters and flooding which makes it harder for the senior women to get fresh produce which is necessary for good health", she stated.

Padma Rao of Yalalevu highlighted that even the \$60 a month social welfare assistance does not cater for the entire household expenses for a senior citizen which includes food, household bills, transport and medication, let alone clothing and other occasional expenses:

"(But) many women at the centre do not get any assistance from the social welfare department and even if they do then it is not enough to cater for all of their basic necessities. Most senior women also do not get money from their children or families." Subsequently a number of the women are growing food to sell at the Centre every Wednesday as well.

Good nutrition is also important for many of the seniors who now rely on a range of medication for ailments ranging from high blood pressure and cholesterol, diabetes and heart conditions, but many do not have the money to cover their medical expenses:

"Many women here at the centre suffer from diabetes, hyper-tension, and eye problems. We visit the local health centre in Ba, but if the disease is at an advanced or crucial stage we are usually sent to the Lautoka hospital for which we need money once again to be used as bus-fares", Salifan Bibi of Wailadi told us.

Pritam Singh added that too often prescribed medicine is not available at the local health centres, but the seniors do not have the money to pay for the medicine from the local chemist:

"Sometimes we have to purchase some medicines from the private pharmacies in town such as tablets for cholesterol and this requires money, even reaching the pharmacy requires bus-fares and which senior people do not have any form of income to help them overcome this problem especially in the rural areas as almost all of us are from farming backgrounds and retired", Singh said.

## Perspectives from Nadi

femLINKPACIFIC's Women, Peace and Human Security Consultation moved on to Nadi on Thursday, January 14th, bringing local leaders from Sabeto, Nakavu, Navakai, Namotomoto, Navoci, Wailoaloa, Korovuto and Korociri for their first monthly Peace and Security meeting in 2010 who identified Environment security, as well as personal security, health and food security as key issues.

FemLINKPACIFIC's Nadi rural correspondent Julekha Mustapha, highlighted that health and environment issues are closely linked especially to the floods and Cyclone Mick in December: "Women in Nadi feel that flooding was the major environment issue faced by them as they have suffered two major cyclones last year, one at the beginning of the year and one at the end, which destroys most of their food crops and livelihoods", said Mustapha who is also a member of the Nadi Rural Advisory Council. Many women also continue to suffer from the lack of regular water supply.

According to Vasiti Pettitt, who is also the Rural Vice President of the National Council of Women, there is a close link to economic security, health security and environment security. Many of the villages which are situated along the Nadi River are barely making ends meet following the aftermath of Cyclone Mick. Many of the families were still recovering from the January 2009 floods: "Some women pointed out that the food rations given by the state was not enough to support those households affected by the flooding until they get on their feet," said Pettitt especially as the floods destroyed the food plantations along the river:

"Most of the villages' we have are situated near the river and it floods on their plantations and farms, from the areas of Saunaka to Narewa, and it takes time for these villages to recover from the aftermath of the floods", Pettitt added.

Other concerns raised during the discussion at the consultation revolved mostly around food security worsened by unemployment: "After the flooding, some households did not have enough income to begin with and that really crippled the food security in many households along the river areas", she added

Pettitt said that another cross cutting issue for most women in Nadi was their personal security which revolves around economic security, food security and health security.

Yasmin Khan, of Martintar added that she is concerned about poor sewerage and rubbish disposal which is a growing health concern and Taina Lord who travelled 9 kilometres from Sabeto Village to attend the consultation also agreed that there was a need to improve rubbish collection for communities outside of the town boundary:

"People in my area tend to pollute the rivers which add to the effects of the flooding as there is no proper waste disposal or rubbish collection in the village that we live in. I implore the proper authorities to somehow resolve this issue which is adding up to become a serious health issue in my village".

These women, peace and human security consultations assist women come together from the wide range of local mothers clubs and groups to discuss and document common issues which can then be highlighted to relevant authorities and development partners through femLINKPACIFIC's women, peace and human security reports. Pettitt is also the President of the Nadi District Council of Social Services:

"We have taken these issues to the district authorities and the provincial authorities to be addressed by the state and hope something can be done soon to resolve these sewerage and drainage problems which exist in Nadi", she said.

