BALANCE OF POWER UPDATE

OCTOBER 2026

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

"Women have great potential to make a difference, not only in the church, but also in our communities. We need to encourage them and provide the right platforms for them to lead." Seru Bolairokosawa -Lead Pastor with the Waiqanake Assembly of God Church, Veisari.

- BOP continued laying the groundwork for its Women in Faith Leadership initiative in Fiji, following a July scoping exercise and August consultations with faith organisations across the Central, Western and Northern divisions. Community dialogues held from 8–24 September brought together diverse faith communities, with women making up 90% of participants, alongside male faith allies.

- BOP's previous support for women leaders in the public sector participating in COP30 continued to create opportunities for learning and knowledge-sharing ahead of COP31. This included the three women from the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources who participated in COP30.

- Three women connected to the Promoting Empowerment and Resilience through Leadership (PEARL) initiative have been named as candidates for the upcoming general elections, with further confirmations pending.

- In partnership with Fiji Council of Social Services, BOP continued to support the development of a locally grounded Male Allyship Model to encourage men to share power, remove barriers and support women's leadership, drawing on community leaders' experiences across Fiji's four divisions.

- On 21 July 2026, BOP supported a Cabe Vakavanua engagement in partnership with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and iTaukei Affairs Board, bringing together traditional and provincial leaders to strengthen collaboration. Building on earlier engagements with key traditional leaders, the event marked an important milestone with the signing of an MOU between SSVM and the Ministry, reinforcing BOP's role in brokering relationships and supporting coordinated stakeholder engagement.

- BOP continued to support the Vakatawa Noke initiative which is focused on strengthening inclusive governance in informal settlements. This included conducting traditional protocols to the Taukei Vuo, the Chief and traditional landowner of the land where the Qauia community is situated.

Participants of the Women in Faith Leadership Workshop.

Vanuatu

"As young women you have an important role in shaping Vanuatu's future. Work hard, invest in yourself and prepare to become the next generation of leaders." Hon. Stephen Felix-Speaker of the Parliament of Vanuatu at the Vanuatu Students Association debate competition.

- BOP continued sharing findings from its voter motivation research in Santo and Tanna, engaging community leaders to strengthen civic engagement, challenge assumptions and build support for women in political leadership.

- BOP continued supporting the Vanuatu Public Service, Governance for Growth, Vanuatu Skills Partnership, Pacific Australia Skills, Department of Women's Affairs and Vanuatu Australia Policing & Justice Program in delivering Adaptive Leadership trainings. BOP Vanuatu delivered training to officers from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities in Tanna and Santo, as well as to the Women in Policing Network in Luganville, and the Penama Provincial Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC).

- BOP supported debate initiatives to strengthen youth civic engagement and critical thinking. These included a debate competition for ni-Vanuatu university students in Suva, in partnership with the Vanuatu High Commission, as part of Vanuatu's Independence celebrations, and a Climate Loss and Damage Debate at Onesua College, in partnership with the Ministry of Climate Change.

- BOP partnered with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Media Association of Vanuatu (MAV) to deliver gender-sensitive reporting training for journalists, strengthening ethical, inclusive and gender-responsive reporting

across Vanuatu's media sector.

- BOP partnered with the Anglican Diocese of Vanuatu and New Caledonia and the Diocese of Banks and Torres to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Mothers' Union in Melanesia. During the event, more that 50 awards were distributed in recognition of the women's outstanding leadership, service and contributions to their communities.

Members of the Mothers' Union in Melanesia pictured during the 150th Anniversary celebration.

Tonga

"As women, we can become discouraged by repeatedly discussing the same issues without turning those conversations into action. Progress comes when we take that next step. If you aspire to contest in local elections, go for it! Regardless of the outcome, the experience will be rewarding." Sisifa Fili, sharing her experience during the Leadership and Financial Literacy session with the 'Eua Women Council.

- ABC Radio Australia's "Sistas Let's Talk", a program exploring issues affecting women across the Pacific, invited women featured in BOP's Trailblazers book to share their perspectives on what it means to be a matriarch in Tonga. Ms Mele Sisi Finefeuiaki, owner of "Lotopoha Exporters", was interviewed on the radio prgram in August.

- BOP supported the visit of Australian Ambassador for Gender Equality, Michelle O'Byrne, in partnership with Hon. Fane Fituafe, Parliament's representative for Tongatapu 6 Constituency. The Ambassador met with emerging women leaders to share her political leadership journey and discuss the opportunities and challenges women face in leadership. The dialogue encouraged participants to reflect on their leadership aspirations and explore pathways to greater participation in decision-making ahead of next year's local elections.

- BOP supported the completion of the Leadership and Financial Literacy training in 'Eua, in collaboration with the 'Eua Women's Council. The training strengthened women's leadership capacity, confidence and financial literacy, with participants expressing interest in contesting leadership positions in the 2027 Local Government Elections. The initiative also strengthened local networks of women leaders and established a foundation for ongoing mentoring and support, with lessons from the pilot informing future leadership development activities across Tonga.

Australian Ambassador for Gender Equality, Michelle O'Byrne, and Tonga's Minister for Internal Affairs and representative for Tongatapu 6 Constituency, Hon. Fane Fituafe, with emerging women leaders from the constituency.

Regional

- BOP contributed to regional discussions at the Policy Dialogue on Shared Decision-Making and Women's Leadership in the Pacific held in Fiji on 23–24 July 2026. Discussions highlighted that sustainable progress requires more than increasing women's representation; it also means addressing the systems, institutions, cultural norms and power dynamics that shape leadership. An ecosystem approach combining leadership development, policy reform, accountability, allyship and locally-led solutions was identified as key to advancing more equitable and inclusive leadership across the Pacific.

BOP Co-Executive Director Mereani Rokotuibau and Fiji Country Manager Josaia Osborne at the Policy Dialogue on Shared Decision-Making and Women's Leadership in the Pacific, Nadi. Photo: SPC.

- BOP participated in the 2nd Pasifika Philosophies Conference, which highlighted the importance of Pacific-centred leadership grounded in relationships, culture, collective responsibility, trust and accountability. Discussions emphasised that inclusive leadership, involving women, young people, elders and communities, is essential to strengthening Pacific agency and collective wellbeing.

- BOP Vanuatu Country Manager, Wilson Toa, and BOP Vanuatu Country Program Officer, Telstar Jimmy, took part in a cross-learning exchange with DT Global's DFAT-funded Building Community Engagement in Papua New Guinea program and its network of faith partners. The exchange enabled both teams to share experiences on engaging faith institutions to influence social norms, strengthen community resilience and support women's and men's shared leadership.

From left: BOP Vanuatu Country Program Officer Telstar Jimmy, Head Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG), the Right Reverend Dr. Jack Kalu Urame, and BOP Vanuatu Country Program Manager Wilson Toa.