**Nalini Singh:** Warm Pacific greetings from the WeRise coalition and welcome to this session. I am Nalini Singh the executive director for Fiji Women's Rights Movement. Thank you all very much for joining us and connecting into this virtual site event brought to you by the WeRise coalition and I appreciate all the panellists that have joined us. Allow me to also welcome those that are viewing the virtual side event from the comfort of your homes in your offices, in your respective countries. I want to note that anyone attending is free to use the general information from the discussion today. However, neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers or any other participants may be revealed without their expressed permission. This is an inclusive event, as we do have a sign language interpreter, and subtitles for those that require it. You can share your comments in the comments section. And if you have a question, we have a segment in our event to allow for question and answer time. My colleague will also put on the hashtags for this event in the chat box, and please do tag us or tweet at us, and we'll do our best to connect with you during the event, or even after the event. I will introduce the speakers presenting today as we get into the panel part of the discussion. But it'll be amazing if you can introduce yourselves in the chat box as well with name and where you are joining us from, that'd be great for us to know. Who are we? The WeRise coalition is a feminist partnership between seven diverse women's rights organisations in Fiji Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Australia. The coalition resources the core work of each of the partner organisation and partners work to secure the safety and leadership of diverse women and girls and engage in collective work to strengthen the Pacific feminist movement. So coming to the event that we are at today, we have called it Women of the Pacific looking at policies to practical realities when it comes to the complex, but a reality for us, which is the climate crisis and what impacts it manifests for our us as Pacific peoples. The global and regional geopolitical and development context is changing drastically in our Pacific continent, or shall I say the blue Pacific continent and the challenges of ongoing vulnerabilities to environmental climate change, disaster risk and economic shocks as well. In 2020, the COVID 19 global pandemic and the ongoing climate disasters have seen unprecedented impacts resulting in immediate and long term health, economic and social challenges for women in our region. Climate change, or as we term it, crisis, is an existential threat to the Pacific way of life. And it will exacerbate other challenges already affecting the region. This panel will highlight not only the issues that you know, we are facing with the climate crisis, but also looking to some examples of policies related to dealing with or coping with the climate crisis and disasters. So while the climate crisis is one that affects all, we usually don't see policies, legislation, and programmes being inclusive or gender responsive. Our panellists will delve into why that is the case and what can be done better. So, I would like us to begin the panel because we have quite a bit to unpack. So I'll take you to the wonderful land of where our first panellist Lilly Be'soer is from. Lilly is a women's rights defender and an advocate for political, economic and social empowerment for women in her native country of Papua New Guinea. She hails from the Jiwaka province in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Lilly is the founder and director for Voice for Change, which is a provincial NGO based and working in the Jiwaka province. Voice for Change focuses on ending violence against women and girls and building alliances with communities and provincial governments in Jiwaka to advocate for safer communities and to end all forms of violence. So, Lilly, my question to you is in the context of Papua New Guinea or more so in the context of where you work, what are the challenges you're facing and how are the women's rights organisations including yours, working to deal with those challenges. And do you see how policies and legislation that has been put in by our government or even the regulations by our provincial governments, how is that being done? Where are the women and girls when it comes to making these policies, these regulations work for all. Lilly, welcome.

**Lilly Be’Soer:** Thank you and hello everybody. Good morning from Papua New Guinea. I am able to share with you the practical experiences of working with the rural women in terms of the climate changes and the climate crisis. I think importantly, I would like to stress here is that most of the women, the rural people, they lack information. They don't really know what is really happening because most of them, they have been using the traditional calendar and they're confused with the long period of rain. They're confused with long droughts and so many things happening and there's a challenge of lack of information. I would like to share one particular experience that we worked with. In 2020, we had a drought for about three months. And when this drought occurred we had women facing a lot of problem with water shortage. So they have to travel to the nearby Creek to get water. And during this process of moving, they have been abused. They have been arrest, they have been assaulted. Some of them, they have been charged to pay, to collect water from where the landowners of the river where the Creek was or the river was flowing through. So these are the challenges that the women have faced, where we were able to go out and document them. And then the other one was the women, one of challenges that we faced with them especially the vulnerable women that most of these women that we support with they normally buy and sell. And they do this retail, the middle woman that buys and sells from the farmer and the extra money that they make that normally sustains their family. So they were not able to resell again because they were not able to resell again because of the lack of continuous production, because of the effect on the diverse climate on them. So the women were not able to continue this activity. So these were some of the challenges that we actually documented cases and had consultation with the women there. Some of the approaches that we took, tried to see how we can address this. One of them regarding the water, we were able to talk to one of the community and also talk to the leaders there. We also asked the police to see if we can help them to come to a common understanding that water is needed, by everybody and they have to access the water. So this was one of the strategies or one of the approaches that we took. We tried to bring the people together to talk to them that they need water and they can let them pass allow them to get water from the Creek, from their Creek which runs on their land. Regarding the women who've been especially reselling. We have now worked to introducing them to micro saving so that they can save little bit of money that they make so that when such time rises, they can be able to use this money to help meet the needs of the family. These are some of the practical approaches that we have been taking. The third one is we are trying to inform people and getting out awareness that such things are gonna happen. And people are really confused because this is something that has never happened. The elderly people are saying that they've never experienced such before. Like the long drought and also at times we have the flood, the flood, like the river floods, which has never flooded before. So this is something that we need to make the people understand what is really happening. Thank you Nalini.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you very much, Lilly, for your very insightful, contribution to this discussion. And I'm sure those that have joined us in this panel. This event will have lots of questions. So please do type them up in the chat box and we will do our best to have all the panellists respond to them. But let me now take you to the wonderful country of Samoa where I'd like to introduce you to our next panellist who is Doris Tulifau. And she is someone that has been very courageous and she's began a non-profit organisation called Brown Girl Woke in Samoa very recently. And it was the first ever organisation to provide programmes and conferences for Pacific Islanders who are living in California. And Doris has worked with homeless shelters that have looked after many of the homeless from Asia and the Pacific in California. And as a cultural correspondence for five years, she has encountered, with Samoans and Tongans in those shelters. Doris has also volunteered and worked in Samoa and in a variety of organisations, including the Young Women Christian Association with Samoa, the Samoa Victim Support Group Juniors, and the Samoa Cancer Society. So Samoa presenting a very interesting case for us because they have recently elected a woman as their prime minister. We are all very proud of the fact, but Doris would like to show a little short video to us all. So before we go into showing the video Doris would like to take a minute or so to just explain what the video is about. And then I will ask you the question that would present to you.

