Climate change, gender and the Pacific

Civil society and national women’s machineries participants at the Pacific Partnerships to Strengthen Gender, Climate Change Response and Sustainable Development conference, Nadi, 2014. Credit: UN Women/Ellie van Boaren.

With the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) conference in Samoa just around the corner, it’s essential that key climate change and gender issues from the Pacific region make it onto the international agenda.

Achieving this requires a joint effort; combining the different skills, contacts and knowledge of civil society organisations, national women’s machineries and government representatives from across the region.

This was precisely the motivation behind the “Pacific Partnerships to Strengthen Gender, Climate Change Response and Sustainable Development” conference.

Held in Nadi, Fiji, from June 9 to 13, the event was supported by a wide range of Pacific and international organisations, including UN Women. It fostered ideas and encouraged the sharing of experiences in an effort to help build the capacity of all groups when it comes to negotiating on the international stage — from identifying opportunities to using the language of the international development sector.

The first two days focused on civil society with national women’s machineries joining for days three and four. Day five was reserved for a high-level meeting that added government ministers and regional leaders to the mix.

The meeting produced two outcome statements: a combined partnership statement by government, civil society, major groups and social movements; and one specifically from civil society organisations.

Pacific women in pictures

They say a picture paints a thousand words, which makes photos an essential tool in raising awareness about gender equality and women’s empowerment.

UN Women has an ever-growing collection of images that reflect the many faces of women in the Pacific, as well as the organisation’s work in the region.

Many of these photos are already on display through the UN Women Asia-Pacific Flickr web page, with more albums being added all the time.

Opening a new chapter

Welcome to the July issue of the “UN Women in the Pacific” newsletter. It’s our way of keeping in touch; spreading the word about our programmes, our staff, our partners and more.

Despite the departure of our representative, Elzira Sagynbaeva, earlier this month it is very much business as usual here at the Fiji MCO.

As such, in this issue you’ll find articles about the our field work in a number of countries, including Samoa’s first Family Law Forum, the Ending Violence in Samoa Roundtable event and Doreen Buettner’s mission to the Republic of the Marshall Islands. You can also find out more about some of our partners and staff.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Elzira for the work she has done during her time here. The office continues to consolidate the gains achieved during her tenure and we look towards the future with confidence and optimism.

Welder Mtisi
Officer in Charge
UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office
Established in 2001 by eight women who had experienced violence and wanted to help other survivors, the Kafe Urban Settlers Women’s Association (KUSWA) has expanded to include more than 1,000 members from many different ethnic groups around Papua New Guinea. The organisation focuses on raising awareness of women’s and children’s rights and court processes, providing training and referrals, and advocating with service providers on survivors’ behalf.

Several representatives of New Zealand’s family court system presented to and participated in the forum, sharing lessons learned in the 30 years since New Zealand first set up their family court. Samoa’s system is closely modelled on the New Zealand one.

Jointly organised by UN Women, the Samoan Judiciary and the Samoa Law Commission, the forum was a deemed a success by everyone involved and UN Women’s regional human rights and programme adviser, Doreen Buettner, says it was fantastic to see such open and frank discussions.

“Samoan is leading the way in the Pacific with its Family Court and Family Violence Court, so we are hoping that other Pacific Island countries and territories will keep a close eye on them and learn from their approach.”

http://bit.do/H3aE

Kafe Urban Settlers Women’s Association

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The organisation focuses on raising awareness of women’s and children’s rights and court processes, providing training and referrals, and advocating with service providers on survivors’ behalf.

KUSWA is often called upon to participate in community mediation in order to give women a voice in decision-making processes at community levels.

In November 2013 KUSWA hosted a mass awareness campaign in Henganofi District, including a march calling for the protection of women and girls and the elimination of violence, which attracted more than 1500 people.

Partner type: Pacific Regional Ending Violence against Women Facility Fund grantee.

Project: Promoting gender equality, access to services and reducing violence against women.

