

# Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance

## Online Dialogue Issues Series



**PYWLA**

Pacific Young Women Leadership Alliance

PYWLA is composed of regional and UN organizations: Fiji Women's Rights Movement (secretariat), Commonwealth Youth Programme South Pacific Center, FernLink Pacific, International Planned Parenthood Federation, International Women's Development Agency, Pacific Youth Council, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, YWCA, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women



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### Introduction

The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance is a network of regional, international, and locally based organisations working with and for young women leaders across the Pacific region. The PYWLA strategy focuses on five key themes, supporting young women to be: Safe, Respected, Included, Connected, and Skilled. The goal of the Alliance is to provide a network to share information, and best practices and resources; and provide a united voice to ensure that governments, donors, and other stakeholders are accountable to the needs of young Pacific women.

This booklet provides summaries of a series of Online Dialogues which were held between June and October, 2013. Nearly 100 young women from across the Pacific region contributed their thoughts and experiences via Facebook around the 5 themes of the PYWLA strategy on topics including participation, transformational leadership, sexual and reproductive health and rights, peer to peer learning, bodily security, and peace and security.

The purpose of the dialogues was to provide an opportunity for young women to express their opinions, and to meet and network with each other. The information gained will be used as a platform for wider discussion among development and government practitioners working in the Pacific. In order to understand best how to support young women to attain leadership positions, we need a better understanding of their concerns, the barriers and challenges they face, and the topics which are important to them. This summary provides qualitative answers to these questions.

Participants were asked explicit questions, which they answered online; they were then provided feedback by moderators, who were selected from the members of the PYWLA. The young women were given two weeks to discuss each topic. Their responses were collected, and the moderators analysed and summarised the discussions for each topic into key ideas and themes.

There were a number of common ideas which emerged across every topic discussed, which suggest key entry points for interventions aiming to assist young women to realize their potential and their human rights. These include:

- the need for comprehensive sexual education in schools;
- the barriers which young women face as a result of traditional and cultural ideas about young women's roles and the worth of their skills, knowledge, and contributions;
- the importance of religion, family, and community as either a barrier to leadership or a much needed support network;
- the importance of access to quality education for young women;
- the multiple barriers of intersecting discrimination for young women who are LGBTI, living with disability, living in poverty, or members of other minority groups; and
- the need for women young and old to support each other and work collaboratively to advocate for change.

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## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

### Dialogue 1: Transformational Leadership in the Pacific

#### Transformational Leadership in the Pacific

Prepared by Bronwyn Tilbury, Fiji Women's Rights Movement

#### Abstract

The first dialogue discussion covered the topic of 'Transformational Leadership in the Pacific'. The young women participants defined a transformational leader as someone who is inclusive, visionary, and adaptable, and who acts as a role model to those around them. Various obstacles to young women attaining leadership positions and becoming transformational leaders were identified, these included restrictive traditions and cultural ideas about women's roles; lack of support from community, family, other women, and peers; and intersectional discrimination based on factors such as sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, education levels, or ethnicity. Participants agreed that to build a more conducive environment for young women to become transformational leaders' attitudes and behaviours in their communities need to be challenged and changed, and they need mentors and role models, and access to education and training opportunities.

#### Introduction and background

The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance is a network of regional, international, and locally based organisations working with and for young women leaders across the Pacific region. The goal of the Alliance is to provide a network to share information, and best practices and resources; and provide a united voice to ensure that governments, donors, and other stakeholders are accountable to the needs of young Pacific women. The Alliance aims to build the leadership skills of young Pacific women to that end. To support achievement of this aim, greater understanding is needed of what young women define leadership to be, what they believe a good leader is, and the barriers they face to achieving leadership positions and being a good leader.



Over the history of development in the Pacific and globally, abstract notions such as 'empowerment' and 'leadership' have been used more and more frequently, but often these concepts are not clearly understood nor are they questioned and examined.

To interrogate these notions, and to provide better understanding of young women's views, the first question asked of Online Dialogue participants was "What does transformational leadership mean to you? What are the obstacles faced by women in leadership and how can we encourage young Pacific women to be transformational leaders?"

Of the nine countries globally that currently have no women in their National Parliament, five are

in the Pacific. <sup>1</sup>Other Pacific Island countries have very few female parliamentarians. This is reflective of women's participation overall - politically, economically and socially. The situation for young women is magnified considerably when they have to deal with traditional, stereotypical attitudes which subordinate both women and young people to a lesser position.

In a regional survey conducted by UNICEF Pacific in 2007<sup>2</sup>, representing more than 600 young people in nine Pacific Island countries, findings highlighted participation methods that young people felt were useful and effective, and participation methods that young people wanted more of. Respondents also identified challenges to participation. Young people acknowledged some positive change with governments, schools, and NGOs being more willing to listen to young people. They said, however, that there remained few avenues for expression and participation at the decision-making level – especially at the traditional and community levels where it was 'extremely limited', particularly for young women. The youth participation that did occur was often not representative, only including 'elite' young people and often being tokenistic than placing real value on young people's contributions. Only 0.8% said that contributing to the process of decision-making was a useful way to participate, though a significantly increased proportion (9.2%) believed that participation in national decision-making processes was important.

Though recent progress has been made in creating leadership opportunities for young people across the Pacific Islands, including the recent revival of several National Youth Councils and the Pacific Youth Council secretariat, these opportunities are still largely dominated by young men. Young women continue to face considerable barriers to inclusion in activities aimed at young people.

The rationale for the participation of young people, and young women, is clearly founded in the human rights framework:

*"...[e]very human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development..."*

*Article 1, UN Right to Development 1986*

*"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of the country, directly or through freely chosen representatives"*.

<sup>1</sup>International Parliamentary Union. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>. Cited in PYWLA, 2011. Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy.

<sup>2</sup>Carling, 2007. Youth Citizenship: Opinions from Young Pacific Islanders. Survey conducted for UNICEF Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 2007.

*Article 21, UNUDHR 1948*

The Millennium Declaration commits in Article 25: *"... to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries..."*

## What young women say

When asked to define what they thought a transformational leader was, the group identified four essential traits. They should: engage in collective and inclusive decision-making; have a vision for the future and the ability to bring about positive change; act as role models; and be constantly changing and adapting their beliefs and style as they learn through their leadership experience.

## Inclusive decision making

Participants agreed that in order to bring about positive change for all, transformational leaders used inclusive processes when making decisions, which means that those in the leader's group have ownership over the changes introduced and their results. In their experience, female leaders favoured collective benefit for the whole of the community and society over benefits to certain individuals. Women were seen to bring a different perspective to leadership, with a focus on collective wellbeing for everyone.

## Visionary change makers

Leaders should not just aim to create changes around them, but to change the act of leadership itself. Participants discussed the need for leaders to not only to lead what people do, but also to challenge their ideas and their way of thinking, to work towards new and innovative solutions. The group talked about the importance of transformational leaders having a clear vision for the future accompanied by a well-defined plan which would include creativity and new ideas, energy and passion, inspiration, and service to others and the community.

## Adaptive learning

The young women agreed about the need for constant learning and changing to adapt to new circumstances and environments. A transformational leader should adapt to the changes happening in society and constantly evolve to better cater for everyone's needs. The group also agreed that good leaders should be open to constructive criticism

from colleagues, and able to change their approach and ideas based on feedback. This type of leadership is more conducive to achieving peace and equality, and promoting growth and productivity.

A participant from Samoa said "It's an ongoing process that never really ends, even the oldest leaders are learning on a daily basis. And so we call that transformational leadership, it gets better as we engage communities and get our hands dirtier"

### Positive role models

A clear message from the young women was that an important part of being a transformational leader was to also be a strong role model and mentor. The participants spoke of the need to have support from other women in leadership positions to demonstrate examples of leadership skills and qualities, and provide moral support and encouragement when they were facing challenges. This teaching through example was seen as an important part of learning to be a leader.



### Obstacles:

#### Culture, tradition, and gender bias

The young women strongly identified that culture and tradition were some of the biggest barriers they faced in order to become leaders in their communities. The rigid gender roles prescribed by

cultural and traditional ideas limit young women's access to resources, information, education, and opportunities to develop leadership skills.

Inangaro Vakaafi said that "the cultural values of island communities often prove a disadvantage for young women in leadership roles not only because they are young but also because of their gender. The traditional leadership roles are usually bestowed upon male elders in the community based on the assumption that they have the life experience and wisdom to be a pillar of guidance for their communities. Within the cultural hierarchies respect and authority are given to men."

### Lack of support

Lack of support was another barrier faced by the young women. They felt that they were discouraged from attaining leadership roles by their communities and societies, and more acutely from their family and peers. This lack of support is a direct consequence of cultural and traditional values which position young women as followers rather than leaders, and do not value their skills, knowledge, and contributions as highly as those of men or older people.

In addition to this the young women referred to a lack of support between women, particularly from those women already in leadership positions. They believed one reason for this might be that there are limited opportunities for women to take on leadership roles, and so women who have achieved these positions are protective of their space and do not want others intruding. They agreed that it was important for women in leadership roles to support others to achieve their potential.

Rebecca Solomon states that "personally I think they [older women] don't want young leaders to become who they are or in their post... I believe that to see the sacrifice of me being a leader I had to step aside and give space for the young ones to move their way up and in order for them to move up I need to mentor them."

### Intersectional discrimination

A few young women spoke about the discrimination they faced not only because they are women, but also because of their race; class or wealth; sexual orientation; and / or education. This intersectional discrimination further impacts their level of access to services, information, and opportunities because

of the inherent systematic injustice and inequalities that exist in their communities.

A transgender woman from Samoa, stated that "for the GLBT community, our contributions aren't always taken seriously, and sometimes we're not even recognised as a valid minority group. There's plenty of discrimination and exclusion. Some of our organisations lack resources because of institutional discrimination"

Pat Buadromo from Fiji expresses this further, stating that "a young women with a degree or highly paid work is more likely to be part of a decision making body, whereas a young LBT women who is a high school dropout and has no form of work experience will be disregarded."

### Recommendations from young women participants:

To overcome the barriers faced by young women requires solutions that suit each situation, whether the barrier is related to culture, respect, or discrimination, it is vital to overcome the obstacles with solutions that best suit individuals and communities within their wider context.

### Role model and mentors

- Create a network of older women leaders to support young women as mentors.

To become effective leaders, young women need positive role models for guidance and support. They should be able to look to older women leaders to create safe environments that empower and enable them to develop the skills necessary to become transformational leaders.

### Education and training

"Every girl can become a force for change. To unlock her potential she must have the opportunity to go to school and build on the skills and confidence needed to meet life's challenges head on." — Dr. Helene D. Gayle, president and CEO of CARE International.

- Provide opportunities for young women to engage in meaningful debates, workshops and further training to help young women build on their skills and strengths.

Education is fundamental in building the capacity of young women to become leaders. Access to education and knowledge builds confidence and

critical thinking skills. All women have the right to education.

- Value and recognise indigenous knowledge

As one dialogue participant quoted: "In the emerging global knowledge economy a country's ability to build and mobilize knowledge capital, is equally essential for sustainable development as the availability of physical and financial capital. The basic component of any country's knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge" (World Bank, 1997).



### Work with Communities

Working with communities to support leadership potential to thrive.

- Build a more conducive environment where leadership roles are filled by those with the ability to lead, and not defined by their gender.
- Demonstrate to communities the value that women bring to decision-making processes
- Work with our communities to change attitudes and practices, to give women a voice, and to strengthen the support from these young women's families and their peers.



## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

### Dialogue 2: ICPD: Young women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

#### ICPD – young women's perspective on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Prepared by Shadiyana Begum, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

#### Abstract

This discussion paper is a result of in-depth online discussion among 20 young women from around the Pacific focusing on the International Conference on Population and Development, with emphasis placed on young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Young women highlighted cultural and religious barriers, lack of comprehensive sexuality education, protection from gender-based violence, the need for better trained service providers, peer pressure, stigma, and limited opportunities afforded by governments and development agencies for young women's involvement in programme development and decision making processes. These issues were identified as some of the most pressing problems in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific, however access to services and information on family planning, and comprehensive sexuality education were deemed as the most important.

