

fem'TALK

The ENews 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 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).

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Keeping Thirteen 25 In Check

A July 10th from the International Women's Tribune Centre highlighted that the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing mediation and its support activities (launched on 8 April 2009) underlines the importance of having women present at peace negotiations and commits to appointing more women as special envoys and representatives. (For the full report see: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/278/78/PDF/N0927878.pdf?OpenElement>)

However, IWTC also reported that when the Security Council held an open debate on the report on 21 April 2009. Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, addressed the Council beforehand on mediation processes and the report and did not once mention women in his briefing.

During the debate, thankfully a number of member States - including Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay - referred to the critical role of women.

The absence of women at the mediation table, despite the calls in UNSCR 1325 and 1820 for their increased representation at all levels of conflict resolution and peace processes, was described as striking, and attention was drawn to the fact that to date not one single woman had been appointed chief mediator. States further emphasized the need for women to be part of peace negotiations in order to adequately address women's perspectives and secure lasting peace and security.

As we are finding, however, to make these commitment practical realities, requires some urgent attention to the barriers to women's representation in decision making positions, so that we are not just reciting rhetoric.

In this ENews Bulletin our Women, Peace and Human Security reports highlight the realities of the range of obstacles which are barriers to rural women even being able to have the time and the energy to be effective representatives. Solutions for women's empowerment must take into account the impact of economic insecurities which are also having a very real impact on women's health. Potential local leaders are missing meals, are burdened by long hours of unpaid work and by poor infrastructure, including limited information-communication channels.

As Anne Marie Goetz noted in May this year, "Women need democracy in the home if they are to enjoy it in public life. It is physically impossible for women to devote the time and energy needed for political engagement if they are burdened with disproportionate care responsibilities in addition to employment outside the home. If men do not shoulder a greater share of domestic duties, women cannot compete effectively. Democracies, therefore, must invest in democratizing the private sphere if they are committed to the never ending challenge of deepening democracy. We should stop asking what women can do for democracy but rather, in a reversal and paraphrase of Kennedy's famous statement, we should ask what democracy can do for women. We could assess women's views of the benefits of democracy and develop an index of democracy from a gender equality perspective"

Temporary special measures (TSMs) or parliamentary quotas have been recognised as an important and practical way to balance the scales of women's political representation particularly followed armed or political conflicts as we have experienced in our region.

A valuable example in our region has been in Bougainville, which has three seats assigned for women in regional seats in the Autonomous Bougainville Government and since 2006 Francesca Semoso has served as Deputy Speaker and has been recognised as a key parliamentary advocate for HIV-AIDS prevention while Laura Ampa also has served as a Acting President of the ABG.

Efforts in Papua New Guinea for increased representation by women in parliament is being closely followed as PACNEWS reported on June 30th that Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare will reintroduce the motion for the nomination of three women representatives to Parliament in the July session and according to Community Development Minister Dame Carol Kidu this was made possible under Section 101 and 102 of the Constitution.

She said lessons were learnt from the March session when the Opposition refused to support the motion, first introduced by the Prime Minister. Misunderstanding of the process by certain women candidates stirred up negative publicity after the motion was introduced and the Opposition refused to support the vote, resulting in the PM deferring the motion for debate at a later date.

Meanwhile, while the women of Tonga wait expectantly for the decision by the Constitution Review Commission to consider their recommendation for TSMs, there is obvious massive disappointment in the Solomon Islands with the government's decision not to support the campaign for temporary special measures.

On July 16th, Radio Australia reported that *"women in the Solomon Islands will not have any seats set aside for them in next year's general elections for the national parliament. The government caucus has dropped a proposal for 10 reserved seats saying there needs to be better consultation and it does not have the support to get it passed by parliament. This comes as a disappointment for women in Solomon Islands, where only one woman has ever been elected to parliament in the 31 years since independence. The concept called Temporary Special Measures was developed by the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs"*

According to Ethel Sigimanu, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs in the Solomon Islands, there was concern that the TSM campaign did not have sufficient consultation at the community level.

This is certainly a critical prerequisite, but as we highlight later in this bulletin, this is more than just about a half day consultation between government and women's groups but about ensuring and enabling safe processes where women are substantively prepared to participate and also have the confidence and security to speak their minds and present their organizational positions and recommendations. Too often formal processes lack the preparatory processes for women from civil society.

Development agencies must also consider ways in which support can be mobilized to ensure they are not only consulting with women's groups, but ensuring the necessary resources to enable women civil society leaders to consult with their own constituencies and enhance democratic spaces in our own movement.

This requires investment in the building and support for information and communication channels including the all important inter-personal communication. It requires the production of appropriate material and resources to provide to women's consultations.

It also requires specific consideration of the political context and realities and the peace and security realities within these initiatives are being undertaken.

And so as we ponder the need for "new improved justification to the political status quo let's consider this statement by Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:

'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government' (Article 21(3)). Half, even more than half, of 'the people' are women. Yet for far too long, women's will, women's voices, women's interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are often amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.'

After all it is not enough to say we need women in decision making positions but to actually make it happen!

Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Coordinator – femLINKPACIFIC



An Open Letter to Pacific Member States of the United Nations:

The Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign is a network comprised of more than 310 women's, human rights, and social justice groups from around the world spearheaded by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), and we are calling on Pacific member states of the United Nations to **act now to ensure the United Nations is able to put in place a new gender equality and women's empowerment architecture which will effectively address the gaps and challenges faced by the United Nations in supporting Member States to implement globally agreed mandates and their own national commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment!**

The majority of UN member states, who strongly support the creation of a composite gender entity, led by an Under-Secretary General and would combine a strategic field presence with a normative capacity. This entity would be best positioned to support the UN system and hold it accountable for gender mainstreaming.

