

FIJI

Empowering Information In Everyday Lives



..... **The ICT Environment
and Infrastructure**



..... **How Intermediary
Groups Use
Communication Tools
for Grassroots
Women's Empowerment**



..... **How Intermediary Groups
View Empowerment and
Communication**



..... **How Grassroots Women
View Communication Tools
and Empowerment**

"Empowering people is also letting people realise
they have the resources within them
to develop themselves."

PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, FIJI



BA

1. Ba Senior Citizens Centre

SUVA & SURROUNDING AREAS

2. Citizens Constitutional Forum
3. Catholic Women's League
4. Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy
5. Fiji Disabled Peoples Association
6. Fiji Human Rights Commission
7. Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprise and Development
8. Fiji Women's Rights Movement
9. Interfaith Search Fiji
10. National Council of Women Fiji
11. Partners in Community Development Fiji
12. Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
13. Poor Relief Society
14. Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team
15. Women's Action for Change
16. Women's Information Network

CHAPTER 17

THE ICT ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN FIJI

Fiji's estimated population of 868,531 is composed of 40% Indo-Fijians, who are believed to be descendants of contract labourers brought to the islands by the British in the 19th century, and 60% native Fijians. This composition has led to ethnic tensions between Indians and Fijians, which is said to have led to two military coups that interrupted Fiji's democracy. The coups were said to be caused by anxiety regarding the Indian community's predominance in the government (Rahman and Naz, 2006). However, further research demonstrates a more complex situation regarding the role of ethnicity in relation to the coup. In 2000, when the group of eight armed men later known as the "George Speight group" held members of parliament hostage and declared a civilian government, the perpetrators used ethnicity as a means to justify their actions (Emde, 2000). However, the actual motivations for the coup were corruption, financial gain, and power. Interestingly, as one study argues, the group utilised their access to both global and local information and networks to disseminate misinformation, through media crossing the spectrum from print to the Internet (Emde, 2000). The resulting media coverage focused on inter-ethnic conflict, despite high levels of *intra*-ethnic conflict (Emde 2000). In addition to these racial tensions, Fiji's social structure is also generally kinship-based. Power resides with local chiefs, who control land ownership and farming (Rahman and Naz, 2006). Media works at the intersection of these multifaceted cultural dynamics, and like the multiple cultures comprising Fiji, the media that was utilised originated in diverse ways and took various forms. This review of literature will demonstrate the social, economic, and political elements behind this media landscape.

FIJI'S MEDIA PROFILE

For a small country with a population of three-quarters of a million people, Fiji has a relatively extensive media infrastructure. The former Vice-President of Fiji Media Watch, Fr. Larry Hannan, stated that the full impact of the mass media came upon Fiji in the course of a relatively short period of time. Until the 1980s, Fiji had escaped the brunt of this worldwide phenomenon mainly because of geographical isolation. Video came only in the 1980s and spread quickly with broadcast television beginning in 1991 (Hannan, 2002). Hannan remarked that the impact of media in Fiji led to a kind of homogenising consumerism, leading to a loss of traditional values and increased prevalence of abuse and commodification of women, among other effects (Hannan, 2002).

NEWSPAPERS

THE FIJI TIMES

The Fiji Times is owned by media magnate Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Fiji Times Limited publishes *The Fiji Times* (Monday to Saturday) and *The Sunday Times* in English. Other news publications produced by Fiji Times Limited include *Na Lalakai* (weekly Fijian newspaper), *Shanti Dutt* (weekly Hindustani newspaper), *Kaila!* (weekly youth newspaper), *Shanti Dutt Diwali Annual* (yearly special edition for Hindu festival Diwali) and *Fiji Times online* (daily). *The Fiji Times* newspapers print articles from intermediary groups and government departments at no cost, given that they fit editorial policy. Government departments and intermediary groups can also write columns in the newspaper. Letters to the editor are a frequent source of commentaries from intermediary groups (Davis, 2005).

FIJI SUN

Sun Fiji produces a daily newspaper in English called the *Fiji Sun* (Monday to Friday) and its Sunday counterpart called the *Sunday Sun*. It also produces a Fijian paper, *Na Sigavou*, which is a four-page insert in the *Fiji Sun*. Its majority is owned by C. J. Patel Limited, together with Fijian Holdings Limited (a financial investment company), Vinod Patel Limited and Ba Provincial Holdings Limited (Ba is one of the 14 provinces in Fiji). It is 100% locally owned. Intermediary groups can also access and publish in the *Fiji Sun* and readers' letters are accepted (Davis, 2005).

