

FNUNIKUA

#EachforEqual



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ADVANCING WOMEN ACADEMICS: FROM WORDS TO ACTION



Earlier articles in FNUNIKUA have explored the growing participation of women in higher education (*Women in higher education: still work to be done, March 2019*), and the continuing underrepresentation of women in science and engineering (*Advancing women in*

STEM, September 2019).

Much has been written over the years about the obstacles that female academics face in advancing their careers. Nearly 130 years after New Zealand became the first country to give women the right to vote in 1893, the world continues to be scarred by sexism and misogyny – as highlighted so graphically by the recent 23-year sentence handed down to the former film producer, Harvey Weinstein, for rape and sexual assault. A range of other factors also hold women back, including societal attitudes, organisational design, and unequal division of labour between the genders when it comes to household chores and child-raising.

Progressive institutions like universities have been seeking to “level the playing field”, by providing flexible working time, offering career breaks for maternity leave, opening crèches and after-school care facilities on campus and revising academic promotions criteria to eliminate gender bias. But if universities are to go beyond well-meaning words and ad hoc measures to increase gender equality, they need to commit themselves to be held to account for their performance.

A number of major corporations have recently sought to expand their “triple bottom line” accounting to begin systematically reporting their performance in reducing gender imbalances. Unilever UK is an example of current best practice. It provides detailed data on the gender pay gap (expressed in terms of both mean pay and median pay), as well as data on the gender balance by pay quartiles (see Figure 1).

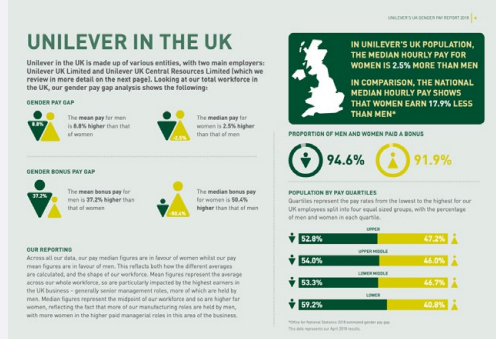


Figure 1: Gender pay gap and staff gender balance

To mark International Women’s Day 2020, Fiji National University has committed to follow this example and produce an annual gender report, to make itself publicly accountable for fulfilling the promise to achieve gender balance in pay and career progression. The Human Resources Division has produced provisional statistics, which will be further analysed for the final 2020 report.

These data highlight the scale of the challenge. In terms of overall staff numbers, Table 1 shows that over the last three years, the gender balance has marginally improved, with women now comprising 47.3% of the staff population.

Table 1: University staff (headcount)

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	FEMALE %
2017	2,284	1,246	1,038	45.4
2018	2,193	1,155	1,038	47.3
2019	2,033	1,074	959	47.2

However, breaking these figures down by function reveals that women are in a slight majority in terms of professional services staff (Table 2), but a significant minority in terms of academic staff (Table 3). The underrepresentation of women academic staff is a cause for serious concern.

Table 2: Professional services staff (headcount)

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	FEMALE %
2017	1,360	663	697	51.3
2018	1,294	603	691	53.4
2019	1,214	569	645	53.1



University figures shows that women are in a slight majority in terms of professional services staff.

Table 3: Academic staff (headcount)

	Total	Male	Female	Female %
2017	924	583	341	36.9
2018	899	552	347	38.6
2019	819	505	314	38.3

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the academic staff balance by college. It shows a familiar pattern which is repeated at many universities around the world: the College of Business, Hospital and Tourism Studies (Business) is broadly balanced, with 48.5% female academic staff. The College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science (Medicine) is predominantly female (64.6%), as is the College of Humanities and Education (Education) with 58.8% female academic staff.

In contrast, the two science and engineering colleges are overwhelmingly male, with the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Agriculture) having only 37.1% female staff and the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (Engineering) even lower at 23.0%. The National Training and Productivity Centre (Training Centre), which provides in-service training courses for industry, is also predominantly male, with female staff accounting for only 36.7% of its staff base. Because of the large size of these three academic units, their relatively low female academic staff numbers skew the balance for the University as a whole.

Table 4: Academic gender balance by college/centre

College	2017		2018		2019	
	Male	Fe- male	Male	Fe- male	Male	Fe- male
Agriculture	66.3%	33.7%	62.0%	38.0%	62.9%	37.1%
Business	53.3%	46.7%	51.8%	48.2%	51.5%	48.5%
Engineer- ing	79.0%	21.0%	77.7%	22.3%	77.0%	23.0%
Education	44.6%	55.4%	39.7%	60.3%	41.2%	58.8%
Medicine	33.7%	66.3%	34.6%	65.4%	35.4%	64.6%
Training Centre	64.9%	35.1%	65.4%	34.6%	63.3%	36.7%
Total	58.7%	41.3%	57.2%	42.8%	57.1%	42.9%

Moving on to the gender balance by the level of seniority, Table 5 shows that 25.0% of the senior management (deans, directors, pro-vice-chancellors and vice-chancellor) are female, while 40% of the middle management in the tier below are female. This could be interpreted in two ways: one the one hand, there is a better gender balance in the management “pipeline”, but on the other, the low representation of women

in the current senior management team suggests there are still obstacles preventing women reaching the highest levels.