It is with utmost urgency that we urge you to ensure now that the process which commenced in 2006 comes to an agreement that member states adopt a resolution to create a new gender entity based on the Composite (Option D) during the current session of the UN General Assembly (GA) – that is before September 2009

The GEAR Campaign has welcomed the Pacific Statement delivered by H.E Robert Aisi the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations on March 30, 2009:

"..... We recognise the vital role of the United Nations in advancing gender equality in our region. We therefore welcome the report of the Secretary-General which provides further details on options for gender architecture reform. We are keen to see the establishment of a strengthened single UN entity dedicated to the advancement of women. This entity would be led by an Under Secretary General and combine normative and operational functions consistent with the proposed composite model."

And so once again the GEAR Campaign is calling on the leadership of Pacific Island Governments to continue to champion the GEAR process so that the UN General Assembly will come to an effective and positive conclusion on this issue:

- Over the past three years, member states have agreed that the current structures on gender equality have resulted in many gaps and challenges, are not well coordinated, and are under-resourced.
- Many Member States and most NGOs involved have expressed a strong preference for one institutional model, the composite entity (option D which combines B + C of the Deputy Secretary-General's July 23, 2008 paper: *Institutional Options to Strengthen United Nations Work on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*) as it is the only option that formally links normative and operational functions.
- The Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the President of the 63rd General Assembly all endorse the creation of a new UN entity on gender equality and women's empowerment during this GA session and have favored the composite option D.
- The entity must have the mandate to hold the UN system accountable for delivering on gender equality, through a strategy of both gender mainstreaming and women-specific work.
- The new entity should have universal coverage with strategic presence at the country level. Even though its offices would begin in the South, it must have a universal mandate to address women's rights in all countries since none have achieved full gender equality.
- The new entity would report both through the SG to the GA and ECOSOC and have an executive board for operational matters that is regionally diverse; takes account of the entity's broad mandate and universal coverage; and provides systematically for meaningful participation of civil society.
- **Therefore, member states need to adopt a resolution to create a new, strengthened and consolidated gender entity based on option D, the composite model, in September 2009 in order that work to create the entity can begin.**

The resolution should authorize an Under Secretary General (USG) and direct the USG to lead the process of creating the entity:

- The new gender entity should be led by an Under Secretary-General (USG) that is a full member of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) to ensure that the new entity has the ability to effectively drive the UN's gender equality agenda.

- The SG should undertake a recruitment process, in consultation with member states and civil society, to appoint the new USG soon. However, the process should involve a credible global search to identify candidates with significant stature, expertise and experience in gender equality work at the national and regional or global levels.
- The USG would lead the process of creating the structures for the entity in collaboration with the current UN working group and report back to the SG & Executive Board with a program of implementation.

The new entity must be ambitiously funded with stable and predictable resources:

- The Member States should pledge and secure a minimum of US\$ 1 billion in funding for the new gender entity in the first phase of development, as well as substantial annual increases built into the process to expand to more countries over time. Public Commitments by states to fund it are needed now.
- This must include significant programmatic as well as staff funding to ensure a strong operational presence of the entity.
- While funding for the new entity will come from both voluntary and assessed contributions, the expansion of field presence will require significant increases in voluntary contributions.
- The entity needs to have delegated authority on financial matters and human resources, similar to that of other funds and programmes, in order to operate effectively at the country level.

It is critical to ensure meaningful, systematic and diverse civil society participation in the women’s entity:

- The active involvement and invaluable contribution of civil society, particularly women’s organizations, in the SWC process thus far has been acknowledged. In order to deliver for women everywhere, it is critical to tap into this expertise and the insights of a diverse and wide-ranging NGO constituency, including grassroots women.
- Systematic and meaningful participation of civil society representatives, especially women’s organizations, needs to be ensured in the governance of the new women’s entity. The Executive Board should include one civil society representative from each region, following the HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board model.
- Civil Society Advisory bodies should be created at global, regional and national levels and should be comprised of representatives from diverse NGOs, and especially women’s organizations and grassroots women at country level.

This is a once in a lifetime chance to improve the lives of millions women and girls worldwide including women and girls in our region.

As you know, gender equality and women's empowerment are goals in their own right. They are also crucial to the achievement of the United Nations objectives in development, peace, security and human rights.

Yet gender inequality exists in all societies around the world, albeit to differing extents. The devastating effects of poverty, discrimination, violence and lack of opportunity affect women in multiple ways, from their economic standing to their social wellbeing, as well as their prospects for better political participation.

No country in the world can claim to have eliminated discrimination against women and violations of their rights. Member States have reconfirmed that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to achieving peace and security, development, and human rights as set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), as well as internationally agreed development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to which Member States are parties also addresses gender equality and women's empowerment. Despite these policy and normative achievements a large gap remains between commitments to women and gender equality and their implementation.”

We therefore look forward to support from your government and other Pacific member states of the United Nations to continue to support the GEAR campaign to ensure a UN system which is more accountable to all the women of the world.

Signed on behalf of the GEAR Campaign by

Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

GEAR Pacific Focal Point

Suva, Fiji Islands

Peace and Human Security – *as a woman, this is what it means to me:*

Reports from femLINKPACIFIC's women's media network

Labasa Women highlight their challenges via Community Radio

It was the day (July 3) that the Ministry of Women in Fiji had scheduled the launch of the revised National Women's Plan of Action (WPA) in the capital city, but for a group of women, members of the Catholic Women's League Dogodru village group, 14 kilometres outside of Labasa town on the northern island of Vanua Levu, what did it really mean?

