

Generation Next - Paving the way for Young Women through Community Radio

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

It may be difficult to understand why there are many barriers that hinder the inclusion of young women in decision making processes not only in the women's movement, but also in broader civil society. In the Pacific, existing educational, socioeconomic, political and cultural barriers, as well as the urban and rural divide, continue to challenge the advancement of a gender equality agenda in the region.

More specifically, many young women are still relegated to traditional roles instead of being recognised as the next generation of leaders of the women's movement, even in spaces that are supposed to be women-centered and inclusive of young women's sexual and reproductive health rights.



of the “suitcase radio station” in Suva. As with any radio station, femLINKPACIFIC also needed a production and broadcast team, and a team that would be informed and guided by the organization’s mission.

femLINKPACIFIC has trained more than 50 young women since the training began in 2004. Through an annual training programme the young women are further equipped with skills to produce in-depth features as well as become more knowledgeable on the regulatory,

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Since femLINKPACIFIC was established in 2000, we have constantly asked ourselves how we can pave the way for young women to learn and grow through our organisation. How can we ensure investment not only in our organisation, but also in the next generation of women leaders who can use community media ICTs to champion women’s human rights, peace and security, from the community to the policy spaces?

Our musings about these questions gave rise to femLINKPACIFIC’s Generation Next Project.

Following the launch of femLINKPACIFIC’s mobile women’s community radio station in 2004, femLINKPACIFIC developed a series of training programmes for young women in Suva, Fiji that built on the role of in-school students who assisted in our monthly “weekend” community radio broadcasts. The Generation Next project emerged from these training initiatives with a vision to develop a core group of young women from diverse backgrounds and experiences, to be the producers and broadcasters

programming and management aspects of the community radio station. The young women who have participated in the programme are both in-school girls, and those who have had to leave school. They are girls who are finding their identity and role in their communities and society as well young women who need a safe space to discuss and communicate important issues, especially after having dealt with our country’s political realities, particularly since the military coup of December 2006.

What are the issues members of Generation Next are talking about?

The young women of Generation Next are talking about a wide variety of issues that are important to girls in our community. These include economic security – living cost increase, domestic violence, and poverty; personal security – women not being able to voice opinions; sexual exploitation of women and children; teenage pregnancies; early marriages and forced

marriages; violence (sexual, physical, emotional), and exploitation; and the lack of access to health services, especially education for women.

They have also been talking about how women's talents are not being completely recognised, as well as health security issues including pregnancy, abortion, HIV/AIDS, molestation at work and school. The discussions also center around peer pressure; unemployment and women as vulnerable members of society. Generation Next has also provided spaces where; stories from women with disabilities, victims of rape and violence are shared. All of these issues, among many others, were raised by members of Generation Next at their mid-year consultation in 2009. These are the issues which form the basis of the "suitcase radio" broadcasts.

So how is the "suitcase radio" making a difference in the lives of Generation Next?

According to Jimaima Luvunakoro, a member of Generation Next since July 2009, one of the important lessons she learned is time management. She said that Generation Next has taught her how to manage her time more effectively so as to meet the deadlines for productions. This entailed allocating time for pre-production, research, and interviews.

Another important skill that young women gain is the production of broadcasts, through the use of Audacity – a free and open source audio editing software. As well, participants develop self-confidence by being taught public speaking and communication skills, says Vika Saro, another Generation Next member.

Moushmi Narayan, a young woman who joined the founding group of the Generation Next project as a nominee of the women's committee of the Fiji Disabled People's Association,



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emphasised that "I've learned how to produce radio programmes and work collaboratively with other young women producers and broadcasters. I also learned how time is a valuable asset when producing my own programme. As a person with disability, I've learned that in order for people to understand my disability I have to be part of the community as it will give room for others to understand the needs of people with disabilities and allow them to create an environment that is disability friendly."

Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide:

When talking about femTALK 89.2FM serving as a bridge between rural and urban communities, this is also about strengthening and sustaining rural women's media network by ensuring a space for young women.



Sulueti Waqa from Ba Senior Citizen's Centre – where femLINK had its first-ever remote broadcast in 2004 shares how her life changed after attending the annual Generation Next training. The soft-spoken, 23 year-old began reporting for femTALK and went on to study journalism and broadcasting. Now, she is at femLINKPACIFIC's community media centre as a Technical Producer, assisting the broadcast team with post productions for local programmes and developing the weekly broadcast log. According to Sulueti, the stories that have the biggest impact are the those from women at the markets, who travel hours from their villages into cities to sell whatever they can grow or make to earn a few dollars. "When you talk to them, they feel like their burdens lighten and they can share the burdens and struggles that they've carried for a long time."

In 2010, femLINKPACIFIC also recruited a team of Generation Next members in Labasa and Nadi – two of the main rural centres in Fiji. This was done through our rural women's media network.

Creating Young Women's Training Spaces

In February 2010, the Generation Next Training Programme focused on Digital Storytelling as an opportunity to invest in expanding the technical production and media skills of its members. Eight rural young women joined the training.

A first step in their empowerment process began when they simply shared their stories, first in a conversation circle and then through script writing and the development of their own digital story:

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technology and it started with me writing my script, my story!" said one participant.

Every day brought a new experience, a new realisation and a new step of self discovery not only for the eight rural young women but also for the Suva-based Generation Next members as they were given the opportunity to communicate their priorities through their own media productions using the appropriate media technology. This also contributed to building their confidence and self esteem.

Through the week-long workshop, participants got the opportunity to learn about Digital Story Telling, which is the effective use of images, audio and sound to help them share their priority issues as young women. They also learned the basics of radio production, including scriptwriting, and on air presentation and production .