Country: Papua New Guinea

Dates: April 2013-April 2015

Total reached: 2,000
In September 1995 representatives of 189 countries came together for the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The resulting Platform for Action is considered the defining framework, and provides a clear roadmap, for the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights. Almost 20 years later it remains a source of guidance and inspiration.

Much has been achieved since then in terms of social, political and economic rights and reforms for women and girls around the world, but there is still a long road ahead if we are to fulfill the promise of the Beijing agenda.

The 20th anniversary of Beijing provides an opportunity to renew commitments and once again mobilise public and political support to make certain that gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to the global conversation around future sustainable development.

Implementing the platform requires that countries develop local strategies or national plans of action, involving changes in values, attitudes, practices and priorities at all levels. Pacific governments have been actively engaged with the Beijing Platform for Action from the start, having already developed the Pacific Platform for Action, which provides Pacific specific recommendations for action in key areas. Many of these have formed the basis for gender equality strategies in the region.

In the countdown to the 20th anniversary, Pacific Island countries and territories have been completing national and regional surveys to highlight achievements and challenges in achieving gender equality. These surveys will provide in-depth country and regional data to inform future sustainable development goals and commitments to advancing gender equality.

http://bit.do/H3sg

From the Pacific to California

Although normally based in Suva, taking maternity leave in California gave UN Women’s Melissa Alvarado the opportunity to address the Greater Los Angeles chapter of the US National Committee at their June meeting.

Melissa is the programme specialist for ending violence against women at the Fiji MCO and shared her insights into how violence affects women and girls in the Pacific.

Few women in the Pacific report violence because they are afraid of the shame and blame that could follow. If they do seek help, it is usually in the form of family friends and community leaders, as opposed to police or health experts.

While the importance of primary prevention is a reasonably new idea in the Pacific, Melissa stressed how important it is to stop violence before it starts, especially through educational programmes for children. Childhood experiences of violence have shown to be one of the strongest risk factors of adult violence, which is why boys and girls who are abused are often likely to become perpetrators or victims of violence as adults.

She pointed to the different levels of violence across countries that show it is not inevitable and is preventable. UN Women works to challenge the social barriers that cause women not to talk or seek help, as well as to invest in those who are hardest to reach.

http://bit.do/unzS
Samoa’s Ombudsman calls for action

As the speaker at UN Women’s Ending Violence in Samoa (EViS) Roundtable event in July, Maiava Iulai Toma called on the country’s churches and village councils to play their part in ending violence against women and girls.

As Samoa’s Ombudsman and the person who oversees the newly established Human Rights Institute, Maiava has already proven to be a strong male advocate against domestic violence and the event provided him with the perfect platform.

“Men who resort to violence in the home must be held to account and helped to change their ways,” he said. “The village council must step up to the plate here with the authority and influence that it possesses to confront perpetrators; and to lend its considerable weight to the process of change.”

Maiava also pointed to churches, which he says are ideally placed to enlighten minds and encourage change.

“As part of the workshops, market vendors associations in Honiara and Auki in Solomon Islands from April to June, and in Suva and Nausori in Fiji in April and May.

Next step for Markets for Change

Now that UN Women’s Markets for Change project has been officially launched in Solomon Islands and Fiji, the organisation has started rolling out its series of workshops for market vendors.

More than 200 market vendors have so far participated in the series of three “Getting Started” workshops, which are aimed at supporting them to work together, decide on their priorities, and take action together to make positive changes in their lives.

One of the immediate benefits from the workshops has been the decision to form market vendors associations in Honiara and Auki, as well as to re-start associations at Suva and Nausori markets. These associations will help give market vendors a voice in market management, especially women, who have largely been absent from decision-making processes.

As part of the workshops, market vendors complete a “mapping” exercise of their local market, asking a wide variety of vendors what processes. The workshops were conducted in Honiara and Auki in Solomon Islands from April to June, and in Suva and Nausori in Fiji in April and May.

Human rights in the north-west Pacific

Last month Doreen Buettner, UN Women’s Regional Human Rights and Programme Adviser at the Fiji Multi-Country Office, headed to the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) as part of a joint mission focused on harmonised human rights and implementation. Located in the north-west Pacific, RMI’s 55,000 people are spread across 29 coral atolls and five islands.