**Doris Tulifau:** Hello everyone, my name is Doris Tulifau. The video that we're about to watch is our climate change club, it's under 350. 350 Pacific is a known youth climate change advocacy around the world. And we have our club at the University of South Pacific, and we allow the students to tell the story as Pacific islanders or authors through this video.

**[Video Narrator]** A person's responsibility, a nation's obligation, the world's duty, climate change. A term so carelessly thrown around yet it's very so vital to the survival of our race, our beautiful Pacific. So deep in the clutches of this nightmare, they see our suffering, they hear our anguish, they know our fear yet they brush it off so casually. Their greed for wealth trumps any hope for our islands to remain. The desire to attain more pushes our homes to the brink of no return. How is it that we contribute the least to the world's carbon footprint yet we carry the heaviest consequences. The saying goes "the strong prey on the weak." And they see us as such. They think the sizes of our land determine the strength of our will. Their injustice stirs the passion beneath the surface of every islander. The drive to see their homes last another generation, the pull to see the region at its primal beauty. The hope that these small islands will make a change. This hope pushes me to stand strong. It ignites a fire within me to see justice served this is my message to anyone willing to listen to my brothers and sisters of blood and of bond. Answer my call, take up arms and stand beside me, bare with me, fight with me. We are Pacifico.

**Nalini Singh:** That was indeed a very powerful video. Thank you Doris for sharing that. And coming back to this panel, my question to you would be, if you could share your perspectives around Samoa's commitments in terms of addressing the climate crisis what would be of focus for you? And if you can elaborate in terms of, how have women being involved or left out in terms of the development of the policies and legislation, what issues are gonna be focusing on for us, because I know there's been a lot being done in many of our countries in relation to adaptation and mitigation, measures that have been implemented. So Doris?

**Doris Tulifau:** Thank you, like you said so beautifully, we elected our first woman prime minister and she spoke last year during COP26, about what we need for climate change. And everyone is talking about climate change finance, and that's something that is huge for me and should be huge for all of us in the Pacific as we only contribute 0.03% to the climate crisis, yet we are feeling the most effects globally. So what can we do is to make sure that we're in these seats, sitting in this conversation as women are the front liners, we are always the people that are there, the local experts to know where this funding should be. But unfortunately with the climate change finance it does go to bigger organisations that take care of this, like the Green Fund, and sometimes makes us feel that we don't have the expertise or the right to be there but we do. I wanted to quote what our prime minister said about what we should to do with climate change finance, but also to a bigger understanding of what Samoa has been doing. Samoa is committed to reducing greenhouse emissions from the electricity sub-sector through the adoption of 100% renewable energy to target 2025, which is a very huge expectation. They said this in 2017 and 2025 is just around the corner. I know we probably said this during the time, where we did not know that we would have COVID, but they have done a lot of work trying to make sure that we have renewable electricity, which is huge. With what I said earlier with the amazing woman prime minister Fiame on speaking last year, this is just a quote from what she said. "We need to ensure a new scale of climate finance goal that builds on the USD of $100 billion on the floor. We must guarantee a balanced allocation of climate finance, between mitigation and adaptation climate finance made available to SIDS are still insufficient and mainly in the form of loans. The prime minister calls to small island developing states to receive scaled up adequate, predictable and long term support from their international community to adapt." With all this said, there's been $100 billion going towards the climate change crisis. We're not seeing that money locally. We need to make this a local international women rights and have us sitting in these conversations. What Brown Girl Woke have done to help we've started clubs at the schools. Sometimes it feels like we're not doing enough, but education is key, especially for this next generation where we're giving this next generation, the world that we've so far, which is horrible right now, but they need to be educated. So with the amazing group from 350 Pacific, we've made a subgroup at the University of South Pacific to educate the university students on what they need to know about climate change. With that, we go into the schools and primary schools to start clubs on climate change and how to speak about it. Also doing storytelling. I think what I've learned with the coalition that we're in right now, WeRise is that people like me need to step aside from youth advocacy and start making sure that I'm in these seats in my own country, learning more about what are the policies and how do we make sure that this funding goes to our local entities and what they need to speak out about. Sorry Nalini, I kept going, going.

**Nalini Singh:** Which is in fact resonating in my opinion, across the Pacific Island countries. But thank you very much for that. And I'm sure there will be questions for you later on, but let me take everyone across the Pacific to another country, back to Fiji and bring us to the work that femLINKpacific does here in Fiji and introduce you all to Susan Grey. Susan Grey has several years of experiences experience working directly in electoral agencies, in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, specifically supporting civil society. And she has extensive experience in project management, policy and strategy development, et cetera. She is the executive director for femLINKpacific, which is a local, regional and national catalyst for change through the use of accessible media and information technologies. And she says that femLINKpacific seeks a Pacific region where there is gender justice, ecological sustainability, peace, freedom, equality, and human rights. So welcome Susan. And I believe you also have a little video to share before we delve into the question that I have for you. So before we show the video, would you like to explain what we are gonna be watching in a couple of sentences, Susan? Welcome.

**Susan Grey**: Sure Nalini, thank you. And thank you Nalini for that and thank you all those that have zoomed in. The little video that will be played, basically just captures the voices of our diverse women's network in the Northern part of Fiji, which is Vanua Levu where I'm from and the voices they basically talk about the impact on their live reality or really their stories about what happened after the event of cyclone Yasa and cyclone Ana. And that was late 2020 and early 2021 and the floods that occurred straight after.

