

The background features several interlocking gears of different sizes and colors (blue, green, and black). Each gear is filled with intricate, traditional Fijian patterns, including swirls and geometric designs. The gears are arranged in a way that suggests movement and interconnectedness.

women in local government

stories of inspiration from Fiji

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Introduction

Equality in local government makes good sense. Local governments whose composition reflects the diversity of the community have an enhanced understanding of the different needs, access to a wider range of skills and encourages creativity which in turn leads to better service delivery and prosperity for the whole community. That is why out of a wide range of words identified during the women in local government networking events in 2009 and 2010 the words 'Diversity, Creativity, Prosperity' stood out as the most fitting to describe the work and goals of women in local government now and in the coming years.

The first woman to be elected to local government in Fiji was Mrs Maureen Wright in 1967 who then went on to become the Mayor of Lautoka City Council in 1970. Since then the progress of women in local government has been frustratingly slow. Despite 40 years of institutional development, the number of women elected into municipal councils has only increased by a marginal 4% to 14.5% in 2008. Across the local government workforce, women's representation ranges from a low of 8% to 40% depending on the council, with less than an average of 20% in senior management positions and 2% in field positions. Although these women have contributed an enormous amount to the growth of the sector and their communities, anecdotal evidence suggests there are still significant social and cultural barriers at all levels in the sector that have been and will continue to be difficult to overcome if tackled alone.

In response, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Pacific and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) have teamed up on a two year project designed to integrate gender equality commitments into local government and enhance the visibility, value and level of support for women employed, elected or involved in local government and help add to their numbers. The objectives of the 'Strengthening Women's Participation in Municipal Governance' (SWPMG) Program are to:

- raise awareness of the benefits of embracing gender equity at all levels in local government
- enhance the knowledge and understanding of the status of women in local government
- encourage the participation of women in decision-making roles in local government
- establish a women in local government network and targeted training program
- encourage councils to engendering workplace policies, practices and service delivery.



Foreword

Women comprise almost 50% of the population yet are still under-represented in all levels of decision-making across the Pacific. Participation in local government is an extremely effective way for women to share in decision making processes about critically important community needs such as basic service delivery, community infrastructure, health care facilities, transportation and local economic development. As the level of government closest to the community, local government is also best placed to enable greater interaction with the daily lives of women in the home, in the marketplace, and in community groups. Now is the time for a stronger focus on what women in communities across the Pacific can contribute to the democratic process.

This booklet celebrates the achievements and important contributions women make to local government and their communities. It showcases to the sector and wider community the diversity, competence, influence, dedication and passion of both current and past female local government employees and councillors. The challenges faced by the women in this publication are also real and highlight the need for change on a number of levels.

The local government sector has the potential to drive real change and improvement in communities. The Pacific is taking on a different landscape posing both challenges and opportunities for local governments such as increasing urbanisation, cultural diversity, skills shortages and economic recovery. The best possible solutions will be found if women and men combine their knowledge, skills and creativity together to ensure the local government sector and their communities prosper in the future.

We hope that the stories contained in this publication will provide readers with a new perspective on why women are important for local government as well as inspire other women to pursue their potential and right to be involved in local government.

Imrana Jalal

Human Rights Lawyer

Messages of Solidarity

Women and girls learn best from each other - that we already know. This booklet confirms it, and provides space to celebrate the diverse ways that Fiji women already contribute to local government. It also speaks to many others who are not yet involved but soon will be. Here is generous practical and strategic advice on workplace gender politics, importance of family support, and clear calls for adequate resources and mechanisms to enable gender equality including peer support, special mechanisms and entry quotas, and much more.

Above all though, I hear a clear message from women: that political restructuring and social transformation toward an equal, caring, peaceful and sustainable society arises where local communities feel connected to, part of, and clearly linked into national governance and that women in local government are a crucial, vibrant part of such work. Congratulations to everyone who has been part of this project, and best wishes and solidarity for your continued contribution to all our lives.

Noelene Nabulivou

Women's Action for Change

The participation of women in all forms of decision making particularly at the local, divisional and provincial level, is a pre-requisite for sustainable peace and development. This has been an important focus of femLINKPACIFIC's work to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) in Fiji and with our Pacific partners. This commitment has been enhanced through the opportunity to produce and share the stories of a number of the women featured in this publication - from Ba to Nadi, Lami and Labasa - through our own community media productions since 2000, and I look forward to a continued collaboration as we collectively demonstrate that the women across Fiji have the wisdom and expertise and the right to indeed share in decision making for sustainable peace and development.

Sharon Baghwan Rolls

femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women



About the WiLG Network

Women's networks in the Pacific play a very important role in promoting awareness of gender issues and encouraging a sense of support and camaraderie amongst women at all levels. Preliminary research has found that women in local government are often outside the sphere of existing women's networks and have limited access to capacity building and knowledge sharing opportunities. Increasing the levels of exchange and support for women in local government, in particular those seeking leadership positions, to ensure their visibility and credibility, require the cultivation of a dedicated network.

The WiLG Network is intended to bring together local government employees, councillors and other women and men eager to discuss new ideas across the local government sector. The network will be an informal think-tank committed to promoting gender equality, enhancing local governance and empowering communities that have the needs of women, men, girls and boys at heart.

The primary purpose of the network will be to:

- Raise awareness of the contributions and achievements of women in local government
- Promote strategies to accelerate the advancement of women in decision-making positions
- Provide professional development opportunities for women in local government at all levels
- Provide networking opportunities nationally, regionally and internationally, and
- Promote best council practices in engendering workplace policies, practices and service delivery.



Former Elected Women

Kala Singh

LAUTOKA

Priscilla Singh

SUVA

Josephine Williams

NADI

Anita Narayan

BA

Lata Naidu

SIGATOKA

Susana Evening

LAMI

Pauline Waqaniboro

LABASA



Kala Singh

LAUTOKA



“ Nothing should stop you from working for your communities. Women are good managers and are more resilient. ”

KALA SERVED ONE TERM AS A COUNCILLOR WITH LAUTOKA CITY COUNCIL. SHE CONTINUES TO SERVE RATEPAYERS IN AND OUTSIDE OF HER WARD AND WOULD STAND FOR ELECTION AGAIN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.

Early Experiences

Prior to being elected, I was a Justice of the Peace. This involved working voluntarily in the community supporting people in need. I was also involved in fundraising for poorer and disadvantaged families in the community, for example by participating in the planning of charitable festivals (mainly the Farmer's Festival and the Sugar Festival)

The Big Decision

I was personally approached by the leader of the Fiji Labour Party to contest the municipal elections.

Support

My family and friends provide ongoing invaluable support. Most of my campaign was managed by friends and the political party provided banners and posters for the election. The families situated in my ward (Tawakuba) also provided support.

Challenges

I was overwhelmed with the way men dominated meetings; a woman's perspective was totally lost. I also found it a challenge to cope with the attitudes of my male colleagues. It was disappointing because my initiatives were always shelved for financial reasons.

Accomplishments

I served one term on the Lautoka City Council between 2005 and 2009. I feel that my election to council gave me greater recognition and scope to better support projects outside of the council as well.