Forget about regular and reliable access to information and the notion that we should all be empowered right now, almost 15 years since the (United Nations) Beijing Conference. Here are a group of women, like many women across Fiji, who continue to play a range of roles from addressing the call of the Vanua (their traditional roles) to responding to the call of the Church, which also includes fundraising and providing financial support for key church based educational institutes in Fiji, including the Pacific Regional Seminary, the Corpus Christi training institute as well as the Catechist Training Centre in Navesi.

In their daily lives, the Dogoru mothers work to overcome some basic obstacles to education, health and economic empowerment, as well as access to information, which are all part of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.

But the Dogoru mothers were not part of the half day consultation on the WPA which brought together women from across the three provinces of Cakaudrove, Macuata and Bua and were keen to learn about the process which resulted in the development of the first National Women's Plan of Action following the 1995 UN Beijing Conference.

Thankfully, as members of the Catholic Women's League (CWL), they have access to information, from the weekly programmes on the national Fijian radio station. Every Monday night, they diligently tune in to receive information from Susana Evening, who is the CWL National President.

The CWL also has been focusing on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325, and have been part of recent national level implementation activities, together with femLINKPACIFIC, including translation of this groundbreaking Security Council resolution. "1325" is a key priority of the CWL and is bound to be on the agenda of the upcoming August Annual General Meeting of the CWL which will be hosted by the Korolevu CWL.

While only six members of the Dogoru CWL will be attending the AGM as part of the Labasa Parish representatives, as Karolaina pointed out "We are looking forward to the different topics that are always part of the AGM (our reps) will go and learn and come back and share"

So what are these obstacles?

First of all let us consider the 14 kilometres of rugged road which they have to contend with daily. Just travelling this road in our femLINKPACIFIC vehicle (which thankfully has 4WD) I was amazed that even though this was the main access road for the large broadcast and telecommunication corporations to the Delaikoro main transmitter site or access to the Nasealevu reservoir which is the main source of water for Labasa town. But, as one of the women observed, "The people who go there don't have to worry; they have their big trucks and four wheel drives" as we wondered why it was that the road had not been upgraded.

It can cost up to \$45 (one way) by taxi according to Bernadetta who we had met earlier in the day at our Women, Peace and Human Security consultation and had come across quickly to finalize plans for our afternoon meeting, "But the driver complained all the way about the road."

We had actually given a ride to a young mum and her daughter who were walking back to the village from the closest kindergarten, six kilometres away from the village. They had been walking since 11am and when we met them it was almost 3pm! It is no wonder that the Dogoru mothers would like to see a village kindergarten built soon. Investment in education is a key priority.

The main access road to Dogodru, along which buses and cane trucks slowly meander, becomes inaccessible when it rains. It is so bad that the Dogoru school children, who usually have to wake up at 4am to catch the 6am bus to town, have to walk the 14 kilometres to the nearest cane sector office in Waiqele.

And so, like many rural village families, arrangements have been made to rent accommodation in Labasa town to enable the children to be able to attend school easily.

So what happens when a woman is due to give birth?

The village midwife, who has assisted with many deliveries, is now too old to assist the women, and this is a concern for the mothers. Karolaina, who is now a grandmother says that the Irish Crossing (low bridge) which is the final access point to the village from the main road, has been on the agenda of the "Bose ni Tikina" since she was a young girl, but they are still waiting for a bridge to be built. During the regular heavy rains (as the village lies in the shadows of a mountain range) they become stranded and often women in the middle of labour will have to walk to the bridge to meet the ambulance, "Women have given birth on the way," she told us.

One wonders, whether it is the lack of economic power, which stifles the voices and issues of the mothers of Dogoru.

Yet these women are certainly enterprising and working hard to overcome their economic obstacles.

The Dogoru mothers are part of a micro-enterprise savings group and to date have invested in large cooking pots and cutlery which they hire out to local communities during large gatherings and events. They are currently saving up for a hot water urn and are now also considering investing in a computer and internet access after our discussions about the potential to secure information and have accessible communication via the internet.

The women are also keen to see the establishment of a local women's craft market in Labasa town as they felt currently there continues to be an undervaluing of women's traditional craft skills, in particular mat and basket weaving. As Bernadetta highlighted, "there is no point weaving mats because we do not get a good price in town." A mat can take up to a week to produce, from preparing the "voivoi" which is woven together in between all the other home and family responsibilities. Yet, all the women are able to earn from the sale mat is as little as \$80.

"We take whatever people will give us, because we need the cash," said Bernadetta.

That is why they also value the handicraft sales at the annual CWL Conference, as they are able to sell their mats and baskets at a good price.

Every year, like other CWL groups, they have to fundraise to cover the costs of the attending their annual conference. Previously, a few women would team up and secure a contract to clear yaqona plantations. Earning the \$500 target also meant sleeping at the plantation "camps" amidst all sorts of "creepy crawlies". While this met the fundraising target it certainly was not the most pleasant experience and so Elenoa, developed the "cooking collective". A cooking day was designated when women prepared special menus for the men and boys of the community. The sale of food and other trimmings earned them \$579, and all the women were able to participate in what ended up being a memorable and fun day!

The Dogoru mothers have also been inspired by the recent developments with the Vunicuicui Multiracial Group's efforts to develop a women's cooperative, which has been a model for women's economic empowerment shared amongst local networks. And so they have approached, femLINKPACIFIC's Labasa NGO partners, the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, to facilitate a similar training and development programme to be able to start their own bakery! This, they say, would be one way to work together to try and earn the daily cash expenses of buying groceries, transport and school and other expenses, which, according to Elenoa, can add up to \$100 a day for an average family with two or three children at school.

