

The importance of non-state actors in progressing gender equality

Federated States Of Micronesia [Enhancing Agency](#)

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Project Partner: FSM's non-government organisations

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As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), FSM reports regularly to the CEDAW Committee on the country's progress towards gender equality. With support from Pacific Women, FSM's non-government organisations were also able to present their shadow report to the 66th Session of the CEDAW Convention (Feb–Mar 2017).

Shadow reports are a method for non-government organisations to present additional or alternative information to that provided by the states.



Ms Yoslyn Sigrah has been recognised as one of 70 inspiring women to mark SPC's 70th anniversary. Photo Credit: The Pacific Community

Ms Yoslyn Sigrah, a lawyer from the state of Kosrae and adviser on women rights issues, was nominated by women's organisations to present FSM's shadow report at the United Nations in Geneva. Workshops and consultations had allowed the organisations to provide wide stakeholder input and ultimately produce the shadow report, through assistance from UN Women and International Women's Right Action Watch Asia Pacific.

Ms Sigrah has worked as an attorney in the public, private and non-government sectors. She recognises the need for a variety of different players to contribute to women's empowerment in FSM, but sees a special role for non-government actors.

'I love doing work with the NGOs because we get things done – we get things done faster!' she says.

'[Staff of non-government organisations] are not afraid to speak out for fear that we may lose our jobs because we are trying to push forward something that we really care about and we know is good for our people – human rights, women's rights, youth rights, disability rights. We push because we are passionate about our issues and we believe in our issues. From experience working for the Government, I believe in progress achieved under the rule of law. However, in the public sector our title or status may limit us to do just enough. Whereas with the NGOs there is no limit to what we can do and achieve.'

Ms Sigrah concentrated on three topics during her presentation to the CEDAW Committee: lack of a dedicated women's ministry, the absence of women in parliament and the prevalence of violence against women and children. As well as discussing where there is more work to be done, Ms Sigrah also noted the achievements in FSM, such as the passing of Kosrae's Family Protection Act in 2014 and the amendment to the Code of the Federated States of Micronesia to provide paid maternity leave for public servants, noting that those in the private sector also need their paid maternity leave.

‘It was important to note in the CEDAW shadow report that all of the key bits of legislations that were passed and the government pointed to in their report were spearheaded by the NGOs. Between the government and the NGOs, we NGOs get things done, but we need to work together. We depend on each other.’

The report’s impact was significant, with the CEDAW Committee’s Concluding Observations and Recommendations for FSM referencing several issues raised only in the shadow report.

*This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2016 – 2017](#). All values are consistent with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).