

## 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 Highlights

*"I am thankful to Balance of Power for this initiative. Through the discussions on the importance of practicing inclusive leadership in the family and wider community, although I'm 74 years old, I feel like I've been born again". Nafe Kuila, member of Kalapu Kau Kalisitiane Kava Club*

- Ongoing collaboration with the **Women and Children Crisis Centre** to facilitate *talanoa* programs with **kava clubs** in Tongatapu, with over 30 men participating. Drawing on findings from BOP's 2020 research on voter perceptions of women as leaders in Tonga, the initiative provides a space to **engage with men** on issues of leadership, gender power dynamics and culture - and challenge perceived norms of men and women's leadership legitimacy.
- Partnership discussions are progressing with the **Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga**, to support the revitalisation of this peak national women's network through both technical and funding support for their **targeted leadership training**, community outreach programs and



*Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga Leadership Training participants*

policy review. Outreach included a 3-day leadership training program with the wives of local government leaders, Town Officers and District Officers.

- BOP Tonga Country Manager, Tupouhau Fakakovi, facilitated sessions and presented at the reflection on progress against the **National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy**. Part of this work includes an evaluation of Tonga's advancement within the Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights.

### Vanuatu Highlights

*"When it comes to our national issues, they are usually discussed between adults - very few young ones join in the conversation. But when we give them opportunities to talk about these issues, they are influencing their peers to think and talk about these things too - and this is a form of changing mindsets". Sherol George, Inclusion Manager, Vanuatu Skills Partnership*

- The **SHEFA School Debate** initiative was launched in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Training, Titan FX, and Kiwanis. This collaboration is **engaging young people** on subjects of civic importance with an emphasis on leadership, political participation and gender equality. The initiative also provides a platform for young people – girls and boys together - to express their views and **build confidence and agency**. The debates are being broadcast on social media

and on national television.

- BOP Executive Director, Jennifer Kalpokas Doan, was part of the four-member team established by the **Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation** to disseminate information and foster public engagement in the lead-up to the **National Referendum**, held on 29 May 2024. The majority of voters backed the proposed constitutional reforms

aiming to reduce political instability and which will **facilitate women's participation** in the political party system.

- The first draft of the research report, **'Unspoken rules of politics – voter motivations in Vanuatu'**, has been developed and is currently undergoing validation and peer review. The research is a collaborative project between BOP, the **Department of Women's Affairs** and the **Australian National University** to understand the motivations of voters and political parties. A core part of the process has been the training of local enumerators and facilitation of **community forums** on inclusive, developmental leadership.
- BOP has continued to facilitate targeted 'Adaptive and Inclusive Leadership' sessions with key partners, including the



Central School debater at the school debate pilot

**Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management (VIPAM)**. BOP also brokered engagement between VIPAM, USP and Leadership Fiji.

## Fiji/Regional Highlights

*"Being part of the FCOSS Women's Leadership Pipeline program has enhanced my leadership skills in my community in Tavua. It has also built my confidence in public engagement - to the extent that I even participated in the Women's Mock Parliament last month". Irene Kumar, FCOSS Board Member & Tavua DCOSS leader*

- BOP's Fiji country program was officially launched by the **Deputy Prime Minister** in conjunction with a video of progress to date, along with the establishment and inaugural meeting of the program's Strategic Advisory Committee.
- BOP is continuing to partner with the **Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)** on the **'Building a Women's Leadership Pipeline Program'** which supports women to amplify their leadership influence from community to formal sub-national and national levels. BOP is also supporting FCOSS in its *Vakatawa Noke* project to formalise **inclusive governance structures** in 23 informal settlements of the Greater Suva Area.
- BOP supported the **Ministry of iTaukei Affairs** to convene key government ministries to identify areas of collaboration for the expansion of its joint research on **'Social Impacts of Labour Mobility on Women and Families'**, which will now extend to cover all provinces in Fiji. BOP was consulted on the development of the new **Migration Policy** for Fiji, with findings from the labour mobility research informing the policy's development.



Fiji Country Manager, Josaia Osborne, speaking at the 2024 Speakers Debate, convened by Fiji Parliament and UNDP

- BOP Fiji Country Manager, Josaia Osborne, was a panellist at the **Speaker's Parliamentary Debate** on 'Women's public leadership: empowering women's participation at all levels of decision making'.
- BOP facilitated a workshop to socialise the findings of its joint research on student perceptions of women's leadership with the **University of the South Pacific Students' Association (USPSA)** Laucala Campus and USPSA Federal. Following the workshop, BOP facilitated a session on Adaptive and Inclusive Leadership with USPSA leaders from across the 12 member countries.
- Working with the **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat**, BOP participated in the revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration MEL Framework workshop.