Table 5: Managerial gender balance

	Male	Female	Female %
Senior management	12	4	25.0%
Middle management	30	20	40.0%

Table 6 shows the gender balance by academic rank for the higher education stream. As a dual-sector university, Fiji National University has separate career streams for higher education staff and those involved in delivering sub-degree “technical and vocational education and training” (TVET). At the higher education level, Table 6 highlights the worrying pattern in gender balance by rank, with women comprising a majority of staff at the entry ranks of Assistant Lecturer (57.0%) and Lecturer (54.5%), but quickly falling away to become a small minority of the staff in the PhD-qualified Assistant/Associate/Professor ranks.

Table 6: Gender balance by rank (higher education stream)

Professor	10.0%
Associate Professor	30.8%
Assistant Professor	33.7%
Lecturer	54.5%
Assistant Lecturer	57.0%

Table 7 shows the gender balance by rank for the TVET stream. It shows a broadly similar pattern, with the percentage of women declining as seniority increases, although women are underrepresented at every academic rank for TVET. This reflects that the fact that the vast majority of the University’s TVET provision is undertaken by the College of Engineering, Science and Technology and the National Training and Productivity Centre, both academic units with low percentages of women academic staff.

Table 7: Gender balance by academic rank (TVET stream)

Principal Instructor	22.2%
Senior Instructor	23.8%
Instructor	27.3%
Assistant Instructor	21.0%
Tutor	41.9%

Finally, Table 8 sets out the gender pay gaps for different levels of seniority. It defines the gender pay gap as mean female pay expressed as a percentage of mean male salary for the same rank. It shows the most significant gap (85.6%) is at senior management level. The Human Resources Division is currently calculating the gender pay gaps for all academic ranks, and the results in Table 8 are the first to be reported. They highlight the importance of further analysing the data and contextualising them. Because clinical medical staff are on separate salary scales aligned to the Ministry of Health, this skews the gender pay balances for some professorial ranks, and this needs to be taken into account in the annual gender report.

Table 8: Gender pay gap by seniority/rank

	Female Pay Gap (%)
Senior management	85.6%
Middle management	90.0%
Professor	89.4%
Associate Professor	136.7%
Assistant Professor	105.1%

The renowned author of books on business leadership, Robert Sharma, argued that “What gets measured gets managed. What gets measured gets improved.”

It is self-evident that, unless an organisation sets a target and routinely measures whether it is moving towards, or away, from that target, it will never know if it is going in the right direction.

Moving to publishing an annual gender report will allow Fiji National University to be held publicly accountable for its performance in terms of achieving gender parity in pay and gender balance by academic rank and managerial seniority.

Failure to make progress on these targets also provides a call for more concerted action in areas where we are falling short, notably in advancing women academics through the career ranks and addressing the underrepresentation of women in science and engineering.

Professor Nigel Healey
FNU Vice-Chancellor

Honourable Akbar reflects on leadership



Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Rosy Akbar (back, second from left) with staff of FNU at Nasinu Campus.

The Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Rosy Akbar was invited as a guest speaker during the Successful Leaders in Conversation Series held at FNU, to mark International Women’s Day. The two-hour interactive session with the focus on female leadership and challenges was organised by the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching. The Honourable Minister eloquently shared her personal and professional experiences and challenges that gradually moulded her into the leader she has become today.

The secret to success is enjoying what you do

Hon Akbar stressed that the path to leadership was not easy, however, it was achievable through perseverance and the ability to enjoy what one does. “I enjoy every moment of my leadership role and have never looked back from the time I have been appointed as a Minister. I have enjoyed the challenges that came my way,” said Hon Akbar. “I can proudly say that I am enjoying every moment of being a politician.” “I think that’s the secret to success. Enjoy who you are, no matter what position you are in, what socioeconomic status you would generally belong to or what struggles you go through.” Hon Akbar advised the audience that drawing strength from the challenges thrown at you will enable you to affect the lives of those aorund you positively. “If you are depressed or if you are bogged down with your problems and struggles, you will never be able to do justice to any role.” The Minister urged the audience of about 100 staff and students to draw positivity from the simplest of things in life and those around you. “If I am travelling and I see a father holding his child’s hand and helping him cross the road or if I see a woman carrying a bundle of wood on her back – I draw inspiration from them.” “If I see children playing in the mud, I am inspired by them, which takes me back to my childhood days – so again it comes back to the fact that I enjoy every moment of my life.”

Values begin at home

Hon Akbar urged the female audience to stand up for each other. “One woman for another – it is a sensitive issue, but each woman needs to stand up for the next,” said Hon Minister. “Each woman in this generation needs to teach the male child and the female child within their home to respect each other. As women and mothers, if we do this, then we will be bringing in a generation of men and women who develop that respect, patience and virtue.” “If we bring about these qualities, then we will not have a problem with our next generation as men and women will be on equal footing.” Hon Akbar emphasised that teaching such qualities begins with families. “If we fail as families, we will fail our future generations. The values such as equality that we always talk about must start with families.”