"We are looking forward to support local women through our women's media network to continue to voice their concerns and provide data and information to policy makers and development partners through our Women, Peace and Human Security reports so support the call for the type of development and changes the women see as priorities," says femLINKPACIFIC's Executive Director, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls,

"Our women's media network will continue to offer women's voices and experiences through our community media and policy initiatives and the focus for 2010 we are working to strengthen our own local information and communication systems through the monthly local meetings on 1325 and women, peace and human security. It is one way we can ensure that UNSCR 1325 is fully integrated and accounted for in local and national development plans because women's experiences and expertise must be part of the process. Women make a difference when they are in decision and policymaking positions and unfortunately there is still not enough substantive representation by women in formal processes, or even consultations with local women leaders, so our work is contributing to bridging this gap so because we believe that the inclusion of their expertise and experiences will help to ensure, to build and to strengthen policies which create sustainable peace and development in their communities and in our nation. A lasting peace cannot be achieved without the participation of women, especially grassroots women's groups and networks, especially when it is organized across ethnic lines."

## **On the Mat at Nadi's "Bangladesh" Community**

*With Sharon Bhagwan Rolls and Kalpana Prasad*

The Bangladesh squatter settlement in Navakai Nadi is 2 kilometres away from the Nadi town and the settlement community dates back 30 years when the Navakai Land and Housing Cooperative was formed by the original group of 100 or so families who moved out of family farms and other areas of Nadi. Today the settlement comprises of close to 800 households living in semi permanent and permanent structures which have been numbered since a visit by the Lands Department in 2009. During this visit improvements to the community were discussed, but for many of the women who also attended the meeting, follow up on the discussions have not been easy:

"We don't keep records of these visits," admitted Kalawati whose family was part of the original settlement residents: "So we cannot follow up on the action promised."

But sometimes the women just do not wait. In 2008, a group of women collected close to \$900 to pay for road improvements. The \$10 contributed meant a lot of each household where the average weekly earning is just around \$90.

Alina moved here with her parents when she was 18 years old. Now, 20 years later, she is part of the economic struggle shared by women in this community and she tries to provide vegetables for the family meals, whatever she can grow in the sandy soil:

"My family eats vegetables, like beans and pumpkin, I grow myself."

Alina, Rajwati and the 26 other women meeting with us on January 15 agreed that their families needed to earn \$150-\$200 a week to pay for food, clothes and other expenses. Only five of the women, including three widows, receive a monthly social welfare allowance.

"I don't know whether to pay the bills, buy the groceries or pay for school," says Puspa Wati. She receives a social welfare allowance of \$74 a month.

But Esita, a single mother of 4 said that she does not receive any form of social welfare assistance and does whatever she can to generate income for her family:

"Sometimes I catch crabs to sell if the weather is good but at other times, I sell pot plants as an alternative income and if the opportunity arises I temporarily work as a sales girl in the shops in Nadi town to earn extra income", she said.

"I did try to get social welfare once, but there is too much running around so I gave up hope", she added.

These days Rajwati can only afford \$20 a week for vegetables and the most basic grocery supplies like a 1 kilogram bag of "arhar" dhal which provides for 4 meals. Vegetable prices are increasing she said, and because they cannot afford to travel into the town area. The local shop is the easiest place to buy grocery supplies, but prices tend to be much higher than the supermarkets but many cannot afford the 70 cents bus fare so they just buy whatever they can afford.

After 20 years as a domestic worker earning \$15 a week, 64 year old Jainap Bibi now suffers from a range of medical ailments does her best to be economically independent. Her son does not have a fulltime job: "If you don't work you don't eat," she says as she explains how she cooks and sells "bara" a savoury to the local school.

Many of the mothers shared their frustration with the lack of employment for their children: "All the boys are sitting at home after we have spent so much on their education," said Kalawati

"We need more information about what education assistance is available for our children," said 38 year old Alina Naidu. Like many of the wives of fishermen in the community her family is not assured of a regular income. During a good week her husband can earn \$50 to \$100 a week but that is not enough to cover the expenses for the start of the school year, as she reels off the shopping list. She needs \$600 for her three children's school expenses including uniforms: ... "They can't just wear shorts. I need help for school fees. It needs to be free."

While cash donations after the floods have been important, for a community living in a flood prone area, Alina sees the need for more disaster preparedness support, in a very practical way: "We need to be given plastics to cover and protect our belongings which get damaged every time there is a flood and we cannot afford to replace them." Groceries or food packs help, but have limited value, especially as Alina's husband cannot go out and fish for several months after a flood.

In a community where the main income earners work as fishermen, carpenters, grass-cutters and as other casual labourers, Kalawati's husband is a general contractor, but with highly competitive rates in the construction market, he has not been successful in winning any tenders since September 2009: "I have to try and grow vegetables using compost and sew to meet my weekly budget," she tells us

Alina also shared that access and affordability to reproductive health services and products needed urgent improvement for women in her settlement. The mother of four highlighted her frustration with her inability to afford the price of the monthly pill which she first accessed as part of her post natal care after her first child 15 years ago. But over the years, she has found the "over the counter price" to be out of reach.