#### Introduction and Background

In preparation for the Pacific Women's Triennial, young women from around the Pacific participated on an online dialogue holding discussions on their knowledge of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) and its relevance to their lives and work in the Pacific. They further deliberated on the term Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) focusing on what SRHR means to them and how young women contribute to the achievement of sexual and reproductive health and rights in their communities and countries. The discussion concluded that securing sexual and reproductive health and rights promotes women's human rights overall, and ultimately leads to gender equality. However, while young women understood



sexual and reproductive health and rights within their lives, it was clear that there can be more done to help them contextualize sexual and reproductive health and rights within global, regional and national frameworks, and the agreed language on promoting the ICPD agenda. This will enable young women to actively engage and participate in national, regional and global conferences to represent Pacific young women's issues for instance in the upcoming ICPD Beyond 2014 conference or to lobby for policy and legislative changes within their own country contexts.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo was a milestone in the history of population and development, as well as in the history of women's rights. At the

conference the world agreed that population is not just about counting people, but about making sure that every person counts. The ICPD was a paradigm shift towards rights based approach to development, focusing on the rights of individuals to make decisions and have choices. A woman's ability to access reproductive health and protect reproductive rights is cornerstone of her empowerment and critical to sustainable development

**'I was aware of ICPD and especially loved it highlighted the relationship between gender inequality and poverty, poor health, poor educational attainment and sustainable economic development. It recognized and placed significance on the role that women and young people have and focused on the fact that their development and human rights would be beneficial for all. The ICPD is highly significant and relevant in my work in Papua New Guinea, with Meri Toksave.'** (Ayesha M D Lutschini)

A total of 179 governments signed up to the ICPD Programme of Action which set out to:

- Provide universal access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights
- Deliver gender equality, empowerment of women and equal access to education for girls and eliminating violence against women
- Address the individual, social and economic impact of urbanization and migration
- Support sustainable development and address environmental issues associated with population changes

The ICPD 20-year plan of action, was followed up by global commitments that further supported sexual and reproductive rights, including through the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the 2010 Global Strategy

for Maternal and Child Health and to a limited extent, Rio+20 outcome document "The Future We Want".

The Pacific Island Countries (PICs) complimented the global commitments with the "1995 Our Healthy Islands Yanuca Agreement", "2008-2015 Pacific Policy Framework for Achieving Universal Access to Reproductive Health Services and Commodities", the "2009-2013 Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV and Other STIs", and the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005-2015) which informs the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, the meeting which the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance meeting will prepare the young women to attend, and other regional and national agreements.

These commitments were further reinforced in the "Kuala Lumpur Call to Action: Asia and the Pacific NGOs Call for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Sustainable Development" (May 2012). Following this meeting, in October 2012 representatives of civil society and other organisations across issues from the Pacific, through the "Pacific Kaci: Pacific Commitment to Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, renewed their commitment to action and to achieve sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people in the Pacific region, seeing SRHR is a rights and sustainable development issue, not just a health issue. Further commitments were made at the Bali Global Forum Declaration (December 2012) and the Moana Declaration (August 2013).

## What young women say

sexual and reproductive health and rights – Focusing on access to Information and Services for Family Planning

Young women highlighted that government and development agencies must strengthen access to information and services on family planning in order to better address teenage pregnancies in the Pacific.

The high rates of teenage and unplanned pregnancies and low contraceptive prevalence rates re-affirm the need to re-examine the way sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services are delivered to young people in the Pacific.

The table below shows that the contraceptive prevalence rates in the Pacific region and the adolescent fertility rates.

Pacific Island Countries	Contraceptive prevalence rate (modern methods)*(%)	Adolescent fertility rate (‰)
Cook Islands	33	24
Fed States of Micronesia	49	44
Fiji	26	36
Kiribati	18	49
Marshall Islands	42	85
Nauru	25	81
Niue	19	20
Palau	18	27
Papua New Guinea	18	65
Samoa	27	39
Solomon Islands	27	70
Tonga	26	20
Tuvalu	22	42
Vanuatu	32	66

(Source: extracted from the Pacific Regional ICPD Review, UNFPA 2013)

Ongoing stigmatization, lack of support from communities, religious and cultural beliefs, exposure to violence in intimate partner relationships, inadequate services, lack of trained service providers, lack of education and awareness are some of the barriers young people face throughout the region. While these barriers have been well documented, governments and development agencies have failed to adequately address them. " ... whatever choice we make must be an informed decision, today a lot of us make the mistake of making a decision thinking we do not a choice. But that is due to lack of information, resources, services and the power to make that decision" and "... personally as a young woman, if I have the knowledge, the support from my family and community and have a good service provider, I would make good informed decision i.e. getting a HIV test without discriminations and stigma from those around me and providing me the service." (Aileen S. Pakachin, PNG)

The measures currently being undertaken to improve access to information and services have neither been inclusive nor participatory for young people especially young women. Most young women believe that all efforts to address these barriers will be ineffective without open dialogue that breaks age and cultural barriers and desensitize issues related to sexual health thus eliminating the stigma associated with accessing family planning services.



Young women recommend that awareness campaigns in the Pacific be focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights being understood as a shared responsibility, thus balancing the power dynamics and responsibilities in relationships. In most cases young women are blamed for unplanned pregnancies. An inclusive education and awareness campaign for both young women and men emphasizing sexual and reproductive health and rights, as a shared responsibility, is an important and critical part of advancing SRHR.

Most young women noted that governments do not need to construct a whole host of service centers, but instead recommend that sexual and reproductive health and rights be added to existing facilities by providing services that are youth friendly and training service providers who can offer counseling, maintain confidentiality, address the fears that young people might have and provide information about various forms of contraception in a professional manner.

A strategy that has not been properly addressed, and in some cases ignored, is the role that the church can potentially play in the improvement of sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. More than half of the young women who participated in the online dialogue believe that religious leaders can be strong supporters and advocates for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. As one of the most influential institutions in Pacific communities' churches can play a pivotal role in helping generate awareness and mitigating issues around sexually transmitted infections, gender based violence and family planning. Young women identified the need to sensitize, educate and include religious leaders in the decision making processes.

### Issues highlighted by young women include:

- Ongoing stigmatization when accessing reproductive health services
- Lack of support from families and communities
- Religious and cultural beliefs
- Inadequate facilities and services
- Unqualified service providers
- Lack of education and awareness
- Peer pressure
- Violence against women and girls

### Some of the recommendations made by young women:

- Create space for open dialogue between young people, parents and other stakeholders that breaks age and cultural barriers
- Ensure existing health centers provide Youth Friendly Services
- Ensure service providers are properly trained to provide services that are youth friendly and honors confidentiality of clients
- Provide in school Comprehensive Sexuality Education
- Sensitize and educate religious leaders on importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Engage religious and community leaders in the development process as they are the gate keepers

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The most effective solution to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific is providing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for in and out of school youths. Incorporating CSE in the school curriculum allows young girls and boys to be able to make informed choices about their bodies; and how to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, harassment and abuse<sup>3</sup>, and sexually transmitted infections thus reducing the health and economic cost associated with issues such as teenage pregnancies. It must be noted however that development of CSE curriculum must be from a human rights and gender equality perspective.

Most young women acknowledge that it is challenging to change behaviours, mind sets, attitudes of the older generations and desired results take time. They strongly believe that preventative rather than reactionary measures are needed to ensure that the future generations have the opportunity to lead healthy lives, fulfil their potential and make informed choices.

While some countries in the Pacific region have incorporated some form of CSE (the term Family Life Education is preferred in some countries) in the curriculum, schools have faced strong opposition from parents and communities viewing sexual and reproductive health and rights education as un-necessary for the development of children. Additionally insufficient effort has been made to train the teachers on dissemination of this information in a classroom setting. According to young women who have experienced family life education in the school curriculum, classes were conducted in an extremely awkward manner, with most of the teachers unable to properly address queries from students. Sensitising and training educators well will equip them to teach students and advocates within their communities and help parents understand why the curriculum is important for a comprehensive education and strong life skills.

Fale Andrew Lesa from Samoa noted that *"In most countries sex education in schools is ineffective; especially when it's not being reinforced by parents. The sex education curriculum doesn't go far enough (it's watered down and doesn't cover all the bases). Most of the students find the lessons extremely awkward and conceal this by cracking silly jokes and*

<sup>3</sup>Efforts are currently underway to strengthen gender sensitization as well as prevention of gender-based violence.

*ignoring the content. I learnt a whole lot more from friends than I did from school or parents”.*

While incorporating comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum is a favoured solution, most young women also agreed that it needs to go hand in hand with the education of families and communities so young people are able to discuss issues within a safe and supportive environment. Most young women noted that resistance from parents and community members towards CSE are often because of misguided information, lack of awareness and education. “Increasing the knowledge of a young woman on family planning is not enough if her family is not supportive or the health centre is 200km away with lack of staff and resource. We find that a young man can't go and get a STI screening because most of the services are for women, especially pregnant mothers. Young women can't practice safe sex because it is against her religion to use a condom or even talk about the issue. Young women can't report a rape case because the families decide to pay compensation or because the police blame the woman for walking out late.” (Aileen S. Pakachin, PNG)

Bridging the generation gap when it comes to addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights with young people is an important element of advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific. Young women noted that a partnership with parents and schools could provide a safe controlled environment to start the discussion on the importance for sexual and reproductive health and rights education and the benefits for young people when they are able to make informed choices. Additionally this space could be used to inform parents and create awareness on the various issues faced by young people.

There is also a strong call from young women to have a review of existing sexual and reproductive health and rights curriculum to have stronger gender equality and human rights focus. Participants called for more youth involvement in all stages of programme development and implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights education curriculum. They further recommended that more focus also needs to be placed on creating awareness among parents and communities simultaneously about sexual and reproductive health and rights education and its importance.

### Some of the issues highlighted by young women:

- Behaviour change is challenging and takes times
- Strong opposition from parents and communities viewing CSE education as un-necessary for the development of children
- Insufficient effort has been made to train the teachers on dissemination on information in classroom settings
- CSE curriculum needs to be based on gender equality and human rights principles

### Some of the recommendations made by young women for Governments and development partners:

- Review existing CSE curriculum to have stronger gender equality and human rights focus.
- Youth involvement in all stages of programme development and implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights education curriculum
- Creating awareness among parents and communities simultaneously about SRHR education and its importance
- Sensitising and training teachers

## Conclusion

The findings from this dialogue suggest that the key mitigating factors in advancing young women's sexual reproductive health and rights are families, communities, religion and culture and that the provision of comprehensive sexuality education in schools provides young women with the knowledge and ability to make informed choices.

## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

### Dialogue 3: Young Women's Participation in the Pacific



### Young women's participation in the Pacific

Prepared by Rebecca Cuzzillo and Mereia Carling, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

#### Abstract,

A vibrant focused discussion with 22 young women from 10 Pacific Island countries sought to assess the level of participation young women have in decision-making processes in their communities and nations. Young women clearly identified barriers to their participation – weak participatory systems, particularly in rural or more isolated areas, and a lack of young women's empowerment. An underlying factor is the influence of traditional attitudes which can impose double discrimination against young women both for their gender and age. A wide range of solutions and interventions are suggested and included for consideration by leaders at all levels and development agencies. Most significantly, these include the strengthening of governance systems to ensure young women's perspectives are included and considered at all levels, and the empowerment of young women, nurtured by families, facilitated by communities and institutionalised into education and national systems.

## Introduction and background

As noted in the summary on Transformational Leadership (dialogue 1), women are not well represented in leadership positions in the Pacific. Young women face the double discrimination of their gender and their age, as leadership roles tend to be dominated by older men.

The human development framework emphasises the value of participation for children and young people's holistic development<sup>4</sup>. Both pedagogy and practice show a clear link between participation and wellbeing (for example, Rajani, 2005; Theis and O'Kane, 2004; Reddy and Ratna, 2002). Through participation, young people build a range of life-skills that assisting their social and emotional development. For youth, participation is a way to advocate for their own causes and change their situations.