Principles of leadership

When asked what principles she has developed over the years as a female lead, which would inspire aspiring female leaders, Hon Akbar urged women to prioritise their goals in life and formulate strategies to achieve them. “Be true and genuine to yourself and understand what you aspire to achieve. It [being a leader] takes away so much out of you, and it even takes a toll on your health, family and private space and this is where having balance is important.” “Without balance, the leadership journey becomes extremely painful and difficult. This is where you need to have those priorities so you can balance your private and work life.” The Minister advised the audience not to rush into things as goals cannot be achieved overnight. She highlighted the need for planning and understanding your needs before setting goals and that it is also important to focus on long term aspirations. “This will be your individual choice, and you need to identify what your strengths are. With these identified, you then need to consider what opportunities are there for you to capitalise on to fulfil your long term goals.”

Hon Akbar urged participants to create opportunities for themselves and never give up when faced with challenges. “But again – be true to yourself and be who you are, and definitely everything will fall into place with your dedication and passion for the job.” “It really should come from your heart what you want to do. You cannot be a fake persona - with this, you will not be a leader.” Learning from past experiences and stepping into the future with renewed energy, new visions and goals, according to the Minister, is an important lesson for everyone. “We don’t give up. This is the most important as many times we think it is the end of the world. This is not going to take you anywhere as the real essence of living life is getting up stronger by learning from the experiences that you go through in life.” “My life is shaped by the experiences that I have gone through. I don’t regret any experience that I have had.” “There are certain things beyond your control but when you keep control of things that are within your means – you can control a lot of things in your life. Step back, analyse the situation and move forward.” “When you let the past haunt you, you are not going to step into the future with a positive mindset,” said Hon Akbar.

Words of advise

Hon Akbar advised the female audience to be more assertive with their choices and decisions. She said the world has already witnessed phenomenal female leaders who are making huge impacts and that the future will see more women emerging as great leaders. “One of the leaders is the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, who recently visited us. She is my inspiration. Very beautiful woman leader and as strong as any man can be,” said Hon Akbar. The Minister reminded the audience that it was their character which needed strength to do the unthinkable. “Have that strength of character and courage to do the right thing.” Hon Akbar added multitasking, compassion and the inherited leadership qualities make women better leaders.



Fortune favours the bold,
says Rogers

On my first day at the Fiji National University (FNU), our lecturer asked me why are we here today. I replied, because I was told I do not have what it takes to be an engineer,” Aurora Rogers reminisced as she walked down the stage in her graduation gown, all smiles and brimming with pride

The 26-year-old graduated with Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) Civil (Pass) from the Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) earlier this month.

“Today is the best day of my life. Once, someone dear to me had hurt me by saying that I will never be able to complete my studies. I took this as a challenge, and today I have proved it wrong,” the new graduate said.

Personal Life

When her parents parted ways in 2004, Rogers was just ten years old. She settled with her younger brother and her determined mother, who was aiming to give both her children better opportunities; mainly when it came to education.

Growing up in a single-parent family set up, gave another reason for Rogers to work harder towards fulfilling her dream.

“Life has taught me a lot. Since a child, I have been seeing and learning a lot from my surroundings. I have seen and experienced poverty and wealth, health and sickness, violence and love,” she continued.

Despite the difficulties, Rogers was encouraged by her mother to aim high. She set her sight on getting a tertiary qualification, eventually settling on a career in Engineering.

“I always wanted to make my mom proud. For me, there is no greater happiness than seeing the women who worked so hard, smile with pride,” she said.

Battling symptoms of Cancer

Life’s greatest challenge for Rogers was when she was diagnosed with cervical cancer symptoms during her third year of studies.

“I had to visit the hospital for tests regularly

and I even had a colonoscopy and biopsy just before my final examinations,” an emotional Rogers added.

The aspiring engineering student mentioned she still sat for her three-hour final examination despite the agonising pain.

“What kept me going was the advice from my mother, who said that God only puts us through tests because he knows well that we will surpass. Nonetheless, as the semester passed, I became better and was cured of all cancer symptoms,” she said smilingly.

Professional Life

Rogers works for Kapadia Consultants Limited, an engineering firm based in Suva.

“As an Engineering Assistant, I work with some designing software like Tekla Tedds and do drafting. I visit the construction sites and also help out in the office to prepare reports, letters and certificates,” she said.

“I would urge those of strong will and determination to study the Civil Engineering programme at FNU. It prepares them to work in the different government agencies and private sectors, to assist in the vision of the development of modern engineering infrastructure for better life of people in the country,” Rogers commented.

Words of wisdom

Rogers is an example of what a person can achieve despite difficulties, if they set their mind, firmly on their goal.

“People who bravely go after what they want are far more successful than those who do not even try,” she said.

Sharing her words of wisdom with other potential students, Rogers said “Students should not get fooled in comparing high school with tertiary studies. They have their ups and downs. Each year that I passed, the next brought another set of potentials to fail.”