THE DAILY POST

The Fiji Daily Post publishes three newspapers in different languages: *The Daily Post* published in English for six days a week (Monday to Saturday), *Nai Volasiga* published in Fijian every week, and the *Chinese Mail*, published in Chinese, which comes out three

times a week (Davis, 2005). After taking full control of *The Daily Post* for an undisclosed price from the national superannuation fund and other shareholders in 2003, the Fiji Government declared its decision to sell off the newspaper to indigenous Fijian interests. However, before the newspaper was sold to indigenous-owned companies, it would have to be nursed into a financially healthy state first (Fiji Government to sell Daily Post, 2003 as cited in Moala, 2003). In the year 2004-2005, the Fiji Government was the major shareholder, owning 44% of total shares.

ONLINE NEWS SERVICES

Fiji Live, *Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun*, *Fiji Post* and the *Pacific Islands News Association* all have websites in which local content is updated daily (Davis, 2005). The Fiji Government also has an online portal which displays press releases and speeches. Articles written by intermediary groups and government departments can be published as features on *Fiji Live* with attached information on the author and the organisation.

ISLANDS BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL (IBI)

Islands Business International (IBI)'s *Fiji Islands Business* targets decision-makers in both private and public sectors, as well as readers interested in news analysis. *Islands Business* targets a similar audience, but also includes overseas readers. It is distributed to all Pacific Island countries, as well as to Australia and New Zealand. IBI produces two magazines: *Fiji Islands Business* (monthly business magazine for Fiji) and *Islands Business* (monthly regional business magazine for the Pacific Islands). Both are published in English.

JOURNALISM

Fijian journalism has garnered criticism for its ethics and quality. "Research has shown that 49 percent of journalists in Fiji has no formal training or qualifications in journalism" (Robie, 2003, p. 338 as cited in Moala, 2003). Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry harshly criticised Fijian journalists for their lack of rigor, ethics and training, as well as because of their constant misquotations or misreporting (Moala, 2003; Robie, 1999). Low pay and difficult working conditions also lead to a high turn-over rate (Davis, 2005). As a result, many journalists move onto other fields like government departments or intermediary groups in search of better compensation.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In 1999, journalists in Fiji were composed of 51% men and 49% women, with a median age of 22 years old. Generally, female journalists tend to be younger, have less

experience and hold less senior executive positions. However, there are also a few women in managerial and executive positions (Azarcon, 2004). Moreover, in a country with a small population, journalist Seona Smiles reports that only a few women are usually tapped as sources and one runs the risk of having the same woman quoted again and again should a “woman’s viewpoint” be needed. Their opinions, no matter how biased or isolated, may thus be interpreted or legitimised as the viewpoint of all the women in the island, cautions Smiles (Azarcon, 2004).

FemLINK Pacific has attempted to remedy these inequities by providing training in particular women’s intermediary groups in the use of both mainstream and community media forms.

Peter Emberson, the current Vice President of Fiji Media Watch, also explained that based on the Fiji report in the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project, 49% of Fijian population is composed of women but women only comprise 20% of the people featured in the news. This 20% consists of women who work in the news, those who present the news, as well as those who are the subject of the news. This trend appears to be reflective of the worldwide situation (FemLINK Pacific, 2006).

RADIO

In the Pacific Islands, the radio is the most practical and accessible means of communication (Shivdas, 2001; Robie, 1999). Fiji has a long radio broadcasting history, dating back to as early as 1934, two years after the radio in Papua New Guinea was launched. The Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) first programme was broadcasted on July 1954 (Davis, 2005). The FBC is Fiji’s national radio broadcasting service. This government organisation consists of two Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) stations and four commercial stations, two of them broadcasting all around Fiji (Isis, 1999). These PSB stations are widening the definition of public service broadcasting and actually aim to improve the standard of living by catering to both indigenous Fijians’ and Indo-Fijians’ needs for information, especially for those living in the most isolated and rural areas (Davis, 2005). Two of the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited’s (FBCL) stations broadcast in the three major languages – Fijian, Hindustani and English (Davis, 2005).