Young women have the right to be included. To ensure this right is being upheld, the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy promotes the investment in young women's leadership by:

- Putting issues affecting young women on the agenda;
- Including young women in the conversations that matter;
- Encourage intergenerational dialogue and mentoring.

This dialogue is a step towards carrying out these strategies. In order to understand the barriers to young women's participation across the Pacific, and identify appropriate solutions, the facilitated discussion focused on the following questions:

1. How can young women be effectively included in decision-making on issues that impact their lives?
2. What can be done to bring young women and our leaders together – where decision-making processes are shared and inclusive of young women's voices? What works? What doesn't work?
3. How can we change adults or leaders' negative perceptions about young people/young women?
4. How do we reach all young women, particularly in countries where there are no organisations like YWCA, and especially for women in rural com-

munities?

5. What are alternative methods for reaching young women who may not have good levels of literacy or may not have finished school?
6. What are ways of empowering young women to speak without being intimidated by leaders?
7. How do we encourage young women to want to participate?
8. How have you become an empowered young woman – what was the key or the moment of change?
9. Is there a need to work on the gender representation within representative structures for youth?
10. What works best? A youth council that is completely independent like an NGO? Or a youth council that has been set up by government?

## What young women say

Young women participated actively in the online discussion, and some clear themes emerged: participatory systems, lack of young women's empowerment, and marginalisation by tradition and attitudes. Inclusion was a theme that resonated with the participants, several offering detailed accounts of their personal situations and examples of best practice. Their recommendations on how best to include young women in decision-making ranged from very practical methodological interventions to large systemic and attitudinal change. Participants mostly agreed with each other's views, with the exception of the discussion about the status of a national youth structure, to which they had varying opinions.

## Participatory systems

The participants agree that there are barriers to young women fully participating in decision-making processes. On the whole, these processes are not inclusive and young women face double discrimination because of their age and gender. Positions of power and decision-making are traditionally male-dominated, and restricted to the older generations. With fewer opportunities and resources available, young women in rural and remote areas face even further marginalization.

Three main issues emerged:

1. Lack of representation for all young people

<sup>4</sup>Holistic development is human development which involves all parts of a person. It includes physical, mental, emotional, and social development.

2. Lack of representation for young women
3. Marginalisation by geography

### *1. Lack of representation for all young people*

Young people face limited avenues of representation and access to platforms where they can adequately voice their concerns, not only on issues directly affecting them, but also at a national and global level. To support meaningful participation, greater levels of representation for all young people are needed, in which their voices are being heard at all levels of governance, from village councils to parliaments.

To be effective, platforms for youth representation require the active participation of young people, as well as the endorsement of society and government. Without community support and recognition, platforms such as youth conferences remain tokenistic. The value of young people's contributions are often underestimated and undervalued by older generations. Increased community support, particularly amongst community leaders, is needed to ensure involvement in decision-making processes at community, provincial and national levels, and that leaders genuinely listen and respond to the ideas expressed.

There is ongoing debate over whether national youth structures should be affiliated or independent from government. There are advantages and disadvantages in both situations and the young women participants had different views on which arrangement is most effective. All participants agree that the establishment of national youth councils on the whole is a positive development for youth representation in the Pacific. While there is some disagreement among participants, the preferred option is for youth councils to be established as statutory bodies.

As a statutory body, a youth council will have access to the financial and technical resources available within government, ensuring some level of sustainability. At the same time, the statute of the council can provide for its independence from any political agenda, as well as establishing the council's control over human resources. Some participants raise concerns, however, suggesting that public support could be an issue as the councils may have difficulties convincing the public they are autonomous and able to act independently. Related

to this are other structural mechanisms, such as youth parliaments and youth conferences, that can be facilitated as a way of considering youth voice and youth issues in national development agendas and other development processes. Young women highlighted the need to provide discussion spaces and forums in academic institutions, with proper facilitators to allow for equal participation of young men and women.

### *2. Lack of representation for young women*

In the Pacific, as well as across the globe, positions of power and decision-making are traditionally male-dominated. This is reflected at all levels of society, from the low number of female parliamentarians, to the often male-dominated provincial and village councils. Young women, therefore, are not only limited by their age, but also by their gender. While the voice of young people is often undervalued, the voice of young women, even more so. A key to increasing representation of women and young women at all levels is recognising gender equality as a development issue to be factored throughout national strategic plans and objectives.

There is a need for greater facilitation to encourage and foster the participation of young women in decision-making processes. Young women need the opportunity to voice their concerns in a safe environment that allows for equal participation of both men and women, and young and old. Inclusive mechanisms will help to ensure that young women feel safe and able to participate openly. Being involved at the municipal level was also highlighted as an important means of addressing the needs of families, young women and young men. For example, ensuring young women have safe towns and market places are best informed by young women themselves.

The young women participating in the dialogue also recommended a greater representation of young women in other more active ways, recognising that opportunities for personal development and leadership can be offered through sports groups and other interest areas and networks. These include accessing vocational education subjects that are more traditionally associated with young men.

Some suggested strategies:

- Simply ask young women for their participation. Young women are more likely to participate in a meaningful way if they are specifically asked for



their opinions in a safe and open environment. This may require some persistence and appropriate methodologies, such as Focus Group Discussions and consensus models of decision-making, as young women may not be used to sharing their opinions.

- Target men to encourage the participation of young women in decision-making. It is important to work jointly with (and not against) men. Men should understand and appreciate the value of women's participation, as well as their younger counterparts, and as such, should work in partnership to facilitate their participation.

### **Best practice: Young Women's Parliamentary Group, Solomon Islands**

The Young Women's Parliamentary Group (YWPG) in the Solomon Islands has several strategies that help provide a voice for young women in the highest decision-making body. The YWPG use parliamentary tools such as petitions and question time to promote the issues important to young women.

In March 2013, the YWPG organised a petition on the expensive and poor quality bus service in Honiara. The cost of the average bus ride had increased three-fold, from \$3 to \$9, with women and children among the most affected by the price increase. The petition attracted more than four thousand signatures and, when presented to Parliament, was unanimously supported and referred to a special select committee. The committee produced a report looking at the impacts of the bus service in Honiara and this will be debated in Parliament later in 2013.

The YWPG was able to successfully mobilise young women on an issue important to them and provide a mechanism through which their voice could be heard by decision-makers. Mechanisms, such as petitions, are widely available to the public. Examples of best practice such as the YWPG help to demonstrate the impact and power that young people, particularly young women, can have when their voices are heard.

### *3. Marginalisation by geography*

While women's empowerment is also an issue, the processes and mechanisms that facilitate women's participation remain a significant challenge across the Pacific, particularly for young women in rural and remote areas. Village-based women, therefore, face heightened barriers to participation, which are greater for younger women. It is often more difficult for young women in these isolated areas to access the support and opportunities to make their voices heard. They face similar limitations to that of young women in urban centres, but often these limitations are heightened in a rural setting. They often have less access to education and information, higher poverty rates and are faced with more restrictive attitudes of village councils and decision-making bodies.

In rural and remote areas, one of the most effective avenues for engaging young women is through church networks and community groups. For many young women who are already involved in these networks, they can form a platform for their participation in their communities and society. In areas where literacy levels may not be high, community discussion may be the most effective way to communicate the voice of rural young women to decision-makers.

There is also a need to highlight the importance of community outreach. Many young women who live in urban centers have familial ties to provincial areas or specific rural villages. These young urban women should be encouraged to use their already established networks and ties to provinces and outer islands to facilitate the participation of young women living in rural and remote areas.

"I remember when I was in university, we had our provincial group have annual visits to our high schools back in our province where we used to talk about a lot of things but also encouraging women to further their education and what other options there were out there for them. When some of them came on board for their tertiary studies, they say our talks used to inspire them to continue on. Small actions can bring a lot of difference!"

Aileen Sagolo, Bougainville

### Recommendations made by young women:

- Support meaningful youth participation in decision-making related to national development agendas and other development processes. For example, the Young Women's Parliamentary Group in the Solomon Islands.
- Establish and strengthen systems for participation including:
  - National youth structures which are supported by, but are independent of, government. These structures should represent the rural and outer islands areas and be inclusive and actively seek gender balance at all levels.
  - Mechanisms established in schools, academic, and other tertiary institutions to provide space for youth engagement in decision-making relating to the institution.
- Create and provide opportunities for young women to participate in decision-making by specifically asking for their opinion and ensuring they feel safe to freely express themselves
  - Target men to encourage the participation of women.
  - Include active means of participation through sports groups and other interest groups.
- Support rural outreach initiatives to encourage young women in urban centers to strengthen networks with their rural counterparts:
  - Utilise church networks, sports groups and community groups to engage young women in rural and remote communities.
  - Facilitate community discussion in areas where literacy levels may not be high.

### Issues highlighted by young women

- Young women face double discrimination for both their age and their gender
- Young women in rural and remote communities face further marginalisation because of their geographical location
- Traditional attitudes that do not value the voice of women or youth are significant barriers to the participation of young women

- A cooperative solution is necessary, where all people, women and men, young and old, urban and rural, work together to facilitate the participation of women in society

## Lack of young women's empowerment

The participants highlight the lack of strong female role models in the Pacific region, particularly the lack of women in positions of power, in politics, in the private sector, and in sport. Of the nine countries globally that currently have no women in their National Parliament, five are in the Pacific.<sup>5</sup> Other Pacific Island countries have very few female parliamentarians. This lack of female representation in the upper levels of government is reflective of women's participation generally across all levels of society.

The young women participants agree that a much greater focus on empowering girls and young women is needed to advance gender equality. They put forward a number of recommendations and proposed solutions to address the issues relating to the lack of young women's empowerment. Two main issues emerged as areas of concern for the young women:



<sup>5</sup>International Parliamentary Union. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>. Cited in PYWLA, 2011. Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy.

## 1. Education

## 2. Culture of apathy

### 1. Education

Education is a significant area which will help to provide women with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in decision-making processes. There is a need to prioritise education, particularly for young women living in rural or remote areas. These women have less access to education, lower literacy rates, and higher school dropout rates than their urban counterparts.

"Education is the key to changing attitudes and first step to enabling awareness on women's rights and empowerment."

Kaisarina Salesa, Samoa

Focus on informal education is also important, such as life-skills training, self-worth building and promotion of mental health issues, human rights, and gender equality. Informal or vocational education and training will help to build the confidence of young women and provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in decision-making processes. This includes providing access to vocational training in areas traditionally associated with men, for example engineering, farming, and fisheries.

Education increases access to information. Young women are only able to fully participate if they are well-informed. The participants advocate for increased freedom of information in the Pacific and utilising not only traditional forms of media, such as print and radio, but also social media and word-of-mouth for dissemination. Radio is one of the most effective ways to reach young women in rural and remote communities that may have limited access to print media and the internet.

Participants cited the importance of young women's networks as a means for empowerment, where young women can take leadership roles, share knowledge and information, and build important alliances. There is a general perception that there

must be something "wrong" with a person to be considered part of a "group". As a result, many young women are not connected by a group, organization, or network. The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance aims to foster a network of young women who are inspired and motivated to participate in processes that have influence on their lives.

### 2. Culture of apathy

Many young women are apathetic about their role in decision-making, and do not want to participate. This attitude often emerges as a reaction to the lack of support for young women's participation in society. Traditional attitudes in the Pacific mean that society places little value on their contributions, which results in disillusionment and indifference. Providing opportunities where young women can meaningfully contribute and participate may help to address a culture of apathy, and a feeling that their contributions will not make any difference.

There are currently limited opportunities for young women to participate in decision-making processes. Providing such opportunities will give young women the chance to demonstrate to the older population, and those in positions of power, their leadership skills and their value as a contributing member of society, and gain confidence in their own abilities. In this way young women will begin to change traditional attitudes and stereotypes about themselves and their competence.