“This was my first mission to RMI and I didn’t really know what to expect. The post WWII United States’ nuclear testing in the area may have been a long time ago but the long-term impacts are shocking. It was such a traumatic event and the effects can particularly be seen in both women’s reproductive health and the land itself.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this, the Marshallese people seem to have a real interest in women’s issues and a hunger to discuss them.

We looked at the Universal Periodic Review as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The participants were especially interested in discussing Article 6 of CEDAW, which deals with the sexual exploitation of sex workers.

This led to much larger discussions about morality, women’s economic empowerment and the root causes of sex work. At the beginning these exchanges were quite tense and then the focus shifted to the lack of opportunities in RMI for women and issues such as a lack of income-generating activities for women, their social status and protection from child abuse.

All the participants, especially the men, expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to discuss these root causes, which had helped them rather than just seeing the sex workers as a problem for their country.”
Ending sexual violence in conflict

A call from the British High Commission in Suva for signatures of support for a global call to end sexual violence in conflict proved very popular. In the end they needed two canvases to contain them all.

The canvas, emblazoned with "#TimeToAct", was on display during the Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict held in London last month, and was part of an 84-hour global relay of events.

The signatures represented a wide variety of government staff, international organisations, diplomatic missions, civil society organisations and the public – as well as UN Women staff.

Co-chaired by Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and William Hague, the British Foreign Secretary, the summit was the largest of its kind ever held. It brought together 1,700 delegates from 129 countries, including 79 ministers.

One of the results was the launch of an international protocol on documenting and investigating sexual violence in conflict, providing guidelines for better evidence collection in order to help protect populations, increase conviction and deter future perpetrators.

Download the protocol at http://bit.do/HY3H

Audrey Micah Manu

Programme Coordinator – Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific (AGJP) Programme
Honiara Office, Solomon Islands

What is the most satisfying part of your job?
I am constantly meeting smart and talented people with ideas and stories to share. The feedback received from stakeholders, individuals and partners on the support provided by the AGJP Programme has been very fulfilling and satisfying. It gives you that extra energy and passion to go that extra mile!

What is the biggest challenge facing women in Solomon Islands?
Solomon Islands women operate their businesses and work in a male-dominated culture. They have minimal representation in decision-making, violence against women is endemic and legal services are not readily accessible to women. Getting the right mix of policy and action to bring about positive change is, in my opinion, a challenge facing women and girls in Solomon Islands.

Who is your mentor?
My most memorable mentor was my father. He has taught me to believe in myself and to be faithful in whatever I do. He was always cheerful and ready to share his infinite wisdom on most subjects but never pushed his ideas. He listens and provides sound fatherly advice. His advice and wisdom has moulded and shaped me to what I am today.

My body, my right – Tonga celebrates Orange Day

Tongans celebrated Orange Day – an international day of awareness around ending violence against women and girls – for the first time on June 25 with a luncheon at Davina House.

Hosted by the Talitha Project – a UN Women Pacific Regional Ending Violence against Women Facility Fund grantee – the event was themed “My body, my right”, promoting a woman’s and girl’s right to decide what happens to her body and her life. It was attended by foreign diplomats, members of parliaments and representatives from a variety of women’s organisations.

Tonga’s Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Lord Fakafanua, said the facts on violence against women and children were disturbing and called for more work to be done to eliminate it.

“Please cease the violence whenever you can, wherever it occurs, before it happens.”

Vannesa Heleta, founder of the Talitha Project, pointed out that no women or girl should ever go through a violent moment in her life and it is important that people understand it is a crime that needs to be stopped.

The Talitha Project works with women between the ages of 10 and 25, aiming to give young women and girls an opportunity to have a voice and make informed choices. It currently works in five areas ranging from leadership and political participation to gender-based violence and climate change.

www.talithaprojecttonga.org
endviolence.un.org/orangeday.shtml