Meanwhile, the Labasa office of the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) the northern centre for femLINKPACIFIC's rural women's media centre was a hive of activity on July 4th as it hosted its first community radio broadcast with the mobile suitcase radio station - femTALK 89.2FM:

"The opening of our office today is a significant event for me," says PCP facilitator and femLINKPACIFIC's northern correspondent, Adi Vasu Chute: "In the past our office has been in the home, in the fields, villages and communities even in local cafes and now we have our own office which we look forward to being a space where women can come and speak with confidence, in comfort and safety and also be a place for future trainings and also we hope more community radio broadcasts too."

The broadcast was also an opportunity for an information and skills exchange between the young women of femLINKPACIFIC's field team and local young women who joined the broadcast from Vunicuicui and Bulileka communities:

"Our community radio broadcast gave us a chance to reinforce the opportunities available for young women like we have done with our Generation Next project," said Veena Singh Bryar:

"Especially as we heard that young women who have had to drop out of school here in the rural communities as they feel that there are no opportunities for them and they give up on their dreams just because they have other commitments. So we really hope we can expand our community radio work into Labasa next year as it really can be a valuable support for these young women as it would also give them a chance to learn new skills. This would really empower them to feel that they are still capable of achieving their goals and dreams. And that as young women, whether they have left school or are now young mothers still can pursue their dreams even if they have had to limited access to education."

Since 2006 femLINKPACIFIC has equipped 50 young women in the capital city with basic radio production and broadcasting skills with a project called Generation Next:

"It's time to bring this work to our rural women's media network now," says femLINKPACIFIC's Coordinator, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls.



For more Fiji Women,

Security reports visit www.femlinkpacific.org.fj

Peace and Human

A Salute to Doreen Awaiasi

Sister Doreen Awaiasi the former coordinator of the only safe haven for survivors and children of domestic violence, the Christian Care Centre (CCC) is a recent recipient of the 'Woman of Courage' award, an initiative of the US Government. She is the third Solomon Island woman to receive this honour. Earlier recipients include Apolonia Talo and Martha Horiwapu.

Sister Doreen was recognised for her work in starting the CCC and taking care of street kids in Honiara. She later expanded the program to provide a safe haven and support for survivors of domestic violence. She has also been instrumental in carrying out research and surveys on the commercial sexual exploitation of children – CSEC.

In an interview with Lisa Horiwapu of Vois Blong Mere, Sister Doreen said she received the award on behalf of the women and children she has worked with and those who continue to suffer in silence.

This silence, she said, is a sad reality of her work, but it empowers her to continue to advocate for the protection of women and children, and for appropriate legislation. This requires urgent action from the Solomon Islands government, she said.

Sister Doreen hails from the province of Makira, and it is there where she is also working to create awareness about the vulnerability of women and girls to commercial and sexual exploitation and the need to bring an end to the "sale" of girls by their families. This, she said, is a common practice in other logging communities and it must be brought to an urgent end.

A Focus on Food Security from the Solomon Islands

Report by Lisa Horiwapu and Olga Chapangi, Vois Blong Mere Solomons

Irene Suri manages a vegetable farm on the outskirts of Honiara. Irene is also a busy wife and mother, juggling the responsibilities of her home and farm, and tending to the lettuces, carrots, yard long beans, cucumber, pumpkin she grows for sale at the market. These vegetables provide healthy meals for her children and an income.

Recently Irene attended an agricultural training programme where she discovered the wonders of the drip irrigation system – the answer to a less tiring task of carrying buckets of water! She was a recipient of a drip irrigation kit at the end of a week long training.

The training was another in a series of recent activities to improve food security organized by the World Vegetable Centre which is based in Taipei. Recent activities have included improving seed management.

Meanwhile Doctor Chris Reid, a senior research scientist at the Australian Museum was in Honiara recently to also assist the Ministry of Agriculture in its food security efforts.

This time, the focus was on improving plant protection by assisting farmers to identify pests and diseases that spoil the standard of crops here in the country. It is important, he said because these are the very people who will be going out to help people in the rural areas or farmers from their various provinces especially in dealing properly with pests problems that they are facing on a daily basis. He said they need to identify all the pests and diseases that are affecting all the main crops in the country because they pose a lot of insecurity for the population.

This training participants who are members of a plant protection network, will then take the training out to farmers across Solomon Islands.

The course was held in one of the collaborators farm, the 'Custom garden' and most of the pests and diseases that are common in the country were found there. The participants were fortunate according to Dr. Chris to see a lot of the problems that were taught about during the workshop. They were also given a session on microscopic organism that spoil crops and vegetables or a very much a threat to our food security.

Personal Security is a Priority for Women *Reports by Kalolaine Fifita Ma'a Fafine mo e Famili INC*

Young women who are forced into an early unwanted marriage leads to school dropout, less access to job opportunities thus living as an immature wife and results in domestic violence in the home. Miss Leka* a 26 year old divorcee was kind enough to share her story on how she was raped while she was still a student and dropout of school because of her feeling of less self esteem which made her married to the man who raped her and build a family full of violence.

Miss Leka is the eldest illegal daughter of her father so she was raised up by her grandmother while her father married to another lady. Miss Leka says that when she was 16 years of age n was still in school, an older man that stayed in the neighborhood took her for a ride and she trusted him because she was still immature. On their way Miss Leka saw that they were running to the end of the Sopu Beach which is known as Mui'isopu, (a place where no one lives there). And when they got there, the man punched her legs so she wouldn't move then he raped her. After he raped her he threatened her not to tell because people will call her names and she will loose the respect that women deserves. And because she was too young and scared, she kept silence and never said a word to anyone.

However after that incident, she dropped out of school and forced herself into a relationship with her rapist. At the age of 18, they married to each other. This was not the end of the problem as she lived an unhappy married life. Her husband was an alcoholic and a drug consumer and their newly build family turned into a violent home. Not only that but he was also seeing other women.