Some suggested strategies:

- Establish a young women's watch group to empower and support young women leaders
- Support networking at all levels for young women to increase exposure to opportunities and information, and build alliances with other young people
- Encourage participation of young women in sports, church, and other community groups
- Promote youth participation in politics, including voter registration and voting
- Organise youth-led conferences and forums ensuring gender balance, for example, model parliaments or UN sittings where young people are given the opportunity to write papers and resolutions

## Recommendations made by young women

- Increase number of women in leadership positions, to provide role models for younger women. This could be done, for instance, through Temporary Special Measures to enable women's representation in parliaments.
- Support access to quality education for girls and young women, particularly in rural and remote areas
- Improve access to informal and vocational education, skills-building, and training
- Promote freedom of information
- Improve access to information, particularly in rural and remote areas
- Provide opportunities for young women to participate in decision-making in meaningful ways

### Issues highlighted by young women

- There is a lack of female role models in leadership positions in the Pacific
- Education, both formal and informal, is key to the empowerment of young women
- Lack of access to information, and limited freedom of information, is a significant barrier to participation for young women
- There is a culture of apathy among young women in the Pacific, due to barriers which prevent them from participating meaningfully
- There is a lack of opportunities for young women to gain confidence in their abilities and demonstrate their skills and knowledge as valuable members of society

## Marginalisation by traditional attitudes

It is often the traditional attitudes of men and older women which inhibit the participation and free expression of young women. Even when given the opportunity to participate, young women can often

find it difficult to honestly express themselves due to cultural expectations and traditional attitudes. This is particularly prevalent in rural and remote areas where traditional attitudes are more restrictive to youth. Widespread systemic and attitudinal change is necessary, where the voice and participation of young women is encouraged and valued by those in positions of power and society more generally.

Education is one of the main avenues through which such systemic change can begin to occur. This can occur through generational change, in which the younger generation is educated to value and appreciate the contribution of all people in society, including young women. The process of attitudinal change can also be supported through education of older generations. Exposure to new ideas can come through different forms of media such as radio, print and social media, as well as word-of-mouth. Focused awareness raising initiatives with older generations and those in leadership positions is also effective. When young women are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making they are able to demonstrate the value of their voice and can begin to change perceptions.

Older women are in a unique position to lead the change and advocate for the inclusion of young women in decision-making; however, instances have been highlighted where they can instead act as barriers to young women's participation. Particularly older women those in leadership positions should be encouraged to act as mentors for younger women and facilitate their participation in decision-making at all levels. At the community level, young women suggested they could accompany their mothers to women's forums so that they can start to learn and be involved.

### Best Practice: Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa

Teagan Moore works in the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development in Samoa. Her experience demonstrates the potential older women have in facilitating the participation of younger women in society.

"I've seen a positive encouraging shift in Samoa where older professional women

are encouraging of the younger first-level officers and push for opinions to be voiced and questions asked.

From my own experience in the Ministry, in staff meetings my opinion is also asked with a way to move forward with programs and work at hand. We're given a lot of responsibility as ACEO has said this is to build our capacity as leaders and coordinators. At the same time we're supported and guided closely by seniors.

With meetings with outside agencies, we are given a platform to voice our opinions and ideas. No question is too dumb. I think it might be the Samoan culture of family cultivated in this Ministry and maybe that most of us are women. I feel like the older staff want the best for us and to develop our potential because they know it's about the vision of our work and carrying it into the future (generations).

Although I feel sometimes out of place if disagreeing, especially with older women professionals from outside, if done in a humble respectful way it works out well."

Teagan Moore, Samoa

### Issues highlighted by young women

- It is not only men, but also older women, that do not value the voice and participation of young women
- Widespread systemic and attitudinal change is necessary if young women are to fully participate in decision-making processes

### Conclusion

The findings from the on-line discussion suggest that young women face a number of barriers to participation, including weak participatory systems and a lack of empowerment. Traditional attitudes are identified as an underlying factor contributing to the double discrimination of young women for their age and gender. The participants advocate for widespread systemic and attitudinal change in which young women are empowered and given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

### Recommendations made by young women

- Educate the younger generation to value the contribution of all people in society, including young women
- Encourage the older generation to recognise the value of young women's participation
- Use media and targeted awareness-raising interventions to expose the older generation and those in leadership positions to the value of young women's participation
- Encourage older women to act as role models and mentors for younger women

## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

### Dialogue 4: Bodily Security



#### Bodily security – perspectives from young Pacific women

Prepared by Laura Cleary, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

#### Abstract

An active and reflective discussion between 24 young women from 9 Pacific Island countries focused on young women's knowledge of their rights in relation to bodily security, their ability to realize these rights, and the barriers and challenges they faced. Clear themes emerged from the discussion, highlighting the importance of family, religion, culture and community in regulating young women's bodily

security and their ability to access knowledge and realize their rights. Education was seen as the key to understanding and realizing these rights. Lack of comprehensive sex education in schools and Universities; religious and cultural ideologies about appropriate sexuality; lack of adequate sexual health services and lack of public services to support access to justice; and the "taboo" nature of sexual discussions were identified as key challenges. A number of solutions were proposed, which focused on encouraging more open discussion at all levels of society; planning culturally appropriate interventions and programs within the Pacific context; support, resourcing, and training for public health and justice services; and ensuring a comprehensive sexual education component of school curricula. The young women advocated for better education of all women and men, to understand their rights, and to empower them to ensure these rights are protected.

#### Introduction and background

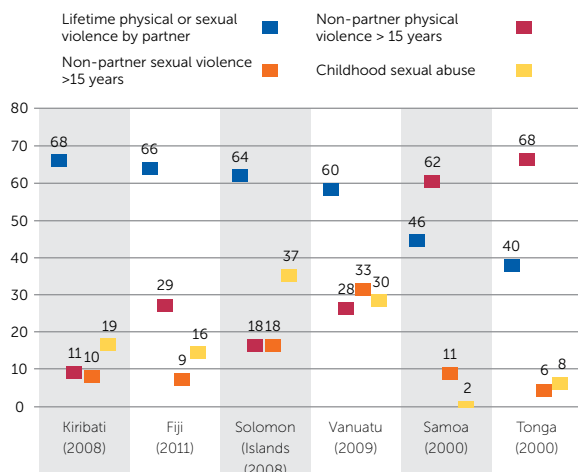
Bodily freedom comprises the idea that all people have the right not to be forced to do things with their body nor have things done to it without their permission; and freedom to be able to make decisions about what they do with their body and have done to it. Bodily security is the protection of these rights from being threatened or intentionally violated. Bodily integrity includes the human right to be able to move freely, be free from sexual assault, and to have choice about our own bodies in matters of sex and reproduction. Bodily security encompasses the rights of all people to have the final say about their own bodies, and what happens to them.

The right to bodily security is a particularly relevant issue in the Pacific, where rates of physical and sexual violence, particularly against women, are high; and many young people lack access to sexual health services and contraception.

A series of family health and safety studies from 6 countries – Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu - demonstrate the high

prevalence of sexual and gender based violence in the Pacific region. The information on different types of violence which women aged 15-49 have ever experienced is summarized in the graph below<sup>6</sup>. These studies will be conducted in more countries across the Pacific.

Prevalence (%) and Patterns of Violence against Women (15-49) in Pacific Island Countries



Prevalence data has revealed that violence against women is high in countries across the Pacific, and requires intensified efforts to prevent and eliminate violence from all sectors of society including government, civil society, community and religious groups, and the private sector. The data also shows different patterns of violence in different countries, pointing to different prevention and response approaches in different contexts.

Access to reproductive health services and information in the Pacific region is also low, which limits men and women from being able to make fully informed decisions. The average contraceptive prevalence rate from 14 PICs is 27.3%, with the lowest rate of 18% in Palau and PNG, and the highest rate of 49% in the Federated States of Micronesia. The adolescent fertility rate in the region is also very high in some countries, with the average at 47.7%; the highest rate of 85% is in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the lowest is 20% in Niue and Tonga. The unmet need for contraception in the region is

also varied, but is as high as 50% in Fiji and 45.6% in Samoa<sup>7</sup>.

The ability of young women to realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights is often limited, but evidence to support this is scarce and large information gaps remain. This dialogue summary aims to start the discussion, and provide information, about young women's perspectives on their ability to realize their rights to bodily security, and their knowledge of these rights. It provides qualitative evidence of the questions important to young women and the issues they face in realizing their rights, and makes recommendations for ways to address these challenges.

Dialogue participants were asked sets of questions on four topics for this dialogue:

- 1) **Understanding of rights** – how they learned about their rights, where they learned about them, and messages received while growing up about their bodies and their rights.
- 2) **Realising these rights** – what young people should know about their rights, whether women are able to say “no”, do young women talk with their partners before marriage, and their own questions about bodily security.
- 3) **Access to services** – whether or not health and justice services are accessible to everyone, and what could be changed about these services.
- 4) **Sexual and gender based violence** – whether women know their rights in relation to violence against women, whether help is available for survivors, whether survivors are blamed, how women can support each other to tackle VAW, and how to stop blaming victims.

## What young women say

There were clear themes emerging from the discussion. The first set of themes relates to the centrality of family, culture, religion, and community in influencing the ability of young women to realize their rights, and to access information about these rights. The second revolves around the importance of education and schooling in providing

<sup>6</sup>Source:Henriette Jansen, UNFPA, 2013, based on:

Fiji: *Report forthcoming*

Kiribati: [http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=211&Itemid=44](http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=211&Itemid=44)

Samoa: [http://www.spc.int/hdp/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=41&Itemid=44](http://www.spc.int/hdp/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=41&Itemid=44) and [http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/)

Solomon Islands: [http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=49&Itemid=44](http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=49&Itemid=44)

Tonga: <http://rmfftonga.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/tonga-vaw-report-final-2012.pdf>

Vanuatu: <http://www.aid.gov.au/countries/pacific/vanuatu/Documents/womens-centre-survey-womens-lives.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>From UNFPA, 2013. Pacific Regional ICPD Review. Suva, Fiji. Pp 15 and 21.

knowledge and understanding, and the influence of peers in providing both positive discussion and misinformation. The third encompasses issues around the availability of services to assist young people to realize their rights, and to the vulnerability of specific groups of people within communities.

## Family, culture, religion, and community

### *Parents and guardians*

Family, particularly parents and guardians, play a key role in providing information to young women about sex, their bodies, and their rights. Respondents either mentioned that they did not discuss these topics in the home, as they were "taboo" (this word was used frequently), and as such they feel that they missed out on key information; or that their parents were supportive and helpful in providing information, and made them feel empowered about their right to control their own bodies.

Mothers were central to this theme, many participants noting that their mothers were their key support or inspiration. The importance of older female relatives to provide basic information about sex and their bodies was clear: "as a young woman I became aware of my bodily rights via conversations with my mother, aunt, and older cousins". Fathers were often mentioned as not being able to discuss sexual matters with their daughters, but were important providers of information about rights, and about how men should treat women. "My dad... was very clear in making sure I understood my rights... One message that I learned quite early was that violence against women is unacceptable".

### Open and honest discussion

The importance of open and honest discussion was highlighted. "I am glad that I was part of a society and family where speaking about rights and sexual and reproductive health was not taboo, but in fact fostered a discussion". The importance of honest discussion was also mentioned several times in terms of married couples, or people who are thinking of getting married. Many respondents noted that young people rushed into marriage after accidentally getting pregnant at a young age without talking to their partner about expectations, and what marriage would mean for them. "I doubt that women in my community talk about sex with their partners before marriage". "As for adolescent girls talking with

their partners of their expectations before marriage, I don't see it often in my community. Most of the time it's a rush decision into marriage and later they found out there are so many issues that needs to be settled before marriage was to take place, but too late, either they already have children or they are way into the relationship and can't call it off".

### *Families regulating sexuality and freedoms*

Many participants said that their parents played a key role in regulating their sexuality and freedom of movement, in terms of forbidding certain activities (no dating in high school, no dates after dark), prescribing who it was acceptable for the young women to date and marry, and setting boundaries about sex. "My parents ...made it very clear that they would not approve of a boy who practiced [certain religions], no moving in without marriage, no sex before marriage". One respondent told the story of a young woman who refused to access family planning because, she said, "my mother is going to kill me if she knows that I'm taking family planning".

