

Alisia Evans, Host, Producer and Broadcaster

Fiji

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~ Alisia Evans

Meet Alisia Evans, the host of FemLINKPACIFIC'S breakfast show Morning Waves. She's only been volunteering with the organisation for nine months but has already come to appreciate the power and importance of feminist community media. She shares her journey as a young woman producer and broadcaster, so far.

Tell us a little bit about yourself...

I am half-English and half-Samoan but born here in Fiji. I lived here until I was seven when my family moved to the United Kingdom (UK). I lived there until I was 23 and moved back to Fiji last April. I started primary school in Nabua and then moved to Saint Anne's. I finished the rest of my education in the UK and have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Geography from Lancaster University.

For my undergraduate dissertation I came back to Fiji to do research on personal identity and material culture in the Pacific. This is where my exposure to development happened and where I came to know more about

the other side of Fiji – the level of poverty, increase in squatter-settlements, et cetera. My thinking, career wise, was really shaped by my experiences in Fiji.

On joining FemLINKPACIFIC...

I connected with FemLINKPACIFIC through my uncle who works with the Pacific Conference of Churches and knew Sharon [Bhagwan Rolls, FemLINKPACIFIC's Executive Director] by reputation. He mentioned my name to her and she said for me to come by FemLINKPACIFIC's Community Media Centre and see what's available [in terms of volunteering and employment].

And so I came down, filled a form and got a call back a week later! On my first day they asked me if I'd like to read the news. I was like "oh my God, I have never spoken on radio before...I don't know how to speak on radio". So I kind of panicked but then thought to myself that even though this is a completely different environment, why not go for it? Jump in! So I read the news and I felt like I had the bug for it. So for the last nine months I've been hosting Morning Waves, FemTalk 89FM's breakfast show, five days a week. I've really learnt more about feminism here. I've always been aware about feminism but had never really been involved in the activism side of it. Of course I learnt about the women suffragettes in the UK at school but its great seeing it in a modern way in the 21st Century. Here, I'm learning about what it means to contribute to women's equality and rights in the Pacific.

On the difference between mainstream and community radio...

In the UK we have the BBC and so many other radio channels, broadcasting mainstream music and radio documentaries on global issues which cater to a wide variety of audience. But for Fiji, because we have a smaller population, I think community radio has the potential to be extremely powerful.

I think the programmes that we produce for community radio are important. Both Sharon and Shirley [Tagi of FemLINKPACIFIC] have worked for commercial or mainstream media and they have seen first-hand the commercialisation of it and how radio is determined by the advertisers. It's all money, money, money. It doesn't really cater for that woman who works 9-5 and comes home in the afternoon and cooks for the family and it doesn't really focus on the issues that local people are experiencing every day. I think because Fiji is one of the lower-middle incomes countries, I guess the Pacific as a whole is, in terms of development and raising awareness, the role of civil

societies, NGOs is greater. I think they can have a bigger influence on development and community radio as a part of that can be critical because it represents the people – it literally is their voice!

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

It has been really cool! The other young women in the office have had some similar experiences to mine but at the same time have also had very different experiences. I only had seven years to experience living in Fiji and the rest of my formative years was over in the UK. So we had different environments that we grew up in. But at the same time, we're all roughly around the same age and we all have the same goal – to speak for women who can't speak for themselves – and trying to change something that we feel is very important as young women. It's fun working with each other and joking with each other.

I work closely with Mere [Moto, one of FemLINKPacific's Community Media Officers and host of the CSO Hour] who joined FemLINKPACIFIC after me and she is always a riot! We do interviews for each other, we help each other with the production and share ideas. It's an enjoyable process.

In naming some of the most memorable interviews...

There's been a few gems along the way. Just recently we covered the West Papua Solidarity march in Suva. That was cool for me because I first learnt about West Papua back in the UK when I interned for an African-based NGO. The Free West Papua campaign opened their head office in Oxford in the same building as ours. I got to meet Benny Wenda and learn about the human rights violations in West Papua. Coming here to the Pacific and seeing all this awareness raising is amazing. And because it was by other Pacific islanders like myself, I thought okay...I can relate to them, they feel the same way as me. I have also done interviews on West Papua with other NGO members.

The radio marathon was also pretty cool. I got to interact more with colleagues here at FemLINKPACIFIC, other producers and broadcasters, who I wouldn't normally get to meet because they do the weekend shift and I do the weekday ones. Regina Rakacikaci, who hosts the weekend show, is involved with Youth Champs for Mental Health [a youth-based advocacy group on mental health] and she was sharing with me how she and the group had gone to communities in the Western Division a couple of weeks ago to

talk about mental issues. I got to understand the other broadcasters at a more personal level and that was pretty cool, as well as the fact that it was 24-hours broadcast! That challenged us to push through the sleep barrier.

Lastly, I have been part of radio documentary production for women in politics where we looked at the experiences of various women in last year's general elections. I interviewed a couple of women in government and parliament right now. At first it was daunting because these women are heads of departments in the government or the Speaker of the House for example, but at the same time, during those interviews I was also able to relate to them as women and not just as public figures. It was good to overcoming those barriers and relate to them as just people.

On her stay in Fiji and the Pacific...

I do plan to stay in Fiji for a while and continue this work. I am really happy where I am right now despite just stumbling upon community media. Even though the development sector is where I always wanted to be in my career, I never really thought of community media or gender equality as way of working for development. I'm not opposed to other kinds of work but I think it's a really exciting time to be in development in Fiji and the Pacific. Perhaps in the future, when I have more experience and am a bit more settled here in Fiji, I would like to travel across the Pacific and see what's happening in other countries in terms of development.

About FemLINKPACIFIC

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

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

In February 2015, the organisation added another milestone to its growing list when it celebrated the technical expansion of FemTALK 89FM Suva to cover the Navua to Nausori corridor of Viti Levu by boosting the transmission power

to 300 watt (it used to be 100). This enables FemTALK 89FM Suva to reach communities in some of the most densely populated areas between Navua and Nausori.

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

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