

Fiji Young Women's Forum Outcomes Statement

1st Fiji Young Women's Forum on Young Women's Participation and Representation in Political Spaces

8th – 10th November, 2013

The Fiji Young Women's Forum convened by Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA), Young Women Producers and Broadcasters- FemlinkPacific and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), brought together young women leaders and activists aged 18 – 30 years from Fiji to discuss barriers and strategies to young women's meaningful participation and representation in Fiji's democratisation process.

We, young Fijian women leaders including transwomen, women living with disabilities, LGBTQI women, rural women, mental health consumers and young women in all our diversities affirm our power as implementers and contributors of positive change, decision makers, partners and leaders of today and the future. Our strength is in our numbers and in our diversity.

The forum builds on the initial Fiji Women's Forum and a rich tradition of activism of Fijian women throughout our national history and is committed to representing young women throughout the country. We acknowledge and recognise the work of the many women who have gone before us and the gains that they have made for young women today. We note the rich history of women's participation in political spaces including social movements and we call for more recognition of this hard fraught journey.

Young Women's Political Participation and Representation

The Fiji Young Women's Forum is deeply concerned with the under-representation of women, especially young women in decision making bodies. Young women face double discrimination for both being young and female and are often excluded in decision making processes, almost entirely absent from local, national and regional decision making and leadership roles. There is an urgent need to correct the historical and cultural exclusion of young women in decision making and political spaces.

The Fiji Young Women's Forum urges local and national governments, political parties, private and public sectors to implement Temporary Special Measures to increase women's representation and participation in decision making. This will enable our State to comply with CEDAW which Fiji ratified in 1995. The Forum further asserts that transformative change is not just about the policies of parties but also party structures that are inclusive and human rights based.

Rights based, Participatory Democratisation Processes

We value and advocate for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with Accountability, that people's human rights cannot be fully realized without accountability of the injustices that have been committed.

The Fiji Young Women's Forum affirms that Democracy, the Rule of Law and the full enjoyment of one's Human Rights are closely linked.

We call for adherence to the principles of democracy including the separation of powers between the executive, the judiciary and the legislative.

The forum affirms that religion and state must remain separate

The Fiji Young Women's Forum is deeply disappointed that young women and the citizens of Fiji were not consulted in the development of the States' budget. We remind the State of their obligation and accountability to translate gender equality, transparency and human rights commitments into legislation, policy and budget allocations and to make these norms and standards the guiding principles of our society.

The forum participants highlighted the importance of having legitimate participatory and inclusive processes in the development of the constitution and national budget.

We call for the reinstatement of the People's Constitution which was drafted by the Constitutional Commissioners headed by Professor Yash Ghai with over 7000 submissions including groups and individual submissions from all over Fiji.

We call on the State's alignment to principles and processes of Free and Fair Elections, such as the levelling of the current unequal playing field and that rules and regulations are not oppressive to political parties and independents. We demand that the elections process is transparent and that citizens, candidates and all other stakeholders are informed in a timely manner regarding electoral developments.

We highlight the importance of the role of the media in a sustainable democracy and call for the removal of oppressive laws and decrees. We note the invisibility of women in the media as powerful agents of change and call for balanced and accurate reporting and documenting of women free of negative stereotypical biases. We note the role of community media and alternative media in facilitating the flow of information.

Sustainable Development

The Young Women's Forum affirms that Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights must be realised. We stress that bodily integrity and autonomy is at the core of all work on SRHR, we call for a comprehensive sexual education, information, services and commodities that is available to everyone including members of the LGBTQI community and persons with disabilities.

We are currently living in a time of escalated social, economic, financial and environmental crisis we urgently seek full and decent employment and economic empowerment for all young Fijian women. We call for the meaningful participation of young women in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of development goals, policies and indicators at all levels.

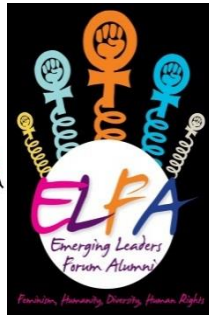
The young women's forum is deeply concerned with the rapid expansion of the extractive industry in Fiji. We call on the State to consider sustainable development options that do not further exacerbate widespread environmental degradation as this further commodifies and compounds the burden on

young women, social relationships, communities and societies at large, increasing the labour required meet their basic needs. We are further concerned with the likely SRHR issues such as sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies and the trafficking of local and foreign women that emerge in relation to sudden increase in the population of male transient workers in remote mining communities.

We acknowledge the support and solidarity of the broader women's movement in Fiji and encourage them to continue to champion the inclusion of the diversity of young women; in particular transwomen especially when in it comes to difficult spaces and circumstances.

We commit to work together in solidarity towards gender equality, participatory democracy, the rule of law and the meaningful participation of young women in local, national and regional decision making bodies.

For more information contact Tavai Bale: 9990869



5th Fiji Young Women's Forum 2018 Declaration

Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision making in Fiji, including formal and informal governance processes. As a result women including young women do not have equal influence over policy decisions that affect our lives. While the country prepares itself for the next General Election in 2018, it is critical that the voices of young women are heard throughout Fiji's development cycle.

Young women are not a homogenous group. We face multiple forms of discrimination because of our gender, age, race, religion, disability¹, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, location as well as social and economic status.

The Fiji Young Women's' Forum (FYWF) aims to create safe and inclusive spaces for all young women to increase and progress their political leadership through meaningful and effective participation in Fiji's communities, decision making bodies and national processes. The FYWF is convened by Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA) and femLINKpacific. Support is provided by Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) as Secretariat.

