

Creating safe spaces for Pacific women at international events

Fiji Regional Enhancing Agency

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Project name: Strengthening feminist coalitions and partnerships for gender equality (We Rise Coalition)

Project partners: Diverse Voices and Action for Equality; FemLINKPacific; Fiji Women's Rights Movement; and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)

Total funding: \$4,800,000

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Pacific Women supports the We Rise Coalition, a group of four feminist organisations working to develop inclusive governance, equality, diversity, justice and women's human rights. Members of the Coalition participated in the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) in March 2018, including hosting a series of feminist knowledge and skill-sharing workshops and advocating for progressive language in negotiations.



Sophie Kilipi and Lilly Be'soer of Voice for Change from Papua New Guinea during CSW 62 in New York. Photo credit: IWDA.

With this year's theme of 'Rural Women', Coalition representatives accompanied five rural Pacific Island women (including four young women) at the meeting, ensuring greater regional representation in the global women's rights movement. The Coalition worked to enable a safe environment for diverse feminists and women's human rights defenders, to support their wellbeing, advocacy and sharing of knowledge.

Lilly Be'Soer attended her third annual CSW event, but it was her first time with the Coalition. Ms Be'Soer spoke on two panels, discussing the concerns of rural women and promoting the rights of rural women for sustainable development. 'I could see how the women from all different walks of life [...] were all working together to bring the voices of the women from the voiceless, whatever their custom or their tradition, wherever they were,' she said.

In contrast, Lucille Chute from FemLINKPacific and Dawson Kai from Diverse Voices and Action for Equality were attending the CSW for the first time. 'As a

young woman from a rural setting [...] being able to participate at the global level is an advantage for me because, apart from learning new things from people around the world, I got to see first-hand the difference in development,' said Ms Chute. 'This has boosted my confidence and I'm able to empower other young women in terms of policy advocacy.'

It was Ms Kai's first time travelling overseas:

'After seeing all these women, I see how strong [they are as activists],' she said. 'Listening to them and seeing them talk and share their issues has made me feel like I want to be like them. I haven't reached that stage yet but I know I will someday.'

Ms Kai spoke on a side event panel on rural, remote and indigenous feminists demanding ecological and climate justice. This was the first time a rural Pacific LBT (lesbian, bisexual, transgender) woman activist has spoken publically at a CSW event.