I feel I am a good communicator and work efficiently. This enabled me to resolve a lot of the issues ratepayers were facing during my term in office. During my term, we upgraded Churchill Park, undertook beautification around Lautoka City and upgraded the Marine drive. I also held the position of treasurer in the Fiji Labour Party's Lautoka branch.

Words of advice

I would encourage young women to continue working in their communities and nothing should stop them from doing so. The fact that women care for the home and hold a full time job says a lot: women are good managers and are more resilient.



Priscilla Singh

SUVA



“ Women have to start believing in themselves as no position of decision making will come their way on a ‘golden platter’. The onus is on us women to initiate change. ”

PRISCILLA SERVED AS A COUNCILLOR WITH SUVA CITY COUNCIL FOR 9 YEARS. SHE IS AN ACTIVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATE AND ALSO SERVES ON THE BOARD OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY WHICH LOOKS AT AFFORDABLE AND DECENT HOUSING FOR THE POOR. SHE WOULD LIKE TO STAND FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.

Early experiences

I am the eldest in my family and grew up in an Anglican home where race and religion were never an issue. The values I grew up with were that everyone is equal, therefore each one of us needs to be treated fairly and be given equal opportunity to decent education, housing, food and water, employment opportunities etc. Everyone is free to express him/herself and should be respected for his/her opinion.

I enjoyed attending political meetings with my Dad and listening to speeches and debates. I grew up knowing that one had to be aware of political issues as it determined the quality of people's lives. My parents also encouraged me to read a lot at an early age and this helped me articulate and expresses my opinions in a meaningful way.

After I got elected, one woman amongst 19 men, I realized that I had an uphill battle in firstly trying to change mindsets about women's participation in Municipal governance. There were moments when I thought I could not continue but prior training from the trade union movement which was also a male dominated arena, sheer determination and support from my own network of women gave me confidence to continue.

The big decision

My political party, the National Federation Party where I served in capacities ranging from women's officer to organize the women's wing of the party to Vice president/management board member, gave me a lot of exposure and experience to make the decision to contest municipal elections. One of my mentors, wife of my party leader also helped me arrive at the final decision to contest elections.


Support

There were some support groups in my ward that encouraged and assisted me throughout my campaign and elections. I also approached many other people as I went along and these were women's groups, religious and sporting groups, social groups, business houses and family members.

I did not receive any support from my council colleagues, except for two in my first term who were able to see the gender perspective. I was constantly strategizing to make a difference and sought advice from professionals outside the organisation so I could serve my electorate effectively.

Challenges

The major obstacle was after I got elected. My male colleagues did not treat me as an equal and always expected me to follow rather than accepting that I was an elected member of council with a mandate. They also had difficulty accepting the fact that I could research, articulate and contribute to policy making. The challenge was to continue to remain relevant and represent women. I knew that women who knew what I was doing believed I could make a difference. My objective was to try and overcome the challenges despite all odds.



I have to admit it was very difficult to influence policy decisions and give it gender balance because initially men refused to understand the need for gender equality in policy making. They did not understand the word “gender”. Eventually, I was able to convince the mayor to allow the elected members to attend a gender sensitization programme. Thereafter, each time an important issue was to be discussed, I took the opportunity to speak first rather than wait for the men to make the opening remarks. I found that when I introduced a subject, it made an impression and members were ready to discuss it. I also thoroughly researched and compiled facts and figures regarding the issue so I could debate with opposition more effectively. I also socialized with members after the meeting and drank a few bowls of the traditional drink yaqona, because I found them to be more relaxed and willing to listen in an informal setting.

Accomplishments

Becoming a councilor gave me the opportunity to lead by example. The fact that I contested elections and won gave me my own identity as I, “walked the talk”. I also realized that people had confidence in me and this is why I got elected each time I contested, three terms (9 years in total). During my terms I was the Chairperson of a number of Council committees including staff and industrial relations; parks, gardens and civic amenities; and town planning and subdivision of land.

I was also a member of the Mandated Committee for Union negotiations and Human Resource Issues, Street Kids and Welfare Committee, Council for Human Resettlement (squatter resettlement), Library Sub-committee (centennial celebrations), Promotion of Sports and Tourism sub committee.

Community aspirations

I am concerned at the growing plight of the majority of women on issues of violence, unemployment and poverty. I wish to influence change in a tangible way, i.e. empower women to recognize they are equal and then be able to change, not accept their subordinate roles.

Words of advice

Women have to start believing in themselves as no position of decision making will come their way on a “golden platter”. Women have over the decades recognized culture and tradition to be a deterrent to the development and advancement of women. Women also know their capabilities, therefore we need to assert ourselves, mobilise and bring to attention the need for gender equality in decision making. The onus is on us women to initiate change.



Josephine Williams

NADI

“ The fundamentals of being a good leader are love, tolerance and respect. I try to put all these values together to achieve the best results possible. ”

JOSEPHINE WAS A COUNCILLOR WITH NADI TOWN COUNCIL FOR 9 YEARS. SHE IS NOW SEMI-RETIRED BUT CONTINUES TO PROVIDE ADVICE TO YOUTH AND WOMEN IN HER CHURCH COMMUNITY.

Early experiences

I am a long serving member of the hospital board in Nadi with a special interest in working on women's issues. I was also greatly involved in the community through St Vincent de Paul and was the first women's chair of the Catholic Parish Council of St. Mary's Church as well as a member of the education board. I have also worked for many years in the hotel industry.

The big decision

I fell into my role in local government by accident. I was recognised in the community for the work I had done and there was overwhelming support for my candidacy. When elected, I was confident that I could represent ratepayers well.

Support

My family and extended family supported me during the election campaign. My campaign managers were my sons and their wives. I also received generous support from friends and family that live overseas. I was supported by the ratepayers in my ward and others around Nadi including church members. I also received training from UNIFEM (Women in Politics Project) before the election.

Challenges

Working with men was a challenge. The men's perspective differed a lot and they supported each other on issues. Policy issues did not have a gender balance because the men were uneducated on the need for considering gender differences.

An additional challenge was working through difficult race issues. I achieved success by trying to understand why certain people behave in certain ways – I mentally changed places. I always treated others as I would like to be treated.

Accomplishments

During my term I successfully worked with people with limited focus and took into account their varying interests. I achieved this by standing my ground and working on issues in the interest of all ratepayers and not any individual or political party.

After being elected mayor of Nadi town (1997–98) I was able to positively impact on development, for example infrastructure, beautification, schools, sports, music and arts. Before becoming mayor, I was deputy mayor for three years and also chaired the parks and gardens committee of council.

Words of advice

Every woman wanting to join local government should know what they are getting into before starting. You also have to build a strong character because participation requires one to be strong in mind and body. “To get respect, one has to give respect”. You also have to develop greater tolerance.

It is also important to prioritise your family and seek their support before venturing into public life because after public life is over, only your family remains.

Anita Narayan

BA



“I feel strongly that women have to believe in themselves before they can advocate and convince others that they can be leaders and represent the community.”

ANITA SERVED AS A COUNCILLOR WITH BA TOWN COUNCIL FOR 15 YEARS. SHE SERVES ON THE BA HOSPITAL BOARD AND WILL CONSIDER STANDING FOR ELECTIONS IN THE FUTURE ONLY IF APPROACHED BY THE COMMUNITY.

