

Balance of Power: A game-changer for Women's Leadership in the Pacific

Balance of Power (BOP) is a multi-country, locally led initiative that supports more inclusive leadership in line with national and regional priorities. Building on lessons learned about what works and what doesn't in the Pacific context to improve gender equality, BOP provides strategic support to local actors working to increase women's voice and agency in leadership and decision-making, particularly in the political sphere.



TONGA

"I saw the FFFT and Balance of Power encouraging women to stand for the male dominated local government positions of District and Town Officer. The discussion moved me to realise that I am a strong woman with skills, knowledge and experience, which can be used to empower the people of my village. I am determined to run a strong campaign to demonstrate that women are capable." Milise Vaiangine, Nukunuku village candidate.

Over this period, Balance of Power has been supporting 'Talatalanoa', a media campaign initiated by **FI-E-FI-A 'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT)** to raise awareness on the importance of increasing women's leadership across all domains. During the month of April, in the **lead-up to the local government elections**, the campaign focused on the benefits of inclusive leadership, as well as encouraging women to register as candidates. By the end of the campaign, 25 women across Tonga had registered – **the highest number of women candidates** since the granting of universal suffrage in 1951. Immediately after

the announcement of candidates, FFFT, in collaboration with Balance of Power, facilitated a number of support sessions for these women.

In partnership with the **Tonga Public Service Commission**, Balance of Power has launched the first stage of its Inclusive Leadership training for senior government officials. Facilitators include adaptative leadership specialists, 'Ofa Guttenbeil Likiliki and Rev. Dr. 'Ungatea Kata, with the aim of building skills and influencing mindsets for more effective models of shared leadership.

VANUATU

"I regret that I have mistreated my wife. Now I have seen this film, I will go home and do my best to support her in anything she wants to be." Viewer of the newly launched **Tru The Lens** film.

In partnership with Titan FX Vanuatu and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, Balance of Power organised a reception in Santo to celebrate **International Women's Day**. The event brought together the two newly appointed **women Assistant Secretaries General** to share insights around their leadership journeys and to **encourage other women** to aim for senior leadership posts.



Photo Caption: Executive Directors, Jennifer Kalpokas Doan and Mereani Rokotuibau, with Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, HE Heidi Bootle, and New Zealand High Commissioner to Vanuatu, HE Nicci Simmonds, at the inaugural 'Balance of Power Partners Evening' in Port Vila.

The launch of the fourth film in the **Tru The Lens documentary series** took place in Sola last month, showcasing the extraordinary leadership impact of Olivia Keith, Principal of Baldwin Lonsdale Memorial School. Over 200 people gathered at the event hosted by the chiefs from Rah Island, at the end of which, Olivia was given a *kastom* name in **recognition of her leadership** status.

Balance of Power supported the **Diocese of Banks and Torres** with a two-day inclusive leadership workshop. Anglican District Priest of Motalava, Father Tione Ling, opened the event, highlighting the critical leadership role women play in the church and encouraging the women participants to **embrace the compatibility of leadership and their Christian faith**.

Data collection is now underway across Vanuatu as part of the collaborative research project between the **Department of Women's Affairs, the Australian National University** and Balance of Power to understand **the motivations of voters and political parties**. A core part of the process is the training of local enumerators and facilitation of community forums.

FIJI/REGIONAL

"Women's leadership in our institutions is critical and needs to be valued and recognized. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is grateful to be partnering with BOP to support this agenda."
Pita Tagicakiverata, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

FIJI

Balance of Power is supporting the **Ministry of iTaukei Affairs** research team to undertake a rapid survey study on the social impact of the **labour mobility scheme**. Through gathering in-depth perspectives across 14 iTaukei villages, the aim is to understand both the positive and negative impacts of the scheme on families and communities – including potential for increase in the **recognition of women's leadership** value and legitimacy.

Executive Director, Mereani Rokotuibau, has been invited as **one of only two women** to be part of the inaugural review of the **Great Council of Chiefs**. This review, based on country-wide consultations, is a unique opportunity to facilitate broad-based inputs as to what form the new council will take. A core focus of Balance of Power's involvement is to see a shift towards **greater representation by women**.

REGIONAL

Key findings of the research on **'Students' Perceptions of Women's Political Leadership'** - jointly conducted by University of the South Pacific Students Association (USPSA) Laucala and Balance of Power - were presented as part of **discussion forum at USP**. The event included guest speakers, panel debates, with a focus on **ways to increase women's participation in politics** and the need for gender-sensitive policies at USP.

Executive Director, Jennifer Kalpokas Doan, was invited to attend the **3rd Pacific Feminist Forum** in Fiji in May.

Both Executive Directors were published in the **Development Intelligence Lab** online platform, The Intel, on the intersection between local leadership and gender equality, and good governance in **Australia's international development program**.