Mrs Leka lived a disaster marriage as she was betrayed and was beaten up by her husband for several times until she couldn't take it anymore so she reported him to the police. Their marriage did not last for 2 years then they were divorced. Now the husband is married to another woman who is her third wife and Miss Leka moves back to her home and stays with her half sisters and brother.

She hopes that women will be empowered from her story and learn to believe in themselves because as she looked back, it was her less of self esteem that made her kept silent about her being raped and not being able to share to her family about her problems.

(* the name has been changed for protection of identity)



A violent environment creates a violent future for children who grow up in these environments. A 29 year old mother was sharing her story on how she grew up in a violent environment where her father was a violent man that affected the way she lived her newly build family as it became another violent home for her.

This mother of five shared that she married at a very young age of 18 because she wanted to run away from the violent home that she grew up in. After she got married everything was fine until she moved in with the husband and stayed at her house with her parents. Her father was a violent man, and he was always advising her husband that he is the one who leads the family and when they have problems or arguments he should beat his wife up because that is the solution to their problems.

This is when her husband became violent. She continued to say that from then on, whenever they had arguments he would always beat her in front of their children. She was also the victim of marital rape.

This mother was abused for years until she got sick of living in such unhealthy environment then she went and seeks help from the Women's Center. She was then kept in the safe house and was looked after by the Center. After weeks she returned back home. This time, she thought that her husband had changed to be a better husband but unfortunately nothing changed and the husband continued to beat her down.

It came to a time where she finally made a decision that she can no longer allow her husband to hurt her then she went back to the Women's center for help. At this time, she is currently looked after by the center in the safe house and she wants to divorce her husband and never wants to see her violent home again.



Environmental Security remains a concern in Bougainville

Report by Suzanne Jimbul

A crater 6km long and 4km wide was gouged out of the mountain and millions of tons of rubble tipped into the Jaba River Valley. The chemical effluent from the copper concentrator was poured directly into the Kawerong River which ran green. Whole forests died and the river changed its course. As millions of tons of tailings were tipped into a once fertile river valley, it became completely barren. Panguna became known as the 'valley of tears.'

Despite positive moves towards peace, unemployment opportunities, road improvements for better access to the market (Panguna) and economic rehabilitation of Arawa is still a major concern. In this account, Grace (not her real name), 46, from Panguna, shares her story.

Grace was interviewed by Suzanne Jimbul regarding the Panguna Mine. She could not further introduce herself because of security reasons.

SJ: What are your thoughts if the Panguna Mine was reopened?

Grace: Reopening the mine will only bring more conflict instead of peace into our island. We've already been through this before and it's best not to repeat the past again. We the women of Panguna and the surrounding areas are so proud of our current president, who himself is in opposition of the reopening of the Panguna Mine and is working so hard to implement his program on the reconciliation process amongst Panguna landowners and different factions involved during the bloody crisis.

SJ: How did mining in Panguna affect the lives of women and children who live around that area?

Grace: Our environment was destroyed. The land that was once surrounded with beautiful flora and fauna was turned into a desert. Rivers we once used as our drinking water, fetched water to cook our food and to fish or catch prawns were used as waste dumps to dump the chemical wastes from the mines. These chemical wastes turned our rivers blue-green and was no longer decent to be used as a source of our daily lives because it was poisonous. These rivers are still poisonous today. Fortunately, we have other rivers available that we go to but we have to walk long distances to get there (approximately 2 hours walk).

SJ: Where did you get your food then?

Grace: Again we had to walk long distances away from the mine site to find fertile land to make our gardens. In addition, the crisis broke out at that time and women and children were vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition for a period of time. It's not because we lived in poverty but women and young girls feared of being raped or murdered along the way by criminals as there were different factions involved in the crisis apart from the BRA's. We survived from tapioca, banana and sugarcane planted around our houses that we cooked to feed our hungry children. Luckily, we had water tanks which we used wisely during those times.

Women saw that this required special attention so we called for a meeting with our elders to address the issue of hunger and malnutrition in our community. Since we were landowners of Panguna and most our men were BRA's who took control of the Bougainville crisis; we came to an understanding that every Wednesday a platoon of BRA would escort us to and from our gardens to collect food for our families. Men and women in Panguna worked together to address our needs that's how hunger and malnutrition came to an end.

SJ: What does economic security and environmental security mean to you?

Grace: Economic security to me means the government should address unemployment in my area because many young boys and girls who are unemployed have turned to theft for survival. There are times, especially during weekends, they travel down to Arawa, break and enter into small shops and rob everything they want. Environmental security to me means the mine should not be reopened (thanks to President Tanis) because Panguna is now a waste of land and our rivers have been polluted. History should not repeat itself. We want a clean and safe environment for our future generations.

SJ: So with the mine closed have things improved around this old mine?

Grace: We have now cultivated our gardens within our own lands. It is now safe and much closer for us to go to our gardens. The rivers are still polluted with only a few fruit trees bearing fruit. The birds have returned and the place smells wonderful with orchid flowers everywhere.

SJ: Do parents or chiefs in your area address the issue of theft? Do police in Arawa address this issue as well?

Grace: Parents and chiefs talk to our children but seem to fall on deaf ears. Every time we try to talk them out of this practice they respond saying, '*Yupela bai givim mipela moni long baim wanem samting mipela ilaikim?*' Meaning, 'Are you going to give us money to buy our needs and wants?' recently, the police have arrested one of them, a young boy believed to be their gang leader, and is still in custody. We haven't heard much since then.

SJ: What are the most important economic activities you feel are the most important for you and your family today?