Early experiences

I come from a family that is involved in politics and social work. I was closely involved with the community and served on many social and religious organizations, including Soroptomist International, Red Cross, The Sanatan Dharam and St. Teresa's School.

The big decision

I was inspired by the late Dr Balwant Singh Rakha and Mr Vinod Patel (both senior members of the National Federation Party). They convinced me to run in the local government election. Although I did not know of the practical workings of councils, I was committed to serve.

“There is a lot of satisfaction that comes from serving people. I enjoy serving the community as I learn a lot also.”

Support

I received a lot of support from my family and husband, and feel that this support is very important for a woman who decides to run for public office.

The campaign itself was managed by the national body and local branch of my political party. I also organised my own group of women and networked through the organisations I belonged to. I received training through my political party and UNIFEM (through their Women in Politics Project) which gave me more confidence. I recommend training to other women who intend to contest elections.

Challenges

I was the only woman on the council to begin with and the women's perspective was totally lost. Women think and act differently; they have foresight, are more cautious, emotional and passionate about issues. I also felt challenged because many councillors were lacking basic education so they did not really understand issues; a few decided and the rest followed. I feel very strongly that anyone wanting to contest municipal elections must have basic education.

Accomplishments

Being a councillor gave me my own identity and I feel very proud of being part of Ba's development in the last 15 years. I supported new market development and new parks. The Ba Town Council also received the award for cleanest town twice from the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. I served as deputy mayor and also chaired important committees, including Building and Health, Market, Staff, Tender and Finance.

Words of advice

It is important that women understand civic issues and the processes of local government. Women also have to rid themselves of the mindset that they have a subordinate role in family and in society. Women themselves have to believe they are equal before any real changes can be realised, 'where there is a will, there is a way'.

Finally, women should start working in their communities to initiate change.

Lata Naidu

SIGATOKA



“Being passionate is only half the battle won...it is still very important to know the workings of council. A lot can be achieved if there is a collective effort.”

LATA SERVED AS A COUNCILLOR WITH SIGATOKA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE NOW ENJOYS HER ROLE AS A FULL TIME MOTHER AND CONTINUES TO HELP THE COMMUNITY THROUGH HER HUSBAND'S HEALTH CLINIC.

Early experiences

I grew up in Sigatoka where my father was a businessman who was involved with a lot of social organisations. He was also very politically active. I attended Dudley High School in Suva. Prior to holding office, I served on an advisory council and was also a member of the Lion's Club and Mother Sangam. Through these organisations I worked for the betterment of my community. This included the right to a safe and regular water supply and better opportunities for destitute families.

The big decision

From an early age I was inspired by the involvement of my father in community activities. I became very interested in political and social issues as a result.

Support

My support mechanism is my family. After I was married, my husband also encouraged and supported me to participate in community and civic affairs. My involvement in the local community, through the Lion's Club and Mother Sangam, also provided support for me to be elected for two terms.

Challenges

Many of my male counterparts did not attach importance to or support me in the issues and concerns that I raised, for example the environment. Although a lot of discussion, debate and resolutions were made in meetings, not much materialized on the issues that I raised. What the male councillors decided was important was done first and senior male councillors would ultimately decide on development projects. It was frustrating that politics too often overtook priority issues.

Accomplishments

I believe I am a good organiser and networker. These skills, alongside my determination to resolve issues that concern ratepayers were essential to me resolving issues. During my term I chaired the festival committees (Diwali and Christmas) and also served as deputy mayor.

Words of advice

Although I received no training before standing for local government, I feel it is very important for anyone that wishes to contest an election to understand the workings of local government. It is important to familiarise oneself with the workings of council before taking the big step because it can become very frustrating once elected when you don't get results. Being passionate is only half the battle.

One also has to have a lot of patience and determination to carry on advocating on behalf of ratepayers when there are insufficient resources and competing interests and priorities. However, women must make every effort to know their rights and fully participate in the civic life of their towns and cities.

Susana Evening

LAMI



“ Women have to educate themselves to be empowered. Age is not a barrier; both youth and older women can participate. ”

SUSANA SERVED AS A COUNCILLOR WITH LAMI TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS AN ACTIVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATE AND HAS PLANS TO ESTABLISH AN INFORMATION CENTRE FOR RURAL WOMEN IN LAMI

Early experiences

I have a lot of experience working at the grassroots level including involvement in organisations, namely Sosoqo Vakamarama, Catholic Women's League and the National Council of Women. My interest in politics grew out my work with the National Council of Women. The Council participates in various UNIFEM training programmes that empower women to participate in elections. UNIFEM supported training include Women in Decision Making, Women in Politics, CEDAW, and voter education.

The big decision

An issue dear to my heart is the lack of women's participation at the local and national levels of government. I decided I was going to contest the elections and as a result encourage other women to seek leadership positions. I feel local government was an important starting point for building my confidence in politics.

Support

I stood as an independent candidate so I needed to gather a support team three months prior to the campaign to help manage campaign logistics. The team consisted mainly of women from my ward who I had known from my long standing work in the community. They supported me by fundraising, preparing flyers and a manifesto, registering voters, etc. The moral and financial support from my family was also invaluable.

Challenges

In my experience, men often dominate debate and discussion at a community level. As a result women's perspectives are not sought. I believe this can be attributed to lack of awareness of the value a well balanced gender policy can bring to the community. This extends to the stereotyping of women's responsibilities as women's issues only: health and civic beautification, for example, rather than civic planning.

Accomplishments

During my term I was the Chairperson of the Health and Environment Committee. In this role, I had the opportunity to share women's concerns at the local government level, resolve women's issues and educate women on important health issues.

I have the ability to speak to people of any standing and resolve issues. Throughout my term, I was dedicated to community outreach. So, each time a decision was made, the community's concerns and input were sought. Community issues that were relevant at the time included income generation projects and finding safe spaces for women to sell their produce.

I have found the use of racial overtones to be an ongoing issue at a community level. This is due to a lack of sensitivity to the issue of race. During my time as a councillor I was concerned about this and always stood to defend the rights of all citizens of Lami Town.

Words of advice

Time management is the key to being successful in whatever one does.

Pauline Waqaniboro

LABASA



“ Actions speak louder than words – I truly believe in this statement and strive to make this a part of my character. I think people respect that. ”

PAULINE SERVED AS A COUNCILLOR WITH LABASA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE WAS THE ONLY FEMALE COUNCILLOR AND ALSO SERVED AS THE DEPUTY MAYOR DURING HER TERM

Early experiences

I come from a small village in the Province of Cakaudrove – Viani Village. I traveled to Labasa for education. I never thought that one day I would become a Councillor.

The Big Decision

As a youth representative in my district (Navatu) I organised many activities and small micro-enterprise ventures. Through these activities women and youth would meet and share their problems with me. Often my role was to help them in whatever way I could when they asked me, ‘what shall I do?’ Not only Fijians came to me, others too. This is what spurred me to stand in the council elections.

