

Balance of Power (BOP) is a multi-country, locally led initiative that promotes 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 supports local actors working to increase women's voice and agency in leadership and decision-making, particularly in the political sphere.

## HOW DO WE WORK?

BOP recognises that deep-seated social norms, attitudes and perceptions around concepts of legitimacy and 'rules of the game' are the primary barriers to achieving gender equality in political leadership in the Pacific. This means understanding the critical role of men and involving norm-influencing agents, including the media and leaders of faith-based organisations and traditional structures, 'working with the grain' of each specific context. BOP itself is made up of influential Pacific Islander leaders who can navigate these contexts and utilise their own networks of leverage and advocacy for influence at community, national and regional levels.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING IN FIJI?

BOP's work in Fiji is guided by Fiji's *National Development Plan* and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.



*The Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei's Inaugural National Indigenous Women's Forum in Suva*

Priority areas include:

### » WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES AND WOMEN'S NETWORKS TO INFLUENCE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES AROUND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

BOP is partnering with Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei (SSVM), Fiji's largest Indigenous women's organisation, to help strengthen its leadership and institutional effectiveness. This includes co-developing SSVM's 2025–2030 Strategic Development Plan, supporting the Marama Sausauvou leadership program for young iTaukei women, and convening the first-ever Indigenous Women's Forum to advance women's leadership and intergenerational engagement in traditional and community structures.

BOP is also working with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs (MITA) and the iTaukei Affairs Board (iTAB) to support gender mainstreaming initiatives, including contributions to the Review of iTaukei Administration and training in monitoring, evaluation, and communications with a gender lens. These efforts aim to ensure more inclusive decision-making and responsive institutions that better serve iTaukei communities.

BOP is similarly supporting the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) to advance a long-term Women's

Leadership Pipeline initiative that builds strong leadership capacity from community to national levels. The program promotes women's participation in local governance, municipal councils, and national politics while engaging male allies to shift perceptions and increase acceptance of women leaders. Through the Vakatawa Noke initiative, FCOSS and BOP are also strengthening community councils in 23 informal settlements in Greater Suva, embedding gender equality in local governance.

### » CONDUCTING RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY BLOCKERS AND ENABLERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY AND USING FINDINGS TO INFLUENCE CHANGE

BOP is working in partnership with MITA and the iTAB to conduct research on the social and gendered impacts of labour mobility, as well as undertaking a refreshed study on *Youth Civic Futures – Deepening Youth Participation in Civil and Political Life in Fiji*, in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Fiji (NYCF).

A key aim is to use the research process as an entry point for discussion around the legitimacy of women's leadership, the importance of civic engagement in the political process, and the need for young women's voices and representation.

### » SUPPORTING YOUTH ORGANISATIONS TO EQUIP AND MOBILISE YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS

BOP is partnering with the NYCF to strengthen inclusive youth leadership and civic engagement by supporting leadership development, strategic planning, and national dialogue on shared decision-making. This partnership is creating opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making at national, local, and community levels, while contributing to broader discussions on gender equality, culture, and youth participation in Fiji.

### » WORKING WITH CHURCHES AND OTHER FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS TO BUILD AWARENESS OF THE COMPATIBILITY OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP WITH RELIGIOUS BELIEF

BOP has initiated discussions with the Methodist Women's Fellowship to support women exercising leadership within the church, while also working with the Fiji Council of Churches to promote women's leadership roles and youth civic engagement. Planning is also underway for the convening of a *Women in Religion* dialogue to bring together women leaders across all faith communities in Fiji, and BOP is participating in the Pacific Theological College's *reSTORYing Pasifika Gender* program, which examines the intersections of faith, culture, and gender.

### » SUPPORTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AS ELECTION CANDIDATES

BOP is partnering with femLINKpacific in its *Women in Politics* program across Fiji's four divisions. Under the theme *She Leads*, the initiative is preparing women from diverse backgrounds with the skills, knowledge and confidence to actively participate in the upcoming municipal and national elections in Fiji.

### » ABOUT US

Balance of Power (BOP) is funded through the Australian Government under Pacific Women Lead and led by Pacific Islanders committed to driving reform and influencing change within their unique country contexts and cultures. BOP's work is informed by national policy frameworks and regional commitments. The first phase (2019-2026) is focused on Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji as well as supporting activity at the regional level.