She does not just want to be able to buy a monthly supply at \$5.50 but she wants to be able to afford \$16.50 for a three month supply. She certainly cannot afford another child, but several years ago, she missed a month's dosage and the result was an accidental pregnancy.

Alina, Rajwati, Esita and Sushila Devi, who is a recipient of the Connect Internet Services- femLINKPACIFIC "Light Up a Woman's Life Campaign", represent the daily struggles of women in informal settlements, working in the informal sector across Fiji, struggling to provide for their families. These women require information on a range of services from education assistance, income generation opportunities as well as sexual and reproductive health services.

Without such support, they are unable to fully realize their potential and enjoy life as they should. They are unable to afford the right to open a simple savings bank account.

What will it take, we wonder, for them to enjoy the articles of CEDAW, the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, to realize their peace and human security priorities?

### **Women Key to their Economic Security: Labasa Feature**

"When a woman can do so much in the house for her family, why can't she do something for the community"?

This was the sentiment of the Vice President of the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum, Nirmala Sharma, at the ground breaking ceremony of their Cooperative store in Vunicuicui on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

For women in Vunicuicui, the ground breaking of their Dairy Cooperative store symbolizes harmony and development which will not only benefit the women but the community as a whole. This is the legacy of the women in Vunicuicui who demonstrate that peace and development is possible when working together without any racial divide.

The women's cooperative plan has humble beginnings initially facilitated by the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding with additional support from femLINKPACIFIC and inter-cultural awareness training with Fr. Frank Hoare.

"With the help of the development programs with partners like Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding and femLINKPACIFIC programs we were able to identify and communicate the need to establish a shop, to be our priority community project for 2009", added Sharma, who is also the treasurer of this women's group.

This was a dream shared on the porch of Nirmala Sharma's home in Vunicuicui. The cooperative will be built on her family's land, but the team with a focus on looking beyond geographical and racial boundaries is determined to build their cooperative on a solid foundation, nurtured by their family and especially their husbands' support.

"As rural women, at that time although we had identified that we need a shop, we did not dream that one day we would be able to establish something as special as this here in Vunicuicui", Sharma added.

The Vunicuicui community is 15 kilometres from Labasa Town and has around 500 households in its vicinity with a population of just over a thousand and with the nearest shop being 7 miles away, which was also quite unsafe for people especially after dark.

The Manager of the Northern Development Programme (NDP) Waisale Tuidama who was present at the ground breaking ceremony said that "A dream has been realized" as members of the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum celebrated the groundbreaking ceremony for their women's cooperative store.

The project, Tuidama acknowledged is a unique one, as the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum is the first women's group to access support through the NDP.

Following the successful participation in the NDP's new business creation course last June (2009) by 9 members of the group, the cooperative project was approved. This enabled equity funding from the NDP which enabled the women to access a small loan from the Fiji Development Bank which will be used to build, furnish and stock the cooperative.

According to Adi Vasu Chute, FemLINKPACIFIC's northern community media correspondent and Pacific Center for Peace Building Facilitator, the NDP also helped these women through education by providing them with business training for 8 days which helped them to draw up the business plan.

The women, including President of the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum, Julie Waqa identified a community shop to families from the surrounding area who find it expensive and difficult to travel to town:

"The women in our group have great leadership skills and the only reason we are able to achieve all this is through the team efforts by our members, who have learnt to work together and live together and our racial differences is what has made us stronger", an emotional Mrs. Waqa said.

Waqqa said that at times it was hard to keep track of the project as it seemed an endless journey of meetings and trainings and trying to understand business initiatives, especially when all the women in the group were only educated until primary school.

"We just kept on taking on the challenge and were always willing and enthusiastic to keep on moving forward", she said and her husband, Uraia Waqa agrees. He is indeed proud that Julie and the committee have persevered:

"I have to admit women have great leadership skills and should be given a chance to speak and contribute in all major development planning projects as they have achieved something that we, men, have not been able to achieve for years now", Mr. Waqa said.

Father Frank Hoare, who conducted 2 inter-cultural workshops with the women, says that the workshop had helped the women to understand each other so that they could work better together:

"Women from both these races, come from different backgrounds and have different perspectives when it comes to business, and therefore, it was very important that each understand the other for their project to be successful" adding that this cooperative project also brings unity among the two races as well because the people need something solid such as these projects to bind them together.

The Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum Cooperative project is more than just a shop. It is a cooperative in every sense of the word.

Adi Vasu says apart from being economically empowered, the women wanted to show the community that women can be good leaders and decision makers when it comes to community development.

"The idea of a shop was big and the women were shy but they still came out strong as they wanted to show the community that women should not be undermined and have strength and leadership skills", said Adi Vasu.