Grace: The government should improve our road system from Panguna to Arawa so women can have better access to travel down to the main market at Arawa to sell our produce. The money we earn will cater for our family needs such as medicine, food and clothing as we all know the cost of living nowadays is very high. Money is what we must have for the survival of our family.

SJ: I understand that there is still fear of freedom of speech and movement or for women and girls to fully exercise their basic human rights within the Panguna and Arawa areas. What would make you feel secure so people could respect your rights?

Grace: I would be more secure if all arms were handed down during this period of reconciliation conducted by president Tanis and his government. Many of our youths still have possession of firearms which they tend to use as threats to take whatever they want from the authorities. I would also be more secure if women in my area were included in decision-making bodies.

SJ: How would you like to be involved in the process of economic rehabilitation of Arawa?

Grace: Our leaders should consult us. We know what projects we want like poultry, piggery and fishery projects etc that could directly benefit our families. Leaders assume that they know what we want. I know what I want as a woman

SJ: How can women be better equipped to be better decision makers in the formal processes being organized?

Grace: We want to be better equipped with information on human rights, land and environment because land and environment affects us. With this information's we can be better decision makers than men.

The work of building peace and involving women in decision-making bodies in Bougainville is an urgent priority. The women of Bougainville are working for peace right now. They must be supported in their work.

As recommended in the femLINKPACIFIC 2008 Policy document, governments should ensure resources and availability of safe women's spaces to organize dialogues and peace and trust-building activities as a precursor to women's full involvement in the peace process.

Regional Reflections

By Betty Hafoka-Blake

Our recent Peace Talks consultation in Suva provided an opportunity of sharing and reporting of activities covered by each partner focused on strengthening of our policy advocacy at national level. There was time to listen and learn from experiences shared by the different participants present and plus trainers and facilitators who led us through the set program for the week.

The one week was also a time to meet with officials of the Pacific Islands Forum responsible for organizing the annual Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) who providing a comprehensive briefing on the FRSC agenda for 2009 and it was also a critical learning time for us as we collectively strive to ensure that women, peace and security issues are were included in FRSC.

The officials took away with them our first quarter Women, Peace and Human Security report and we were hopeful that this would serve to provide information for leaders, policy makers and peace builders into work done by CSOs on the important roles of women in conflict and prevention and peace building.

The report was also an important document for the sake of reminding leaders and policy makers to ensure a more gender inclusive approach to peace and security in our communities and countries.

Our 2nd annual Peace Talks Dinner was also a time to meet other peacewomen and a practical training for the participants who had worked on their speeches. It was wonderful to hear our young women reflect on the challenges faced by

each of our partner's situation back home. Challenges ranged from issues of women in rural and remote communities, rising sea levels in small islands, domestic violence, related health issues, lack of participation of women in formal decision making and the introduction of temporary special measures for women equal participation in Parliament for the Solomon Islands and Tonga.

As we the femLINK-Tonga representatives returned home to continue to ponder and wonder how UNSCR 1325 could be introduced at the National level.

How can it become a tool for our women to use for security purposes against men (husbands) who believe that women/wives are their properties and they can do anything they like with their wives or partners?

The same mentality has been tolerated for so long that husbands or men took it to all levels of society. The death of five women out of six deaths in the first six months of the year in Tonga was caused by homicide and domestic violence related issues confirmed that women of Tonga are very insecure. The tragic actions from these men who were husbands and spouses to these women seriously determined insecurity and vulnerability of women.

The last quarter left behind, images of women and young women as correspondents and coordinators from the four Pacific Islands Countries striving to highlight women's issues on peace and human security. It is a great challenge to us as peace builders to move with plans and policy makers and to implement UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Human Security more intensive.

Veena's Viewpoint: A Journey of Listening

The 1960's and 70's marked the beginning of the women's movement, though it really began in the 19th century and continued through the early 20th century. It began with women speaking for their rights. They fought and worked together to change their status in society, and to make known to others that they were not just house wives, mothers or daughters, but they were agents of change and they were also responsible for having a say in issues concerning them.

We have heard about the struggles of great and amazing women like Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and of Gloria Steinem but these are stories of our women here in Fiji. Stories of grand mothers, daughters, mothers and stories of women who have been that change!

This is my story about women, of their realities, and our journey of documenting women's stories. Well, maybe not a journey per say but a journey still in terms of the amount of traveling we did to get to where these women were, from the rainy and cold Suva, to Nakavu village, to Navakai, to the sugarcane fields in Sabeto, to Ba with the senior citizens where we celebrated their 10th Anniversary, to Savusavu well known for their hot springs

and to Dogoru hidden in between lovely mountains, trees and right beside a river and it is 14km away from the main town and lastly to Vunicuicui in Labasa.

This was a journey of the suitcase radio, the tape recorder, and our journey of documenting womens peace and human security issues. The process was tiresome and at the same time very informative and interesting, not to mention sad. To hear what the women were doing in their communities and what they did to help generate income for their communities and homes.

For Sojourner Truth, who is well known for struggling and fighting for her rights as a woman, as a human being in America, she experienced a lot in her life- as she was born a slave and most of her thirteen children had also been sold, So while out in the field we have heard of stories that is equally depressing and sad. Some mothers are told to leave their home by their children, because they don't want to have that responsibility of looking after an elderly person, And there are young mothers who have lost hope and believe that they can never achieve their goals and have let go of their dreams- that its impossible to go back to school, I have met women who are already worrying about where to go and live, though they already have a place to stay, this is normally the cases with women living in HARTS who have sons- they are worrying for what the future will bring.

There were stories from women who were already struggling to make ends meet. A young woman feeding a family of 9 adults and she was the only one working and got paid a meagre \$16.