Support

In 2005, my friends recommended I run for local council because I had successfully helped a lot of people. They said, ‘we need a leader like you’. Their support strengthened my courage and gave me the confidence to take on the task and face whatever challenges might come about one-by-one and head-on.

Challenges

I contested a seat that was traditionally regarded as an Asian Party seat. My Fijian community did not support me and two of my colleagues ran against me. I just kept quiet and stuck to my aims, motivations and morals and at the end of the day I was voted in.

Accomplishments

I facilitated the Clean-up Campaign involving Labasa’s business community, youth and women’s groups. Part of the campaign included successfully sourcing the donation of new rubbish bins. The campaign was the first of its kind to involve civil society in council initiatives. It is now being encouraged in other municipalities as a positive way to encourage civic engagement and pride, with the added benefit of reducing costs.

I have also been instrumental in securing resources for community projects including new computers, books for the municipal library, and funding for school maintenance, infrastructure and convenience facilities.

Words of advice

Once elected, you have to think as well as act in a bigger way because once you are voted in you are a mother to those who voted for you and also those who did not. You are there for everybody regardless of race, colour, creed and gender.

Looking back over my time in local council, it is important to:

- Learn to listen
- Take whatever may come as a challenge
- Learn to be patient
- Be respectful
- Work for racial equality
- Respect all rights



Women in Management

Jasuman Khan
TAVUA

Preeya Ieli
LAMI

Setaita Bale
SUVA

Talei Silameicagiri
NASINU

Premila Chandra
NADI

Josephine Koro
SUVA

Nirmala Padayachi
SIGATOKA

Sushil Kumari
BA

Asenaca Nawaqalevu
SUVA

Pritanshu Reddy
NASINU

Selina Rokowati
SUVA

Sani Lata Singh
SUVA

Joana Adivukailagi Vatuloka
SUVA



Jasuman Khan

TAVUA



“By meeting people from all walks of life we get to know and have a much better understanding of the public and their needs. This helps us provide them with better services and with satisfaction.”

JASUMAN HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS AND IS CURRENTLY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT TAVUA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS COMMITTED TO MAKING TAVUA AS ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AS POSSIBLE.

Background

After receiving a Diploma in Accounting and Management I worked as a bank officer for twenty years.

Joining local government

Due to family commitments I was unable to accept a transfer in my bank to Suva. As a result I entered employment with the municipal council. I brought experience in finance, administration and management. I do not regret this decision as I have excelled in the local government like I did at the bank.

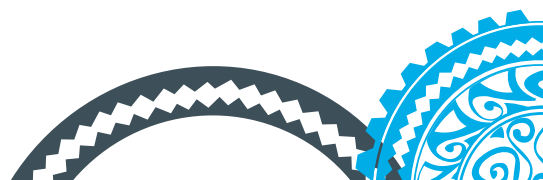
One of the benefits of working in local government is that we get a lot of respect from the public and the people we deal with. By meeting people from all walks of life we get to know and have a much better understanding of the public and their needs and this helps us provide them with better services and with satisfaction. We also interact with other stakeholders and service providers including government departments which give us a better understanding of our roles.

Support

I have the skills to do my job well because I have been trained in a lot of these areas from a young age. My parents have been instrumental in this; especially my late father to whom I am most grateful. I am sure if my parents were around today they would be very proud.

My children are also very supportive which is why I am able to contribute more of my time to my work. As the Chief Executive Office, I work until the last officer finishes for the day and often longer because 80 percent of my official hours are spent attending to customers, ratepayers, contractors and supervising work. I also make rounds of the town during the weekends to ensure that everything is ok. If there is anything needing attention I immediately get my workers on duty to attend it or give it the first priority the next working day.

“Working in partnership with the community is the only way of enabling us to provide them with the best services and amenities within our means.”





Challenges

I have experienced two major challenges whilst working in local government. First, my role in restructuring the finance department of Ba Town Council whilst still employed by them was difficult. Second, it was initially a challenge when appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of Tavua. In this position, I need knowledge in all areas including finance, management, administration, public health, building, engineering, infrastructure, town planning, dealing with the public, listening to taxpayer grievances, attending to complaints, etc. However I am proud to have taken up the role in a local government which is dominated by men. At present there are only two women holding the position of Chief Executive Officer out of twelve positions in the country.

Accomplishments

I worked for eight years in two municipal councils before being appointed the Chief Executive Officer, of Tavua Town Council. I do not have any difficulties fulfilling my duties despite not having an engineer, building survey, health inspector and works supervisor. All of this work is carried out under my supervision with assistance and advice from my colleagues from other municipal councils and officers from the Local Rural Authority.

Community aspirations

Ultimately, I hope to assist in educating the community to become more responsible citizens. More responsible in terms of their role in assisting the council to provide them with a clean and healthy environment to live in and respecting the laws at all levels, local and national. Working in partnership with the community is the only way of enabling us to provide them with the best services and amenities within our means.

Words of advice

No job is impossible for a woman provided you have the will to do it. For any job you are in, you need to be willing to do extra, give your best and be proud of what you do. Only then will you enjoy your job and you will also be determined to progress and excel. You only progress by learning and being dedicated and honest.

Teach those who you work with and learn from others.

Preeya Ieli

LAMI



“Involvement in local government creates a platform for women in society to be recognised as equal partners in decision making.”

PREEYA HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR 15 YEARS AND IS CURRENTLY THE CEO OF LAMI TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS AN ADVOCATE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WORK IN HELPING TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS.

Early experiences

My greatest inspiration is my dad. He is a Justice of the Peace (JP) and from a young age I was inspired by his commitment and dedication in assisting the people of the community.

Joining local government

Seeing the dedication of my father gave me the urge to join the local government.

Support

I work eight hour days, five days a week. I also commit five hours each month to attend council meetings. I have adjusted well to the work commitment with the support of my husband. He has been a tower of strength throughout my career.

Challenges

Working in a male dominated arena, my biggest achievement is gaining recognition as a woman holding a leadership role. I am also very proud to be able to provide efficient and effective service delivery to citizens with limited resources.

Accomplishments

Local government provides employees with the opportunity to address and resolve peoples' problems. I also learn about the economy and the effects of decisions made at a national and international level on the lives of individuals. I also better understand the mind set and norms of communities, their habits and living standards. In essence it enables me to better understand people.

Community aspirations

I like to think I have been able to assist in improving the relationship between the national government and local government and continue to seek support for issues of common concern like roads, water, drainage and squatter settlements. I would also like to see improvements in the living conditions in the settlements including a clean and constant water supply.

Words of advice

I encourage all women who would like to join local government to apply. Participation in local government is the very first step in enabling women to voice the concerns of women in the community and bring about changes to enhance and encourage recognition of women in leadership roles.



Setaita Bale

SUVA



“ Women should not stay in the background anymore. Instead they should come forward and participate in civic affairs. ”

SETAITA WAS FORMALLY THE CITY SOLICITOR AT SUVA CITY COUNCIL. SHE IS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF HER COMMUNITY AND OFTEN OFFERS FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS.

Background

I have a LLB and a postgraduate Diploma in Legal Studies both from the University of the South Pacific. I am also a certified Mediator for Dispute Assessment and Resolution. After graduating in 1999, I began working with a law firm, Q.B. Bale & Associates. After, I worked with a number of other law firms including Tevita Fa, Lateef & Lateef, and Law Solutions.