### *Religion*

These regulations were often tied closely with religion, many participants noting that their religion specified strong messages about when and with whom it was ok for them to have sex, and that these religious messages were reinforced by their parents. The young women were from a diverse range of religious backgrounds. One participant said that she would not have sex before marriage because the bible tells her to "use her body for God's glory". Another respondent told the story of Muslim girls in her high school who would not answer questions about sexual and reproductive health in exams because "knowing about sex means you are having sex".

### *Cultural ideas*

The ways in which cultural ideas and conventions regulate young women's roles, their ideas about sexuality, and their ability to realize their rights was discussed several times. Clear expectations were set by communities and culture about young women's appropriate roles. "I was constantly reminded I was a girl, and being one meant so many many things".

The regulation of women's sexuality, and what was considered appropriate sexual behavior was key. One participant told the story of seeing women from a neighbouring village having their heads



shaved, because they were caught "entertaining" soldiers from the army barracks. When she asked why they had been treated this way she was told by her older sisters that "that's what they do to women who misbehave". This idea of victim blaming came up several times, with one young woman stating her belief that one of the reasons that women are raped in her village is because they do not dress appropriately. A clear message received by the young women was that if their rights were violated, it was their fault. One participant clearly stated that "discussion around violence and victim blaming needs to be steered towards showing women that there is no shame in being a victim of violence, rather the shame belongs to the perpetrator".

#### *Married women*

Many participants mentioned that many women do not believe they have equal rights with their husband, and that they must obey their husbands. "I feel that women ... know more about their rights related to their body ... but not many of these women are able to say no when their boundaries are crossed, especially when they are married... They are taught your husband has all rights over you". Young women are told that once they marry, their husband's home is their own and "come what may you are to survive there".

A key theme was that women in relationships are subject to sexual and physical violence by their partners, but do not feel able to seek help and are not aware of their rights. Many stories were shared of friends or relatives who were beaten and raped by their husbands, but were not supported when they sought help from their families, because the rights of the husband were seen as more important.

#### *Community vs individualism*

Women were taught to be submissive and non-confrontational, which was identified as a barrier to their being able to realize their rights. "When young girls grow up in the village, they are taught to be respectful", and as a result, they do not feel able to speak up when their rights are violated.

It was seen that collectivism is an important aspect of the culture in which many young girls grow up in the Pacific. The collective good is seen as more important than individual wellbeing. Participants recommended that in response to this, programs will be more effective if they work with villages and communities to understand the harm which is

caused when women do not have bodily security, and looking at models which assist communities and villages to address these problems as a community.

#### *Recommendations made by young women:*

- Open and honest communication between children and parents about sex, sexual health, and young people's rights is very important.
- More open and honest communication between young people who are going to get married about their expectations and needs, will foster relationships where women are more able to realize their rights.
- Supporting young people to access contraception will reduce rates of young people rushing into marriage due to unplanned pregnancies, and the number of young women who are in harmful or abusive relationships.
- Provide information to young women about their rights within marriage, and support young married women to discuss the issues they are having within the context of their families.
- Include women who are involved in violent or abusive relationships in women's and community groups so they feel supported and can ask for help.
- Culturally specific interventions which focus on the collective nature of Pacific culture may be more effective - helping communities to ensure women can realize their rights, rather than focusing solely on individuals.

#### *Issues highlighted by young women:*

- Young peoples' parents play a critical role in providing information about sexuality and rights.
- Religion and culture are key factors influencing the way that young women's bodies are regulated by others.
- Women who are married are less able to realize their rights because they are taught that their husband's requirements are more important than their rights.
- Communities and culture play a strong role in defining ideas about women and their rights.

## Education and schooling

### *High school education*

A second clear theme revolved around the importance of education in informing young women of their rights, and supporting them to feel empowered to realize these rights.

All agreed that school was an important place for young people to get information about sexual health and rights. Some participants had been to schools where sex education was thorough and informative, but most agreed that "teachers rushed through the topic of sexual reproduction and did not allow room for questions and discussions." Two respondents had gone to school in Western countries, and both noted how surprised they were by the different information they received in sex education classes in these countries. They agreed that this information was very useful for their understanding of their bodies and their rights, and left them better prepared to realize these rights.

Peer to peer learning was also important for learning, but many of the young women felt that peers provided misinformation, or focused on the negative aspects of sexuality, such as sex being "dirty" or "disgusting". They felt that open and informative discussion of these topics, which provided opportunities to ask questions, was very important for young people.

Those who had been to University noted this was a critical time for learning about their rights.

Many respondents noted the importance of media in providing information about sexual health and rights, including radio, TV, and magazines. They felt that sometimes this information wasn't always as useful as it could be, because it focused on abstinence messages, rather than providing the information they needed to understand their bodies and their rights.

### *The importance of access to education for young women*

There was clear agreement that education was exceptionally important for young women to feel empowered to realize their rights. Many respondents noted that in their villages, young women had less access to information about sexual health and their bodies. Stories were told of relatives or friends who did not have high levels of education who did not know about sexual health or rights. "Yes it is

education that gave me the strength and the insight to soar above my societal predicaments, because I am well informed, know my rights, and can make sound judgments". Women with low levels of literacy were identified as highly at risk, as it was difficult for them to access information, and they often didn't feel confident to discuss these issues. Women with less education had less understanding about where to seek help when their rights were violated, and what services were available to assist them.

Another emerging issue was the need include men as well as women in education programs. Respondents felt that young men needed to be informed about rights and responsibilities as well, and that programs which work with both men and women would be more effective.

Recommendations made by young women:

- Ensure sexual and reproductive health issues, and discussions of young people's rights, are included in school curricula, and covered thoroughly by teachers in a way which is supportive, allows questions and discussions, and is not rushed.
- Provide teaching and information not just on sexual health, but on rights in schools.
- Provide written information to students, in case they are too embarrassed to ask questions.
- Support women to finish high school, and encourage women to attend University.
- Programs to support understanding of SRHR could work with popular media which young people access, to provide relevant and correct information.
- Women with high levels of education and literacy should be involved in community campaigns to assist women to understand and realize their rights.

Issues highlighted by young women:

- Education is critical for young women to understand their rights and to feel empowered to realize them, and to know when and where to go to seek help.
- School sex education is a critical source of information for young people, it would be strengthened if the topic was covered more in-depth and students had the chance to ask questions.
- Young people get their information from school, media, and peers. It is critical that they have a reliable source of correct information.

## Access to services and vulnerable groups

The third emerging theme from the discussion was access to services, and the needs of vulnerable groups.

Many respondents mentioned that in their countries it was difficult for young women to realize their rights because the services to support them were either non-existent, under-resourced and overworked, or not supportive of young women's rights. Sexual health services were said to be available in most large urban centers, but in rural or isolated areas it was difficult for young women to access sexual health services and information. Even when these were available, young people in these areas did not always know where to go to. The respondents noted that the services which were available were doing the best they could, but lacked the resources, funding, and staff to reach everyone. The state could play a much bigger role in providing funding and support for these sexual health centers, which were often run by NGOs.

Access to justice services was another key issue. Participants noted that when women were subject sexual or physical violence, particularly in their homes, they often did not receive assistance from police and the justice system. Women with low levels of education were particularly vulnerable here, because they did not feel confident to advocate for their rights to the police. "Dysfunctional systems" was a phrase used several times to describe state services. The need for training of service providers to

meet the needs of women and girls, and to support women to realize their rights was clear.

Particular groups were identified as being less able to realize their rights including women with disabilities, single mothers, and women living in remote or rural communities. Public services needed to be more mindful of vulnerable groups, and develop specific strategies to ensure access for everyone. Some noted that young women who are involved in behavior such as drinking and taking drugs are more vulnerable because they engage in high risk sex.

## Knowledge through employment

Many of the participants noted that they gained their knowledge of their rights to bodily security through their jobs; through training they had received while working for NGOs or other community groups, or through programs run by NGOs in their communities. They recommended the need for expanded community outreach work and training which targets young women.

## Recommendations made by young women:

- The capacity of organizations and health infrastructure to adequately address and take into account the needs of young women, women with diverse sexual identities, and survivors of violence and abuse needs to be built through awareness raising and training.
- Information about service providers, and where to seek help, is critical for young women to realize their rights.
- Some groups of young women are particularly vulnerable, and their diverse needs should be a key component of programs which seek to give young women access to services.

Issues highlighted by young women:

- Health and justice services providers across the Pacific are not able to meet the needs of all women, particularly young women.
- Access to services and information is a key barrier for young women to be able to realize their rights
- Some groups of young women are particularly vulnerable, including single mothers, women with disabilities, women living in rural and remote areas, and women with low levels of education.
- Young women working in the NGO or community development sectors gained much of their knowledge of human rights and bodily security through workplace training and community awareness raising activities.

## Conclusion

This dialogue suggests that the key factors in young women's ability to realize their rights to bodily security are family, community, religion and culture; and that education plays an important role in women knowing about their rights and being empowered to realize them. Each of these provides an opportunity to reach young women with messages, information, and tools for empowerment and protection. Access to services and information is a key concern, and the participants advocated for strengthened service provision which met the needs of all young people.



## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

### Dialogue 5: Peer to Peer Learning

#### Peer to Peer Learning

Prepared by Kimberley Sachs and Tarusila Bradburgh, Pacific Youth Council (PYC).

#### Abstract

This paper summarises the discussion about the topic 'peer to peer learning', between 15 young women from seven Pacific Island Countries. The questions asked centered around the definition and benefits of peer to peer learning, and how to make this type of learning more effective. Participants clearly identified that this was a valuable way to learn, particularly around topics which young people might feel uncomfortable discussing with their elders. They felt that this type of learning empowered young people to think for themselves, and was a more interesting and engaging way to relate.

#### Introduction

The discussion on peer to peer learning included 15 participants from seven Pacific Island Countries: Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands. Participants were asked to discuss their definition of peer to peer learning, share their stories and experiences of using this type of learning, and give their recommendations on how to make it more effective. Their ideas are summarised under the headings below.



#### What the young women say

##### What is peer to peer learning?

"Peer to Peer learning: This dialogue platform is a perfect example for this idea. This type of learning is an evocative and inviting way to learn where we consider our own life experiences, community, culture and potentially our dreams. But in this concept it is vital to understand the term 'peer'. The relationship that we have with one person may trigger a different learning journey as opposed to another individual. What and who do we consider PEER: For example: my first encounter with my colleague Tevita Tokalauvere was during a Fiji Council of Social Services Peer Mentoring Workshop where he facilitated the workshop and I participated as a Form Four student. Today we work for the same organization. I can say that he is part of my peer group but back then I would not have considered him so. Therefore, the importance of establishing that Peer style relationship is important with this concept!"

(Menka Kalisha Goundan, Fiji, 2013)

"My definition of Peer to Peer learning is best seen in "walk side by side" or companionship scenarios. Where it's main focus is on collaborative work or being in Partnership with others. So if it's an issue of youth, youth would best be interested or be able to grasp concepts quickly when it's done by others that share the same experience, interest or views. It has to be ENGAGING and involves action rather than listening to words of instructions."

(Lucille Sain, FSM, 2013)

Respondents were clear in their definition of peer to peer learning as learning between two people who are similar in their age, religion, sporting interests, cultural background, and / or experiences; people who are like minded. A participant from the Solomon Islands said that "peers are people with the same interest, people who hangout together, same ages etc." Many participants said that this type of learning is usually one on one, rather than in a group, and has an emphasis on sharing and collaboration, and learning and working together, rather than the usual teacher / student dynamic. They said that peer to peer learning is usually interactive, and involves doing things rather than listening to someone talking.

Most participants had some experience of the topic through their work, for example in community development organisations. They said that in their work young people were usually given training, and then went back into their communities to do peer to peer learning sessions, with support and mentoring from teachers or other professionals.