The motivation for this project is economic and food security but it has a broader meaning for these women from Vunicuicui who have demonstrated that women have the leadership qualities to pull off a project and address a human security issue which was priority for these women for years. .

And the plans for this shop by the women does not end here, once electricity reaches this area the women have plans for an internet cafe too. Another project for this flood prone area is a seed bank.

It is about women working through cultural differences and it truly points to a positive way and a true model to invest in women!

It is no wonder that Mr Tuidama told the gathering that the NDP has plans to increase its investment and support for women.

Meanwhile women in other parts of Labasa have also highlighted economic security as their priority concern in a Women, Peace and Human Security consultation organized by femLINKPACIFIC on January 20<sup>th</sup> at the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding office.

27 women and young women had come to this consultation from as far as Tawake Village in Udu Point which is about 210 kilometres from Labasa Town and about 5 hours of bus and boat ride on a road that still needs to be tar sealed, women had come from Bulileka, Vunimoli, Cawaira, from Nakama village in Waiqele, Siberia, Tuatua, and Vunivau.

Economic security was once again at the top of the agenda for women in Labasa who highlighted that women in these areas do not have any formal employment to cater for their basic needs.

“4 of us have come from the Tawake village in Udu point and women in my village are faced with the challenge of putting food on the table, so the women go fishing and catch sea crabs because no matter what happens they have to provide for the family but it all depends on the weather”, said Una Dugunu, 27 year old single mother of one.

She said that the women in the village areas should get together and plant things which are in high demand and which will bring the most income such as Yaqona plants.

But, planting is not all that easy for the other women from other places in Labasa who are faced with the economic security but only have land enough for subsistence farming.

Prem Lata Bhan of the Arya Mahila Mandal says that economic security is important especially for the women as they are the ones who have to manage the house and teach the family about food security.

“The cost of basic food items is very high and it is harder for the women to manage their homes and families, which is why it is the key priority for all the women at the consultation”, Bhan said.

Mrs Qalica Nanise, 59 years, added to this, saying that cost of living was increasing dramatically but the salary of people remains the same and this is seen as part of the reason why people are unable to manage financial resources.

Mrs Qalica said that the single mothers are the ones who are facing the most problems even though some of them were on social welfare.

"The widows and single mothers are getting around \$60 a month and now the new resolution that they would be given \$30 worth of grocery rations per month, that is all good, but the issue here is that \$30 is not enough even for one day considering the prices of goods in the supermarket let alone, it being able to cater for a month", she said.

"The women in my group during our discussions have said that they need to find better ways to cater to their children's education needs and bus fares and it is just impossible", Mrs Qalica added.

Education was also one of the solutions that women in Labasa came up with in order to combat the rising need for economic security in their communities.

Bhan added that it is important to give children of this generation education which can be the answer to the struggle that women at the grass roots level are going through: "The time has gone when boys were the only one's educated in the community, it is important that girls also be educated so that they can be empowered to cater for themselves and their families instead of relying on other people."

The issues raised through femLINKPACIFIC'S Labasa Women, Peace and Human Security Consultation have once again highlighted that women in our rural communities are not given the opportunity to take part in decision making which is a critical component if the issues of women are to be addressed at the policy level.

Women need access at the community decision making level if their human security issues are to be addressed and taken seriously.

"We need to have discussions and dialogues to solve these problems but it is hard for women to access decision making especially in the community as men do not allow women the opportunity to talk", said Mrs. Qalica.

These are the challenges that women face everyday in their lives and yet do not get the opportunity at the community level to raise their voices and opinions to find solutions which the women know but are not allowed to share by the traditional structures that still binds our society.

Women, indeed have the key to their Economic Security.

## **Vunimoli Women Highlight Human Security Issues**

Access to land and water ensures food and economic security for the members of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal (women's group) who met with femLINKPACIFIC at their simple temple perched on a hill overlooking the community school, farms and river which meanders down from the mountain.

This is a small but active community of women, making time during a week full of long days (most wake up at 430am) to organise prayer meetings and other community events at the temple which also serves as the local evacuation centre. Perched high on the hill it is safe and secure from the river which they know with each cyclone or hurricane has the capacity to rise and destroy crops and dwellings.

They all live 15 kilometres or \$4 return bus fare from Labasa Town.

Access to a central water supply is limited to only certain families, while others like 50 year old Prem Lata Bhan, 50, the "Pundita" have organised their own water network through a lease system with the local landowners. But the price of water adds up.

From \$50 as an annual maintenance fee, there is also the cost of the water-pipe system. This cost has fluctuated from \$500 cash per family to \$1650 which is the cost of 5 feet of corrugated iron sheet.

