

Frances Tawake, Network Coordinator – Rural and Regional

Fiji

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~ Frances Tawake

Meet Frances Tawake. She is FemLINKPACIFIC's Network Coordinator – Rural and Regional, a position which sees her coordinating activities around five Centre's in Fiji – in Ba, Labasa, Nadi, Nausori and Tavua – as well as regionally with network members in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Tell us a little bit about yourself...

I'm from Tailevu and went to Saint John's College in Ovalau. I grew up listening to the radio and just like other young people I used to imagine myself talking on the radio.

On joining FemLINKPACIFIC...

“I found out about FemLINKPACIFIC, through the Lami Catholic Women's League, where I was volunteering. I was part of the group that was invited to their young women's radio training and after attending that I joined the organisation in 2010.

When I first started, I was part of the young women's broadcasters and producers team, doing interviews and producing programs. Within one year I

moved to the role of Community Media Assistant, undertaking logistical work. Later I worked in the capacity of the Programs Administration Officer and in 2015, I became the new Network Coordinator for FemLINKPACIFIC's rural and regional. My work involves coordinating work around our five of FemLINKPACIFIC's Centre's in Ba, Labasa, Nadi, Nausori and Tavua. I am responsible for organizing activities for broadcast, consultations and simulcast in these Centre's. I also coordinate conveners on the ground who implement activities. Aside from Suva, Labasa is the only Centre which has a radio station. In the other Centre's, women come together on the third Wednesday of every month for the 1325*community media network meeting. I usually travel to the Centre's every quarter for the broadcast network meetings.

Aside from work in Fiji, I also coordinate work with network members in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

On the importance of community radio...

When I first joined FemTALK 89FM and started doing interviews and producing radio programs, I realized that the radio is more than just a device that has music and voices coming out of it. Radio for me is a very important tool that can be used when advocating for issues concerning women and girls as well as other vulnerable groups such as the LGBTQI** community, persons with disability and so on.

I am very happy when women use media as tool to communicate their issues. Radio is an information tool. When women script and produce the programmes, they don't just produce any random content, these issues are real to them. This is their life.

On the difference between mainstream and community radio...

After working with community radio, I now only tune into mainstream radio to listen to the news. There is very big difference between mainstream and community radio. Community radio is in-depth, it talks about issues and provides an important space for women to voice their opinions and in the process empowers them. Mainstream is very shortcut but we recognize that it's a business after all.

On interacting with other women and being part of the movement...

It's fun working with women and young people but can it also be very sad and emotional because people are talking about their daily challenges and that's often hard to hear. In terms of working at FemLINKPACIFIC, we have a big team of young women we're always given a space to talk, use our skills and utilize opportunities that come our way.

As a co-convenor through FemLINKPACIFIC, I have also been fortunate to be part of the Fiji Young Women's Forum, a very inclusive space for young women. I am also part of the Fiji Women's Forum and that was a different space compared to the young women's one. It's interesting for me to be part of discussions with older and more experienced women and to learn from them.

* FemLINKPACIFIC works to translate and operationalize the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, to demonstrate the opportunities for advocacy and input that can be made at a policy and community level, as well as within their women's networks.

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, Intersex

At the time of this interview Frances was preparing to represent FemLINKPACIFIC and the young women of Fiji as a member of the Pacific media team at the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York. Frances had previously produced podcasts and reports from the 2013 Secretariat of the Pacific Community convened Pacific Women's Triennial Conference.

About FemLINKPACIFIC

FemLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women is a Fiji-based feminist community media organisation. It was founded in 2000 by a group of women and men who came together through the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil. The organisation emerged in the aftermath of the 2000 political crisis in Fiji, as a peaceful way of speaking out against what was happening in Fiji.

On 5 May 2004 it launched Fiji and the Pacific's first women led community radio station – now known as FemTALK 89FM.

In February 2015, the organisation added another milestone to its growing list when it celebrated the technical expansion of FemTALK 89FM Suva to cover the Navua to Nausori corridor of Viti Levu by boosting the transmission power to 300 watt (it used to be 100). This enables FemTALK 89FM Suva to reach communities in some of the most densely populated areas between Navua and Nausori.

Pacific Women is a strong supporter of the critical work FemLINKPACIFIC engages in to ensure the women of Fiji, especially rural women, have a voice in national decision-making. As part of its long-term support to increase gender equality in the Pacific, Pacific Women was pleased to invest a grant of AUD 186,000 to FemLINKPACIFIC, which contributed towards this technical expansion.

Following this year's weekend marathon broadcast held to mark World Radio Day (themed 'Youth and Radio'), the organisation's young women staff and volunteers reflected on their journey so far.