A mother who walks about 10km to pick her daughter up daily from kindergarten, her daughter who is just 5years old gets to walk as well. Imagine, they have to start walking at 11am (from the daughter's kindergarten) to their village, and they would still be walking even after 2pm. And mind you, the road is not tar-sealed or safe; it has rocks, holes, and bushes who knows what could happen to mother and daughter one day! And yes, the lack of transportation is the main issue. Then again, the roads are so bad that drivers complain every minute when driving through this road which explains why buses do not wish to drive in this area. These are the realities of the women that we speak to; it's about their peace and human security.

This journey involved women speaking to each other of their human security issues. It involved a lot of listening, talking, sharing, and documenting of stories. Some cried and we cried too, just listening and thinking how and why life could be like this- so unfair and unjust.

We have some who complain about not getting their mobile reception and they think it's a big deal (I get like this sometimes), yet these women have more bigger and real things to worry about. There are people who have been crying for ages about their roads, their lands, and children yet it has fallen on deaf ears. It is heart breaking to witness what these women and children go through, what they have to endure to survive.

I have read and seen things that looked or seemed unreal and unfair, and would always brush it aside and tell myself that this is how life is, but this should not be. There are things that we could do to help, but who is doing exactly what? So I guess this was our role, to be bringing information and sharing it with the rest of the women and at the same time, documenting their realities and human security issues and now sharing it with you.

The main issues that have come up during our rural visits and field work were of Health, Economic, Food and Environment Security and not forgetting Personal Security. These women are already trying to get involved in income generating initiatives. So that they could cater for their families needs and contribute to their families' income. Everyone is struggling. Women have also raised the need for having better health services, the need to improve wages. Most of these women get \$5 - \$8 a day, and they work for only an average of two days. Who can survive with that during these hard times? It is very hard! I mean to buy eggplant or pumpkin, we pay \$2, or 10kg rice would cost us more than \$15 - \$30 and powder milk would cost us about \$5. So imagine, how hard life must be for these women. Most of these women have confessed to skipping meals, just to budget whatever little they have.

Women have also been raising the issue of pollution and the importance of having clean and safe access to water. Women have talked about their women, peace, and human security issues.

So just like our womens freedom and peace advocates in the past who have struggled tirelessly to get their voices heard and to be the difference, we have met women in these various communities, villages and towns and have experienced and witnessed their daily struggles.

This is our journey to her-stories, it is their struggles, their peace and of their human security.

Special Report from Vanuatu ***By Sharon Bhagwan Rolls***

Jenny Ligo has an awesome and somewhat daunting task. She is the recently appointed Child Protection Officer for the Vanuatu Government, based with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and we met recently at the Saralanga stage, the venue of for the celebrations of a unique annual Public Holiday. It was July 24th, National Children's Day and was the culmination of an eight day awareness raising campaign based on the findings of a recent baseline survey conducted in seventeen schools across six communities.

Jenny's focus is now the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and Vila:
"We want to ensure children live a life free from violence, free from abuse, free from neglect and exploitation."

What is critical, says Ligo, is to help Vanuatu families understand that they are part of a global family committed to the implementation of the CRC:

“We want to have a safe community for the children of Vanuatu especially as Vanuatu is a family oriented nation and we feel that it is important to maintain that and to hold on to the cultures and customs that are good for children.”

Awareness about the CRC, she added, is important not only for parents but also the children themselves as well as traditional leaders, the chiefs as well as the women and mothers, and this can only happen she says if the budget allocation to the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Womens Affairs so that they can expand their work into the provinces.

It also requires a strong and positive relationship with media networks, including community media and theatre:

“ I think this is an area women and children in Vanuatu have to work hard on, building relationships with media outlets here or even to have one on our own. Its not easy to get a media company out to promote the work of children and women easily. This is where it depends on who you are and what relationships you have with people as it is today. The womens affairs desk and the children’s desk worked together with Vanuatu youth in the agencies. This is where it brings good impacts of bringing the media out to cover it,” says Ligo.

With the National Children Day’s celebrations are over, Ligo is also looking forward to taking on the next phase of her work:

“I have been a focal point for women in the past so working for the children to me won’t be hard thing to do or even to work with the conventions such as the CEDAW and CRC. These two conventions complement each other especially when we are working with women and children. I find it very interesting because its an interesting job and am already making good impacts just like today’s events with the big number of people coming out. To me it’s a big progress even though this is just my third month in the office. I have not seen such a big crowd ever before. We also have a lot of sponsors for today’s event too and that too shows great impact. We have seventy sponsors and I think this is why it is important to have the right person at the right place. We organized this event in only a month and its already to me in the right direction and this is what we want to do in all the six provinces. What we did today is what we are going to do in the provinces. Its a lot of work but it brings out to people that there is a need for all of us to work together to promote the work of women and children and today is the children’s that people are here to celebrate in numbers, that’s my observation. So if we want to promote the work of children, it has to be done parallel with women otherwise we will see the women left behind.”



Looking Ahead to the International Day of Peace:

On June 13th UN Secretary General issued his statement in the lead up to the commemoration of the International Day of Peace (IDP), which is observed each year on 21 September, as a global call for ceasefire and non-violence. According to Ban ki Moon and for many of the stalwarts of the IDP it is a time to reflect on the horror and cost of war and the benefits of peacefully resolving our disputes.

This year, the UNSG highlighted that he is using this important day to ask governments and citizens of the world to focus on the important issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation:

"The end of the Cold War helped lift the burden of nuclear catastrophe from a generation that had lived under its cloud since the end of the Second World War. Nonetheless, the threat persists, as recent events attest. Unless we vigorously work for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, we will continue to face threats from existing nuclear weapons, as well as additional risks that more States, even terrorists, might acquire and deploy such weapons, potentially annihilating millions of people.

