

## 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

*"Since birth we have been taught that fathers make decisions, and it creates fear in us... this program encourages us to include the voices of our wives in decision making." Kalapu Fetakinima, kava club participant*

- BOP continued its collaboration with the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga to facilitate *talanoa* sessions on inclusive leadership in kava clubs in Tongatapu. The initiative provides a space to engage with men on issues of leadership, gender power dynamics and culture. In these latest sessions, club members were



Kava Club meeting in Tonga

interviewed to capture shifts in attitude around women's legitimacy as leaders. At the final event in December, members invited their wives and family members to hear testimonials of the impact of the *talanoa* sessions in changing their thinking.

- Filming has continued for the documentary BOP is producing on the leadership journey of the only female elected Member of Parliament, Hon Dulcie Tei. Planning is now underway for the film launch, potentially at a national Press Club in partnership with the Tonga Media Association and PACMAS.
- Data collection has been conducted and the results analysed for the joint BOP/ Tupou Tertiary Institute research initiative to understand young voters' motivations in the lead-up to the general election in November. Based on the low youth turnout at the last election, this activity is providing an opportunity to engage early with young people and raise awareness on civic engagement

and broader leadership issues.

- BOP Tonga Strategic Adviser, Lautoa Faletau, gave the keynote address at the WCCC inaugural *sub-fono* in Vava'u. WCCC is carrying out a survey and *fono* (meeting) with women throughout Tonga to ascertain priorities for women across the country. WCCC collected 1,000 surveys in Vava'u and the preliminary findings were presented at the *fono* which was attended by the Lord Governor and over 500 women. The national findings will be discussed at a National *Fono* in November and presented to the incoming government in December.



Front row (3rd from left): BOP Tonga Strategic Adviser, Lautoa Faletau, at the WCCC inaugural *sub-fono* in Vava'u after delivering her keynote address.

### Vanuatu

*"A woman too has her place at the table at the national level." Hon Marie Louise Milne, MP.*

- BOP has been providing expert analysis to regional media on the election of the only woman elected to Parliament in last month's snap general election. The ABC interview with BOP Country Manager, Wilson Toa, can be found [here](#).
- BOP officially launched its research

report, '*Unspoken rules of politics – voter motivations in Vanuatu*', in November. 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 facilitation of community forums on inclusive leadership as part of the data collection process - a first for many community members around the deeply entrenched barriers to female political representation. The full research report



Pala Luen, former Manager of Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration, speaking at the Graduation of the first cohort from the Public Service Leadership Program (PSLP) in Vanuatu



Vanuatu BOP Country Manager, Wilson Toa, the Vanuatu Cricket Association

is available on the Balance of Power website, as well as on the Toksave and

- ANU open research repository websites.
- BOP continued its partnership with the the Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration (VIPAM) and the Public Service Commission; in November, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MoJCS), BOP celebrated the graduation of the first cohort from the Public Service Leadership Program (PSLP), which focuses on fostering a leadership environment that includes both men and women. The ceremony honored

20 graduates from the MoJCS, who completed the three-month program and have now earned certificates in Public Service Workplace Leadership from the University of the South Pacific.

- BOP facilitated an Adaptive and Inclusive Leadership workshop with personnel from Vanuatu Cricket, stimulating discussion around the importance of women's participation and visibility in non-traditional areas.

## Fiji

***“Women play a very important role in Fiji. In all our villages and communities, women are the engine room— carrying out much of the essential work. It’s also very important that we include them in the governance of our communities and in decision-making”. Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistance Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister***

- In November, BOP supported Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM), the oldest indigenous women's organisation in Fiji, to convene its centennial celebrations. This brought together more than 2,000 women from the SSVM provincial branches with the theme of 'A New Beginning'. A key part of the event was the launch of the BOP-supported documentary on how SSVM has incubated women's leadership for nation-building throughout its history.



Guests attending the centennial celebrations for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM)

- BOP Executive Director, Mereani Rokotuibau, was part of the iTaukei Administration Review, the recommendations of which were formally endorsed by the Great Council of Chiefs in November. The review provided an analysis on potential reforms from village to national level, with a particular focus on mainstreaming gender equality at all levels of iTaukei administration. Following the endorsement, it is now stipulated that there must be at least one female representative from each combined district within Provincial Councils.
- Over this period, BOP conducted partnership brokering sessions with the National Youth Council of Fiji (NYCF) to identify common areas of work around the promotion of inclusive leadership, and also supported the Provincial Youth Forum of the Fiji Islands in its strategic planning meeting. At the NYCF AGM in November, a woman was elected for the time ever in the respective positions of President and Vice President. BOP also supported the Viti Indigenous Tourism Alliance in conducting its AGM, which saw one woman elected to the Board.
- BOP was part of the panel convened by IDEA on 'Exploring Temporary Special Measures (TSM) for Inclusive



Women representatives from Manikoso Settlement participating in the Governance Training for Melanesian Communities in the Greater Suva Area

Governance in Fiji.' The event brings together key stakeholders—including political parties, civil society organisations, and regional and international experts—to discuss TSM considerations for Fiji including potential opportunities and challenges.

- BOP supported a pilot Governance and Leadership training for the Community Councils of Kalekana and Manikoso, with a focus on inclusive leadership. This initiative is part of the Vakatawa Noke project that is a joint collaboration between the Office of the Prime Minister, the Commissioner Central's Office and the FCOSS and is specifically tailored to Melanesian communities in informal settlements within the Greater Suva Area.

## Regional

- BOP supported the University of the South Pacific Students' Association (USPSA) Federal in convening the USPSA Council Meeting in November to endorse its Strategic Plan for the next three years, with 'Inclusive Leadership' as a core priority.
- BOP Executive Director, Mereani Rokotuibau, was invited by Gendernet

and DFAT to virtually present a case study at the Gendernet Annual Conference in Paris in November, focused on BOP's work to influence policy change for women's representation on the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) in Fiji. 30% of GCC membership now must be women.

- BOP Vanuatu Country Manager, Wilson Toa, and Seman Saraken, Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs presented

on a panel at the Australasian Aid Conference in Canberra in December, highlighting the findings of the groundbreaking research, *'Unspoken rules of politics – voter motivations in Vanuatu'*, with a focus on the need for locally-led, participatory research processes.