The FBCL *Radio Fiji One* and *Radio Fiji Two* stations’ PSB programmes are produced by intermediary groups and government departments, featuring a range of development issues through community messages, talkback programmes and coverage of meetings of the Great Council of Chiefs and the Parliament. On the other hand, the FBCL’s four commercial stations are mainly oriented towards music and news with some information programmes and talkbacks (Davis, 2005).

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

FBCL has 24 full time journalists (Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited [FBCL], 2006). Previous reports state that though wages in the Fiji Broadcasting Commission are equal, it is primarily men who hold a bigger share of the decision-making powers (Rounds, 1976). Of a hundred employees, 36 are women, with two holding executive positions, one working as a technician and six employed as announcers. Moreover, in *Fiji Gold*, majority of the DJs are males, while only one or two are women DJs who have their own shows (FBCL, 2006).

Fiji Limited (CFL) is a locally owned and managed company, both in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. CFL has a subscription-based website, *Fijivillage.com*, which contains news, music and sports information. The news bulletins online also include audio features (Davis, 2005).

CFL's five commercial music radio stations also target different age groups and language groups – some Hindustani and some Fijian (Davis, 2005). Since 1985, CFL has developed a network of 11 separate transmitter stations that provide coverage over all the major islands of the Fiji group. All stations broadcast on FM frequency (Davis, 2005). CFL has also developed a staff share-ownership scheme and profit sharing scheme. Currently, over 95% of its staff own shares in CFL (Davis, 2005). The CFL employs a total staff of 62 people, consisting of 23 women. Even though this tells us that there are more men than women, it should be noted that there are women who hold senior positions in CFL. For instance, six of the 10 department heads in CFL are women (Isis, 1999).

In *Women Speak Out! A Report of the Pacific Women's Conference*, Bernadette Rounds reports that in radio stations in Fiji where she worked, programmes that show a woman outside her domestic routine are sorely lacking. Women listeners also tend to be quite passive and uncooperative, hardly making any suggestions for the kind of shows that they want (Rounds, 1976).

In terms of grassroots women's access to radio, a study done by Mohammad Habibur Rahman and Rafia Naz called *Digital Divide Within Society: An Account of Poverty, Community and E-Governance in Fiji* discovered, upon interviewing disadvantaged housewives, women slum dwellers, beggars, single mothers and the elderly, that although most of them did not have an idea about ICTs and e-governance, a few of them utilised the radio (Rahman and Naz, 2006).

INTERMEDIARY GROUPS AND GOVERNMENT ACCESS

In terms of intermediary groups' access to FBCL, FBCL's Chief Executive Officer notes how irregular the intermediary groups' demand for media access appears to be. For instance, intermediary groups seem to only get motivated only when there is a project,

such as International Women's Day and National Health Week. However, once the event has passed, people appear to forget all about it (Davis, 2005).

TELEVISION

Television was introduced to Fiji in 1991 (Hannan, 2002), and one of the first shows to be aired was a rugby match (Nicole, 2006). Fiji Television Limited operates the national free-to-air television station, *Fiji One TV*, which broadcasts mainly in English, but also has some Fijian and Hindustani content. It also broadcasts three pay television channels (Davis, 2005).

The programme format of *Dateline Fiji*, one of the programmes shown in Fiji One, is largely magazine style and event-oriented with a focus on the country's socioeconomic progress, infrastructure developments, and cultural promotion as well as on agriculture, tourism, health, education and affirmative action. National reconciliation and human interest segments have also been featured in some programmes. Other programmes like *Voqa Ni Davui* (Fijian language) and *Sitara* (Hindustani language) both provide analysis of government and rural development initiatives. *Fiji One TV*, as with radio FBCL, also carries live broadcasts of parliamentary proceedings (Davis, 2005).

TARGET AUDIENCE AND DISTRIBUTION

Fiji One TV targets children to adults, with age-specific programming. Mr. Leweniqila, Fiji Minister for Information and Communications, also highlighted Fiji TV's achievements in attaining 100% coverage of the Fiji islands, reaching as far as the interior of the main islands and the *Ono-I Lau* and the *Yasawa* group (Fiji Government Online Portal, 2006d).

At the time of the survey, *SKY Pacific*, a new 12-channel direct-to-home service for Fiji and other Pacific countries, was about to be launched. This includes *SKY Entertainment*, *Fiji One TV*, the *Cartoon Network*, *ABC Asia Pacific*, *CNN*, *Turner Classic Movies*, *MTV* and *Nickelodeon* (Davis, 2005).

