How do Pacific coalitions think and work politically for gender equality?

Taking a look at the We Rise Coalition
Who is the We Rise Coalition?

1. Diverse Voices in Action (DIVA) for Equality: LBT collective, Fiji
2. FemLINKPACIFIC: women’s community media organisation with focus on women, peace, security, Fiji
3. Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM): women’s rights organisation, Fiji

We Rise MOU signing in Melbourne, Australia on 8th April, 2016. Photo: IWDA
How does the We Rise Coalition work?

• Existing relationships, over many years
• Acknowledge diverse strengths of organisations and individuals
• Carefully, deliberately self-defining, with a high level of self-reflection – can be a slow and arduous process
• Despite apparent formality of structure, trust leads to greater flexibility and mobility
• Feminist praxis – putting feminist theory and principle into action and ongoing, evolving practice
“A coalition is more than just a project activity”
Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, FemLINKPACIFIC

Photo: IWDA
How does the We Rise Coalition work?

We Rise MOU outlines **five principles** underlying their praxis:

1. **Commitment to equality**
   • Vastly different sizes, ages, histories, status and budgets of four member organisations
   • Working with equality is done very deliberately, carefully negotiated and managed e.g. equality in practice in strategic leadership

2. **Solidarity**
   • Open conversations about how to deal with differences in strategy between the organisations
   • Solidarity in practice e.g. climate change advocacy
How does the We Rise Coalition work?

3. Transparency, accountability and co-responsibility

• Very challenging area
• Necessitates calling each other out for poor practice

“It is easier to call out those who are politically far from you, but to do it in a healthy way with a close ally, that is an inherently more complicated process”

Noelene Nabulivou, DIVA for Equality.
How does the We Rise Coalition work?

4. Sustainability

“Empowering individual women... cannot achieve systemic change. Sustainable change can only be achieved by demand-driven approaches...building movements of women.” We Rise MOU

5. Self care

• Difficult, sometimes dangerous work, necessitates nurturing bodies, minds and organisations to prevent burn-out and staff turnover.

• Use “practice of reflexivity”, involving regular coalition ‘health-checks’ to increase “stamina for movement building”
“Something [others don’t] recognise or speak about is how to navigate self-interest. We are transparent about what we want to get out of this Coalition, collectively and individually – our MoU documents this.”

Meghan Cooper, International Women’s Development Agency
What has the We Rise Coalition achieved?

Reach
In its first year:

• 2,235 people were involved in We Rise Coalition DFAT-funded activities.

• 2,048 were women and 79 were men, and 108 identified as transgender.

• 74% were from rural/semi-rural areas and about ¼ from urban and peri-urban areas.

• Fiji, Pacific regional, Asia-Pacific and global advocacy
What has the We Rise Coalition achieved?

**Effectiveness**

Systemic change can only be seen over a longer timeframe, but there is evidence that these organisations are contributing to change. Difficult to clearly extract what the organisations have achieved specifically as a coalition, but these may include:

- Engagement in local, regional and global advocacy efforts for diverse women’s human rights.
- Strengthening civil society mechanisms to advocate on women’s human rights.
- Leading the design and implementation of research to highlight the diverse women’s experiences and role in decision making in Fiji
- Engagement and building networks with diverse women in rural and urban Fiji
- Establishing a baseline Coalition model and developing collaborative ways of working.
What has the We Rise Coalition achieved?

Pacific Feminist Forum, November 28-30, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

“As feminists in the Pacific we recognise multiple intersecting forms of patriarchy, long standing and unequal gendered power relations and emerging processes of oppression.” Pacific Feminist Charter, 2016
What have we learned?

• The process of coalition building can be just as important as the immediate outcomes
• Deep engagement between organisations, not just individual leaders, can lead to more stability through difficult times
• Trust leads to greater flexibility
• Locally-found, locally-led solutions - ‘facilitative vs directive’ role
• Does inclusivity/diversity lead to more sustainable change in the long term?
What does this mean for Pacific Women?

• Role in convening, connecting groups, researchers, ideas, models etc – and learning from them

• Role in supporting existing and emerging coalitions – and learning from them

• Collaboration with PLP and locally-led coalitions and groups

• Continuing to explore a key assumption in the Pacific Women program design: That working through coalitions and alliances for change will contribute to more sustained and substantial outcomes.