

Girls are the change makers – just ask them

Federated States Of Micronesia | Fiji | Papua New Guinea | Regional
Solomon Islands | Tonga | Tuvalu | Vanuatu | Enhancing Agency

December 10, 2021



Girls from the six Pacific Girl partners united in 2021 for the International Day of the Girl Child. Image credit: Pacific Women / Sian Rolls

When Samoa hosted the 84th Session of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in March 2020, it was the first time any United Nations treaty body held a regional session outside Geneva or New York – and Pacific adolescent girls were there to lend their unique voices to the discussions.

Pacific Girl partners Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, Talitha Project in Tonga and Equal Playing Field in Papua New Guinea worked together to influence policy change at the session. While COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented girls from Fiji and Papua New Guinea travelling to the event, 17-year-old ‘Ana Malia Falemaka from the Talitha Project was able to represent the group in the side event titled, ‘A dive into the Blue Pacific’. ‘Ana Malia chose to use the platform to speak about the urgency to take action to stop violence against children including sexual violence and incest.

‘We cannot always rely on our leaders, elders and parents to do everything for us, we Pasifika children can be leaders in our own homes, schools and society, our leaders and elders have done so much for us, now it’s time for us

to do ours,' 'Ana Malia said. Participating in UN forums is just one way that Pacific Girl participants are using their new skills, confidence, experience and agency to effect positive change.

In Pacific Girl's first full year of programming to support adolescent girls (aged 12–19 years) to reach their potential, 351 girls participated in formal opportunities to share ideas and learn from each other; 128 girls were supported to take on leadership roles, 45 girls participated in forums, and a number of girls collaborated on five advocacy initiatives. (Pacific Girl's first full year of programming was 1 July 2019–30 June 2020.)

'Equal Playing Field has helped us gain confidence by making programs that allows us to stand in front of our own school peers and discuss ideas,' shared Josephine Stanley, a member of one of Equal Playing Field's school action groups.

School action groups build students' knowledge of violence against women and girls, and respectful relationships. Students from one participating school reported that boys are now beginning to be helpful and show respect to others and that bullying has reduced.

'At first I wasn't so confident to stand in front of everyone. After a year with the program ... then I began to gain my confidence,' Josephine said.

Josephine was one of 10 panelists who shared her journey during the 'Girls Agency: The Pacific Girl Journey' virtual panel discussion, one of three online sessions led 'by girls for girls' held in mid-2021. To ensure a safe space for open and honest dialogue, the girls chose a closed panel discussion led by adolescent girls and young women involved in the six Pacific Girl initiatives together with members of the Pacific Girl Regional Learning Network.



The Adolescent Girls Advisory Group (AGAG) coordinated by CARE in Vanuatu contributes to ideas for the Pacific Girl program. Photo credit: CARE in Vanuatu

The convenings brought together more than 60 adolescent girls and young women to reflect on the successes and challenges of the program, and to share ideas to inform the future of Pacific Girl. Ensuring that there is ‘nothing about us, without us,’ girls have been involved in every stage of developing the program. This includes CARE Vanuatu and Fiji Women’s Rights Movement establishing adolescent girl advisory groups to provide direction for their projects.

Graduates from young women’s leadership projects are also often engaged as peer-facilitators and mentors to Pacific Girl projects, including Fiji Women’s Rights Movement’s Girls Arise! and CARE Vanuatu’s Laef Blo Mi, Vois Blo Mi (My Life, My Voice) projects. In the Federated States of Micronesia, Jayrene Engichy is the Coordinator for Chuuk Women’s Council’s Young Women’s Empowerment Program. A former participant in the program, Jayrene wanted to help other girls in her community, so she became an instructor.

‘I wanted to teach ... to a level where the younger girls can understand,’ she said. ‘They tell me they understood better because of me, so I like helping them out like that and it makes me happy.’

Another Pacific Girl participant who is speaking out to make change is Clera Tengu, an adolescent girl who is deaf. One of 200 girls involved in the Girls Rise Up! project implemented by YWCA Solomon Islands (in partnership with CARE), Clera credits her participation in the project with developing the confidence to become an advocate. This has included taking part in a radio

talkback segment with the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation to promote support for girls with disabilities and appearing in a promotional clip for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

‘In sign language, I am very patient and humble,’ Clera signed. ‘I didn’t learn any skills until I joined the Girls Rise Up! program and, as a deaf person, life skills has helped me. Attending trainings, I know that my actions speak louder.’

All girls have the right to realise their full potential and Pacific Girl partners are working to turn girls’ aspirations into their lived realities.