In June 2006, the government, urged by the fact that the TV station was doing well financially, decided to offer its shares to the public (Fiji Government Online Portal, 2006e). To its credit, the station has also expanded its market to Papua New Guinea, with some 6 million people tuning in to it, 800,000 people in Fiji and some 2 million in other areas of the Pacific (Fiji Government Online Portal, 2006e). Aside from this, *Fiji Television Limited* has also been exploring the feasibility of introducing public service television (Davis, 2005).

Yasana Holdings, the commercial arm of the 14 provinces in Fiji, owns 51% of the company, while the Fiji government has 14% of the shares and no representation on the Board of Directors. The remaining shares are held by a range of shareholders (Davis, 2005).

More than 90% of *Fiji One* is locally owned (Fiji Government Online Portal, 2006e).

Despite this, *Fiji One* has been criticised for having very little local content or public service broadcasting (Davis, 2005). This has given way to the popularity of American programmes, such as soap operas and sitcoms (Isis, 1999).

Since television was introduced in 1991, very little training has been done to prepare consumers and even local media practitioners to the whole new language and culture that TV introduced (Hannan, 2002). Studies of TV's effects also conclude that images espoused in the media have allowed Fijian adolescent girls to negotiate opportunities and conflicts brought about by the rapidly shifting social environment in both creative and destructive ways (Becker, 2004). TV is also causing negative body images among female Fijian adolescents, as TV shapes their views about themselves through a desire for competitive social positioning (Becker, 2004). Local advertising for cleaning agents and household products also relegates women to highly subservient and domestic roles, while women's sports are given very little attention.

FILM

All of Fiji's ten movie theatres are private enterprises. For example, the Village Six cinema complex is jointly owned by companies from Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. Scattered throughout the main island of Viti Levu, these theatres show English and Hindi feature films (Isis, 1999). The film industry is governed by the Film Control Board, which falls under the Fiji attorney-general's department. The Board consists of four to five members, two of whom are women (Isis, 1999). Films to be shown are submitted to the Film Control Board for screening. Generally, the board is comprised of conservative citizens (Isis, 1999). It is replaced annually, with a few staying on to maintain continuity. Although the board has been generally composed of men, a recent survey shows that 45% of the board is now composed by women (Isis, 1999).

Moreover, although cinemas in Fiji are required to carry ratings for their films, this is not always enforced. For infractions, the only penalty that the board can mete out is to take down posters without visible ratings. Even though adult films are given ratings, people under eighteen are still not prevented from watching them (Isis, 1999). This guideline also authorises the board to cut scenes from movies, but this hardly prevents the airing of content which is derogatory towards women. For example, Hindi films exhibit a high level of violence against women, though they continue to be given "general patronage" ratings. Moreover, these types of films are patronised by a lot of Indo-Fijian audiences, either through cinemas or through pirated videos (Isis, 1999). Moreover, Fiji's intense reliance on tourism for its economic growth has also led to increased pornography in the film industry. A recent pornographic film, for example, was allegedly shot in five of the countries' top resorts (Naivaluwaqa, 2006a).

INDIGENOUS AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Esther Batiri Williams believes that any plan for development must integrate traditional ways of knowing with modern communication modes and information systems to ensure their effectiveness in communicating to women (Williams, 1999). Passing information along to family members is a common way of communicating and preserving family tradition. These traditional modes of transmission work in conjunction with the modern day radio, TV, print materials, teachers, films and videos (Williams, 1999). Because of this juxtaposition, children are suddenly initiated into a different mode of learning when they enter school as they have to learn things through the written word, apart from how they have always been taught (Williams, 1999). Other modes of transmission are also found in chants, songs, dance, drama, poetry, lullabies and stories. For instance, there are chants about fishing, planting, ancestors, life, people, the village and growth (Williams, 1999).