“There will be days to party, and there will be days to fool around, but do not fool around with the feelings of your loved ones. They want to see you strive and reach the skies,” she said.

GWF applauds FNU



Graduate Women Fiji’s President (GWF), Maria Ronna Luna Pastorizo-Sekiguchi.

Graduate Women Fiji’s President (GWF), Maria Ronna Luna Pastorizo-Sekiguchi acknowledged FNU’s continuous support in encouraging young women to take up careers in fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Pastorizo-Sekiguchi commended the university in bridging the gender divide while making a presentation on the activities that GWF conducts to promote lifelong education, to improve the status of women and girls and

enable women to effect positive change for a peaceful world.

According to the Head of GWF, tertiary institutions drive towards encouraging equal participation is essential in the rapidly developing world.

“GWF believes in inspiring girls to aspire to take up STEM careers by providing them with safe, supportive and fun environments to learn about STEM subjects and surrounding them with positive female role models, who are successful in STEM,” said Pastorizo-Sekiguchi.

“We thank FNU for partnering with us through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to continue our work in inspiring young females to take up STEM careers.”

Pastorizo-Sekiguchi said FNU has an extensive outreach of campuses located in every part of Fiji and this collaboration will certainly be fruitful in enabling their vision to be realised.

“The organisation cannot achieve its vision alone and that we need as many partners as possible.

“FNU being actively involved in promoting STEM subjects and careers to women and girls – it allows us to work closely together.”

“We are grateful to FNU for providing us with venues to conduct our workshops and training,” said Pastorizo-Sekiguchi.

Dr Prasad juggles mommy duties
and academic role



Dr Ravita Prasad.

It is not always easy for women to manage a demanding career and family life. The daily challenges of juggling both roles can be daunting, but women do it every day. One such person is Dr Ravita Prasad, who is an academic at FNU’s College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST).

Dr Prasad, a Lecturer in Physics, has three children; 10, seven and five years old.

“Being a full-time working mom comes with its fair share of responsibilities, but nothing is impossible when you have a supportive family. My mum and mother-in-law help me whenever and however they can. My husband also plays a key role in managing the household with me. I would say, a supportive family and time management are the two things you may need to come out victorious in your personal and professional life,” she expressed.

Originally from Nausori, Dr Prasad said her approach as a full-time working mother, is having a positive attitude, being humble and keeping priorities in check, both in your professional career and personal life.

“After work, I go home and spend time with my kids. When my kids are asleep, I go to bed and then wake up around 1 am. This is the time I usually do most of my academic writing. It helps me focus and get new ideas,” Prasad added.

The senior academic who was recently recognised with the first-ever CEST Teaching Excellence Award, credits her parents, as being key influencers in her decision to join the

science and mathematics field.

“When I was in primary school, my father would, at times give us interesting mathematics problems to solve. This generated eagerness to learn more at school,” she said.

“My mother always wanted me to become a teacher. Therefore, after completing high school studies, I did a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Physics. I started my career as a secondary school teacher in 2004,” continued Prasad.

“Later, I completed my Post Graduate Certificate in Education to fulfil all the requirements of teaching. After this, I graduated with a Master of Science in Physics programme in 2008 from the University of the South Pacific (USP). I joined the Fiji National University’s Derrick Campus, formerly known as Fiji Institute of Technology, as a Lecturer in 2009,” she added.

Dr Prasad continued to advance her studies, and recently she graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Physics from USP. She highlighted that a healthy work-life balance also depends on the colleagues a female is surrounded with.

“We all should have a leader who understands the challenges that a staff faces, which may be impacting their professional life. I would like to recall a situation in 2016, this is when due to personal commitments, my babysitter was not able to look after my daughter for two months. Our Acting College Dean, Salabogi Mavoa approved my leave without pay with me doing a few work things from home,” she mentioned.

She said gender balance is achieved in the work environment when women are included in decision-making where their opinions are noted and actioned.

“I would like to encourage other male co-workers always to support their female colleagues.

“They juggle work, manage home duties, kids and family relations and some may also be studying.”

Having her career firmly mapped out at an early age, Dr Prasad said much has been done to help inspire women and girls to study and work in science-related fields in recent years.

The Physics Lecturer reiterated that females need to balance the gap of being under-represented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related fields.

“Women and girls should not be scared to go into different paths. If your interest lies in something, go for it. Do your level best and success will come your way,” said Prasad.

Duo highlight importance of gender equality

Amidst the daily humdrum of computer noises and students quietly conversing at tables between the library bookshelves sits Usha Kanta, surrounded by files neatly placed on her table as she types away on her computer.

Kanta's table is located at the entrance of the Fiji National University's (FNU), Labasa Campus Library so everyone entering the facility gets a quick friendly smile, nod followed by 'How can I help you today?'

Kanta, who is soft-spoken yet full of words, is a Subject Research Liaison Officer and has worked for the University for almost a decade.

"In my role, I interact with faculty staff, research scholars and students to ensure that the library is continuously providing them with informational resources which enhances their research, learning and teaching," she said.