- During TCS when it happened in the north individuals with disability had a very hard time to access the evacuation centres. The infrastructure for evacuation centres were not disability friendly, not only that there were issues coming up from evacuation centres with regards to women being victims of sexual abuses. And that's something that the national disaster management office could look into. The sort of information that they give out for preparedness should not only be on preparing for disasters, but also on areas of respecting boundaries during natural disasters.

**[Video Narrator]** It is one of the stronger cyclones up there in Houston.

**[Video]**  Some people lost their homes, a lot of crops, the backyard gardening and people had a lot of damages done and lost a lot of properties and their crops.

**[Video]**  Most of the farms in Labasa were totally destroyed. It was really hard for the farmers to getting their produce because foreign trees were flying down there across the road. Most of the vendors don't have anything to sell this affect their income.

**[Video]**  A recommendation to the community, to the stakeholders and to the state of the government. If only we could have evacuation centres within the village to cater for our elderly people and the disabled as they are unable to go to the schools, which are mostly used as evacuation centres.

**[Video]** This has affected my life personally with the life of those that live in the same community as I do the damages done to the property and the amount of money that we had to use in order to restore what we had lost during this year with food security, water and electricity, also with the education of children.

**[Video]** And during this pandemic, the women and children, they suffered a lot. And when the pandemic came, they were not prepared for it. And also they didn't have all the knowledge of how to go about it. And they had fear, a lot of fear because there were a lot of deaths going on.

**[Video]**  I agree with the statements that women and children faced the worst impacts of disasters, including the pandemic, because most of the women have to be resilient get up and find ways to cater for their families. My recommendation to the community, that they have to have some savings before any disaster strikes. They have to have preventative measures with them and for the government to give assistance to both farmers and vendors as well during any disaster.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you very much Susan, for that video, which really highlights and spotlights on the issues that we face here in Fiji, where we have seen the frequency of tropical cyclones increasing and we are not able to recover from one and we get hit with another one. So my question to you would be in regards to sharing in terms of the work that femLINKpacific has been doing, I mean, you have been connecting the local to national, regional and global in terms of the available spaces, to talk about the impact of disasters and climate change as it really relates to how it impacts women, but, reflecting on that, would you also would like to, share your focus in terms of which particular area for policy or programmes in Fiji, or do you think, it serves women or has not. And how have we been involved in that or is that an existing gap?

**Susan Grey**: Thank you Nalini for that. And you know, I'm actually Zooming in right now from Ba which is a Western town of Fiji. And I'm actually here for World Met Day. And, we have the ministers for disaster responsible for the NDMO responsible for Fiji Met here in this particular location. And the theme of that is, early warning and early action and femLINKpacific has been invited to be part of this space and this is all part of what we are trying to do is take those voices to the national. And here we are also trying to take those voices to the global. So with femLINKpacific, central to our work is our feminist work is our women's weather watch modality that we've taken to even parts of the Pacific. And I'd like to focus specifically on the disasters, the climate crisis. You've heard about the women when they're talking about the pandemic. So we are talking also about multiple crisis and the impacts on the lived realities or basically on how it's impacting diverse, rural women and girls. So recently we conducted in the Northern part of Fiji over the second wave of the COVID 19 pandemic. And those were the voices that you just heard. And that was around about October last year. So Viti Levu was on lockdown. So it was our young feminist media team there in Vanua Levu, they conducted about five intergenerational dialogues in all the three provinces. And those dialogues basically was really about the experiences of tropical cyclone Yasa which make landfall in Vanua Levu. And so a Northern feminist community radio station really also felt the brunt of the cyclone, just like much of the infrastructure on the island. A month later around about January. A few of us also travelled up to the north. There was also a lower level cyclone TC Yasa that also made landfall that cut through Viti Levu, but brought heaps of moisture and so much rain that caused widespread flooding in the north. So, what we tried to do as a feminist media organisation was do that media documentation of the stories of the women in a safe space and why we do it, that's the modality and the methodology that we use, we do that because we know it is us that they can talk to. And that basically stories, storytelling, the telling all that is really the data of the Pacific islands and so on. So, we do that storytelling. We do those convenings, those diverse rural convenings with a feminist media approach of do no harm where we try and also allow that unfiltered and that authentic voice to emerge and so forth. In a village in the north, the women basically spoke about the heating of the sea and their personal security. They had their assigned traditional role where they were to bring in the reef fish and the crabs. However, the sea became hotter than usual, even in the dark, there wore long sleeve garments to fend off the mosquitoes out in the sea and because it was dark and the seas would be cooler as the night wore on, they went in groups for their own personal security conscious of not being alone. So we've tried to share that with state agencies, their voices, their findings is imperative for our work. So with that, we are trying to seek gender justice and encourage women's participation and leadership in disaster preparedness response and recovery. And that is exactly why I'm here, here in Ba and to also meet up with director NDMO director MET and so forth. So, we really would like to also just also talk, talk about the statistics that we have got with the impacts of cyclones Yasa and Ana. The top four responses that we saw in that assessment that everyone were basically talking about their personal safety, which was around about 71%, their mental health, and also their ability to see families and friends. And that's where their mental health also came about. And you talk about the policies to practicalities without the questions of practicalities do emerge. Fiji has a natural disaster risk reduction policy for 2018 to 2030. That policy has guiding principles covering human rights and gender based approaches. Do we, in the movement, in the women's movement really, really know about that. How about that engagement? And does that policy really reflect the live realities of diverse women and girls? We just did an assessment just like last year. And these are the same old issues that are appearing about evacuation centres. This policy was put into place in 2018 and with left that Nalini I know the time is up for me, but I'm happy to also answer questions.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you so much Susan, incredible work indeed. And yes, you've highlighted what we have been saying that we don't think that women are not let alone in the spaces where such consultations and decisions are being made. And our concerns are not therefore heard when policies and regulations and legislation are being crafted and enforced. We'll come back to that in a little while, but let me take all of us. And we were supposed to also go to Tonga. However, our partner from Tonga is unable to join us, and I'm sure everyone that is part of this event will know that Tonga recently faced an incredible amount of hardship with the volcanic eruption that happened and the tsunamis that came in the aftermath. So they're unable to join us today, but I'm sure if our partner, which is the Talitha Project from Tonga, if they were with us, they would share the same sentiments around how these policies and regulations in terms of addressing the impacts of climate change and disasters really don't have us at the table and our voices missing from them. So how do they respond to our needs? Well, that's the big question, but so now I have the pleasure of taking you to Vanuatu where we have a partner organisation Sista led by an incredible young woman, Yasmine who is an activist for women's rights and empowerment. She is the executive director and founder of Sista, which is a charitable organisation based in Vanuatu and driven by feminist values. Sister aims to use arts, media and communication, to empower women and girls and raise awareness and advocate on issues that affect them. They were also recently established in 2016 in fact, and since that time, Sista has evolved where women across the globe have been standing in solidarity with each other to challenge oppression and claim their rights their vision is simple so she says. We know that it's one that we share with, and it's incredibly difficult at times, but their vision says that we want to live in a world where women and girls are able to enjoy their rights and participate fully in decisions that affect their lives. So it's exactly on that tone that I welcome Yasmine as our next panellist. And I ask her to share, what has been happening in Vanuatu because at the moment Vanuatu is having an outbreak of COVID 19, slightly delayed but there have been significant number of cases as well as Vanuatu has been very proactive with the Pacific in relation to coming up with a number of policies and regulations in response to adapting and mitigating to the impacts of climate change. So Yasmine, over to you.

