

Small grants can lead to big opportunities

Fiji Leadership And Decision-Making

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Since 2017, the Fiji Women's Fund has been rolling out a new model of granting and capacity support for women's organisations, groups and networks in Fiji.

The Fund's approach is leading to successful leadership outcomes for individual women involved in its program; and the Fund itself is being regarded as a leader, attracting regional and global recognition as the first national women's fund in the Pacific region.



Artisans of Rise Beyond the Reef. Photo credit: Fiji Women's Fund / Rob Rickman.

The Fund has provided 24 organisations with grants for activities and daily operations across 30 initiatives, along with capacity development support to upskill staff and volunteers. Its grants model enables the Fund to reach women in rural and remote areas and those who are marginalised, such as people with disabilities or facing discrimination. The Fund supports grantees to network, collaborate and increase the influence they have on decisions at local and national levels. Its model is enabling women to lead in all these spheres, generating positive change in Fiji.

With the Fund's financial and technical support, grantee partners are finding new opportunities to exercise leadership.

'I have learned that I should fight for my rights. I should raise my voice for my rights. We should help others when they are experiencing problems,' a participant in one of the Young Women Lead Advocacy clubs said.

These clubs were established by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement on three Fiji National University campuses.



Female beekeepers of Ra Naari Parishad. Photo credit: Fiji Women's Fund / Rob Rickman.

Through club membership, young women from the Labasa campus have been able to discuss the issues of sexual harassment, security, discrimination and controlling relationships with the Head of School and the Campus Director. This dialogue was an important step for the young women students in establishing relationships with decision makers and exercising their leadership skills.

Other leadership opportunities are arising through initiatives that are working toward different outcomes, such as economic empowerment. Talanoa Treks works with communities on the island of Viti Levu to increase income through hiking tourism. 'With this funding, we are trying to support women to address some of their identified needs and priorities,' the Founder Marita Manley explained. 'We started by trying to support women to be contracted as guides by their village enterprises, which is slowly showing results in terms of increasing numbers of female guides.'

This is increasing women's employment and also resulting in women taking on leadership roles in their village, becoming role models for other young women.

Other grantees are starting to redefine what women's leadership looks like in Fiji. The Striders Women's Rugby Club is building the professional earning capacity of its players, giving them a greater profile in a male-dominated sport. Rise Beyond the Reef and Ra Naari Parishad are helping members of their collectives develop business decision-making skills in ecologically sustainable handicrafts and beekeeping, respectively. Graduate Women Fiji is giving girls opportunities to get ahead in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) through school holiday camps.



Susan Pocock of Naitasiri Women in Dairy. Photo credit: Fiji Women's Fund / Rob Rickman.

The Fund's mid-term review identified numerous women, who are members of grantees, gaining influence in their communities and at national, regional and global levels. Women in organisations supported by the Fund have taken on positions including District Coordinator and Village Coordinator.

FemLINKpacific influenced the draft national Disaster Risk Reduction policy to recognise the role of women-led community media and radio. The Ministry of Agriculture has given the Naitasiri Women in Dairy Group an office space and the group's President was also invited to speak at national and regional meetings such as the Pacific Connect Dialogue. The group's President, Secretary and Treasurer were elected to the same positions in the newly formed Fiji Women in Dairy Group established by the Ministry.

Over and above the ways the Fund promotes women's leadership through the activities it supports, it is itself emerging as a model for others.

As the first national women's fund in the region, the Fund is assisting Pacific initiatives that are keen to follow its strong example. It provided input into developing the Marshall Islands 50:50 Innovation Fund and hosted steering

committee members in a peer-to-peer learning exchange. The Fund is also considering recommendations from a study it commissioned with the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia and Pacific to assist with establishing a Pacific-wide feminist fund.

Fund grantees represent a diverse range of community-based and civil society organisations, including women from rural and remote communities, young women, women of faith, the lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LBTI) community, women with disabilities, women in sports and women in business.

This story has been developed for the Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2019. It features a Pacific Women-funded initiative and partner. For more information about Pacific Women's support for initiatives across the region, refer to the interactive map: <https://pacificwomen.org/map/>