"I also assist students to understand a particular discipline-specific research method and guide them regarding the library research methods available that they can use for their specific research problems and projects."

"I chose to work in this field because I love reading and I also want to help patrons find the information they need, whether it is in books, articles or on a database."

Kanta works in a team fully comprised of women and was glad to share her views on this year's International Women's Day (IWD) theme, *An equal world is an enabled world*. #EachforEqual "Gender equality is essential for economies and communities to thrive. We have the chance to become healthier, wealthier and harmonious communities."

"Women are equal contributors to our society as we are all part of a whole. Together, we can make change happen."

"From my experience, women have characteristics that make us as effective as men when leading, but in different ways."

She said becoming the independent mother-of-two she is today was through her father, her biggest male supporter.



Usha Kanta.

"He has always been my biggest inspiration and source of support," Kanta acknowledged.

"He is full of encouragement, trusts me and pushes me to do my best. In our quest for gender equality, we aren't fighting alone because some of our biggest motivators can be the males in our lives."

She encouraged other women to continue striving towards their career goals with the support of their family.

"Individually, we can choose to participate in the collective fight against bias and open our minds to various perceptions, all with the common goal to better the world we live in today."

In a staff room, one floor above sits Jreeta, an Assistant Instructor in Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

Jreeta looks after three science labs, provides technical support and works closely with students to explain experiments, demonstrate how to use the equipment and helps lecturers during a



Jreeta.

class. When asked what her message would be if she were to speak to females, young and old alike, about women empowerment, Jreeta was quick to respond.

"As a woman, think about all the battles you have fought, and all the battles still left to fight," she said.

"All women are superheroes, so don't get demotivated by society and always make your own firm choices about your professional and family life."

Jreeta said gender inclusiveness was achieved in her home and was evident when female family members actively took part in decisions and had their views taken into consideration.

"At my workplace, they promote a better work-life balance for both genders," she said.

"Women are equally offered training and mentoring by the University and having a strong support base will allow every one of us to thrive in the workplace if our skills and contributions are recognised and valued."



Margaret Gabriel (middle) with her lecturers at FNU Natabua Campus.

Education is key – Gabriel

Margaret Gabriel, a Master's student at FNU's College of Humanities and Education (CHE) said she was unaware gender parity existed while growing up in Rotuma. Gabriel said as a youngster she was taught that everyone was equal and always have advocated this as she grew older. According to Gabriel as she matured, she realised that women were required to put in an extra effort to get recognition or be heard. The soft-spoken is a firm believer that Education is a great tool to empower women to shatter glass ceilings and be recognised as equal contributors as their male counterparts.

Gabriel said when she entered University, she was determined to lead by example. An opportunity opened up in 2017 when she took up the challenge to serve with the Fiji National University (FNU) student body.

The former Rotuma High School student said she decided to take up the role so that young women like her were represented during decision-making processes that directly affect them.

"It was not always ideal and smooth sailing, but the opportunity to lead has allowed me to grow as a person and has taught me to take on any challenge and do it well."

"One of the challenges faced during my tenure as the student president for FNU Natabua Campus was being perceived as incapable of leading because I was different from what was seen as acceptable – I was a girl and from a minority ethnic group," she said.

Reminiscing her childhood days, the 22-year-old said she enjoyed serving in this role without

being concerned about gender parity.

"Because of the matriarchal nature of Rotuman culture, I was sheltered and oblivious that gender parity existed," she said.

To empower herself after completing her Bachelor of Education (Secondary) (English/ Geography) at FNU, Gabriel's thirst for knowledge drove her to enrol in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education. She successfully completed this and is currently pursuing Master of Education and Humanities by research this year.

"As a young woman, I believe that it is not enough for us to only talk about empowering ourselves and other women, it is our responsibility to put in the hard yards and secure leadership positions, get that degree, finish that chapter, make that proposal, start that organisation."

"We have to take the necessary actions to ensure our place at the decision-making table not just because we are women but because we are capable. Our actions will do more than our words to decrease the gender gap in our institutions and at every level of society," she adds.

She encourages young women to pursue education as it increases knowledge and skills development and teaches women to have a better understanding of social and political processes which is crucial in today's fast-developing world.

Gabriel said she learnt from many inspiring women throughout her life, and each of them has had a positive impact and helped shape the aspiring leader she has become today.

Gabriel was one of the nine inspiring women from FNU to compete at the National Model United Nations Competition (MUN) in Washington DC in 2018.

She adds that MUN provided her with the space to break traditional boundaries of leadership.

Rural women empowered

Retired nurses, Mereani Yaranamua and Losena Tuira believe specialised training programmes offered by the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) in rural and maritime communities are empowering women to drive change within their communities.

NTPC, through its Non-Formal Education Department, offers two specialised programmes - the Sustainable Livelihood Project (SLP) which is fully-funded by government and the Community Alternative Learning (CAL) programme.

The primary objective of SLP is to train and empower rural communities and villages with basic practical skills and knowledge, relevant and to immediate and future sustainable needs. In doing so, it addresses the productive use of local natural resources as a means to alleviate poverty.