For 26 year old Sherine Lata from Korovuto, Nadi, it was an opportunity to use computers and other new information and communication technologies which she does not have access to in her community.

"This was the first time for me to ever touch a laptop or computer and I got this chance through participating in this workshop. This workshop also provided me with the safe space to communicate the issues which affect me deeply and which can help other young women who are going through the same issues," she said.

The training reaffirmed the need to provide access to communication and information tools for the women and young women in the rural areas to ensure they have an equal opportunity to communicate their issues and to ensure that rural women are better represented in development and dialogue processes.

This training was an excellent opportunity to explain the role of Generation Next to the core members of femLINKPACIFIC's women's media network. By providing young women practical media skills training and helping them understand the policy connections, we enhanced

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young women's opportunities to use a range of creative techniques and media technology to communicate the most important issues affecting young women in their communities. At the same time, the participants recognised that digital story telling, like radio, is a safe space for young women to address some of the more sensitive issues using appropriate and accessible media technology.

For 19 year old Charlene Ashley, a new member of Generation Next in Suva, the digital story telling workshop has led her to discover the producer in her.

"I have discovered many new and invaluable things in this week long training with young women from my age group and have also learned how I can use these ICT's for women's

empowerment and improve their representation in media", she said.

The training also contributed to building greater understanding and partnership between the Suva and rural participants who will be contributing to in-depth features for the weekly "suitcase radio" broadcasts.

This partnership building links closely to a goal of femLINKPACIFIC, which is to contribute to strengthening women's media/information-communication network to support women's peace and human security advocacy in Fiji. By focusing on building the capacity of a core group of young women producers both in the capital city and in two target rural communities, femLINKPACIFIC is also using community media to link the issues and experiences of young women with the broader gender issues in peace and human security. The establishment of the rural "Generation Next" team is paving the way for strengthening the rural women's media network through the involvement of young women, with a vision to improve the access of target communities to Fiji and the Pacific's only feminist-based community radio station.

For 26 year old Makareta of Nakavu Village in Nadi, the week was also an emotional journey of self discovery and realisation. "This workshop re-affirmed that anything is possible, especially for me, as I did not have access to information and communication tools but here I am, learning to make a digital story with the latest in technology and the best part is that I get to tell my own human security story and share it with other young women of my age", she said.

19 year old Lucille Chute who is now working with her mother, Adi Vasu Chute, femLINKPACIFIC's longest serving rural correspondent, said, "I have gained confidence to speak out in public and also gained the knowledge of how to use media to communicate similar stories of women and young women in my community".

Suva-based Sulueti Waqa learned new aspects of the connection between Media and ICTs and empowerment, despite using ICT's in her everyday life. She emphasizes that "I have learned new ways to use the existing communication and information technologies and this will help me in being a better producer and to produce quality technical content."

The workshop ended with the rural and Suva-based Generation Next team recording a Generation Next Anthem "Invest in Me" which was produced as a digital story.

Linking Young Women with Global Campaigns

femLINKPACIFIC is a member of AMARC – the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. In 2009, Suva-based members of Generation Next assisted in organising and hosting their global community radio broadcast campaign as they staged local broadcasts using suitcase radio station (femTALK 89.2FM) with women from communities in Nausori Town, approximately 30 minutes away from the capital city to enable rural women in participation of the campaign, 16 Days of Action to End Violence Against Women. The young women also produced special segments with various NGO partners and took to the streets of Suva with their tape recorders to gather "vox pops" from the general public addressing the theme for the campaign.

According to Kalpana Prasad, femLINKPACIFIC's Community Media Officer and one of the broadcast coordinators, "The 16 days of outdoor community radio broadcast was an excellent opportunity for capacity building for the young Generation Next team members who got field experience in producing programmes and then putting them directly on air. Most of the young women also got an opportunity to

conduct live interviews with the rural women. The programs produced by femLINKPACIFIC with the different rural women's clubs during the 16 days of community radio broadcast to commemorate the 16 days of activism enabled the rural women to provide their perspectives on the campaign's theme. The women were offered a safe space to consider these issues as human rights issues. This resulted in all the women speaking out on the issue of violence against women."

Generation Next is more than the Suitcase Radio Station

The Generation Next project also has served as an entry point for young women into femLINKPACIFIC, as several of them have become members of femLINKPACIFIC's

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core team at the community media centre – including positions such as Policy Research Officer, Community Media Officer, Technical Producer and CMC based correspondent – with the latter two also assisting as Generation Next team leaders.

Providing mentoring and media skills support, femLINKPACIFIC also aims to provide an annual media skills training programme for Generation Next members, as well as our regional correspondents, to enhance not only the media skills but also the feminist/gender analysis skills of Generation Next – enabling the young women to not only produce and broadcast content, but to also enhance their own knowledge and capacity as advocates of gender equality, women's human rights and peace and security advocates.

Building on the organisation's participation in the People's Communication for Development research of Isis International, as well as on its role as coordinator of a Regional Women's Media and Policy Network on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Generation Next project continues as part of femLINKPACIFIC's broader Women, Peace and Human Security architecture as a way to enhance women's information and communication channels. Community radio remains an important platform and outlet for women; allowing them to be heard in current political discussions. Moreover, as radio productions surface women's voices, they also contribute to policy outcomes, especially as Fiji's current political context makes it harder

for femLINKPACIFIC to encourage mainstream media programs to use features produced by community women due to requirements under the current media regulations.

The continued investment in the Generation Next project will enable femLINKPACIFIC to actively involve young women, as part of our contribution to the strengthening of women's information and communication networks and the empowerment of women during a critical time in Fiji's political history. ♦

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