

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.

Regional

For the first time ever, BOP facilitated a learning and networking exchange between the **only two elected women MPs from Vanuatu and Tonga, Hon Gloria Julia King and Hon Dulcie Tei**, linking them with regional stakeholders in Suva. This first-of-its-kind initiative included engagement with the **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat** and preparations for the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women, enabling better integration of national and regional perspectives.

BOP team members presented on panels at the annual **Development Policy Centre Australasian Aid Conference** in December 2023 in Canberra, sharing experiences in facilitating locally led research and the benefits of local leadership in development cooperation.



Hon Gloria Julia King and Hon Dulcie Tei, with BOP Vanuatu and Tonga Country Managers

BOP continued its support to **UNDP** by facilitating sessions on working with men at the **Pacific Women in Power Forum** in Auckland, which brought together women MPs from across the Pacific.

Tonga

"There are so many positive takeaways from this fantastic BOP initiative. Through the exposure to the vast opportunities available at the regional level, I am both excited and better informed on how I can continue empowering not only those in my constituency but the rest of the country as well". Hon MP Dulcie Tei

BOP has formed a new partnership with select **'kava clubs'** to roll-out a pilot series of *talonoa* sessions, which presents new opportunities to engage with men on issues of leadership, gender dynamics, and culture.

A collaboration has also been established with **Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga** - the country's original national women's organisation - to support training and institutional strengthening at the community level, including among wives of district and town officers to support increased exercise of leadership and influence.

Production has commenced of a series of **'women trailblazer'** stories - **'Fakataulama Ma'ae Kaha'a** - spotlighting women who have broken through the 'glass

ceiling'/'thatched roof' to make impact in traditional male-dominated spaces.

BOP Tonga supported the participation of **Hon MP Dulcie Tei** at the **cross-learning exchange** in Suva.

Consolidation of the relationship with **Tonga's Crown Princess, HRH Sinai Kakala Tuku'aho**, to build support for and engagement with BOP's objectives and activities in Tonga.



Hon MP Dulcie Tei

Vanuatu

"Thank you, Balance of Power, for this learning exchange to Fiji and for also including my husband. His support is critical to my success, and we are a team in this political journey".
Hon. MP Gloria Julia King

BOP is continuing to collaborate with the **Vanuatu Television and Broadcasting Corporation** in the conduct of its **Pres Klub** initiatives, with forums in this quarter focused on the national referendum on political stability, scheduled for May 2024. This includes framing discussions around the importance of **inclusive political leadership** and **civic engagement**.

Following on from the series of adaptive leadership workshops conducted in partnership with the **Public Service Commission**, the BOP Vanuatu Country Manager facilitated a targeted adaptive and inclusive leadership workshop with the **Department of Tourism**, supporting the reformist drive within this agency.



BOP Vanuatu supported the participation in Suva of **Hon MP Julia King** at the **first ever cross-learning exchange** for a ni-Vanuatu woman MP.

Fiji

The relationship with Balance of Power has been most productive and useful for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama as an organisation."
Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, President, SSVM

BOP joined with **Women's Fund Fiji** for its 16 Days of Activism program in Lautoka in December. The program used sports and art to showcase the competency and talents of women, men, boys and girls, including people with disabilities – fostering an inclusive environment to work against discriminatory norms and attitudes.

BOP is continuing to work closely with the **Soqosoqo Vakamarama**, including in the development of its new Strategic Development Plan and supporting engagement with the **Hon Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka** on progression of the Articles of CEDAW, with a particular focus on increasing women's leadership representation - at the **provincial council level**, on **statutory bodies** and within the **Great Council of Chiefs**.

BOP has expanded its support to **Fiji Council of Social Services** on 'Building a Leadership Talent Pipeline for Women'. This has involved supporting the *Vakatawa Noke* project, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management**, working with informal settlements in the Greater Suva Area to strengthen governance structures for increased representation of women in decision-making.



BOP's partnership with the **Ministry of iTaukei Affairs** is continuing to deepen. In February, BOP was part of the Reflection and Planning meeting, in conjunction with the **Tailevu Provincial Council** and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. This event focused on operationalising the Tailevu Strategic Development Plan with integration of the findings of the BOP-supported **Labour Mobility research**, aiming to better mitigate against negative community impacts, as well as legitimise and support the leadership of women in a changed context of gender roles.

At the first meeting convened by the **National Youth Council of the Fiji Islands** since its revival by the government in 2023, BOP facilitated a session on Inclusive Leadership to inform the development of the organisation's new strategic plan.