Joining local government

My decision to join local government was an individual one. I saw the opportunity as a challenge in comparison to my previous work; primarily because it involved the community.

Support

I feel my work is demanding and I often have to take work home to meet deadlines. Fortunately, I have support at home so I can generally balance my work and family life quite well. However, I do feel I am not adequately remunerated as there is still an element of double burden for women.

Challenges

Rates collection has been a challenging issue that involves many defaulting ratepayer cases. I work closely with the finance team in ensuring ratepayers are paying their rates on time, as this affects the council's cash flow.

A current challenge, as a result of my position in the management team, is working with the Interim regime. Even though there are rules and laws in place, some decisions are made unilaterally.

Accomplishments

I enjoy my work at Suva City Council because I know I can provide sound legal advice on council issues and positively influence decisions.

Community aspirations

I have provided free advice to a Fijian programme on criminal law and enjoyed doing so. I plan to continue to put my legal expertise back in to the community by offering legal advice on projects that the community wishes to pursue.

Words of advice

Women should not stay in the background anymore. Instead they should come forward and participate in civic affairs. I believe women must be selected on merit as this will help with sound policy decision making.

I also believe women do a better job in local government because they are more committed and better listeners.

Talei Silameicagiri

NASINU



“Men should not deter women because they have the skill (feminine side) and a more humanitarian approach to things.”

TALEI IS THE HEAD OF THE LEGAL AND ENFORCEMENT DEPARTMENT AT NASINU TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS COMMITTED TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE AND ENSURING YOUNG PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NASINU.

Early experiences

I have a Law (LLB) degree from USP and a Post graduate diploma in Legal practice. I have also acquired a degree on contractual law and agreement from the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji. I am also registered as an environmental impact assessment (EIA) consultant with the department of environment.

The big decision

I wanted a different experience from the normal practice at Law. I wished to interact with people (ratepayers) more and advise them on different mechanisms of Law and what it means so they are able to better understand the workings of council.

Challenges

I begin my day at 8 am. I also work weekends. My work involves attending many meetings and I also get recalled from leave if there are important and very pressing issues. There is a lot of work pressure but I find it invigorating. I have a very understanding husband who supports me and I have a somewhat healthy work-life balance.

Accomplishments

Part of my work has involved addressing processes undertaken by council that were not legal and bordering on corruption. I have also been able to assist in correcting major loopholes in procedures and ensuring people comply with council standards. An accomplishment would mean being satisfied that I have addressed the needs of a customer, (ratepayer) recommended alternatives about what is possible and the legal way to do things.

I see myself as an advocate for change and wish to bring in best practices from overseas councils through networking.

Community aspirations

I am involved in the councils work with youth and hope to see that this continues. I am currently in the process of organizing a competition on proper disposal of both garden and kitchen refuse. Plans are underway to involve youth in all seven wards through a monthly roster. We hope the project will help to make youth become more responsible and instill civic pride.

Words of advice

When confronted with challenges try and find solutions. Women can really contribute a lot to Local Government development. Men should not deter women because they have the skill, (feminine side) and a more humanitarian approach to things which they do very well. Women should be more ambitious and get into leadership as they will ensure peace and stability.

Premila Chandra

NADI



“ Women should not think they are lesser than men. ”

PREMILA HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS AND IS CURRENTLY THE SENIOR HEALTH INSPECTOR AT NADI TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS A STRONG ADVOCATE FOR COMPOSTING AND RECYCLING AS THIS MAKES BOTH ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SENSE.

Background

I worked for the Ministry of Health prior to joining local government. I am also proud to have more recently completed further studies at the Fiji School of Medicine.

Joining local government

I responded to a vacancy and was successful. I have worked for the Nadi Town Council for the last eighteen years. I am now a senior member of staff.

Today, former Nadi Mayor (Mrs Williams) and Suva City Councillor (Priscilla Singh) are my role models and an inspiration to my work.

Support

My husband is very supportive. He is a good cook and I have also trained my children to cook basic meals. My husband also supports my studies. I feel that his support enables me to have such a rewarding career.

Challenges

Engaging with ratepayers who are not happy with the council is difficult because they often do not cooperate. However, I now know 95 per cent of the ratepayers and have built strong relationships. I am now able to ensure council rules are followed.

Accomplishments

I am proud to have achieved a senior position in the Nadi Town Council. I find my work very satisfying as I work on a wide range of issues and interact with the community. As a technical field officer, I act for the council but also for ratepayers.

I know my work well and feel satisfied with the outcomes I achieve. I am trusted to make decisions regarding my area of expertise. My professional advice is well respected and I am consulted on important issues before council endorsement.

Community aspirations

I am an advocate for composting and recycling both for environmental and economic reasons. I also see there are opportunities to help improve the quality of life in the community by encouraging women that are homemakers to do home gardening, to grow their own vegetables and to not rely on market produce alone.

Words of advice

I would advise women to set goals and remain focused until they achieve their goals. I would encourage women to join local government and to venture into male dominated jobs because I am an example of what women can achieve. I am very proud to be the first female health inspector and someone who climbs a ladder to inspect buildings like my male colleagues.

Josephine Koroi

SUVA



“Take the chance to be a part of local government... It broadens ones knowledge of civic issues.”

JOSEPHINE HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SINCE 1974 AND IS CURRENTLY THE SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INSPECTOR AT SUVA CITY COUNCIL. SHE IS KEEN TO STAND FOR ELECTION SOME DAY AND GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY BY ENSURING SOUND POLICY DECISIONS.

Early experiences

I attended Lelean Secondary School and then the Fiji School of Medicine.

Joining local government

I joined the council after applying for a position I felt I was adequately qualified for.

Support

I find my work very rewarding. The working conditions are good and the council is a good employer which enables me to lead a wholesome life. There are occasions when I have to work overtime or take work home but generally I am able to maintain a healthy balance between my work, home and church activities.

Obstacles

Everyday presents new challenges as I make quick decisions regarding health and environmental issues. The added responsibility comes from the fact that Suva, being the capital city, is seen as the model or leader for other municipalities. So, I also assist other smaller municipalities with challenges that arise.

Accomplishments

I have a very satisfying professional life and feel appreciated for the work that I do. My advice is sought on issues concerning my area of work before policy decisions are made.

Community aspirations

An issue I am concerned with is the growing squatter settlements around Suva City. I am particularly worried about life within these make-shift homes that people build. They have no proper health, sanitation or hygiene standards. This can give rise to diseases and poor health of inhabitants. I try to do everything within the council's resources to ensure health standards are met, but I feel a lot more still needs to be done.

Words of advice

I recommend young women take the chance to participate in local government as health and environmental issues are now key issues in development. Involvement in local council broadens ones knowledge of civic issues and there are many opportunities.

Nirmala Padayachi

SIGATOKA



“If a woman knows her job, nothing should stop her from progressing. I would encourage young women to acquire a high level of education and then contest elections so that a balanced gender perspective is incorporated in policymaking.”