## The benefits of peer to peer learning

All participants said that peer to peer learning was an effective way to work with and educate young people, because "youth are more responsive when the message is delivered by someone more or less around their age group". They said that this type of learning made those involved feel more comfortable, and more easily able to discuss and learn interactively, by removing some of the usual barriers to free and open communication. This was particularly true for sensitive topics, such as sexuality and puberty, which many didn't feel comfortable talking about with older people, or which they felt

was "taboo". Many respondents said that they had to learn about sensitive topics through their peers, because they were too scared to talk to their parents. A respondent with hearing impairment shared a personal experience about how during school when the topic of sexuality and health was brought up, the message given to students was that sex is taboo; but when she had a conversation with her peers they were able to have a more open discussion, which helped her to get useful information about her body. Another respondent did feel "ashamed" to ask her peers about menstruation, but did so because it was easier to discuss with peers instead of her parents.

A respondent from Samoa described peer to peer learning as being more effective, particularly in rural communities, because people learn better from doing than hearing. One of the key messages was that 'traditional' types of learning and teaching, where students are given a lecture, can be "boring" for young people, and does not engage their interest well. Peer to peer learning is effective because it shows young people how to do something, rather than telling them how to do it, and it can be fun and interactive.

Because peer to peer learning is more engaging and interactive, it increases the involvement of young people in the learning process, which empowers them to take ownership of their learning, think for themselves, and form their own opinions. This type of learning encourages independent and critical thought, which is not always found in more traditional student / teacher relationships. This type of learning can also be useful for young people because it helps them to understand complex ideas in ways which they understand.

## Effective peer to peer learning

Participants said that peer to peer learning can happen through sharing information using many different types of communication. This includes written, physical (doing or showing), verbal, and visual communication. Respondents agreed that depending on the group some forms of communication may be more effective than others. Barriers to open and honest communication should be considered, including the type of language that is used – participants said it's best to use language young people can relate to; stigma around certain topics and discussions; culture; religion; and personal attitude. "The relationship that we have with one person may trigger a different learning journey

as opposed to another individual" – this quote demonstrates that some topics are best taught by the teachers young people feel most comfortable with: their peers.

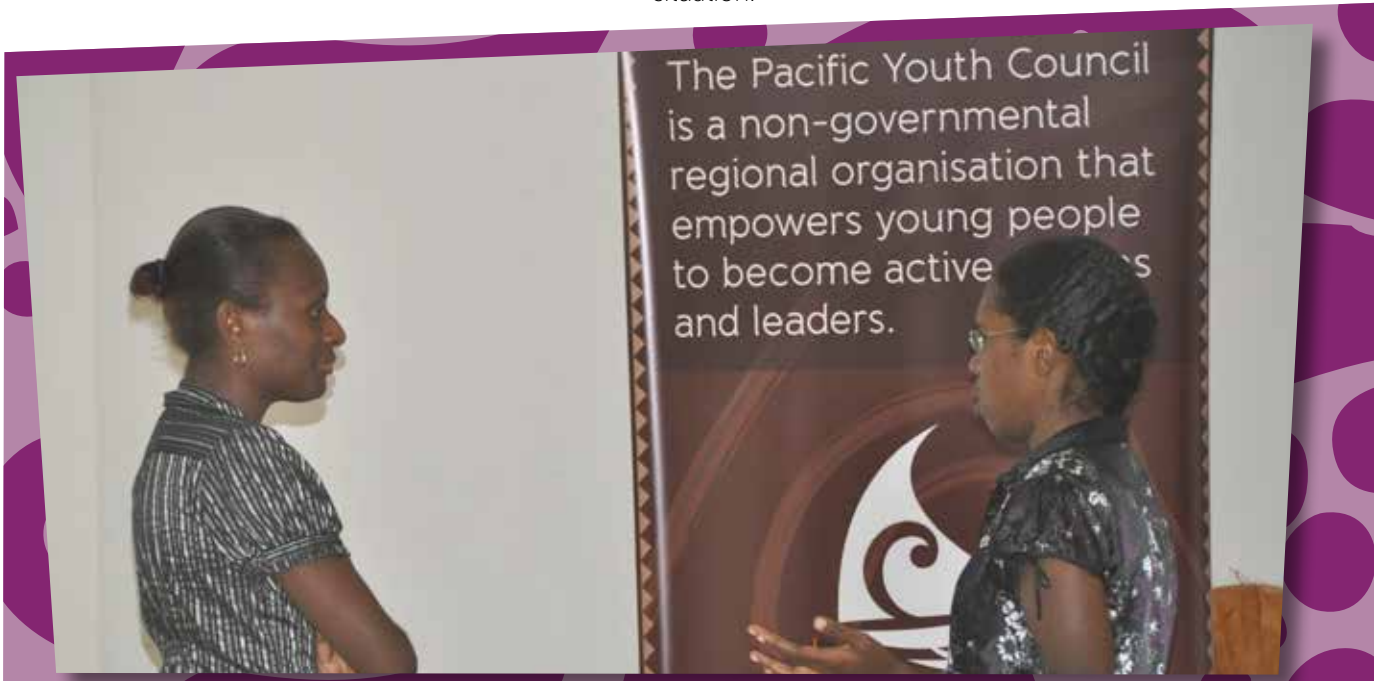
Recommendations:

- Peer to peer learning should be engaging, and focus on active learning rather than listening.
- Peer to peer learning should be done in a way that is fun, easily understood, and makes young people feel comfortable to talk about issues honestly and voice their opinions.
- It is important to understand who people feel their peers are, this will change over time as they get older and their interests and life experiences change.
- It is important to use a "vernacular" which young people understand. Using informal language helps young people to feel more comfortable. Peer to peer learning is a good way to do this, because peers often share a common vernacular.
- People who do peer learning should work to break down the normal barriers to communication, especially when talking about sensitive issues, so that they feel comfortable to talk freely.
- Adapting peer to peer learning to different learning styles, based on the type of people in the group will make it more effective.

- Issues highlighted by young women:
- Peer to peer learning is a good way to reach young people, particularly about topics which are sensitive, like sexual health.
- Young people often feel more comfortable to have open and honest discussions with their peers, which empowers them to take control of their own learning and form their own opinions
- Peer to peer learning is generally more focused on interactive "doing" learning than passive "listening" learning
- Learning which empowers young people to form their own opinions is an important tool to support them to engage in debate, and have their voices heard in decision making

## Conclusion

The respondents in this dialogue found that peer to peer learning is a form of communication that can be more effective in reaching and engaging young people about culturally or generally sensitive topics. The use of young people as teachers working with their peers in collaborative learning is empowering to young people, and is effective because it breaks some of the barriers to communication in a traditional older teacher / young student learning situation.



## Pacific Young Women’s Leadership Alliance Online Dialogue Issue Series

### Dialogue 6: Women, Peace, and Security

# WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY



Prepared by Veena Singh Bryar, Femlink Pacific.

## Abstract

This dialogue summarises contributions from more than 20 young women and youth representatives of the LGBTQ community focusing on the issues of peace, security, conflict prevention, and the involvement of women and young people in decision making processes. The participants provided their definitions of peace and security, and what “being safe” meant to them as individuals; identified barriers and challenges faced by young people in tackling issues of peace and security and conflict prevention; and discussed their participation in key processes and structures. Specific solutions and interventions have been suggested for consideration by leaders at all levels. The need to bridge the intergenerational

gap was clear. Despite the traditional marginalization of women from decision-making structures, women have been instrumental in brokering peace during crises and conflicts and continue to play a vital role in peace-building.

## Introduction and background

Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325): Women, Peace and Security, in October 2000, there has been increasing recognition in the Pacific of women and young women’s role in conflict prevention and peace building; and that sexual and gender-based violence is a security threat across the region. Before the adoption of UNSCR1325, Pacific women actively



campaigned for the security sector to be more accountable and participatory, and to respond to the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys.

Pacific Island Forum Leaders adopted measures addressing security concerns during the enactment of the Honiara declaration in 1992. The objective of the Biketawa Declaration is "upholding democratic processes and institutions which reflect national and local circumstances, including the peaceful transfer of power". It is within this security framework that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the Pacific Island Forum cooperate.

Despite the traditional marginalization of women from decision-making structures in the Pacific region, women have been very important actors in the process to broker peace - for example during the crises in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, and Fiji - and continue to play a vital role in peace-building. In December 2010 as part of the 10th anniversary commemoration of UNSCR 1325, a Pacific Regional Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was established with members from the Pacific Islands Forum, CROP and UN agencies, and civil society. In June 2011, the Forum Regional Security Committee gave the group the policy task of developing a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This was subsequently supported by Pacific Women's Ministers in August of the same year.

*The Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015)*

The Regional Action Plan<sup>8</sup> provides a framework at the regional level for Forum Members and Pacific Territories to enhance women and young women's leadership in conflict prevention and peace building, mainstream gender in security policy-making, and ensure women and girls' human rights are protected in humanitarian crises, transitional contexts, and post-conflict situations. It also sets out a regional mechanism that will support regional and national efforts.

The Regional Action Plan<sup>9</sup> provides a broad framework at the regional level to assist Forum Members and Pacific Territories<sup>10</sup> to accelerate implementation of existing international, regional and national commitments on women, peace, and security.

The Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security has the following aims:

- Provide a regional policy and programmatic framework that compliments and supports national efforts and provides guidance for all countries at the national level.
- Provide an enabling environment at the regional level to improve women and young women's leadership in conflict prevention and management, peacekeeping, security policy decision-making, and ensure women's and girls' human rights are protected.
- Strengthen civil society, women's groups - including young women and gender equality advocates - engagement with regional security and conflict prevention policy and decision-making.
- Develop a partnership between government representatives from Pacific Island Countries and Territories, CROP and UN agencies, and civil society, which will help to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication and overlap.
- Pool technical assistance at the regional level for women, peace, and security, capacity development support, and financial resources.
- Collect, store, and share research and analysis on women, peace, and security that will be used to inform regional and national policy and programming efforts.
- Support reporting and monitoring of existing commitments and help to assess progress.
- Support fundraising to enhance donor commitments to the advancement of women, peace, and security issues in the region.

<sup>8</sup>Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. 2012-2015. <http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific%20Regional%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Final%20and%20Approved.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Relevant RAPs: EU Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace, and Security & Implementation of UNSCR 1325 as Reinforced by UNSCR 1820 in the Context of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP); AU Gender Policy, released in 2009, draws upon international gender equality instruments including UNSCR 1325; SADC Protocol on Gender and Development; In December 2006, the ICGLR member states adopted the Pact on Peace, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region, which integrates 1325; The Economic Commission for the Great Lakes Countries Regional Plan of Action for Implementation of 1325 in three countries and Regional Steering Committee; Mano River Union developing a RAP and; Dakar Declaration and ECOWAS Plan of Action for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 in West Africa.

<sup>10</sup>The RAP covers all members of the Pacific Islands Forum: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The RAP will also be shared with Territories covered by SPC and they will be able to draw on support offered regionally for work on Women, Peace and Security.

### Online discussion questions

In order to get a clear understanding on what Women, Peace and Security meant for young women, the following questions were asked of dialogue participants:

- What does peace and security mean to you?
- "Being safe: what does that involve? And why should women be involved in decision making processes, especially on Peace and Security matters?"
- What is most necessary for positive results in the area of women, peace, and security and what concrete and achievable changes do you want to see in your community and country? How can we work on getting more young people, particularly young women, to stay connected and included in these spaces?
- As young people or young women, what messages do you want to send to the United Nations, the Security Council, and other policy makers about women, peace and security resolution 1325 implementation?

### What the young women say

*What does Peace and Security mean?*

"Peace and security means the absence of war, a world where everyone attains their right to live in liberty and being free to express and exercise their rights"... Veronique Maebiru

Women's security is all-encompassing. It is not just related to armed conflict – or even to domestic violence – but affects every area of women's lives. The question of women's security is one of the welfare and status of women, human security, and the impact of decisions related to the military, the police, and the broader security sector on women.

It was clear that most of these young people wanted an end to the different forms of violence they were exposed to in their homes, communities and countries. Women often bear the brunt of modern day conflicts and violence, including where rape is and has been used as a weapon. Most of the

participants spoke of the impacts of conflict on women and young women and the need to end specific threats to women. Most of the participants highlighted the need to continue to include women in decision making processes, and that women must be at the centre of peace talks, peace negotiations, conflict prevention, and post conflict reconstruction.

