

FWRM and FNU workshop highlights young women's issues

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) in partnership with the Fiji National University (FNU), organised a series of workshops at campuses across the country to raise awareness and promote young women's leadership and empowerment.

Recently, three Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) workshops were carried out at the FNU Nasinu, Natabua and Labasa Campus. This was part of the Young Feminist Rise Project: Young Women Lead Initiative by FWRM in partnership with FNU and supported by the Fiji Women's Fund, an initiative of the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Development.

"The Fiji Women's Fund is quite excited to be supporting this innovative project that focusses on building agency of young women in universities such as the Fiji National University to enable them to organise brave and safe spaces for discussions and approaches to shift and transform patriarchal norms and behaviours," said Michelle Reddy, Fund Manager.

The Vice-Chancellor of FNU, Professor Nigel Healey said that the University was delighted to be supporting the work of FWRM in promoting gender equality and women in leadership.

"Universities open the door for anyone – regardless of gender or ethnicity – to fulfil their potential and transform their life chances," Professor Healey said. "It is crucial that in achieving this mission, FNU inspires young women to find their voice and take their place as the leaders of tomorrow."

FWRM Executive Director Nalini Singh added: "This is an exciting partnership for FWRM and FNU to come together with a common purpose of empowering young women. Together, we intend to create a much needed enabling environment for young women to take the lead in driving their collective advocacy action plan in relation to the changes they want to see in their campuses and individual networks." Over 40 young women students from FNU participated in the GESI workshops at the Nasinu and Labasa Campus. The two-day workshop focused on creating safe spaces for young women to dialogue, promote mentorship, intergenerational learning opportunities and awareness,



FNU participants at the workshop.

and promote dialogue and action from a feminist and human rights standpoint.

The Nasinu workshop comprised of students from the University's Derrick, Pasifika, Tamavua, Nasinu and Nabua Campuses.

A participant at the Nasinu Campus, Bachelor of Commerce student Tajeshwari Devi, said the workshop provided her further insight into the challenges faced by women and the various ways that these could be addressed.

"During the workshop, we highlighted issues such as gender inequality, gender identity, patriarchy, fear of being left out and women not taking leadership roles."

She emphasised that a change of attitudes towards women was needed and more women should support women.

"This is important because when young girls see women in leadership positions or working with confidence, they are inspired because they know they can relate and aspire to the same dreams," she added.

Another participant, postgraduate student Elina Tabuanitoga, said being part of the workshop empowered her to take up more leadership roles on campus and mentioned that other participants were encouraged to overcome barriers that restricted them from being a leader in their respective campuses.

"This workshop challenged us to discover our potential and enlarge our capacity to take up any role and leadership responsibility on campus, in the corporate world and the nation of Fiji," she said.

"I believe more young women should take advantage of initiatives such as this which will only benefit us."

The workshops were planned for the Central, Northern and Western Divisions and participants will work towards forming a Women's Advocacy Club.

"Once these clubs are registered and affiliated to the Fiji National University Students' Association (FNUSA), they will have their own events and activities planned and women's advocacy and awareness sessions organised at different campuses," said FNU Student Support Coordinator, Vijayta Sharma.

"The cohort of females that would be trained through this program would be our 'focus group' that shall assist the Office of the Registrar in other programs and events like Orientations, Open Day, Graduations, sports days, assisting students with disabilities and residential life programs," she added.

The second phase of training will take place later in the year.



Tajeshwari Devi and Elina Tabuanitoga (first and second from left) and other FNU participants at the workshop.