The Project has 16 technical and vocational courses with the main focus of empowering rural, maritime and urban informal communities with necessary practical skills and knowledge for sustainable needs.

The CAL programme aims to deliver technical and vocational skills training to rural, semi-urban and informal settlements around Fiji.

CAL assists in upgrading competencies of participants who have completed the 2-weeks courses delivered under the Sustainable Livelihood Project and also encourages individuals involved in the informal economic sector to develop their full potential to meet Industry TVET Skills demand.

Yaranamua believes the work carried out under CAL meets with this year's International Women's Day campaign theme of #EachforEqual as it empowers rural women with opportunities

that they may not typically have access to.

Yaranamua and Tuira work as Trainers in Caregiving under the CAL programme.

"Women are becoming the drivers for change in our urban communities as they are now moving away from their traditional roles and seeking more participation in the running of communities and the workplace," Yaranamua said.

"We, through the CAL programme are now extending this to our rural and maritime communities, so women have equal opportunities as men when it comes to gaining new skills and abilities," she said.

Tuira said through her experience of working with rural communities as a nurse, there was a mind-set to give preference to men when it came to skill-building. She said this attitude is now changing as rural women are breaking stereotypes and are quite eager to gain skills in equal footing as men. "Our programme is open to all. It provides equal opportunities for both men and women to gain skills," she said.

"We have been encouraging the participants of our programme, especially the women, to apply the skills they have learnt and go out and seek jobs for the betterment of their communities. This is now taking place in these communities," Tuira added.

She said upskilling rural women allows them to have jobs that improve their financial situation, particularly in the competitive nature of the world.

According to Yaranamua, if rural women are empowered, they can start small business ventures or gain employment which will have ripple economic benefits within the community.



Mereyeni Yaranamua (left) and Losena Tuira.

Whippy shares *#EachforEqual* views



Ruqaiya Whippy.

Life experiences, whether experienced first-hand or recounted, can shape or alter a young person's dreams in life and this rings true for Ruqaiya Whippy.

According to Whippy, her mother claims she wanted to be a pilot while growing up, however hearing about how her mum became ill after giving birth to her made the 21-year-old pursue studies in the medical field.

Whippy is currently a Year 4 Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) student at Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' (CMNHS).

"Medicine can heal people. It helps people get well from sickness. And I feel like being the physician to

be able to do that, heals you in many ways too, it's like food for the soul," she said passionately.

"My mother influenced my career path and what got me was how grateful she is to her doctors to this day and how she still remembers the doctor who brought her back and guided her recovery."

Reflecting upon this year's International Women's Day theme of *#EachforEqual*, Whippy said it was appropriate as it made one acknowledge all that has been achieved and those yet to be achieved.

"We have figured out that a world where everyone is equal can lead to a world of greater possibilities, now all we're yet to do is realise this theme," she said.

"I would like to see equal opportunities in education and employment. I would like for females to feel safer in school, in their workplaces or on the roads. I would like to see women filling in more of those top-level managerial positions and get paid as much as her male counterpart would."

"I would like to see a world where people understand that we as females want cerebral equality and that any criteria of selection should be based purely on merit."

Whippy, who is also the President of the Fiji School of Medicine Student Association (FSMedSA), proudly highlighted that her College had more females than males but added that the point of gender equality was not about having an advantage over the other.

"Just focus on the daily grind. Be consistent. And where you know you're right, be persistent and stand your ground. And absolutely never let anyone tell you that you cannot or you're not enough," she said confidently.



Finau Voi and Professor Nabobo Baba (right) during IWD celebrations at Natabua Campus.

Professor Nabobo-Baba shares experience

In academia, despite the considerable progress made over the few decades, women continue to face barriers to selection, promotion and recognition in work according to a teacher, researcher and a prolific author, Professor Unaisi Nabobo - Baba.

Prof Nabobo-Baba having spent almost 30 years in the field of education, mostly higher education and development, said due to the lack of Fijian women academics, it was challenging to get role models.

"There are not many Fijian women academics let alone Pacific women, so it has been hard getting role models who are professors."

"The University is still a male space, it is patriarchal, Euro-centric in its processes and policies and is a hard terrain to negotiate. But, we must try and perhaps slowly we will have to strategise as women and scholars to break glass ceilings and barriers to promotion in academia," the senior academic said.

While sharing her experiences, Prof Nabobo-Baba said when she was employed at the University of Guam she one the only female in the University's Promotion and Tenure Committee.

"I was the only woman among the seven men. There are many other difficulties related to promotion. In essence, some related to individual aspirations or lack of, family and cultural designs, some structural barriers and some are related to issues of gender and class".

"Historical legacies of absences of dominant roles of women in knowledge industries and especially in academia, also present themselves "as real as Everest"-a mountain of all mountains to scale," she said.

Prof Nabobo-Baba draws her inspiration from a few females who have been instrumental in her success as academia.