**Yasmine Bjornum:** Hello everyone and thank you so much Nalini. It's wonderful to be here with everybody. So I would like to start off by talking a little bit about our current situation in Vanuatu. So since the outbreak of the pandemic.

**Nalini Singh:** Yasmine, if you can put up your camera please, we would like to see you.

**Yasmine Bjornum:** Okay. With the pandemic, Vanuatu has closed its borders and has only been accepting repatriation flights We've managed to keep ourselves safe for the past two years up until March 4th of this year, where we had our first community outbreak. Patient zero had no travel history and was identified to be a member of parliament who allegedly breached a quarantine facility to visit friends. This case is currently under investigation and has brought to light an issue that Vanuatu has tolerated since the beginning of our independence in 1980, that there is one rule for the big man and one rule for everyone else. I apologise. So Vanuatu's governance is based on a west minister system with Melanesian values and Christian principles. Our parliament members are only men, and we've only had a handful of women represented in the highest decision making body of our country. The last one being a decade ago, decade ago of having women in our decision making body. So I'm telling you all of this, because I want to talk about how whoever is in the whole landscape to be able to emphasise the importance of having women in these spaces to manage the climate crisis. Many of our 52 MPS have chiefly ranks with kinship and language tying across political groups, ensuring community participation and social protection. While this can be positive it also enables an environment where constituencies are afraid to speak out and we do not question our politicians actions out of respect. We have witnessed corruption, stealing and endured convicted criminals as our MPS. But this incident of having a member of parliament go into a quarantine facility, breaching it, not cooperating with health officials has helped us to understand as a people that we must take a stand against this behaviour and have zero tolerance as this particular incident put all of our lives at risk. Thankfully we've had no fatalities and only two people are hospitalised to date with 1,117 cases confirmed since the beginning of 2022. I bring this up to start our conversation to highlight one of the biggest barriers to address the climate crisis. There must be political will to address the climate crisis. And at this point, I'm not sure if we have that in Vanuatu. Last year, our prime minister announced that we would be setting up a ministry of oceans, fisheries and maritime affairs. He stated that the purpose of this new ministry is to increase revenue to the government through fishing. There has been no other public documents or reasons to justify setting up this ministry, which has come at the expense of dismantling the ministry of justice and community services. I'd like to give the benefit of the doubt that perhaps a ministry of oceans is very much needed for other reasons, besides the government needing revenue through fishing. Because right now our biggest in revenue stream is through passport sales. So maybe we need to diversify, but I'm really not sure if this is really the intention. Maybe we need a ministry given the current fate of our world's largest ecosystem, our ocean, which has seen major fishing corporations exploiting our waters while oil and gas companies, mine our sea floors for more unburnable carbon, and perhaps Vanuatu is taking a stance to ensure we are part of the global decision making, given that an extensive and evolving body of international law governs our oceans and who knows, maybe we could potentially be advocates to protect Marine ecosystems and promote sustainable Marine industries, but I'm not sure if that's really our intention. The fact that we dismantled the ministry of justice, which is responsible for overseeing our human rights and a number of key agencies, including the department of women's affairs, the child's desk, the disability desk correctional services and courts to set up a ministry of oceans is concerning particularly given the fact that it was done without due process. At the time when this was happening, the director general of the ministry of justice, Madam Doris Day Kenneth, which is one of Vanuatu's longer serving senior female public servants questioned the government for not following this due process and was terminated. There was no consultations and no strategy provided. She recently won her court case and the council of ministers revoked its decision to establish a ministry of oceans and instructed the prime minister's office to resubmit the paper following provisions of the government act. But the example has already been sent, do not question the government or you will be silenced. Doris Day Kenneth is no longer a public servant, and she was a key person to speak out on women's issues and ensure our voices were heard. She held more senior positions in government than any other women in our country's history and this is a huge loss. So basically for me, if we wanna address the climate crisis, we need to challenge the entire political system, which is rooted in patriarchy. We cannot dilute the voices of women. We cannot exclude women in decision making. We cannot silence women when they speak out. And we are in this climate crisis because we have been exploiting the earth to produce and consume in an unsustainable way. This isn't just about carbon emissions. It's about how we take resources, lands, and rights of others in the process. This process is systemic and politicised, and those who contribute the least to the crisis are the most affected. We are up against giants, big corporations and patriarchal governments, but we are living in a time where women are committed to stand together and shape decisions and influence policy to protect earth the way she has protected us and given us this home, especially for us in the Pacific, we really are living in such a wonderful abundant land. I can see that even now with COVID. Gosh, it doesn't matter if we're on lockdown, we all have backyard gardens, it's all good. So we do have a duty to do it. The time is now to create a world that has space for everyone. And it starts with including women in important decision making spaces to drive innovative solutions and justice for all, and to protect our environment for the benefit of all living beings in the future to come. Thank you.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you so much Yasmine for making so much sense and I absolutely resonate with your calls as well. Let me have a look at the chat box where I see there's been a lot of conversation and I can see that there are some questions. So I will attempt to take some of those and get our panellists to respond. So Chris Knight from Soroptimist you've been prolific with your questions. So I will pick a few and pose them to the panellists. The first one, question is to Lilly, Lilly if you can turn your camera on and come on to the screen, there's a question for you. Chris Knight is asking that PNG is to have an election soon this year in fact, he's asking whether the women in your area enrolled and able to vote and what can he he's from the Soroptimist International, but there are clubs in Papua New Guinea what can they do to assist you? And so yes, Lilly, what would you like to say?