Unfortunately the women are not always involved in the negotiations and meetings with the landowners, whether it is to do with access to water or land lease arrangements but they have organised themselves to apply for a water tank project from the Canada Fund.

The membership of this small club has been affected by the departure of a large number of the families from this area. Since 1998 a number have left for "brighter prospects" in Suva, but the women we met have chosen to remain in Labasa and their husbands continue to farm the land assisted by seasonal labourers.

The toil and hardships of three generations of farmers, exacerbated by the expenses associated with maintaining their land lease, has mothers like 47 year old Manju Deo encouraging her children to seek employment in other sectors: "We encourage our children to get formal employment so that they would be able to get money for the running of our households and buy our basic necessities", she told us. : However training and job opportunities remain limited, as do wage levels.

Lease payments the women shared can add up to \$15000, and that does not include the additional "good will" payments which often coincide with the regular cane payment:

"It is hard for us to make such high payments to land owners and most of us rely on bank loans to renew the leases, those who are unsuccessful are usually evicted and they have no choice but to move to the town and city area's which is much harder to cope with considering the high prices of goods," one mother told us.

Land remains an immensely sensitive issue.

Meanwhile the 38 year old President of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal, Maya Wati Prasad is the sole income earner for her family. Assisted by her 20 year old son she is responsible for the ploughing, planting and harvesting as well as the housework: "I wake up at 3am so I can complete the housework and go to the plantation by 8am."

Her husband who has several disabilities is confined to their small house while Maya works on a small plot of land allocated to her and other families by a local landowner.

In return for access to the land, Maya "pays" the landlord half of everything she grows: "I mostly plant peanuts as my landlord has told me that it was a profitable cash crop but I also plant other crops such as corn and rice which my husband sells at the market", she tells us.

A bag of peanuts usually sells at \$60 a "tin" while she produces cornflour which are all sold at the Labasa Market.

But managing a peanut and corn plantation is not easy and she has learnt to adjust her planting schedule according to the weather: "(With) dry and good weather it is time to plant peanuts and corn. During the rainy I plant beans, baigan (eggplant), chauraiya (spinach) and rice."

Since the members of the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandal arrived into this community as young brides more than 20 years ago, they have worked in their homes, worked the land and worked for their local community, proving that women's work certainly goes beyond tradition and norms.

And now almost 15 years since the ratification of CEDAW and the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, with commitments to advancing the status and rights of rural women they are still working to have a greater say in the public arena of decision making. Hopefully it won't take another 15 years to transform the structures so that they can have a formal say about land, water and other aspects of their economic security.

## **'The femLINKPACIFIC Market Report'**

*By Sulueti Waqa*

"I face a lot of difficulties especially with finding the right types of vegetables which sells, but I have tried my best to overcome this by devising my own buying methods", Alumita told femTALK 89.2fm which broadcasts a weekly community radio programme segment dedicated to interviews with market vendors. Stories are recorded through femLINKPACIFIC's Community Media network and builds on femLINKPACIFIC's market report series including through community video productions since 2001.



Many women in Fiji have involved themselves in small business in order to make ends meet for their family. They have extended their territory from being confined in the four walls of their kitchen to farming and market vending.

Most of them start their day early when everybody is still resting and going back home when the rest of the family members are in their comfort zones. Just like Aliti Dibose, who lives in Qauia, her days start at half past five in the morning. Having a multi role, she normally prepares everything for the family before going to sell in the Lami market on the outskirts of Suva: "I usually cook and sell fish with coconut cream, taro leaves with mutton, fish and cassava, sausage and egg and also cakes, pies and cookies", said Aliti which means that apart from cooking for her family, she also has the task of cooking for her small business.

But, being a woman, Aliti never loses hope and believes that struggles develop strength, saying that the real strength is when going through hardships, one does not surrender. Despite her brave sentiments, Aliti admits that there are challenges which she has to overcome in order to successfully cater to her family needs. One issue in particular which affects the women in Aliti's community is the lack of infrastructure: "There is no proper bridge available and when it rains heavily, the bridge is flooded and the women cannot go to the market to sell their produce", said Aliti, adding "This affects our families as we are not left with any expense money to buy groceries at home and also other expenses that needs payment".

Women are responsible for many task in the household, in supplying for their families, they have special and diverse knowledge in terms of crop production, post production and marketing. This could be seen in the Lami Market, just like Alitia , Alumita Kolinisau also sells in the Lami market and very much aware of the different needs of her customers, she sells cassava, cabbage, pumpkin, lemon and egg plant.

These women are also parents, who realise that almost every measure of education or talent is now associated with higher income and so are willing to face the daily struggles at the market in order to invest in educating their children so that they have a better life.