"There have been a few women at different stages of my life. Early in life growing up around Nausori, I respected and fondly remembered the magnanimous late Deaconess Olivia Nataniela-she was a mother to all orphans at the Dilkusha home in Nausori.

"Then there were my early teachers, including my mother. She was hard-working, profoundly spiritual but was always happy. My grandmother-she was a tower of strength (physically and metaphorically). I learnt from her duty to one's people first, and foremost-one cannot lead others if one was not forthcoming to one's inner group first," she said.

Apart from her role as a Professor of Education at Fiji National University (FNU), Prof Nabobo-Baba is also the Head of Campus, Natabua, Lautoka.

According to her, she does experience resistance when leading men via many directions and levels.

"What I have done is to look for good male and female friends in academia and elsewhere to understand and address male resistance."

"I also try to learn quickly the history of the different countries and institutions I have worked in so that I try to understand causes of resistance and how these may be appropriately turned around to serve a bigger purpose of institutional and nation-building," she said.

Professor Nabobo-Baba is encouraging young women to enter academia and find a niche.

"Academia is traditionally male dominated-it is historically rooted in what I call "maleness". To young women, my advice is to observe what makes males get ahead. Get to emulate some of that behaviour but do not lose your feminine qualities," she stressed.

Female staff encouraged to focus on career growth

The College of Humanities and Education (CHE) Associate Dean Research, Dr Zakia Ali-Chand has challenged all the female staff at the Fiji National University to strive for progression in their careers.

Speaking at the IWD celebrations at Nasinu Campus, Dr Ali-Chand said challenges are part of life and successfully overcoming them add to one's leadership and overall character.

"It is important to understand that this year we are also celebrating our 10th-anniversary, and some of us have been here for the last 10 years or more," said Dr Ali-Chand.

"We need to ask ourselves – are we at the same place as we began in 2010, or has there been some progress in our careers. If we are at the same place as we were 10 years ago, then we can be left behind because FNU has moved on very fast, especially in the last four years."

"The University is continuing to take giant strides as a leading higher education institution in Fiji and the Pacific. Therefore, there is a need for you to reflect on your journey to be on par with the University's aspirations and goals."

The senior academic has urged young women to be more proactive participants in social and professional dialogue forums.

"Young women you need to be seen, don't be complacent, you have the potential to do wonders. Do not ask yourselves who will do this for us, instead be ready to tell yourself that I can and I will do this."

"Such attitude and participation will empower and mould you for positions at managerial levels. It will instil confidence in you to take up any leadership positions. It will prepare you for the future."



College of Humanities and Education (CHE) Associate Dean Research, Dr Zakia Ali-Chand.

From Fiji to New Zealand – Journey of one of FNU’s First Graduate

Meenal Dewakar was part of one of the most historical moments of higher education in Fiji. She was one of the individuals who graduated during the inaugural graduation ceremony of Fiji National University (FNU) in 2010. “FIT had just merged with other government institutions to form FNU. It was the first graduation for FNU, and I was so excited to be part of history in the making,” expressed Dewakar.

Born and raised in Vunivicui Labasa, Dewakar attended Vunivicui Sanatan Dharam Primary School from Class One to Six. Her family then moved to Suva, and she finished the rest of her primary school education at SSM Primary School in Nabua. She then attended DAV College in Nabua to complete her high school education.

Tertiary Education

After completing Year 13 at DAV College in Nabua, Dewakar enrolled in the Diploma in Business Management programme in 2009 at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) which later formed part of FNU’s College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS).

“FNU was the only University at the time which required students to complete practical work attachments before they could graduate. Not only did this provide the opportunity to practice what we were learning in the classroom but also gave all graduates a competitive advantage over other graduates.”

“The University strives to prepare the students for employment in their chosen career or advanced studies through the acquisition of the required skills and knowledge needed for the successful completion of the programme of studies,” said Dewakar.

Reminiscing her university experience, she said, “There were many unforgettable personalities among our teachers, but the Late Mr Imo Sagoa is someone I will never forget. He usually went out of his way to help his

students. I have many good memories from the University. Many of my fellow students became close friends, and we spent countless pleasant moments, not only in classrooms but also in cafés.”

Dewakar completed and graduated with her Diploma in Business Management programme in 2010.

The following year, in 2011, she enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce (Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations and Management) programme at FNU.

“All my Diploma units were cross credited, so I was required to do only two additional years of study,” she said.