**Lilly Be’Soer:** Thank you. Yes, we are preparing for the election now, when we are really doubtful about the election will turn out but everybody's working really hard to have a violent free and a successful election this year. Regarding the women, last week, the UNDP has run a session on the more parliamentary practise session and there were 55 women were enrolled and they had this session so by the 28th of next month, April, we should know, that's when the routes will open and then the nominations will begin. And by mid April, we would know how many women are actually contesting for the national election that is coming this this week. Yesterday, we had a briefing from one of our senior police from the nearby district, that there are firearms, a lot of firearms being moved within our area. And she was pleaing to us, need to collaborate, to see that we have a violent free and a safe election, and everybody exercise their rights to vote. So there will be an area where a lot of campaign and awareness needs to be done. One of the thing that potential thinking came out of this, a lot of reviews has been done after the national elections. Now they're saying that there will be separate polling booths for the women. I think in the last election, there were some done in some other provinces in the nation but now they said that there'll be separate polling booths for the women to vote separately. So we hope that this will give the women the rights to exercise their rights to choose the leader that they want. So we are hoping that this will happen. On the other hand, we are very mindful because of this information that we got from the police yesterday, about so many arms are being moved in. So yes, we will be needing help and support and prayers as we go to the polling and we don't really know as for the organisation, like this, we are underground. We'll be calling in for the risk and safety, how we can intervene where there is a need and how can we help if we are able to help but this is what we are preparing for now, thank you.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you so much, Lilly. And I hope for a change that we have many women candidates who are also standing and this time around that they will be receiving more votes and hopefully getting into the parliament as well. So all the best for that, Lilly, thank you very much. Moving along. It's great to see so many of you joining in from different countries. Big, warm welcome to the event. There's another question from Chris, and this is to Susan. If you can please turn your camera on and come onto the Zoom site. Yes, so Chris was asking, what is the best way to get in touch or best way to get communication out to the women in the rural and remote areas in Fiji? Is it by radio?

**Susan Grey**: Thank you Nalini and thank you Chris for that question. Yes, well, radio is definitely a very powerful medium. We also realise that there's a lot of even rural women that are on social media and so on because of connectivity and so forth. Facebook is quite popular for the older age groups. There's also for what we do as a feminist media organisation to reach out to rural women's networks when there's a depression that's coming. So that's how women's weather watch modality in place. We send that SMS blast so that would go to at least 500 women. So it really depends on the type of information that you are giving at that particular time whether it's those snappy, concise, early warning messages that you need to disseminate or where there's the conversation that you need to have in a convening. And that's where we basically convene those safe spaces for diverse rural women.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you very much, Susan, a big shout out to all the women's committee members from FDUC, Fiji trained unions, union Congress, that have joined. And so it was wonderful to have you here, thank you. Moving on. I think the contribution's from Ofra Kesame from SPREP has been very interesting mainly in relation to the contributions that Samoa has made in its second national, I think at the NDC, these other national determined contributions or commitments rather. So I think that is important to note that yes, of course there's a lot of commitments being made, but I think one of the important issues that we are trying to highlight here in this panel is that, are women part of that? Where our voices, where our lived realities and can things be done a little bit better in terms of having our concerns noted as well, because we've been saying it over and over again, and the IPCC and other international, regional, and even on national level, we all know that women are disproportionately impacted by climate change and the impacts it has. And we need to be looking at the slow onset, the rapid onset of the various types of impacts. And what does that mean in terms of the loss and damage that we are experiencing, the economic and noneconomic and, so where are women's concerns in there when there's a plethora of policies and legislation and programmes that has been implemented with huge amounts of climate financing that has been coming our way, which we still say is not enough, but how do we know that whatever is coming our way is going to where it's needed the most? So this is what the panellists have been trying to highlight as well as bring to the fore light. And it's not just in these panels that we talk about these issues. We talk about these issues in many of our national fronts and, we do our best, but such is the context in the Pacific and many other countries around the world where our voices are not necessarily heard in that way. So moving into the other comments. Let me see. Yasmine, there's a question for you. If you can just turn your camera on and come onto the Zoom. And this is from Christine King, I think yes, someone who has a very keen interest in the work we do here in the Pacific. She's inspired by your passion and she's asking, how many in the wider Pacific support your work. I guess this is the work that Sister has been doing in the last few years.