The forum builds on the initial Fiji Young Women's Forum of 2013 and the rich tradition of activism and feminism by Fijian women throughout our national herstory and is committed to representing young women throughout the country. We recognise the work of the many women who have gone before us and the gains that they have made for young women today. We acknowledge and respect the rich herstory of women's participation in political spaces including social movements and we call for more recognition of this hard fraught journey.

The 5th Forum brought together 19 diverse young women leaders and activists aged 18–35 years from Vanua Levu over 3 days to discuss barriers and strategies to young women's meaningful participation and representation in Fiji's local and national governance processes.

¹ Including psychosocial disability

We, young Fijian women leaders, including transwomen, young women with disabilities, young women of both religious and non-religious beliefs, young lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer and intersex women, aspiring young women politicians, young women sex workers, rural young women, young women mental health consumers *and young women in all our diversities*, affirm our power as implementers and contributors of positive change, decision makers, partners and leaders of today and the future. Our strength is in our numbers and in our diversity.

This declaration below represents the voices of these young women. It captures our lived realities and calls for immediate action to the following demands:

YOUNG WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

We acknowledge our lack of voice at home, in communities including in traditional structures such as land owning units as well as the work place. Lack of financial independence, limited economic opportunities, as well as educational qualifications also affects our autonomy to confidently engage in decision making in these spaces.

Recommendations:

- FYWF strongly recommends the inclusion of young women in all our diversities within formal and informal decision making spaces.
- Awareness training and capacity building workshops including leadership programmes must reach us in our communities.
- We must have access to mentoring, coaching and accompaniment strategies to support young women to realise their human rights including freedom of speech and expression.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Our economic security is linked to structural and systematic barriers such as access to equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work.

We also recognise that employers do not take into consideration the health needs and wellbeing of diverse young women.

Due to its unregulated nature, it is important to recognise that young women working in the formal and informal sector in Fiji often cannot easily access social security provisions including Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) as well as paid maternity leave.

Recommendations:

We call upon the State as well as trade unions, the national employment centre and community leaders to recognise and support young women's labour force participation including:

- Providing adequate resources to ensure young women have access to educational opportunities to support their professional development in the work place
- Collaboration between private sector, government and women's rights organisations in terms of addressing gender inequality and social norms in the workplace including occupational health and safety issues, sexual harassment and formalising grievance processes
- There is a need for employers to take into account the needs of young women with different forms of disabilities and provide a disability inclusive environment such as the installation of Job Access with Speech (JAWS)

INFRASTRUCTURE

We raised issues in terms of accessing basic services including:

- Poor road and drainage conditions resulting in flooding
- Poor and irregular public transportation services including accessibility of bus services and technical maintenance issues related to e-ticketing systems in rural and remote communities
- High cost of maritime transportation as well as a lack of safety equipment, non-compliance of safety regulation by boat operators and shipping companies
- Insufficient water supplies including the provision of water trucks into communities, as well as a lack of communication by the Fiji Water Authority on water cuts which impact the ability of community members to practice good sanitation and hygiene
- Geographical location for communities is a barrier to connect to the electricity grid

Recommendations:

- The State and service providers must recognise and support the voice of young women to be able to address these issues through consultative processes including consultations in communities and villages
- The State must ensure its budgetary processes are in line with the National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action and takes into consideration the needs of rural and remote communities including young women's access to basic services.

HEALTH

We identified several barriers to accessing adequately resourced health services including:

- Lack of health practitioners including well-trained doctors and nurses to provide quality health services
- Discrimination by health practitioners in terms of gender, race and disability
- Lack of prescription drugs, ambulance and other equipment in health centres and hospitals

- Poor sanitary and hygiene conditions of health centres
- Language barriers
- Long waiting times
- Channels for complaints are not accessible to the needs of the public particularly for persons living with disabilities

Recommendations:

- Greater collaboration between women's rights organisations and health practitioners through gender sensitisation workshops and trainings highlighting the connections between women's rights and access to quality health services including sexual, reproductive health and rights
- Young women must be supported to work with community leaders to undergo basic emergency first aid training
- Budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Health must reflect and be responsive to the needs of rural, remote, maritime and urban communities in terms of accessing health services

Background:

FYWF builds on the intergenerational The Fiji Women's Forum, which was first convened in 2012, as well as the rich tradition of activism and feminism by Fijian women throughout our national herstory. The mission of FYWF is to increase and progress young women's political leadership in an effective, meaningful and inclusive participation in Fiji's communities, legislative bodies and national process. FYWF is built on the guiding principles of mutual respect, active participation, transparency and good governance, accountability, gender sensitivity, respect and appreciation for human rights and diversity.

FYWF has successfully convened four national forums with a combined total of over 100 young diverse women. These young women actively participated in the lead up to Fiji's 2014 national elections in their local communities. These included nationwide distribution and awareness of the My Guide to Voting (young women's voter guide) and the forum declaration to political parties and other stakeholders. Following the first national forum (November 2013), FYWF noted the importance of State obligation and accountability to translate gender equality, transparency and human rights into legislation, policy and budget allocations. This process is critical for young women to be able to not only understand their needs reflected in the policies but at the same time the State is fulfilling its responsibilities.

For more information contact:

*Alisia Evans alisia@femlinkpacific.com
Tima Tamoi timatamoi30@gmail.com
Chandra Fisi'iahi fj.alumni.elf@gmail.com
Mamta Chand mamta@fwrn.org.fj*