Career in Fiji

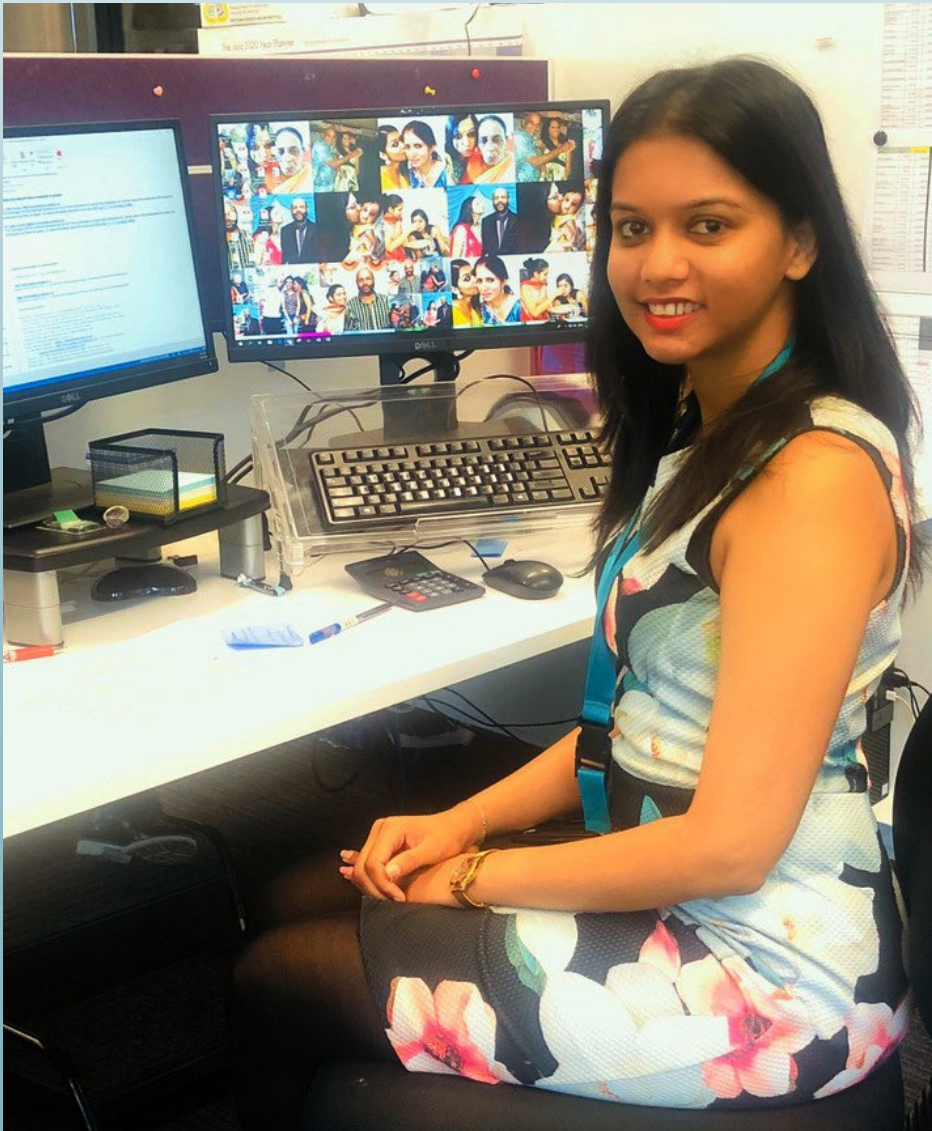
In August of 2011, Dewakar started working for De Vos on the Park as the HR Manager and Accounts Officer. She started taking evening classes to accommodate both work and studies.

Though it was not easy, she graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce (Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations and Management) in December 2012.

After working for De Vos for another couple of years, she joined the Suva Chamber of Commerce and Industry as an Office Executive in 2014. The following year, she joined the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) as the Executive Assistant to its Director.

A few months later, in her role as an Executive Assistant, she had an opportunity to take up a position at FNU. She grabbed the chance and started working at the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) as the Academic Officer Learning and Teaching.

Her job involved compiling the College Handbook; coordinating project meetings and educational workshops; working on the course outlines for five disciplines; assisting Academics and Course Developers with new programmes; processing graduation and cross-



credit applications; and, creating College examination timetables, among other duties.

Living and Working in New Zealand

Dewakar continued working as Academic Officer Learning and Teaching for three years before migrating to New Zealand after getting married.

“I enjoyed my work at CMNHS, however, I had to move to NZ after I got married to be with my husband,” she said.

Like most people, Dewakar faced some difficulties in moving to a new environment.

“One of the major challenges I faced was moving to a new country and adjusting to it. With support from family and friends, I overcame that challenge.”

The other challenge was job interviews in New Zealand as it was fairly different from my experience in Fiji.

To overcome this, Dewakar undertook some training, “I attended the Work Connect Workshop which helped me a lot on how to perform in interviews and I was finally successful in securing a job,” added Dewakar.

She currently works at the University of Auckland as the Faculty Administrator. Her job involves managing the 14 faculty committees.

“What I enjoy most about my job is I get to learn lots of new things every day,” Dewakar said.

Words of Wisdom

Dewakar’s advice to students is to always strive for something higher.

“My ambition growing up was always to be independent and bring out best in people. I have always been very good at communicating, networking, listening to people’s problems and coming up with solutions to help them,” she said.

Dewakar’s top three tips for graduates starting in their career are, “things are not always going to be easy never give up. Change is inevitable; learn to adapt. Learn to hear feedback and never let it fester you. Instead, consider it, take what works, and move on.”

She believes these tips helped her grow in her career and hopes it will do the same for others.



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FNU NIKUA wants to hear from you

FNU NIKUA welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj



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