Though this section will focus on Fijian cultural forms, other cultural influences are also present in Fiji, and these influences sometimes manifest in traditional performances. For example, Fijian-Chinese organisations such as the Yat Sen Primary School (formerly the Fiji Chinese Primary School), the Fiji Chinese Cultural Centre, and the Chinese Youth Social and Cultural Association have sponsored events such as Taiwanese acrobats and the Lion Dance held in the streets of Suva in celebration of the advent of the Chinese New Year. In September 2005, the Chinese community celebrated their 150th year in Fiji with a three-day festival that included cultural performances, a family day, banquets, and a souvenir magazine (Gregory, 2005). Additionally, Fiji sees the impact of Indo-Fijian communities in hybrid cultural performances. For example, in schools, Indian children often chant Fijian songs and perform a *Meke* in traditional Fijian costume while Fijian children likewise perform Indian folk and film dances in Indian clothing (Singh, 2000). Thus, traditional performances become a way to bridge cultural and racial gaps.

SONG AND DANCE

Fijian song (*sere*) and dance (*meke*) appear to be extremely visual ceremonies. Using bamboo percussion instruments, Fijian music is also infused with ukelele and guitars. Fijian songs have always been viewed as inseparable with dance due to the latter's rhythmic nature. Fijian music also incorporates diverse symbols. With its 800 dialects, Fijian culture also abounds with songs or *sere* (Fiji Magic, 2006a).

THE YAQONA CEREMONY

At the end of the day, the men gather to drink Yaqona in the village hall and discuss village affairs. The *Yaqona* (*Kava* in most of the Pacific Islands) is Fiji's traditional drink and serves an important mediating role between parties in ceremonial and social situations (Fiji Islands Culture Guide, 2006). Like all traditions, the *kava* session also has its negative

side effects. Drinking *kava* is very similar to drinking alcohol in the West, and women get angry at the use of *kava* amongst men and adolescents, especially when it leads to increased resignation and laziness (Nicole, 2006). The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre also reported that women and children were more likely to suffer from physical abuse due to the macho attitudes that become entrenched in the homes, exacerbated by high levels of stress and self-destructive behaviors such as drug, alcohol and *kava* abuse (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF], 2006).

TABUA

The most symbolic icon of traditional Fiji is the *tabua*, or whale's tooth. These prized items are presented as a *sevusevu* (gift) from family to family, normally through chiefs, as a token of friendship and peace. *Tabuas* are central to traditional weddings and rituals for asking favours and settling arguments. Before the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) came to intervene, disputes between families due to rape have been solved by the mere offering of whale's tooth. The representative male of the offending family will offer it to the representative male of the aggrieved family who then decides if the token of apology will be accepted (Nicole, 2006).

THEATRE

In Melanesian Islands, Fiji included, theatre is used as a political tool for informing the community about the development issues that face them, a tool that will arm them to make more informed decisions about the choices they are confronted with (Thompson, 2000).

In a place where illiteracy is rampant, the most powerful, direct and effective way of communicating ideas is through theatre. This is because theatre is a far more indelible tool in Melanesia than the written word (Thompson, 2000). Women's intermediary groups like Women's Action for Change (WAC) specifically use the theatre to forward their advocacy (Thompson, 2000).

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The ITU's *Digital Access Index* conducted in 2003 ranks 178 countries according to their ability to access ICTs. Based on this study, Fiji ranks 85th and figures in the middle of the medium access group. Due to its fairly high literacy rate and school enrollment rate, as well as flat local call pricing rate for dial-up Internet access, Fiji compares well in terms of knowledge and affordability but performs less favourably in infrastructure, usage and quality (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2003).

TABLE 1. ICT AND POPULATION: FIJI

Population	825,847	2003
GPD per capita (US\$)		2003
Phone subscribers per 100 inhabitants	25.66	2003
Computers	42,000	2003
Internet hosts	493	2003
Internet users	55,000	2003
Internet subscribers	9,000	2003
International bandwidth (Mbps)	12	2003
Radio households	128,000	2002
TV households	78,000	2002

Source: International Telecommunication Union, 2003

Limited infrastructure is a major barrier, especially in rural areas. Teledensity in urban areas ranges from 20 to 60 per 100 people, which is considered low by global standards but high by the size of Pacific households (Williams, 2006).

SOUTHERN CROSS CABLE

Fiji lies at the hub of a network of communications super highways, linking Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and mainland America. Fiji is served by the Southern Cross Cable Network. It is the only country in the region to offer data transmission by this means (ITU, 2003). In addition, it also maintains effective satellite links (Williams, 2006).

However, Fiji appears to be not making the most of its capacity to offer broadband services because of the exclusive licence agreement that the government has with FINTEL. This agreement gives Cable and Wireless a 49% share, while the government, through Telecomm Fiji, gets 51% (Williams, 2006). FINTEL is also an Internet service provider.