Not only is it essential to increase and include women in political and peace processes but it is necessary to include and increase the number of women in building and sustaining democracy. Women, young women, and young people are still under-represented as voters, leaders, and elected officials. Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains under-represented in the political arena. It is crucial to also include marginalized groups, who face the brunt of violence and conflicts. Peace and security within the Pacific LGBTQ community is more complex than it is usually assumed or understood.

"...Peace & Security for the Pacific GLBT community is not easy to understand. Most of us have been victims of discrimination and violence. Peace is perhaps more psychological than it is physical. We experience rejection from our own friends and family. We question our own existence, our right to happiness. Peace of Mind is perhaps more important to us than peace in the physical form. It is absence of self-doubt and the celebration of our identities. Security is the absence of discrimination and violence. The freedom to be who we are without prejudice. The GLBT community is vibrant but smaller number. The challenge is to organize ourselves to ensure maximum profile and influence. We're not there yet but we are closer than we were yesterday!..."  
(online participant)

What was clear from the discussions was the longing for 'home', or the nostalgic notion of it. For some of the participants it meant a place that allowed free movements, freedom from fear and freedom of speech.

"... no more hatred, fear, killing, burning of houses, rape, drug abuse, domestic violence and family separation. It is a Freedom of movements and freedom of speech...free from harmful obstacle and live in peace, joy, love and respected world..." (Janet Oge)

of seducing possible rapists. Knowledge is security. Service providers is security. When I know that rape is a crime and report it the police and they put the rapists behind bars that is security for me..." (Aileen Sagolo)

Many of the online participants spoke and shared their fears which came about as a result of them sharing their thoughts on what peace and security meant to them. Though peace and security and fears of individuals are all interconnected and linked, fear still stood out as a reason why we are continued to be faced with violence, invasion of our privacies, attack on our human rights and destruction of our human securities.

Many of the online participants through their discussions and sharing spoke of:

- fear of death
- fear of torture
- fear of losing friends/family
- fear of hunger
- fear of losing property or means of livelihood
- fear of losing land (home/country)

"...I come from Bougainville, an Island that experienced a cruel ten (10) year civil war that resulted in the compromising of peace and security. In 1997 a cease fire was declared and a peace process was called in to restore law and order into the island.

One of things that really gripped me about the crisis was "fear", that vulnerable feeling you have when you feel your life is at stake or that the lives of your loved ones are at risk..." (Jacqui Joseph)

"...Peace means I am part of a larger community living in harmony and involved in decision making. Peace to me as young woman is men respecting women, and protecting our integrity and identity regardless of religion, gender and age. Peace is knowing that I have access to knowledge and resource. I don't have to fight for what I know I am entitled to by birth, by gender, by nationality etc and knowing that people around me are also accessing all that they need. Security is having to stand up, voice out, action my rights and having the choice to choose from options without having to fear that I will be intentionally caused harmed, whether physically, verbally, emotionally or mentally for it. It means walking around freely, dressing the way I like without being accused

## What does "being safe" mean?

Across the region, high rates of violence against women and children, unstable political environments and ethnic conflict continue to undermine peace and security – compromising the safety of individuals, families, and entire populations. Young women have the right to be safe from harm, discrimination, to be safe in their own bodies, to be safe within their communities and home and also the right to be safe when sharing opinions and thoughts.

All forms of violence have serious implications on young women, not only do they have a negative impact on young women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health but they also impact greatly on their role in the public and private spheres. Violence prevents young women from fulfilling their potential as leaders within their homes, communities, and country.

"...To answer what involves "being safe" I answer by way of personal experience. On a larger scale, being safe involves my trust in Government and its relevant departments to ensure that the justice system works, that there is good governance among the running of a country's daily affairs and that corruption is not a disease that has gone viral. Being safe means that there is non-discriminatory access to services that promotes and protects a person's well being, services such as a friendly police officer helping you in a matter, a compassionate health worker guiding you through a difficult rape, miscarriage, abortion or birth. On a much smaller scale, being safe involves my personal ability to choose to be self aware about the dangers of criminal behaviour, having available and easy access to self defence classes, having access to confidential therapy if needed and trusting that not all men and women are against gender equality..." (Kaisarina Salesa)

The anecdote above captures what most of the online participants had shared in regards to what 'being safe' meant. Being safe was not only limited to personal, political or economic security; it involved being free from all forms of violence and discrimination, and making decisions and knowing that whatever choice has been made is respected. Being free also meant having access to services and information, protection and an environment where one is respected and heard.

For one of the young woman online participant, 'being safe', "was knowing that you can prosper; no-one can harm you or inflict you under any circumstances. A sense of assurance that you can rely on the members of your family and society to sustain your basic especially with the issues of Peace and Security is vital because it's the women and children are the venerable members of the society, who can be sorely victimized in the absence of peace and security. And as evident in the recent tension that ripped our

nation; homes and public infrastructures are being burnt; families are torn by separation or conflict; men from rivalry groups tortured each other; young husbands are forced against their wish to join the "army" for the sake of their family's safety; no freedom of movement, neither speech; women and children fled their home, every person is no longer safe in their own communities as respect for one another is lost. Thus the toll of killing, looting and rape is despicable. The Sense of "Being safe" evaporated into thin air. I was left in suspense to question why it happened. Who should I blame? Where can I go? When will it all end? But the question that I feared most is "how can I help make it end?" hence it dawned on me that peace comes from within. When an individual has this inner peace and actualizes in a given secured environment, he exerted peace, and that is how one can help to promote peace. To ensure that there is a positive result in the work of women, peace and security; women must be involved in the process. As evident in the recent ethnic tension that has disrupted my country's peace, women have taken the initiatives to negotiate with the warring groups prior to the regional interventions. Young women can also take such lead because of their sphere of influence..."

Most of the online participants highlighted the need to involve more women and young people in peace processes and conflict prevention. Not only will this ensure that women and young people's perspectives are included in the agenda but strategies are designed and coordinated specific to the needs of women, young women, minority groups, and young people.

"..My security encompasses aspects of personal, physical, emotional, mental, financial, education and social. My belongings should not be touched without my permission, my body should not be violated. My emotions should not be played around with or manipulated. My mental state of mind needs to be at peace so I can make clear decisions. I should have excess to equal employment opportunities (based on my interest, merits, experience and qualifications), I should have equal excess to education opportunities and 'being a female' should not hinder me from education opportunities. And finally my social security whereby I should be able to move about freely (without fear) in my social context. This includes the physical social environment and the virtual (internet world too)..." (Alzima Elisha Bano)

### *Women's Involvement in Conflict Prevention and Political Participation*

UNSCR1325 changed the way that women were viewed in conflict peace and security, by seeing women not as victims, but as key agents for change. It focuses on the protection of women in crisis situations, and also calls for the effective participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building; the mainstreaming of gender equality in peacekeeping missions; and for the UN to appoint women into strategic positions related to peace and security.

Most of the participants echoed and strongly supported the need to increase women's political participation and decision-making. They stressed that women's participation is fundamental to democracy and essential to the achievement of sustainable development and peace in all contexts. This participation should be during peace, through conflict and post-conflict, and during political transitions to open the way for women to participate in all decisions affecting their own lives and their countries and regions.

There was a strong recognition by the online participants of the essential contributions women and young women continue to make in the achievement and maintenance of peace and

security and to the full realization of human rights; to the promotion of sustainable development; and to the eradication of poverty. Even so, that women and young women in every part of our society and also in the world continue to be largely marginalized from decision-making and existing societal structures, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, and attitudes, and due to poverty disproportionately affecting women.

### Recommendations made by young women:

- Call upon all leaders and key officials and states, including those emerging from conflict or undergoing political transitions/tensions, to eliminate all discriminatory barriers faced by women including young women, particularly marginalized women/groups
- Encourage all States to take proactive measures to address the factors preventing women from participating in politics, such as violence, poverty, lack of access to quality education and health care, the double burden of paid and unpaid work, and to actively promote women's political participation, including through affirmative measures, as appropriate.
- Increasing and improving the participation of women and young women in local official processes.
- Provide women and young women with the necessary tools to participate successfully in all aspects of political and peace processes.
- Engage women in legislatures, political parties and civil society as leaders, activists and informed citizens to create an environment where women can advocate on matters of policy, run for political office, be elected, govern effectively, and participate meaningfully in every facet of public, private and political life.
- Encourage all states to ratify and fulfill their obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and to implement fully Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and other relevant UN resolutions.



## Conclusion

Women are 'waging peace' but there is a critical need to shift from commitments to operationalisation of USCR 1325, and CEDAW to ensure an effective response to the complex and multifaceted threats and challenges to human security in the Pacific. An effective response requires the participation, recognition and valuing of the experiences and role of women, young women and marginalized women and groups. The women, who have crossed conflict lines to promote non-violence, peace and human rights, usually ignoring the personal risks that such actions could cause, continue to remain outside of the formal peace process. The reality for many women, both in the Pacific Island region and around the world, is that we are excluded from the very structures that make the decisions to sustain peace or to engage in conflict.

## Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance On-line Dialogue Issues Series

# Dialogue 7: Gender, Economic, and Ecological Justice and Rights

Prepared by Noelene Nabulivou, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)<sup>11</sup>.

### Abstract

For this dialogue session, DAWN asked young women advocates for their views on links between gender, economic, and ecological justice and rights (GEEJ). This summary of the discussion adds to the body of publicly available responses from the economic south by diverse women advocates, including younger women from the Pacific.

### Introduction and background

DAWN and other GEEJ-Pacific alumnae and allies are supporting the work of the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance as part of a wider important body of work by south feminists and women's rights advocates. Since 2010 this work in all regions of the economic south is increasing diverse engagement to transform global economic and climate change governance structures; build capacity in policy analysis and advocacy on key gender, economic, and climate justice issues and their inter-linkages; and encourage solidarity and support for each other when doing this important advocacy and movement-building work. It includes many young women advocates from all global south regions, including the Pacific. This PYWLA dialogue provides further qualitative evidence from young women about their views on GEEJ related issues, and the barriers and challenges they face. Closing this summary are further GEEJ resources from DAWN, GEEJ-Pacific network members and wider allies, for information and use.

### What young women say

On the challenges for young women working on issues of economic and ecological justice, discussions spanned the realms of 'body politics', sexual and reproductive health and rights, young women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy, and an end to all sexual and gender based violence. Young women spoke of traditional practices that stop them from reaching their full potential. They raised



issues of intersectional discrimination based on age, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and faith. Discussions more specifically included development definitions; land access, sovereignty and land grabs; economic empowerment; ecological degradation and extractive industries; over-development; mal-development, and transparency and good governance.