Adi Fane Gonekalou from Viyani, Navatu in Vanua Levu who is married with seven children, shifted to Labasa town for the purpose of better education for her children and she is now a regular vendor at the Labasa market, in order to be able to afford to send her children to school. She is the sole bread winner for her family. Tapping onto her talent in cooking, she sells cakes and tea at the Labasa market, in addition to that, she displayed some mats and handicrafts which she makes in her spare time in order to earn some more cash.

This re-affirms that women in the rural areas will no longer let location be a barrier in the need for proper education.

Like Adi Fane of Labasa, Luisa Lewa, from Nasauvakarua in the interior of Navosa, shifted to Vatulaulau, in Ba for the sake of her children's better education.

Luisa is a market vendor in the Ba market and sells yaqona as the source of her income. Her Approximate earnings for a day is twenty dollars which she uses to cater for her family needs. She is also part of the economic struggle that all women have to encounter and with the husband being sick it has taken determination for most of the women but recently women have admitted that the economic situation is adding to the burden of their daily struggles:

"Life is now harder sometimes I go home with only five dollars ", said Luisa.

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## **The Section J Spot:**

### **FemLINKPACIFIC's Annual Generation Next Training: Amplifying Young Women's Views**

"I have realized that I can play a much greater role in raising the issues of women and young women in my community through the use of the media technology and it started with me writing my script, my story!"

From February 1 – 5<sup>th</sup>, femLINKPACIFIC hosted its Annual Generation Next Training Programme and for the 8 rural young women who have now joined our organization's Young Women's Project, the empowerment process began when they simply shared their stories, first in a conversation circle and then through their scripts and the development of their own digital story.



Every day brought a new experience, a new realization and a new step of self discovery not only for the 8 rural young women, but the Suva based Generation Next members also who all got the opportunity to communicate their priorities through their own media productions while contributing to build their confidence and self esteem using appropriate media technology.

Through the weeklong workshop, young women participants got the opportunity to learn about Digital Story telling, which is the effective use of images, audio and sound to enlighten their priority issues as young women and also learn the Radio Basics, including scriptwriting, on air presentation and production as our feminist based media organisation works to enhance the opportunity for young women to be heard through the media.

For 26 year old Sherine Lata from Korovuto in Nadi, it was an opportunity to use computers and other new information and communication technologies which she does not have access to in her community, to tell her human security story.

"This was the first time for me to ever touch a laptop or computer and I got this chance through participating in this workshop", an emotional Lata said adding that "This workshop also provided me with that safe space to communicate the issues which affect me deeply and which can help other young women who are going through the same issues".

The training reaffirmed the need to provide access of communication and information tools to the women and young women in the rural areas to ensure they have an equal opportunity to communicate their issues and to ensure that rural women are better represented in development and dialogue processes.

According to femLINKPACIFIC Executive Director Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, this training was an excellent opportunity to explain the role of Generation Next as core members of femLINKPACIFIC's women's media network by providing them practical media skills training and also helping them understand the policy connections!

"This digital storytelling training has also enhanced the opportunity for the 20 participants, including our regional correspondent from Tonga, to use a range of creative techniques and media technology to communicate, especially about the most important issues affecting women and young women in their communities" says Bhagwan Rolls, "At the same time, digital story telling, like radio, is a safe space for women and young women to address some of the more sensitive issues using appropriate and accessible media technology."

For 19 year old Charlene Ashley, a new member of Generation Next in Suva, the digital story telling workshop has led her to discover the producer in her: "I have discovered many new and invaluable things in this weeklong training with young women from my age group and have also learnt how I can use these ICT's for women's empowerment and improve their representation in media", she said.

For 26 year old Makareta of Nakavu Village in Nadi, the week was also an emotional, personal journey of self discovery and realization: "This workshop re-affirmed to me that anything is possible, especially for me, as I did not have access to information and communication tools but here I am, learning to make a digital story with the latest in technology and the best part being I get to tell my own human security story and share it with other young women of my age", she said.

19 year old Lucille Chute will now be working by her mother's side in Labasa. Her mother is femLINKPACIFIC's longest serving rural correspondent, Adi Vasu Chute: "I have gained confidence to speak out in public and also gained the knowledge of how to use media to communicate similar stories of women and young women in my community", Chute added.

Meanwhile, FemLINKPACIFIC's newly appointed Suva based community media correspondent and generation next member Sulueti Waqa, said that despite using ICT's in her everyday life, she has learnt new things in this week's training, which has increased her knowledge and skills in technical production:

"I have learnt new ways to use the existing communication and information technologies and this will help me in being a better producer and to produce quality technical content", Waqa said.

Bhagwan Rolls said the training is also building greater understanding and partnership between the Suva and rural participants who will be contributing to in-depth features for the weekly "suitcase radio" broadcasts: "Community media is linking issues and linking young women, the future of our movement!"