NIRMALA HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SINCE 1979 AND IS CURRENTLY THE SENIOR OPERATIONS ASSISTANT AT SIGATOKA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE WISHES TO BECOME FURTHER INVOLVED WITH HER COMMUNITY AND DO SOCIAL WORK.

Background

After completing high school, I received on the job training. However, most of my professional skills were self taught.

Joining local government

I responded to an advertisement in the newspaper for a receptionist/typist position. In those days getting a job and keeping it was important because Sigatoka town was a small town with not many job opportunities. I considered myself very fortunate to have a job so I continued working for the council and progressed to become a Senior Operations Assistant.

Support

I feel I have a healthy balance between my work and family.

Challenges

In 1979, when I joined the council, I was the only woman. It was a big challenge to work amongst so many men. As the only female, I was reluctant to attend meetings because I felt out of place. I also feel that a more participatory approach – and not a top down management style – would be adopted if there were more women in council. Now there are six other women and I feel more comfortable. However, having only men around should not be a deterrent for women. If a woman knows her job, nothing should stop her from progressing; and she can be a role model for other women.

Another challenge was adapting to new technology that was introduced over the years; for example, the shift from using typewriters to computers. I had to teach myself as no formal training was provided. However, I was very committed to my job and persevered through these difficult times. I am now computer proficient and proud of my achievement.

Accomplishments

It has been very rewarding to see Sigatoka town grow and develop to its present glory. All the paperwork related to the development and changes within town were prepared by me. As a result I feel part of all the developments including the development of Lawaqa Park, the bypass road, market development and the proposed river bank development.

Community aspirations

Sigatoka needs an improvement of public conveniences as this is very important for the health and hygiene of the town. There should be awareness raising programs on litter and civic pride in cities and towns.

Words of advice

Start by getting involved with your local community through social work and community development issues. Be part of awareness raising campaigns so you understand the issues and are then able to advocate on important issues.

I also feel local government is a good way to improve communities. I would encourage young women to acquire a high level of education and then contest elections so that a balanced gender perspective is incorporated in policymaking.



Sushil Kumari

BA

“ Be innovative... be honest and work hard. Women are just as capable as men in making decisions about their municipality. ”

SUSHIL HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR FIVE YEARS AND IS THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT BA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS AN ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION AROUND PUBLIC HEALTH AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION.

Background

Prior to working for local government, I was a law clerk.

Joining local government

I began working for Ba Town Council in 1995. I now work for the Chief Executive Officer and the Special Administrator.

Support

I have a good work life balance which is helped by a flexible employer; it's a give and take relationship. I also receive a lot of assistance from my spouse. We share household responsibilities.

Challenges

I am often the first point of contact for ratepayers when my superiors are unavailable. In these situations I have to make the best decisions I can so that the issues raised are resolved satisfactorily.

Accomplishments

As a result of my work in local government I have enhanced my knowledge of the law because all aspects of local government (e.g. town planning and health policies and initiatives) are implemented under the Local Government Act. Building on my experience as a law clerk, my current work is very interesting and fulfilling.

My work is rewarding because I help ratepayers better understand law and community issues. I also feel I am in a position where I can make decisions, give instructions and am consulted on important issues, for example rates collection. I feel a great sense of responsibility because I supervise six other staff members.

Community aspirations

If there was one thing I could do to improve the life of my local community it would be to educate the public in the area of health and poverty alleviation. I believe one of the challenges as well as opportunities for local government is building meaningful partnerships with ratepayers and the public. I believe there needs to be more support for creating space for dialogue through workshops, seminars and other gatherings that can help address these issues.

Words of advice

Be innovative because today's women are well educated and have the resources to do a lot. Women should also be honest and work hard because there is nothing that is impossible.

I would encourage women to not confine themselves to just the home but to participate in civic activities because women are just as capable as men in making decisions about their municipality.



Asenaca Nawaqalevu

SUVA



“ The sky is the limit. Get your fundamental rights: set your goals, work hard (because there is no substitute for hard work), make your plans, and commit to God. ”

ASENACA HAS WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR FOURTEEN YEARS AND WAS THE CITY PLANNER AT SUVA TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS NOW A TUTOR FOR THE TOWN PLANNING COURSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AND SERVES ON THE FIJI HABITAT FOR HUMANITY BOARD.

Background

I have a Bachelor of Planning from the University of Auckland and a Master of Urban & Regional Planning, majoring in environmental impact assessments and development economics, from the University of Sydney.

Joining local government

Since secondary school I had planned to do something totally different from the traditional careers of many women. I was very concerned about the environment and how it was being managed. Also, my favourite subject was geography and my teacher played a big role in helping me decide what career I eventually chose.

Support

I have established a network of very senior personnel in important roles like the ministry. This has allowed me to make alliances nationally and regionally that give me a lot of scope in advising on updated development and planning issues.

Challenges

I realize that I hold a powerful position which means I can influence decisions, and I have on many occasions been able to do so. However, sometimes I feel very constrained by the 'politics' that takes place at the policy-making level. Another challenge is working in a male dominated area; engineers, architects, surveyors and planners are mainly men.

Accomplishments

In my role I work well with the different political parties that are elected every three years and the government to arrive at the best outcomes. I am also involved in encouraging investments in changing the skyline of Suva; including the Morris Hedstrom City Central, Suva Central, Great Council of Chiefs and Fiji Inland Revenue and Custom complexes. Ongoing work includes the foreshore development which will involve commercial, retail, recreation, office space and hotel facilities.

It is important to keep abreast of new development philosophies and best practices as new learnings are continuously emerging. Such issues include global warming, rising sea levels and CO₂ emissions. I stay informed by attending workshops, meetings and conferences.

Community aspirations

I feel strongly that there needs to be more support for working with parents in the community on social issues. There are many issues to be concerned about including drug abuse, teenage pregnancies and HIV and AIDS which impact on our quality of life. I believe that the council has a role in supporting ongoing awareness raising programs and education both formal and informal to ensure these issues are addressed.

Words of advice

I strongly believe that family and church values help women in their quest for a career whether personally or politically. Furthermore, if women are committed, they can achieve anything they want.

Pritanshu Reddy

NASINU



“ Nothing is impossible, Planning is not impossible. I am an example of what women can achieve in a male dominated arena. ”

PRITANSHU IS A TOWN PLANNING OFFICER AT NASINU TOWN COUNCIL. SHE IS AN ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS ISSUES.

Background

I hold a Degree in Environmental Science, a Certificate of Planning from The Institute of Australia and am currently studying at USP for a degree in Land Management. As a town planner my work involves assisting in the preparation of town planning schemes, developmental control, rezoning, subdivision, conditional development and advisory services, and other duties delegated by the manager of engineering.

I wish to complete my degree in Land Management and then pursue a Masters degree in urban development studies from an overseas University and then eventually emigrate. There is not too much scope for my profession and I wish to achieve a lot more in my career.

Joining local government

I served as an attaché in Nadi Rural Authority for 11 months. My work involved building inspections, subdivision and rezoning. I also worked for the Ministry of Health, Town and Country planning as a technical assistant for 6 month. All these work experiences gave me inspiration and confidence to apply to Nasinu Town Council as planning officer.