ON BODILY AUTONOMY AND SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE, THERE ARE CLEAR LINKS TO ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE: One of the clear themes of the online discussion was the prevalence and ferocity of sexual and gender based violence and devastating effects on all areas of the lives of Pacific young women and girls, including young trans\* people. The participants spoke about it in several ways, including:

<sup>11</sup>Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is a 30 year old network of feminist scholars, researchers and activists from the economic South working for economic and gender justice and sustainable and democratic development. Website: [www.dawnnet.org](http://www.dawnnet.org)

4. From Tonga, one young woman shared a story of a family beating of a teenage girl that ended in her death. She called for an end to beating as a way to discipline children and young people in Pacific communities;
5. From Vanuatu, another said that "For us Ni-Vanuatu young women, we must be very proud of the connection we now have with others – about how important we are to our own families and society and even our own country. We must not look down on us. We need to strive for the best of our own future. We must put our hands together to raise our voices and concern on the treatment that men are doing to us and we must not let men to continue this behaviour. We are not to be perished with ignorant selfishness, hatred and fear."
6. MORE ACTION, NOT JUST WORDS: In earlier postings on peer learning, there were comments on the need for action-based peer agendas. Rather than just having the right words in mainstream political and policy documents, with little to show in participative implementation, we must find ways that are practical and useful to move development alternatives forward by and for young women and girls:
  - FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS: This is a useful entry point for discussions on the value of 'emic' or 'localised strategies' along with wider shared 'solidarity strategies' from elsewhere. Here, external parties are not bringing development solutions for young women, but young women are respected and enabled to research, develop, adapt, and implement their own strategies and solutions; with accompaniment from wider allies and movements as required and requested. This is very important work for the women's movement, especially in regions where intersectional and persistent gender-based inequalities and discrimination against women, as well as very high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, still persist and in some cases are rising. How can young women and trans\* advocates in the Pacific work more strongly on issues of SGBV, and link this to their low levels of formal economic, social and environmental decision making? This, while Pacific women and girls anyway provide so much of the critical care economy tasks that keep our communities functioning? What are the roles of wider women's groups to enable and support and accompany such work by younger and diverse women advocates? This certainly requires further explicit action on the societal, state and other institutional barriers preventing Pacific women's and girls' and trans\*people's full bodily autonomy and rights, social and economic autonomy and rights, and their ability to exercise their full, active, and un-mediated citizenship.
  - CHANGING THE DEFINITIONS OF 'DEVELOPMENT': Young women advocates raised that there are so many positive and 'colourful pictures of economic development' prevalent through the Pacific. Too many development partners and leaders, they say, continue to assert that a particular form of resource-intensive, commodified 'economic development' is the key to success of Pacific communities. Instead sometimes, one advocate argues, land should not be developed: "it should be looked after as it is or we will have too many buildings and not enough trees". She is very clear that there are alternative definitions of development. She is also here raising issues of land being priced out of the pockets of most Pacific islanders, as expatriate, development and other foreign owners and developers drive up the market prices for land and houses. "Personally I do not own any land (sadly). But I wish to. And when I see the rate at which development is taking place all over Fiji (especially in Vitilevu along the Queens and Kings highway) I feel in a few decades there will be no land left."
  - FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS: Such observations provide opportunities for further discussion on 'land security, sovereignty and tenure', 'land grabs', 'rights of the commons' and 'rights of nature'; also on the rights of Pacific people to own land instead of high foreign ownership. These are also valuable entry point discussions on the Post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals negotiations taking place right now at the global level. Who should decide on definitions of development? Are the views of young women ever taken into account? We now often speak about human rights, but what about 'rights of the commons'? This is the interesting idea that there are social and natural resources that belong to everyone on this planet - air, water, oceans, etc. Some state these resources must be kept as common resources, never owned privately, nor commodified into a product to be sold. Is this possible? What kinds of policies are needed to make this a reality? Do any Pacific governments now have policies that move



this forward? Such questions are being asked by many communities as they find their interests pitted against corporate and state interests on issues of foreign exchange earnings and state income as against the wellbeing of forests, oceans, sea-level rise, air quality, fisheries, and biodiversity loss. There's much to discuss here around concepts such as 'ownership', 'stewardship' and 'intergenerational justice' of the environment, a subject of interest also to other young women advocates throughout the GEEJ process.

- **VALUING INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP:** Another issue of concern is on traditional leadership, and young people not being truly valued for their contributions. It was raised as an example that elders tend to make the sole decision where land tenure is concerned. One proposal was that youth leaders should instead be at the front and centre of these discussions as the consequences of land sovereignty and development will be faced by future generations. It was raised that this also manifests as a generational gap where younger advocates are trying to empower youth to take ownership of their land and environment, while some older generations see this as a threat, stating that NGOs and CSOs are 'brainwashing young people'. Young women called for more understanding and support for their contributions to regional development.
- **FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS:** There are very strong, mobilised, and networked national, regional and global youth networks. While many focus on youth-focused analyses, others are insisting on political platforms in all intergovernmental and political spaces because of their constituency, but also explicitly because of intergenerational effects of current development decisions. How can young Pacific women find their places in these movements, and be best enabled by States, CSOs and CROP agencies to do such important development work?

When asked to share specific strategies that Pacific young women advocates use to introduce and strengthen economic and ecological work in their overall life and work, the following was shared:

- Elisha Bano shared from her work with Emerging Leaders Programme in Fiji and her community advocacy with Citizens Constitutional Forum, saying, "(W)e link our sessions to Climate change and environment awareness where relevant as people can relate to these topics. For example:

During community workshops when we ask for groups to present on HUMAN RIGHTS we give one group the topic of Climate Change and ask them to link it to Leadership and Human Rights." DAWN also shared with online participants the details of some Pacific women advocates active in GEEJ-Pacific and DAWN work, including: Leentjie Besoer from Voice of Change in Jiwaka in highland remote PNG working on addressing links between increased child marriage, extractive industries and violence against women. Filomena Tuivanualevu from FWRM making links between SRHR and extractive industries linked to mining in Bua, in Fiji. Lice Coakansiga from PANG doing work on trade policies in the Pacific and their differing effects on women and men. Kathryn Relang for WUTMI in Marshall Islands working strongly on issues of water salinity and access, maternal health, gender and climate justice. There are so many examples of such young women advocates. A strong part of growing PY-WLA and wider feminist movement work must be to affirm, support, and amplify work of such South women leaders, to add more to these numbers, and to build active networks and solidarity between their various work on gender, social, economic, and ecological justice.

- **FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS:** One of the advantages of inter-linkage analysis frameworks is that they enable diverse groups to find their own entry points into issues that they may not consider their primary work, but that in the end are actually integral to core human rights, social justice, economic, and ecological concerns. GEEJ advocates come from very different trade justice, economic empowerment, feminist and gender equality, LGBTIQ/SOGL, indigenous and other backgrounds. Using interlinkage approaches, they find complementary and solidarity work with others, and often new and innovative perspectives are revealed.
- **ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES LINKED WITH ECONOMIC JUSTICE:** Rita Norman, a young woman advocate with Wansmolbag in Port Vila, Vanuatu gave a practical example of her inter-linkage work: "In 2011 I was asked to be part of the organizing committee for a climate change competition with youths attending Music class in the WanSmolbag youth centre. In partnership with Live and Learn, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, GIZ, Department of Forestry and Ministry of Health, the Youth Centre held a Mixed



Band Competition around the themes of climate change, sanitation and hygiene, and International Year of the Forest.” She also shared that “today, we understand better than ever before that our health is not only dependent on what happens in the doctor’s office but is determined by the air we breathe, the water we drink and the communities we call home.” Rita also discussed the participative environment project at Wan Smolbag Theatre, including community clean-ups and roles of young children as ‘Environment Community Members’

- **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:** Participative engagement of young people in economic and environmental activities must always take care to work on issues of ‘volunteerism’ and what constitutes ‘work’ and ‘recreation’. Young women must be carefully and fully involved in discussions on the structure and processes of projects, so that they are not in any way exploited, and so that young people’s projects are enabling to the young people engaged in them, and reflective of their needs;
- **WORKING ON TRANSPARENCY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE TO ENABLE POSITIVE ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL DECISIONMAKING:** Annie Cyrus, a young woman advocate working with Transparency Vanuatu raised critical points related to enabling conditions for environmental justice and rights. She wrote that “ecological justice recognises the human responsibility for the wellbeing of the earth”, and that their organisa-

tion mainly uses the term environmental justice, as she is more familiar with it. She noted that in her organisation, workshops are run for young people to educate them on their various rights and responsibilities and also encourage them to fully participate in activities and to promote good governance values to treat everyone fairly, and for a better Vanuatu free from corruption.

- **FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION:** Annie’s contribution is vital as it raises issues of right to information; transparency and good governance as essential for all gender, economic and ecological justice and rights work. It invites a discussion on how much harder it is to fight ‘mal-development’ where there is not transparency and ‘freedom of information’ legislation and policies in place to help find correct information. Also, how many women in communities, including young women such as Annie are already at the frontline to alleviate negative effects of some policy decisions on economic, environment and development issues, yet are the very last consulted by formal decision makers?

## Conclusion

There are many and varied gaps and losses when young Pacific women advocates are not equally included in all political processes, or only in tokenistic ways. As clearly demonstrated here, the skills, knowledge and courage of young women advocates are substantive and critical in ensuring that gender, economic, and ecological justice are not just dreams of diverse Pacific young women, but lived realities.

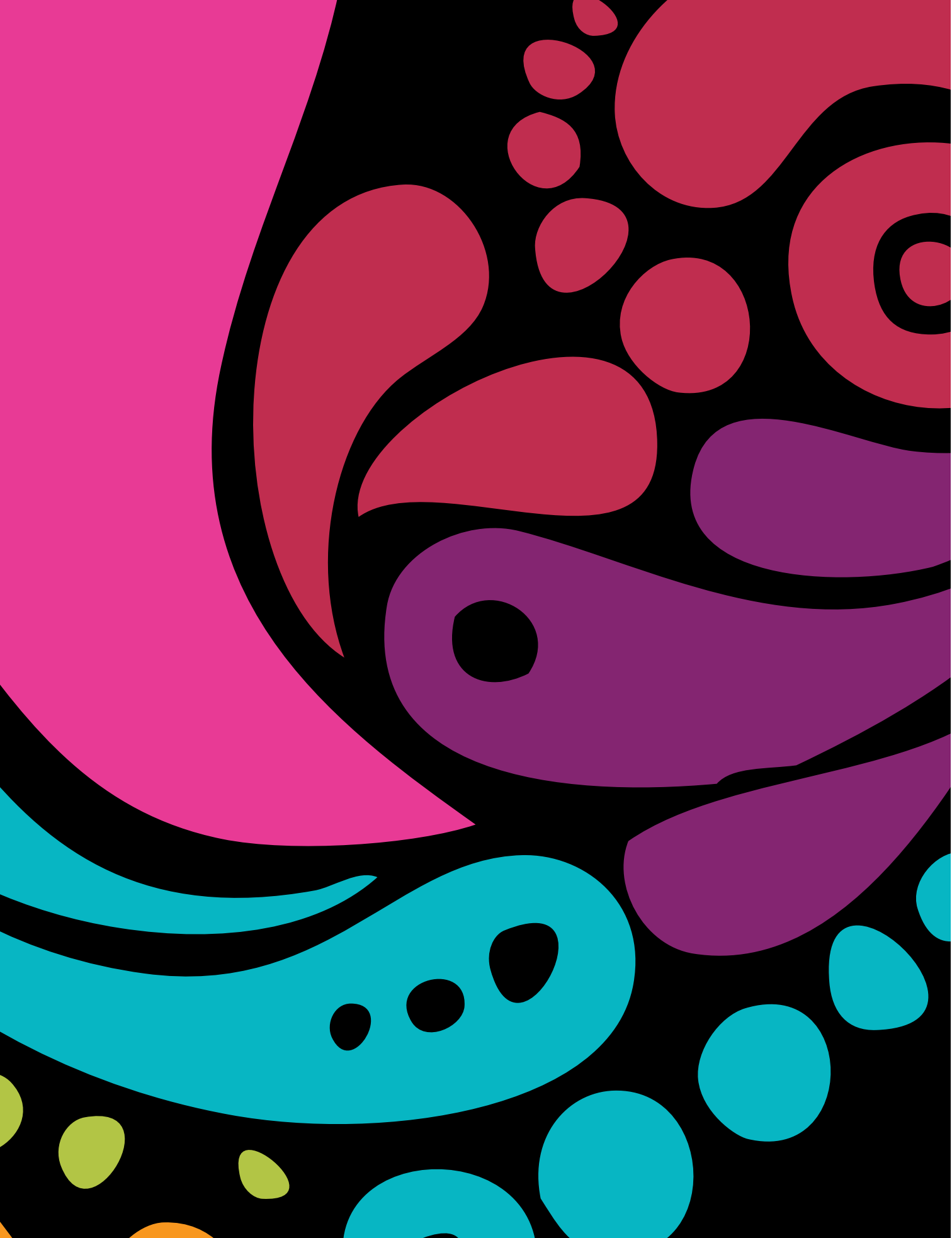
## Further resources:

DAWN website : <http://www.dawnnet.org>

There are sections specifically related to Political ecology and sustainability (PEAS) and also to the interlinked Gender, economic and ecological justice (GEEJ) work. Past combined GEEJ statements of young women advocates from the Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and Africa can be found here.

Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/DAWNfeminist?fref=ts>

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# Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance

## Online Dialogue Issues Series



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