

Women and young people influence government policy

Tuvalu Enhancing Agency

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Speaker from Nukulaelae atoll in Tuvalu at the 2019 Tuvalu National Women and Youth Forum during a dialogue with government. Photo credit: Pacific Women Support Unit / Sian Rolls.

by Louisa Gibbs and Sian Rolls, Pacific Women

More than 70 women and young people gathered in Tuvalu's capital of Funafuti for the Tuvalu National Women and Youth Forum. It was the first forum of its kind, bringing together women and young people from all of Tuvalu's islands in a pioneering collaboration between government and civil society.

Senior parliamentarians, including Acting Prime Minister the Honourable Ampelosa Tehulu, participated in a dialogue with participants. Significantly, the parliamentarians committed to incorporating the recommendations in the Forum's outcomes statement when developing the National Development Policy, Gender Policy and Youth Policy in 2020.

Co-hosted by the Gender Affairs Department and the Tuvalu Family Health Association in December 2019, the Forum allowed women and young people to voice their experiences, needs and priorities.

‘The people of Tuvalu understand the challenges and the opportunities in our country,’ said Asita Molotii, Gender Affairs Department Director. ‘So it’s critical the government hosts National Forums like this to give a platform to Tuvaluans to be central in developing approaches best suited to our national context, to ensure women and girls are treated the same as men and boys.’

Issues discussed included ending violence against women and girls, advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights and increasing women’s participation in leadership and Falekaupule – traditional decision-making roles in Tuvaluan communities.

Peleseti Folitau said she planned to use what she had learned upon returning home.

‘I strongly recommend that today, empowering women in decision making is vital,’ Ms Folitau said.

‘There are several messages I learned from this National Women and Youth Forum. One of the messages triggered in my mind is that domestic violence against women is increasing nowadays. Therefore, on my return to Nukulaelae and as a President of our women council, I will [use my enhanced] knowledge gathered from this forum.’

The event included a women-only session which created a safe space for women to feel empowered and meaningfully discuss issues that affect them in a way they had never been able to before.

Pina Tepaa, representing the Nui Women’s Council, summed up the importance of the event: ‘More awareness programs like this forum and funds is important to develop our small communities.’

Pacific Women joined the Pacific Community’s (SPC) Social Development (SDP) program and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in supporting the event and provided technical and communications support.