

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.

## Fiji

*I'm grateful to Balance of Power for providing this Youth Capacity Building Training. It has given young leaders - women and men - the opportunity to deepen our understanding of what it means to lead with purpose in our communities." – Virisila Dicoci, Team Leader, Assemblies of God Church, Labasa*

Balance of Power (BOP), in partnership with the National Youth Council of Fiji, convened divisional dialogues on governance and leadership across Fiji's Northern, Western, and Central Eastern divisions. The initiative strengthened institutional capacity and created pathways for young women, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, to engage in leadership roles.

BOP supported the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM) - Fiji's oldest indigenous women's organisation - in convening an institutional strengthening session for its National Executive Council. This session enabled SSVM to reaffirm its collective vision while bolstering governance within its provincial structures. BOP also supported workshops in conjunction with the iTaukei Affairs Board (iTAB) in Bua and Macuata, where the women led the development of three-year strategic plans aligned with both SSVM and Provincial Council goals.

In partnership with the iTAB, BOP conducted interviews across four communities in Naitasiri and Serua from labour-sending households to explore the *Vakacoko Vanua* model to enhance approaches to labour mobility. The research revealed differences in community experiences while highlighting the vital leadership roles of women in sustaining and guiding the process.

BOP supported the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in convening a governance training for its newly elected Board members and Secretariat. The session brought together a dynamic group of young women who have recently assumed leadership positions, marking a generational transition for the organisation.

In partnership with the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC) and Caritas Fiji, BOP organised a half day *Ecumenical Talanoa* with youths from Christian and Hindu faiths on social issues including the civic engagement of young people and national leadership with an inclusive lens.



Members of the SSVM participate in a group discussion during the institutional strengthening session

Under the theme 'She Leads', *fem-LinkPacific*, with support from BoP, conducted eight *Women in Politics* trainings across Fiji's four divisions in preparation for the upcoming municipal and national elections.

## Vanuatu

*"Leadership is not easy, but I am reminded from workshops like this, that I should not look down on myself but remain strong throughout the challenges I face. I am grateful that DOBT leaders have recognised us women leaders and encouraged trainings like this for us. I will take this back to women leaders in my district and help them with their roles."- Vewe Angela Vagel, Regional Leader, Southern Region (Gaua), Diocese of Banks and Torres*

BOP conducted an Adaptive Leadership session for women leaders within the Diocese of Banks and Torres (DOBT) in Torba province. The training focused on shifting mindsets to foster greater acceptance of women's leadership and helping participants recognise their leadership potential. BOP also facilitated financial and board governance training for the DOBT to strengthen institutional capacity and legitimise women's leadership within the organisation.

BOP supported Hon. MP Marie Louise Milne as she participated in the Fo-



Hon. MP Marie Louise Milne during the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting

rum Economic Ministers Meeting at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Serving as Head of Delegation for this regional event, MP Milne represented Vanuatu at the Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting and took part in a joint *talanoa* session with Forum Economic Ministers to discuss strategies for 'future-proofing' Pacific economies amid global challenges.

BOP supported the socialisation in Santo of its Voter Motivation Research, *Unspoken Rules of Politics in Vanuatu*, empowering community and church leaders to lead local outreach on the findings and stimulate civic engagement. BOP also presented findings at the inaugural National University of Vanuatu Research Update, focusing on the barriers and enablers to women's political participation.

In partnership with the VBTC, the Vanuatu High Commission in Suva, and the Vanuatu Students' Association in Fiji, BOP hosted the first overseas *Press Klab* event in Suva as part of Vanuatu Independence celebrations. The event was held at Laucala, USP and featured a livestreamed panel discussion on the theme, *Vanuatu: 45 Years On*, with panelists including Vanuatu High Commissioner, Mrs. Viranria Brown, and Director General, Mrs. Cherol Ala.

BOP Vanuatu Country Manager facilitated a series of Adaptive and Inclusive Leadership sessions including for the Australian-funded Governance for Growth initiative and the Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program, a new Women in Leadership program under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities, and for the induction of newly elected provincial councillors.

Port Vila International School, with support from BOP, hosted the 2025 Inter-School Debate Competition, providing girls and boys with a platform to strengthen their public speaking, and stimulate civic engagement on issues including gender equality and digital transformation.

## Tonga

***"The adaptive leadership training has taught me that the deepest challenges, like shifting mindsets, building trust, and navigating cultural tensions, require a different kind of leadership - one that's courageous, patient, and willing to stir the pot when necessary."- Kalolaine Mafi, Deputy CEO, Tonga Ministry of Education and Training***



Six of the nine women featured in *Trailblazer: Fakataulama Ma'ae Kaha'u*, including HRH Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku'aho (seated, centre), pictured at the official launch event in Tongatapu

The launch of *Trailblazer: Fakataulama Ma'ae Kaha'u* showcased the leadership journeys of nine Tongan women who have driven change in male-dominated sectors, featuring an exclusive interview with HRH Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku'aho. The publication challenges gender stereotypes, with the aim of inspiring youth, especially young women, and promoting gender-inclusive leadership ahead of Tonga's 2025 national elections.

Twenty senior officials from key government ministries in Tonga have graduated from the Public Service Commission's (PSC) Adaptive Leadership Training (Cohort 2). The three-part program, delivered from March to July 2025 through a partnership between the PSC and BOP, supports senior government officials in effective governance, with a focus on the benefits of inclusive leadership and decision-making for improved service delivery.

BOP, in partnership with local experts and the UNDP Pacific Parliamentary Development Portfolio, conducted a half-day 'taster' workshop during Tonga's Women's Practice Parliament. The session engaged a cohort of aspiring women leaders representing all constituencies and provided a platform to build skills and confidence ahead of the November 2025 national elections.

BOP socialised its Youth Voter Motivations research findings with the Ministry of Internal Affairs Youth Division. The session presented key insights on youth attitudes and engagement, including around women in political leadership, providing evidence to support the mid-term review of the National Youth Policy as well as to inform future youth programming and initiatives.