**Yasmine Bjornum:** Thank you, Christine. And really appreciate your response. I got a bit thrown off in the beginning. I've got my daughter in the background, so I was hoping that everyone captured what I was trying to say there. So thank you so much. I think, and honestly, to support the work that Sista is doing, we actually really would like for people to stand with us as we are going to be questioning the government as they set up this new ministry of oceans and be posing the questions that I know that people who are working in the government are afraid to ask. And, we see that as our duty, as civil society and as a citizen of this country, why are we setting up a ministry of oceans at the expense of a ministry of justice? And it would be wonderful if we could have that solidarity from people in the Pacific to be able to ask this question, because I do know that those public servants in government have told me that they are afraid to ask in fear of losing their jobs and being silent. So that would just be wonderful once we get into that process and that would be great if you could share our work. Thank you.

**Nalini Singh:** Thanks Yasmine. Looking back into the chat box, I see that Selena is asking if there are any volunteer opportunities to help in anyway she lives in Australia. So many of our organisations Selena do have volunteer opportunities. You'd have to tap into our websites to see what processes are involved and just be in touch with the different partners that we have and then take it from there. But given that we have a situation of the COVID pandemic, many countries are restricting travel and movement. So, that just depends on how each country's, situation is changing in regards to the pandemic. Chris, you're asking if this recording will be available. I think, yes of course, the session is being recorded and I think it will be put onto our social media pages. Definitely on the FWRM page so you can see it there. Maybe the other partners will have it as well. So you can take the link from our social media pages. There's a question from the question and answer box, and this could be to any of the panellists. It is around other newer NGOs of women. So maybe Doris and Yasmine, this is for you. As the newer NGOs of women seen as non-traditional, are the post-Christian revivals of women's traditional organisations that negotiate as a group with men and if so, how are they economically supported? So either Yasmine or Doris, maybe Doris, you have the first go, please, and then you're followed by Yasmine.

**Doris Tulifau:** Because I grew up in both places. I grew up in America and Samoa, so I can say it's nontraditional, but it is very traditional as we are still to get into the villages, it's still very traditional. So it's for me to learn the protocols of our country and how to implement the way of thinking for example, climate change, when we go into villages and we talk about the glaciers that are melting 5 billion miles away that's affecting us, how do we speak to traditional people, elderly people in a way where it's at the forefront of our oceans. So, we can say we're nontraditional, traditional as we are a youth group, but I like to think that for myself, we have to understand how to be intergenerational and not feel like we're doing a big change because it's huge in our community and it's very scary.

**Nalini Singh:** Yes, it is very scary. It's even scary for us, the more established organisations as well, because the challenges are very complex. Yasmine, if you would like to share.

**Yasmine Bjornum:** I think that for us, I know that we identify as a feminist organisation and that word feminism is not very welcome here. It's definitely got negative connotations to it, but because at the core of our work, we use arts, media and communications. This has been a really powerful entry point to be able to progress gender equality while at the same time, celebrating our culture and our traditions. And I think by using arts, media, coms, we're able to create this dialogue. And it's kind of like a safe creative space to be able to open up these conversations so that we can find new ways. So yes, we may be progressive, but at the same time, I know that because we really truly value celebrating Vanuatu and our culture at the same time. I really believe that we can do both progress gender equality, while retain traditional values. It takes dialogue. We need to start to speak to each other about how we can hold tight to this while moving forward.

**Nalini Singh:** Absolutely. Yeah, I agree with you 100%. Sanote is asking if they can get a copy of the transcript. I'm sure if you email my colleagues, they will put their email in the chat box for you. They can definitely facilitate getting a copy to you. And we have one more question and I pose this to Susan, Susan, you can put your camera on. This question is around how can policies and legislation become more inclusive of women here in Fiji?