FemLINKPACIFIC's work with young women began with the launch of the organization's suitcase radio station in 2004, when a team of 5<sup>th</sup> form students from St Joseph's Secondary School assisted in staging monthly community radio broadcasts.

The Generation Next project emerged from training programmes for young women in 2005 and by 2006 with funding from the International Women's Development Project, a core team of community radio producers and broadcasters were established to assist femLINKPACIFIC produce and broadcast 20 hours of women's weekend radio.

To date, femLINKPACIFIC has trained more than 50 young women, and this year, programmes will focus on in-depth features as well as the weekly "vox pops" and Women's Market Report for the weekend broadcasts in the capital city.

This annual training programme is supported by the International Women's Development Agency and the World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC).

According to Bhagwan-Rolls, the establishment of the rural "Generation Next" team is paving the way for strengthening their rural women's media network through the involvement of young women, with a vision to improve the access of target communities to Fiji and the Pacific's only feminist-based community radio station.

The workshop will ended on 6<sup>th</sup> February with the rural and Suva based generation next team recording a Generation Next Anthem "Invest in Me" which will be featured in several presentations by femLINKPACIFIC's Executive Director, when she travels to the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission of the Status of Women in New York

## **The Suitcase Radio: Making Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action A Reality**

*Reflection by Kalpana Prasad*

'Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.'

This is 'Section J' of the Beijing platform for action which was passed as an outcome document in 1995. The section J of the Beijing platform for action remains an important part of the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the final adopted outcome document in 1995.

Section J 1 of the Beijing Platform for Action states that there is a need for increased participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.

Through our work, and in particular our community radio station, FemTALK 89.2fm, we are working to implement Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action, for women in our rural women's media network, including members of our Generation Next Project.

The "suitcase radio" more than taking appropriate communication and information technology to the women in their communities, because it is also a practical tool for empowering women to inform policy through the programmes they contribute to.

The suitcase radio plays an important role as what we term appropriate and accessible because it provides an opportunity for women from all walks of life, either it be women in the rural areas, women with disabilities, young women, urban women, old women, women from different ethnic and inter-cultural backgrounds or women from other CSO's and NGO's to be heard on our radio station.

Community Media also gives women the chance to showcase their talents as decision makers and leaders in the community and the process adopted by us as the radio and media team of femLINKPACIFIC, encourages women to become more empowered when talking about the issues that affect their daily lives because through the work that we do as community media (listening and documenting women's stories and issues) we have realised that women also have the solutions to the issues that they face and that is why they make such great decision makers.

It is true that although more women are involved in careers in the communications sector, few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy.

The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private, local, national and international media organizations and so our suitcase radio processes, gives women that chance at becoming more visible with their issues, which is at times overlooked by corporate and commercial media outlets.

For too long, our issues, women's issues, have been camouflaged by corporate policy and popular "hype" but as I am finding, community media and radio outlets to make the commitments in outcome documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action a reality. It has been 15 years now since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, but the question remains on whether it has made a change for the better for the women in our communities who continue to struggle for their basic human rights and survival in a world where discrimination against women is an open reality. Have the governments fully committed to become gender inclusive when making decisions at the policy level?

The WACC Photo competition 2010 has been launched. The competition, in its seventh year, is being run on Flickr for the fifth time! This year's theme is Communication and Poverty. Poverty includes communication poverty. Stronger voices of people living in poverty lead to better understanding and action aimed at tackling injustice and inequality. With open access to information and knowledge, poor communities can work towards a better future. Images should focus on communication helping to overcome poverty; tearing down communication barriers; having a voice and being heard. The competition is open to men, women, and children of all ages and from all countries. Amateurs and professionals are welcome to submit entries. A selection of entries will be used in WACC publications, such as their website and their journal "Media Development". Each entrant may submit an unlimited number of photographs, but no entrant may win more than one prize in the contest. Winners of the competition will be awarded cash prizes. There will be one first prize and five commendations. The first prize is US\$500, and each commendation will be awarded US\$200.

For more details, visit the WACC website at:  
<http://www.waccglobal.org/component/content/article/2176:wacc-annual-photographic-competition-launched.html>

## Women's Civil Society News

### **Women Against Crime, Vanuatu**

*This article was prepared by Michelle Eaton. Michelle is a ViDA Volunteer who is working to support the Vanuatu Ministry of Justice & Community Services to strengthen community partnerships and implement crime prevention initiatives. Michelle is also a member of the Women Against Crime Committee and has been a key player in the coordination of the Neighbourhood Watch Program.*

The Women against Crime (WAC) group, is a multicultural women's organisation that formed in January 2008 after an increase in property and violent crime in Port Vila, in particular, focusing on women. These concerns were discussed and raised by WAC to the National Crime Prevention Forum and as a result, the Women against Crime Committee was formed. One key recommendation of WAC was to form a Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) and Community Safe strategy. In August 2008, WAC formed and developed strong ties with the Vanuatu Police Force Crime prevention Unit and the National Crime Prevention Office. Early support was provided by Supt Vake Rakau and John Taleo and this support has continued with the newly appointed Commissioner Joshua Bong and Officer Commanding Police District South Superintendent Kelson Blue.

