

A platform for sustaining feminist fierceness

Regional Enhancing Agency

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By Louisa Gibbs and Sian Rolls, Pacific Women.

The reasons why the second Pacific Feminist Forum was important are as varied as the 150 participants who attended.

The civil society-led forum brought together diverse, feminist women and men from across the Pacific to share knowledge and experiences, celebrate achievements and strategise for collective action to achieve women's human rights.

The forum, held in Fiji from 20–22 May 2019, was supported by Australia's Pacific Women program through the We Rise Coalition, Fiji Women's Fund, Mama Cash and the UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office.

'The Pacific Feminist Forum space is important – one of those moments that you get women from across the region to come together,' reflected Viva Tatawaqa, Management Collective Member for DIVA for Equality.

'This kind of platform can really be used to move the work of feminism,' she said.

Women creating their own spaces to foster collective action is essential. It is a foundational step toward creating social change for gender equality. Participants highlighted the value in coming together, building a movement and making connections in a dedicated, safe space.

Michelle Reddy, Fund Manager of the Fiji Women's Fund, valued the reach of the forum. 'To hear what other feminists from across the Pacific region are talking about – their challenges, their barriers, things that have worked for them – can be a really good space in terms of learning as a Fund team but also connecting them to partners who may be working in the same areas,' Ms Reddy said.

‘I think overall it is a really good space for sustaining feminist fierceness. It’s one of those moments where you suddenly don’t feel alone,’ she said.

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation takes a faith-based approach in its work to end violence against women. The centre runs prevention programs, supports a network of women human rights defenders and provides crisis services. Advocacy Coordinator Agnes Titus emphasised the importance of making connections to affect change into the future.

‘It is building on the momentum. It enables us – the coming together of women – at the local level, and then at the national level, and then here at the Pacific level,’ Ms Titus said.

‘The more we get together, the more we come into contact with one another and learn from one another it helps us to...think of the many ways that we could deal with our issues, in our local context,’ she said.



Alisi Rabukawaqa at the second Pacific Feminist Forum. Photo credit: Pacific Women Support Unit / Monica Waqanisau.

The forum has a special place in the spectrum of collective women’s action in the Pacific, creating the space for exploring ideas leading to personal growth and attitude change.

Alisi Rabukawaqa from Fiji, who attended both the 2016 and 2019 forums, called it an ‘amazing space.’

‘I love the challenge of having to constantly communicate in a way that is inclusive of feminists across different cultures of Oceania, of LGBTQI, of people with disabilities and many other intersectionalities; this is no easy feat and not many forums actively try and ensure this level of solidarity in their movements,’ Ms Rabukawaqa said.

‘If anything, it may be a key niche of the Pacific Feminist Forum.’

Rodney Simai of Wide Bay Conservation Association in Papua New Guinea added: ‘Everyone has their own worth, they have their own value and they have their own unique beauty. And as feminists, we try to make the world see their best worth.’

‘I really wish that one fine day things may change... everyone should have equal rights and equal recognition in society.’

This story has been developed for the Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2019. It features an event supported by several Pacific Women-funded initiatives and partners. For more information about Pacific Women’s support for initiatives across the region, refer to the interactive map: <https://pacificwomen.org/map/>