**Susan Grey**: Thank you Nalini. Yeah, well, that's really the biggest question that we constantly ask ourselves and constantly also, push the barriers and also talk to the state about, how can you include us a bit more and so forth. And I think it also has to do a lot with family convenings that are based, it's a grassroots movement buildings sort of work. And we know that we believe that, doing everything in the communities and just being local that is very impactful and so forth. And to get in those views in a very effective, impactful manner that you would have to get that at the local level and then you start moving that up. If you're able to do that in a very multi-pronged way and where you are engaging with the state and where the state is also engaging you in a very genuine way where it's not tokenistic because sometimes it's quite nice to just say, okay, I have how many women at the table, but whether whatever they say does have an impact on the actual decision is another matter. So what we are just trying to do is really just to engage at various entry points. We are also hoping that events like this that's being commemorated and celebrated in Ba where you have two cabinet ministers that are there that are there with their permanent secretaries, and that we have rural women in the same room that that engagement will really lead to something that's more impactful, post-World Met Day, and that it's not forgotten. So, and I guess also, it's also all the feminist work that we are trying to do as WeRise coalition and so on femLINKpacific cannot do this on their own, on our own. We have to work with feminist allies like all of you to also just to get the state to acknowledge us a bit more.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you, Susan. And I think this is an opportune moment for us to also perhaps announce to the groups here who are from the Pacific, in the many different countries in the Pacific, that the WeRise coalition will be organising the third Pacific feminist forum this year as well. And those of us who have been part of the first and the second Pacific feminist forum will know the importance of solidarity and movement building for us because we are dealing with really complex issues. Complex issues would include, how we are impacted by the climate crisis. And the third Pacific feminist forum would be a bit different given the way in which the COVID pandemic is impacting our ability to gather and travel. So, we are going to be organising national feminist forums in up to about 16 countries across the region, and then coming together in a regional virtual forum. So this will be an opportunity for many of you in these 16 countries which is going to be announced soon, that you can be a part of and carry on this conversation because we need to be forming our own tables, as well as claiming the tables that are there for consultation and decision making. So it starts with us and it leads on to those other tables because our voices cannot remain with us all the time. It needs to move. How do we do that? We do it by coming together, having consensus of our issues and moving that forward. So, with that, we still have a fair few minutes. So, looking at how the Pacific is doing in terms of our concerns I don't have to be speaking too much about this, but we all know that the gender indicators for the Pacific, we're not doing too well. If we are looking at women in leadership, we as a Pacific, as a region are the lowest in terms of the IPU ranking. There's a really, really big sort of gap in terms of where women are when we are looking at women in our parliaments. And there's a lot that needs to be done. Yes, it takes a lot of effort and we are continuously talking about this issue, but that's the reality. If women are not in those type of leadership positions, where do we go to, where do we push on our issues? Because what we see is that increasingly our governments are taking a very gender neutral approach, which we all know that it is not gender responsive at all. So what be done then to ensure that what we are experiencing, what we have talked about, how does this present itself into our policies and programs and legislation. And one of the last things that we talked about was on the data, where is the evidence and where is the data. And often we see that data is gathered. There's a lot of data that is being gathered by many agencies, but it's not disaggregated. So at the bottom line, we hope to have data that is sex disaggregated, so that it actually contributes to policies, programmes, and legislation that is being discussed and put into place is at least at some level gender responsive. So maybe to explain from Fiji. And if I take on sort of an extension to my moderators hat and just explain two initiatives that is being implemented in Fiji. One is looking at a gender indicator that is very important to us is around violence against women and girls. And we know that Fiji has one of the highest rates of violence. And in relation to that, because we have been doing a lot of work in terms of protection, but moving into a prevention plan. So we've taken a very bold approach to a all of country, all of population, of government and population approach to developing a national action plan, which looks at prevention of violence against women and children, girls in particular, and working out an action plan that is in consultation with widespread as possible. So that we are putting in realistic plans, realistically well resourced, budgeted well resourced plan. So we are looking that this plan will indeed be cognisant of the fact of the kinds of violence that we see that women and girls are facing with the onslaught of the climate crisis. The disasters we experience, because it's important that this action plan addresses those issues. The second initiative is to move our governments from being gender neutral, to being gender responsive. We have a very, all interesting all government initiative, which is called the gender transformative institutional capacity development, which is actually getting all government ministries and agencies moving towards, first of all, starting with gender responsive programming and budgeting, very important. And then looking at moving into gender mainstreaming into all areas across the ministries. So these are two initiatives that has been approved by our government, which could look at some of the issues that we are facing and to see how are women included in that. So women have been part of the design of both the initiatives, both the initiatives are led by our national women's machinery and the consultations for at least the NAP for prevention of violence against women and girls that has included majority of women, as well as men in terms of designing that action plan. So I thought to just give you a little bit of context around that, and we have another question and this, I think, could be to any of the panellists. And the question is, are these policies to practical realities for women also understood or made aware to men in the communities you interviewed or helped out? So maybe let me begin with Susan and then move down the panellist lines. And I think this is a very interesting question for everyone to engage with. So Susan.

**Susan Grey**: Thank you Nalini. Yeah, just on that question, the spaces that family convenes that's a space for diverse rural women. So whatever policy that government has and so on, we try and break them down, have that conversation in those particular spaces with the women and so forth, because generally it's a man that tend to have firsthand access to that particular information. But what has emerged a lot in our convening is that because some of these women have been part of the network for quite a while, they basically become someone just said yesterday, and this was in Tavua, another Western town that they become almost like the district officer in their particular community because we are sharing that information, having that engagement in that space, they take it back to their families. That could be their spouses, the members of their matangale, the whole village and so on. And then they also engage also with say the Turaga-ni-koro and also share that information with him and so forth so that sharing, that engagement and so on happens. And that's because we try and do that movement building as a feminist media organisation with a diverse rural women's network.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you, Susan. One of the other panellists would like to interact with that question as well. Are the men engaged in these processes maybe Lilly, are you still here Lilly?

**Lilly Be’Soer:** Yes. I think when disaster hits, I think everybody's seeking information and they all try to seek information and seek any help they could get. We are a major, everybody run to the church, they were seeking refuge in the church, and they don't go to the church, but during this time, everybody went to the church. And so these are some of the lived experiences that we have, but when it comes to disaster, also we see that there's certain things pop up as well, too. And also there's negative things as well, too. Like maybe when disaster happens, like when we have a drought women were the only one that she was put at the table, but then when they found that there were not many, and there were no food there then they also tried their best to help the woman to look for food so this was something good. And also try to get the family involved, more talking and see how they can that means something good came out of sometimes this, like impact happens. And then also, we also saw when this drought came in, like when women were arrest that there was this like pushed one of the women to the front to lead and talk and bring this issue out into the open where in some of our cultures it's very diverse and there's certain forms that women are not allowed to state and talk, but this last thing happened and they saw reality of it. So this also helped the woman to go into, be able to use the platform, which is a positive to give out a voice of the women as well. And then that has been allowed and then it can take on as well. So that means that in some of these norms and traditional customs and customs that we have, that has been broken in that area as well. But when it comes to not like we have our own specific role to play, like the women used to fetch water, the gardening and all this. Sometimes men, they don't help, but I see that when this disaster or anything happens, then we see that men are coming forward and they also need information. This time they're really looking for information. They don't know what is really happening. They have a lot of different beliefs. This use different kinds of beliefs relates to traditional, relates to religion and things like that. And they're confused at all these times. That moment of disaster, they need to be like, especially with the women, they need to be comforted. They need to be counselled. They need a safe place to stay.

**Nalini Singh:** Thank you, Lilly. And yes. I'm sure the men were really surprised in terms of listening to the women's issues because they don't see the impact they have on women in terms of their action, because I'm sure the majority, if not 100% of the harasses were men themselves. So good on you for doing that. There's another question. And maybe, I pose this to Doris and it's around. Do you think women from NGOs or respective movements should join the political arena and address these issues with the authority or maybe create space for more female oriented workspace? Doris

**Doris Tulifau:** I'm sorry Nalini. Can you say the question one more time?

**Nalini Singh:** Yes, the question is, do you think women from NGOs or respective movements should join the political arena and address these issues with the authority or maybe create space for more female oriented workspace?