A major benefit of working in local government is that I get a lot of opportunity for training. I am the only planning officer and the only one in my field so I get the first chance. I also get exposure at management level to present reports and this is great for building self confidence.

Challenges

What I find interesting but challenging is how council functions. People have difficulty in taking instructions from a woman and people get annoyed so they are quick to lodge complaints about compliance issues. However, I am assertive and insist on following the rules. It takes some ratepayers a while to understand that rules cannot be broken at whim.

Accomplishments

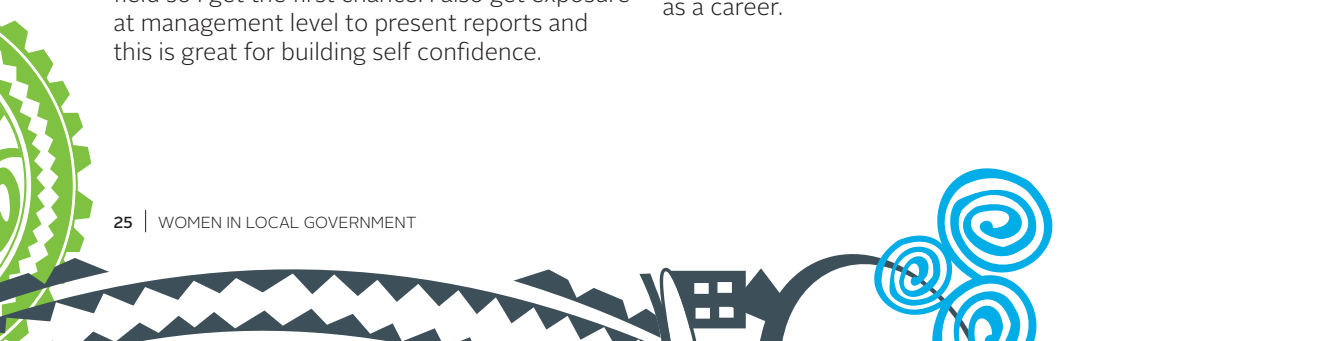
I feel a sense of accomplishment when people understand the reasons behind certain Town Planning issues. I have also done thorough research and gathered enough information to start work on the Nasinu town planning scheme. I have also been a part of the development of the Planning section which processes all zoning applications and business licenses as per the town planning Act. I am glad to be part of the change.

Community aspirations

I see a real need to prioritise education and awareness of the community on local governance. A good example is how the squatter community is growing in our country – the community has to understand the legal implications and why Council has to administer specific rules.

Word of Advice

Local Government gives women an opportunity to develop professionally and also work with the community. It also encourages women to further their career. I would advise and encourage women to take on town planning as a career.



Selina Rokowati

SUVA



“ Women should have a positive attitude because if you do, you can move mountains. Pursue your goals and don't let age be a factor. ”

SELINA IS THE SENIOR RECORDS CLERK AT SUVA CITY COUNCIL. SHE FEELS AS IF SHE WAS BORN IN COUNCIL AND IS KEEN TO CONTINUE MOVING UP THE LADDER.

Background

I have completed a tertiary- secretarial course (shorthand), industrial attachment and supervision course on computer management at the Training and Productivity Authority Fiji and University of the South Pacific.

As a Senior Records Clerk my current work involves being responsible for the entire record keeping of council including administration, correspondence-internal/external, legal documents, council minutes and reports, media releases, records on by-laws, legal documents pertaining to tenancies and staff bonds.

Joining local government

I wasn't particularly inspired, just encouraged by ministry of youth to try working as an attaché, I applied and have been here since. I have worked in various departments of council and am now the most senior person in record keeping.

The greatest job satisfaction has been to learn and appreciate customer concerns. It has given me a lot of confidence to perform within a certain time. I am also very happy with my working conditions.

Support

I am a workaholic so I don't keep track of time, I simply enjoy my work. I keep a healthy balance between work and home responsibilities. My weekends are entirely for my family. I have a good support system at home.

Challenges

The biggest challenge is being able to meet deadlines. The registry is the heartbeat of the organization because it depends on records and how efficiently we can provide information to the internal customers who can then provide customer information.

Accomplishment

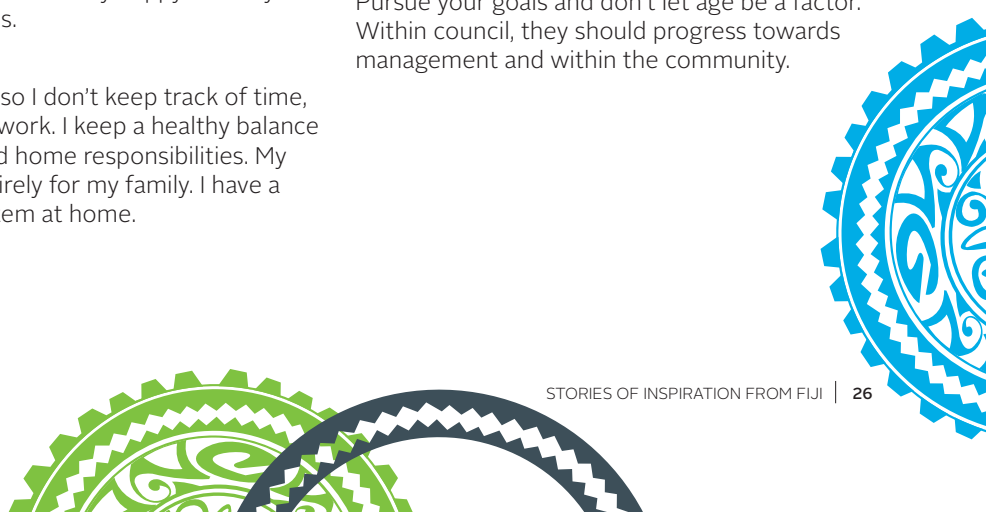
Being able to deliver to my superior's on time and be able to research and work under pressure. I am satisfied that I have done an honest days work. Also understanding human nature and behavior and trying to instill a positive attitude and motivate fellow workmates to achieve goals.

Community aspirations

I would conduct quarterly workshops to raise awareness of what services are offered by council and how to handle grievances. In particular, communities need to understand what rates are used for, what laws or by-laws are in place and what good governance is. I would explain to ratepayers what rights and responsibilities both council and ratepayers have towards each other, that it's a partnership.

Words of advice

Women should have a positive attitude because if you do, you can move mountains. Pursue your goals and don't let age be a factor. Within council, they should progress towards management and within the community.



Sani Lata Singh

SUVA



“ Women have to become stronger and make their own decisions. Women have to become assertive and move forward because we have a lot to offer. ”

SANI WEARS NUMEROUS HATS. SHE IS CURRENTLY THE 'TEA LADY', CLEANER AND ACTING RECEPTIONIST FOR SUVA CITY COUNCIL. SHE IS A COMMITTED CHARITY WORKER AND STRONG ADVOCATE FOR ISSUES AROUND POVERTY AND CHILDREN.

Background

I finished high school and then a typing school to learn stenography. Prior to working in local government I worked as an indenting clerk for a customs agency. I have also contested the Municipal workers Union elections and won and served as a committee member.