This alarming outlook is counterbalanced by a new momentum on the part of world leaders to address the issue of nuclear weapons. The United States and the Russian Federation have signaled a new commitment to cut their nuclear arsenals. Furthermore, the Conference on Disarmament, which includes all States with nuclear arms, has recently broken a decade-long deadlock and agreed to work to resolve some of the key issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation.

We must build on this momentum. To that end, I am launching the WMD-We Must Disarm! Campaign. Over the next 100 days, the United Nations and our partners around the world will work to raise awareness of the true costs and dangers of nuclear weapons. Between now and 21 September, we will issue 100 reasons to disarm, via Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, email, text message, radio and from friend-to-friend. Celebrities will also help us spread the message. And finally, as we observe the International Day of Peace with world leaders gathered in New York for the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, I will proclaim one strong, simple message: We Must Disarm!"

GPPAC, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, works to promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding at both a conceptual and practical level.

As such, the UN International Day of Peace - which falls on 21 September and calls for a 24-hour global ceasefire - represents an excellent opportunity to promote our agenda.

What is the International Day of Peace?

In 2001, UN Resolution 55/282, set aside 21 September as a global ceasefire and day of peace and non-violence. The idea is to convince combatants around the world to cease fighting for 24 hours and to highlight non-violent solutions to conflicts. An International Day of Peace has existed since 1981, but it did not have a fixed calendar date (it was instead tied to the first day of the UN General Assembly session). Efforts by the advocate and filmmaker Jeremy Gilley and his supporters led to the 2001 UN Resolution fixing the date on 21 September. Mr. Gilley's effort was called Peace One Day, and is going stronger than ever today.

Although a day of commemoration has existed for some time, many peace and conflict prevention organizations have not taken it as a rallying point or publicly acknowledged it. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) aims to help change that.

What are GPPAC's goals for the International Day of Peace?

GPPAC uses the International Day of Peace as a rallying point to raise awareness about the value and necessity of conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. Recognizing that knowledge and support for these issues remains low among the general public and many policymakers, we have launched a campaign to highlight some of the many successful civil society peacebuilding and conflict prevention stories. We also aim to raise awareness about the potential for conflict prevention work generally, peace education programs, and much more.

In this call to action, we invite peace groups, civil society and as well as mainstream and community media groups to forge alliances to not only celebrate a Culture of Peace but to also create media and community spaces to address the theme as what it means for our region. For more information and to send us your activity news email: the GPPAC Regional Media Focal point Sharon@femlinkpacific.org.fj and Chiara Massaroni c.massaroni@conflict-prevention.net

Fiji Women's Civil Society News: *Fiji Cancer Society Western Branch Report by Cherie Arts*

On May 1st 2009 work began towards the establishment of the western branch of the Fiji Cancer Society and a steering committee was formed to move the organisation forward. Members included Judy Zundel, Beverly McElrath, Robyn Collingwood and Krystel Gough.

Work continued with the organisation of membership details (including a \$10 membership fees) as well as arrangements for the launch of the organisation.

The Western Branch was formally launched within few weeks with the formal election of the Executive and General Committee who include:
President – Robyn Collingwood, Vice President – Beverly McElrath, Secretary – Cherie Arts (replacing Krystel Gough who was leaving Fiji), Treasurer - Riaz Khan and General Committee members: Louise Acreman, Lala Sowane, Paula Holden, Amete Nagatalevu, Judy Zundel and Dr Ram Raju.

The new Committee held its first meeting on June 4th at the Oceanic Communications Limited situated in the Colonial Plaza Nadi which is providing the Cancer Society along with the Pacific Children's Foundation with valuable administration space.

With the support of a wonderful group of volunteers, The Cancer Society office will be open for a few hours in the morning Monday through to Friday.

At the heart of the Western Branch of the Fiji Cancer Society are women who are currently undergoing treatment for cancer or who have been touched by cancer thru close family and understand the importance of creating awareness especially in our rural/village areas.

Our aim will be to create awareness whilst also providing a place for people needing assistance to come to. We will provide a person to accompany them to an appointment should they need this, we will make the appointments for them, get pamphlets out to the rural areas, generally assist as best we can.

Poor Relief Society acknowledges contribution of Dr. Garimella

by Sabita Gandhi and Sharda Segran

On 20 June 2009, the Members of Poor Relief Society farewelled Dr Vijayalakshmi Garimella Who first arrived in Fiji in 1989 and little did she knew that she would not be leaving these Pacific shores for another 20 years.

Dr Garimella served at Valelevu and Samabula Health Centers before being promoted to Principal Medical Officer and posted to the Oxfam Clinic, at Suva's Colonial War Memorial Hospital where she served as the Reproductive Health Officer in-charge. She was responsible for training of medical students, nurse practitioners, midwives not only in Suva but all other divisions as well as the regional students.

Garimella has been acknowledged as a dedicated and hard working medical practitioner whose first priority is the patient and her commitment and dedication to advocate for the health of women would she her on many occasions taking regular time out to support free medical health clinics in partnership with organisations, such as the Poor Relief Society and delivering information and services, including pap smear tests for women in villages, settlements, schools, garment factories.

The Poor Relief Society has been conducting free health clinics as a community service for the last six years and as Garimella, has always regarded the delivery of sexual and reproductive health information women about their sexual and reproductive health, this was an important platform to share information about the range of cancers, the importance of self breast examination and family planning, for older and young women.



The Poor Relief Society acknowledged that through Dr. Garimella, thousands of women took advantage of her services this has contributed to the early detection of cases of cervical cancer, which helped save women's lives

The Society presented Dr. V. Garimella with a Certificate of Appreciation (see left: Dr Garimella receives the certificates of appreciation from Mrs. Damodar and Mrs. Khewal)