**Doris Tulifau:** Yes, I think speaking for myself, I want to take that next step as a youth advocate. What my next step is. We need more women in parliament. We need more women in these spaces, especially the political arena, as much as we hate it, as much as we can talk about the corruption, but what are we gonna do about it? What is the solution? And that's having one of us that actually have done the work, go in the spaces and not just make a space for someone to come in and learn a little bit about organisation, it has to be us. It has to be the people that are in this group, our coalition, the leaders, to make that leap, 'cause we know what's going on. We know it from the community level and we know how to speak on it. We gotta make sure that we're informed, we're educated and how to reeducate, our community on understanding. And again, like the question before scared of change when it's not change, it's just educating more. So yes.

**Nalini Singh:** Great, thanks Doris. That's why I gave the question to you because I know your stance on, what you'd like to do in the future. Good, Yasmine, do you have an opinion on that? And also in the previous question, which looked at, are men aware of women's issues and have they been helping out or creating more obstacles I would assume, but I leave you to respond to that from your context.

**Yasmine Bjornum:** Thank you, Nalini. I think, just building off what Doris is saying, when we talk about women's issues, especially when we look at gender based violence, it is not a woman's issue. It is a man's issue. It is not our problem. Men are the perpetrators of violence. And I think that's part of the narrative as well that we need to start going towards. Year after year, we talk about violence against women and girls, how do we stop it? And us women are coming together. We are now in a time, after COVID, with the climate crisis, men, it is your turn now to come together and this is your issue. You guys are the ones perpetrating violence. You guys are the one, I'm sorry, stripping our earth of its resources. It is time for you to recognise and flip the script and take responsibility because us women are coming together. Look at us here now through the WeRise coalition and playing our part, the men need to start doing their part. And particularly with gender based violence, this is not a woman's issue. This is a man's issue.

**Nalini Singh:** Absolutely. Absolutely, I agree with that too and so are many of our participants. I find this comment in our chat box by Andy Miller very interesting. And it's a pet peeve for me as well. And it has been for a long while and I just read off what Andy Miller has said. That we get far too many gender work plans prepared by international consultants, collecting dust as they do not lead to tangible results for the people on the ground. We need more authentic voices heard here to lead our work on gender in the Pacific. So Susan, what do you feel about this statement by Andy Miller? I mean, for me, I agree. One thing that we have seen is that we need, women, men, people, young people, the diversity of men and women in any country to be designing this in these work plans and programmes together because we understand our realities the best we know what works for us. We know what resources we need, but we are never asked because it is so much better if some other internationally renowned person is brought in, paid a lot of money to do this. So, but Susan, what is your perspective about it.

**Susan Grey**: Well absolutely Nalini and we were talking and you're talking about sustainability. I mean the political masters, well, the ministers were also talking about them, but just regardless, when we did that gender assessment up in the Northern division late last year where Fiji's borders were basically still closed and so on. And we started that from about September, October and so on. And it did not even include us, here in headquarters, in the capital, in Suva. This was our young feminist media team that was doing that gender assessment with partners that were on the ground. Some of them we also knew that included, the early childhood teachers and so on because the schools were on lockdown. And I presented the preliminary findings of that to the Fiji facility, which was our development partner for that particular project. And some of the preliminary findings are basically things that didn't really come out in earlier reports because we were convening the spaces that were safe, that the women knew that they owned and they were talking to those that were familiar with their context and so on. And, so it's just a matter of us, here we are, as a WeRise coalition, Pacific feminists trying to also help each other and so on, so that we can ensure that the voices that we share are also shared with a very do no harm manner. I mean, a lot of those that also come in that are so extractive extract the information, take it and goodness knows wherever they're going to use it for and maybe sell it for the big bucks. And we've all been talking about that Nalini as Pacific feminists and so on, and I'm sure that's something that would also come out in the upcoming Pacific feminist forum.

**Nalini Singh:** Absolutely true. I think looking at the question post by Jacinta Murphy she's asking are men even talking about being the problem. Well, in most of the countries, perhaps not, but in Fiji with the processes in developing our national action plan for the prevention of violence against women and girls, it is based on one common root cause, and it is pegged on that, with patriarchy, the fact that we have entrenched gender inequality that is the root cause, it is the power of one prominent gender over another, and why does that happen? It is because of that inherent, entrenched nature of gender inequality. So for us, yes, that has led to men talk about being the problem. And it is in the consultations that we are engaging men in many fields, talking about formal justice sector with police, we're talking about men in sports and many different sectors and they too are coming up with some action points as to how they could be part of the prevention plan, because we know that often that when we lift programmes from other countries and just bring that over, because of our cultural context it does not work out the same way we do not get to those kind of results. And there are many programmes that we can talk about, which has not worked. So we hope that this will definitely contribute to a significant reduction in the prevalence rates that we have here in Fiji. Okay, I think we are coming to an end to this session and on behalf of the coalition partners, I would sincerely like to thank all of the, well, first of all, the partners themselves for coming on board as panellists, as well as all of you who have joined us from so many different parts of the world, it's incredible, what we get to see and see how we can be together. This is a second year where we are having these side events on an online virtual platform, but it's great to have everybody on. And so we thank you too, for being here with us and sharing your thoughts and contributing to our discussions. And we are definitely looking to seeing how at least for those of us in the Pacific, as part of the feminist movement, see how you can join this conversation and even more as part of the third PFF. And we thank you, and our sincere thank yous to all of you for joining this panel event. And thank you for making it very meaningful. One for us, the WeRise Coalition partners as well. So those of you who would like to see the video, or would like to have access to the transcript, my colleague again, is going to put her email in the chat box and please do give us a shout out when you need that information, as well as connect with us on our social media. My colleague is going to put up the handles for you as well. We'd love to hear you in those spaces. And so, from all of us, thank you very much and everyone, please enjoy the rest of the day and rest of the week and rest of these CSW sessions. I hope it works out in favour of what we want from our governments in terms of commitments. And then it becomes our responsibility to hold them to account. So thank you very much and we'll see you soon. Thank you.