Joining local government

After my dad retired, I joined council (under the policy that the union negotiated for children to get first opportunity if there is a vacancy). I started work in the nursery and then to my present job. I was always very keen to learn about council and its workings.

The benefits of working in local government are that I get to meet and help a lot of people. I also learn new things from them as well.

Support

I am an un-established staff so I have to do 44 hours of work. The hours are long and both jobs have to be completed. However, I have great support from my daughter and family.

Challenges

My work as a receptionist is very challenging. I have to deal with all sorts and some people are very rude and vent their anger on me. I have to remain calm and collected and listen patiently and this takes a lot of patience. After all, I am the first point of contact for the council and as such have to be patient and polite.

Accomplishments

I feel I have accomplished enough when I have finished my work without any major problems and have served ratepayers.

Community aspirations

Poverty is an issue for me and I would like to help those in need. Children are not attending school and I would like to assist in some way. I try and employ them around the house. I also do a bit of charity work in my area.

Words of advice

Women have to become stronger and make their own decisions. Joining Local Government would help women get to know issues around them at local level better. Women have to become assertive and move forward because we have a lot to offer.

Joana Adivukailagi Vatuloka

SUVA



“ A good working culture has to be cultivated so there is mutual respect. ”

JOANA IS CURRENTLY A LANDSCAPER/ GARDENER AT SUVA CITY COUNCIL. SHE IS AN ADVOCATE FOR THE EFFICIENT USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND HEALTHY OUTDOOR LIFESTYLES. SHE ASPIRES TO BE THE BEST AND MOST EXPERIENCED LANDSCAPER IN FIJI.

Background

I have a Certificate 1, 2 and 3 in Horticulture, Floriculture, Landscaping, Propagation and Nursery management, Land Management and Vegetable farming. My current work entails designing gardens, beautification of the city, nursery supervision, plant propagation, grafting, marcotting, layering (air or soil layering), division and planting.

Joining local government

My love for nature was my motivation to join the Council as a landscaper and gardener. I grew up in a family whose main source of income was farming. My family imported agricultural produce. I also gained experience from a Taiwanese Agricultural mission and did a lot of field work with them.

Support

I get to put to practical use whatever I have studied and can use my knowledge and experience to actually see things grow around me. I work the normal working hours and have enough time with my family, so there is good balance of work and home life.

Challenges

Working with my male colleagues in the field and initially getting respect for my work. My relationship with them is now as someone who leads and gives direction. I also disseminate and share information to achieve optimum results. This builds mutual respect.

Accomplishments

I am responsible for garden designs around the city's main new developments e.g. Morris Hedstrom City Central complex, the Suva Market Crossing and other gardens within the city.

Community aspirations

Planting more trees and gardens within the city would be my priority. I would also like to work with schools to educate younger people to appreciate nature and have civic pride. I would like council to initiate campaigns to bring about more awareness on civic pride and keeping people from damaging and stealing.

Words of advice

Working with men is challenging but a lot has to do with behaviour and attitudes. A good working culture has to be cultivated so there is mutual respect. Education is also very important and women should keep exploring new avenues to upgrade themselves and achieve their goals.



Male Champions

Josefa Gavidí
SUVA

Apetaia Veioغو
SUVA



Josefa Gavidí

SUVA



JOSEFA WAS THE FORMER DEPUTY MAYOR OF SUVA CITY COUNCIL.

Is gender balance important in local government?

Definitely, there has to be a fair representation of both genders because all policies and laws affect everyone and communities are made up of both gender therefore it is absolutely essential to have both perspectives.

Why should men and women both contribute to policy making?

For the simple reason that half the populations of the country are women and they have a lot of potential and can add great value to discussions and debate. They have a different perspective on issues and getting more ideas will help make sound and sustainable policies for the city.

Is it a challenge to have women in Local governments?

Yes, it is a challenge to have women in Local Government because men have a mindset and have not been able to change with time. They are still holding on to their culture which defines the role of women as homemakers and men as leaders. Although patriarchal structures are slowly changing, it is going to take a long time.

An example of men's negative attitude toward women in leadership was when a women's name was suggested to chair the Finance portfolio — the men who were in majority decided that a women could not handle the responsibility although she had more experience and knowledge in the area.

What are the benefits of having women in Local government?

I believe that women are by nature better organized. Women tend to take into account finer details which men overlook. They are more sensitive for example; the city planner at Suva city council is sensitive to Heritage property so

whenever there is a development issue, she helps keep things in perspective.

Women also have greater decorum and respect for the value of good governance. They also lead by example.

What initiatives could help get more women elected to Local Government?

Government should now seriously consider making laws that compel political parties to have a gender balance in their selection of candidates for elections. Laws will ensure women's equal participation and also help eradicate social and cultural barriers that deter women from political participation.,

Are women's issues also men's issue?

All issues are human issues and if women are to be respected as human beings as they deserve equal respect and opportunities.

Do you think council services adequately address the needs of Women and girls?

No, more effort has to be made to provide better services to women and girls. Issues of safety and security and civic amenities like clean toilet facilities is greatly lacking in our city.

Has the attitude toward women in Local Government changed?

There have been some inroads made but a lot more needs to be done. The tireless work of some NGO's namely the Fiji Women's rights Movement, The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Unifem has raised considerable awareness on issues of women's rights, violence against women, the importance of women's participation at all levels of decision making etc. but this has to continue and gain greater momentum. Men will have to be gender sensitized through special programmes and then men themselves advocate including women at decision making levels.

Apetaia Veioغو

SUVA



APETAIA WAS THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AT SUVA CITY COUNCIL.

Is gender balance important?

Yes, gender balance is important because there is a need for the female perspective. Women with merit must be part of management decision making.

Why should men and women both contribute to policy making?

Women and men participating ensure better judgments leading to better policies. More participation by both gender benefits any organization

Is it a challenge to have women in local governments?

There have been some occasions when women have merited a position but have not been given the opportunity. Unfortunately this still continues despite senior male managers supporting females, as outside forces begin to undermine management decisions. The Human resources department, in my view should be headed by a woman as they are able to communicate more effectively, are more receptive to change and more approachable.

What are the benefits of having women in local government?

Women that have the educational background and experience would raise the capacity of Local government because women are by nature more specific and concerned with detail so standard of service and delivery is of high quality.

What initiatives could help get more women in local Government?

Traditionally men have been in leadership but times are changing and women must participate in Local Governance. In my view, special measures have to be taken to include women in decision making. A quota system ought to be legislated to ensure women are given the opportunity.

Local Government must also encourage equal employment opportunities to enable workers to have a career path with financial rewards.

Are women's issues also men's issue?

Yes, all issues are common to both men and women but priority is always given to men and this is probably because women are not at the decision making levels to highlight their concerns.

Do you think council services adequately address the needs of women and girls?

No, council has a broad-based approach that does not specifically address women's issues. A lot more could be done to look at safety aspects and civic amenities.

Has the attitude toward women in Local Government changed?

Yes, attitudes have changed a little but more can be done. Local Government is somewhat structured like Central government so changes are slow, however more modern and contemporary approaches are practiced by younger male managers so changes are going to occur eventually.



iwda
international
women's development
agency inc.

UNDEF  The United Nations
Democracy Fund