

**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

***"Gender equality is not just a women's issue. When women are part of political leadership, communities benefit. We're proud to support efforts like this one through the Balance of Power program." – H.E. Brek Batley***

BOP participated in the 2025 Tonga National ICT Expo under the theme "Empowering a Resilient Digital Tonga" to promote civic engagement, gender equality, and digital literacy. BOP was invited by Tonga Women in ICT (TWICT) to be part of the Expo. The Expo provided a platform to raise BOP's visibility, promote voter registration, and engage directly with youth, women, and educational institutions. BOP collaborated with the Tonga Electoral Commission, youth organisations, schools and government ministries.

BOP partnered with Tonga Public Service Commission (PSC) to deliver Adaptive Leadership Training for senior public servants, Acting CEOs, Deputy CEOs, and high-potential women leaders identified by their ministries. Cohort 2 of the Adaptive Leadership program was successfully completed during this quarter, marking significant progress in building leadership skills across the public service. The initiative offers a key opportunity to influence leadership culture at the highest levels of government while supporting women's advancement into executive roles. It also aims to foster a cross-ministry leadership network committed



Participants attending the Cohort 2 Module 2 of the PSC Adaptive Leadership Training.



Invited guests pictured at the official launch of the MP Dulcie Tei video, which included (front row from L-R); BOP Co-Executive Director, Jennifer Kalpokas Doan, Poasi Tei, Hon. Dulcie Tei, Australian High Commissioner to Tonga, H.E. Mr. Brek Batley, Tonga Minister for Health, Hon. Dr. Ana 'Akauola and Rev. Tevita Feka Mafi.

to inclusive governance and long-term institutional transformation.

The follow-up interviews and testimonials from the April 2025 Kava Club activities in Tonga revealed that participants were positively influenced by discussions on inclusive leadership, mutual respect, and shared decision-making within families and communities. Strong religious values underpinned these shifts, with participants showing increased awareness of social issues like gender equality and children's rights. Originating from research showing traditional biases against women in politics, BOP strategically engaged Kava Clubs as a platform to challenge these mindsets. The findings highlight a clear demand for continued sessions to broaden participation and sustain impact.

BOP supported Hon. Dulcie Tei, Tonga's only elected female MP, by producing a video documenting her leadership journey since 2024, highlighting her challenges and growth in a male-dominated political environment. The video launch in April 2025 attracted strong community interest and aimed to raise awareness, challenge gender biases, and inspire future women leaders. BOP plans to use this video as an advocacy and learning tool, and

to provide ongoing support to Dulcie, as well as explore expanding support for other women leaders ahead of the November elections.

## Vanuatu

***"As the Bishop of Banks and Torres, I see the partnership between DOBT and BOP as very important. It's very significant to the work that the Church is carrying out. There are many Anglicans and a large number of our people (in Torba province), and so we need better leaders. We need more capable people to lead our communities." Bishop of the DOBT, Anthony Ling***

Building on its relationship with the Diocese of Banks and Torres (DOBT) and the Vicar General through its 'Tru the Lens' women in leadership film, BOP recently formalised its partnership with the DOBT and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) through a signed agreement on the island of Motalava in Torba Province. This partnership, the first-ever signed by the DOBT with an organisation outside the church, will support joint efforts in advocacy for shared leadership and disability inclusion, as well as women's leadership development within the church and at the community level.



Wilson Toa, signing the Partnership Agreement with the Bishop of the DOBT, Right Reverend Bishop Anthony Ling in Torba, Vanuatu.

BOP successfully brought together community leaders, church leaders and partners from research sites that were part of the voter motivation research (2024) for a three-day program focused on sharing research findings and, planning local outreach with the aim of increasing civic education. The initiative reinforced leaders' understanding of their influence in shaping inclusive governance, particularly in supporting women's leadership and motivating young people to engage in community and national discussions.

BOP supported the Department of Women's Affairs to conduct a two-day workshop for elected members of the Luganville Municipal Council, including women councillors elected through Temporary Special Measures. The workshop strengthened councillors' understanding of their roles, municipal responsibilities, and decision-making structures. Participants identified key institutional gaps through a SWOT analysis and expressed the need for continued support in governance and planning.



Community leaders pictured at the Voter Motivation Research Socialisation and Planning Meeting in Port Vila.

Following the success of the 2024 SHEFA School Debate, BOP, Titan FX, and Kiwanis successfully expanded the competition to SANMA Province, with the pilot event held in Santo as part of Digital Week. Organised in partnership with the Department of Communications and Digital Transformation and TRBR, the debate engaged four secondary schools and focused on themes of inclusive leadership and women's political participation. The event generated strong interest among students and stakeholders, confirming demand for a larger SANMA-wide debate later this year. BOP also supported participating schools in advance through preparation visits and awareness on civic engagement and youth leadership.

## Fiji

***"We are fortunate to have the support of Balance of Power as we seek institutional strengthening for our organisation. This support will ensure that we are able to reach women at all levels"* Adi Finau Tabakaucoro – National Executive Chair of SSVM**



From L-R: Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, Ms. Eseta Nadakuitavuki, Balance of Power Executive Directors, Mereani Rokotuibau and Jennifer Kalpokas Doan, Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM) National Executive Chair, Adi Finau Tabakaucoro and Deputy British High Commissioner to Fiji, Ms. Nicola Noble, at the Launch of the Strategic Development Plan in Nabua.

BOP worked closely with Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM), the country's largest indigenous women's organisation, to develop a new five-year Strategic Development Plan (SDP) that strengthens its structure and governance. The SDP positions SSVM to respond more effectively to national priorities such as young women's leadership, economic empowerment, and political participation. This marks a critical shift towards making SSVM a more future-focused and impactful institution.

BOP supported the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs (MTA) and the iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB) in designing an Integrated Strategic Communication, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework aligned with the MTA and TAB Strategic Plan 2024–2028. This process included tailored capacity building to embed gender-sensitive indicators and monitoring systems to support increased focus on inclusive leadership across iTaukei governance structures.

In partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection and the TAB, BOP is co-developing a leadership training package for women in provincial areas. A pilot phase will be launched in the Central Division to support women's participation

and leadership in traditional and community governance. The initiative is part of BOP's broader strategy to increase women's visibility and influence in decision-making spaces through these strategic partnerships.

In collaboration with TAB and the SSVM, BOP conducted a week-long research exercise in the communities of Nuku and Nabukaluka. The research explored how the Vakacoko Vanua model is understood and applied at the community level, particularly in relation to supporting families of overseas workers. It focused on community perspectives around the impact of labour mobility on remittances, gender relations, and social dynamics—centering on legitimising women's leadership in changing community context through the research process.



Staff of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and iTaukei Affairs Board attending the MEL & Strategic Communications Training.

## Regional

BOP strengthened its regional presence and support for women leaders in political leadership. On 3 June 2025, Hon. Marie Louise Milne', Vanuatu's only female MP, accompanied the BOP Vanuatu team to Suva, Fiji. They presented findings from the 2024 Voter Motivations Research at the USP/ANU Pacific Update and shared insights on her political experiences since her election earlier in 2025.



Vanuatu High Commissioner to Fiji, Her Excellency Viranria Brown, Vanuatu's only female member of Parliament, Hon. Marie-Louise Milne', and Balance of Power Co-Executive Director, Mereani Rokotuibau.