One of the early tasks saw a joint WAC and VPF presentation to the Malvatumari Chiefs Nakamal on crime trends, future Crime prevention strategies and the potential support for of a neighbourhood watch/Community Safe Program. The joint presentation was supported and lead by the Director General of the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Mr Joe Ligo. Guests included the Chinese and French Ambassadors, Commissioner of Police, various head of Government, senior Police, Chiefs, elders and the community. The outcomes of the presentation saw high level government and community support to pilot a neighbourhood watch program in the area of the Freswota community. From there, a NHW/Community safe strategy, led by WAC, formed a stakeholders committee and began to work with the Council of Chiefs and Freswota community. Freswota was chosen for the pilot program due to its large mixed island population and emerging crime issues. The community also already had an established Chief system in place however had not actively involved police in their community groups.

The initial NHW program saw a community survey conducted by WAC with local chiefs to assist in identifying community issues and potential remedies to those problems. The survey identified the need to forge closer police/community relations in the Freswota community to enhance the relationship between the community and the police to allow maximise crime prevention and reduction.

Once this was identified, Women Against Crime began worked with the Council of Chiefs to form individual NWH groups where they introduced a Police officer to the groups. These meetings allowed a forum for various issues and concerns to be directed back to the senior VPF officers to develop policing responses. These meetings also provided a forum for VPF officers and WAC coordinated community groups to present to the chiefs and the community on key crime prevention issues that included property crime, marijuana, trespassing, domestic violence, wilful damage to property, to parenting issues and lack of respect.

Several newsletters were also distributed throughout the community outlining various crime prevention strategies. All of the NWH individual meetings and group presentations have been held at the Freswota School after gaining strong support from the community and school leaders. Some of the positives that have come out of NWH have seen police go into the schools to present to the children on child abuse, drugs and personal safety strategies, the setting up of a "car wash" business for a Freswota youth group to allow refocusing of anti social behaviour, police implementing a property engraving register and a community notice board in the market place.

The WAC group have been supported and encouraged along the way by the Ministry of Justice & Community Services and as of June 2009, have been included in the Ministry's five year strategic planning to work together with Crime Prevention and other stakeholders for a *Safe and Harmonious Community*.

The latest strategy, lead by WAC and supported by the Ministry of Justice, is the creation of a "Community Safe Handbook", which is a resource safety handbook focusing on community safety issues and providing accessible information for each household to be shared with family and friends.

The handbook will feature information on how to set up a neighbourhood watch group, home safety, fire safety, medical emergency information, personal safety, safe parenting, safe driving, safety on the social scene, the issue of drugs and alcohol and referral and emergency contact numbers. The aim of the hand book is to raise awareness amongst members of the community to allow a better understanding of these social problems and know who they can contact to obtain the right advice. In compiling this resource kit, it has made various organisations aware of the community's need for information whether it be delivered in a handbook or provided by a presentation. This booklet will provide long term information in Bislama and result in a better informed community leader. It is envisioned the handbook will be launched late February 2010.

Throughout WAC's work in the community, various women's groups have expressed the need for more information on domestic violence, parenting information and drug use and misuse awareness.

The WAC group are all voluntary and include women from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds such as Child's rights and early childhood development, journalism, policing, and women's organisations, women working with Chiefs and training. The group is chaired by Jenny Ligo and has recently become a nationally recognised and registered NGO. They have recently launched their 2010 calendar which features the community, police, women, chiefs, youth all working together to create a harmonious community.

Future visions for 2010 will see the Women Against Crime group go further into other communities, supporting the Ministry of Justice & Community Services, the Crime Prevention Unit, and other organisations throughout Vanuatu to deliver crime awareness, better parenting advice and education on personal safety. If you would like any further information on what we do, please contact [womenaganistcrime@yahoo.com](mailto:womenaganistcrime@yahoo.com), we are more than happy to share our ideas for the good of the community.



*Front L to R Chairwoman of WAC Jenny Ligo, Christine Keasi, Daisy Warsal, Marie NG, Michelle Eaton, NHW coordinator, Lucy Sandy, Naomi Thiel, calendar designer.*