NEW ICTS

Out of the 1,668 villages in Fiji, there are over 600 villages that do not have access to basic telecommunication services (Ministry of Information, Communication and Media Relations [MICMR], 2004).

TABLE 2. ICT OWNERSHIP IN FIJI

Fixed phones/100 inhabitants	12.0
Mobile phones/100 inhabitants	13.3
Internet hosts/1000 inhabitants	1.0
TV households/100 households	58.0
Personal Computers/100 inhabitants	5.1
Internet users/1000 inhabitants	66.6

Source: Monitoring the Digital Divide, Orbicom 2004 as cited in Williams, 2006

Fijians are increasingly aware of the constraining and regulatory environment that exists in Fiji and are advocating for the opening of the market. This opening will enable them to make use of the opportunities that ICT provides in terms of business, communication and e-learning (Williams, 2006). Despite the high costs of telecommunications at this point in time, two companies in Fiji have established back-office operations and five more are in the pipeline. Fiji's strengths lie in its good transport system, cheap labour and tax-free incentives for businesses that are among the best in the world (Williams, 2006).

ICT ACCESS OF BUSINESS PEOPLE, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND WOMEN

A 2006 study on the "digital divide" mapped ICT awareness among business people, students, teachers and working women and discovered that these groups were aware of new ICTs and of their huge potential. Big businesses and the private sectors were aware of ICTs as a growing field and see it as something that is used daily in government, businesses or schools. They practice "e-governance" by using computers, scanners, printers, fax machines, Internet, IT packages, and other information communication tools (Rahman and Naz, 2006).

In contrast, though teachers and students were also aware of ICTs, they were not aware of e-governance. Teachers also observed the high impact of ICTs as seen through the rise of Internet shops in urban areas and the rise of students taking up computer studies. Computer courses and Internet access are also rising throughout Fiji's primary and secondary schools (MICMR, 2004). Working women also had access to PCs and the Internet. They also recognised the privileges that allowed them access to new ICTs - good jobs, high education levels and access to basic services (Rahman and Naz, 2006). Villagers, including farmers, carpenters, house girls and cleaners, on the other hand, had no idea what ICTs were, saying that the government never asked them for suggestions because they were poor. They also expressed their frustration regarding the government's role in tackling poverty. Poverty-stricken women, disadvantaged housewives, single mothers, beggars, and

the elderly also relayed that they have never heard of new ICTs or e-governance before (Rahman and Naz, 2006).

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NEW ICTS

FemLINK Pacific reports that the majority of Pacific Island governments maintain out-moded legislative and regulatory frameworks with regard to broadcasting and telecommunications. Therefore, without the work of community radio advocates, communication technologies could easily fall into the hands of private sector interests (FemLINK, 2005). The few intermediary groups or civil society groups who do advocate for ICT policies also have had limited opportunities at both the regional and national levels (FemLINK, 2005). This is particularly true regarding the Pacific Plan's Digital Strategy. The Pacific Plan is a regional plan coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. It grew out of recommendations from Pacific Leaders at the 2005 Pacific Islands Forum meeting and is designed to strengthen regional cooperation and integration. However, this advocacy space has not been very open to civil society. Civil society organisations in Fiji Islands have also had limited access to The World Summit on the Information Society.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO NEW ICTS

Women and women's groups in Fiji face several hindrances. Aside from the feminisation of poverty in Fiji, which greatly hinders access to new ICTs, women also appear to be intimidated by technology (Shivdas, 2001). Other than a shortage of skills in the area of ICTs, the women's groups' representatives also reported that learning these skills could also be quite time-consuming. Furthermore, because new hardware is often outside donor policy, a communications officer for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement also stated that there is also a lack of funding for these kinds of improvements. In addition, the cost of Internet service remains outside of some groups' reach. Though women and women's organisations are more accustomed to personal and direct means of addressing each other, they cite their great appreciation for the opportunities that new ICTs offer, such as the extended capacity for networking and interpersonal communication (Shivdas, 2001). They also recognise that the Internet can be crucial in archiving and disseminating research, as well as getting information about donors. Therefore, those who do not have access to these technologies miss out a great deal. FemLINK Pacific reports:

“Within the Pacific Island region, very few women's civil society groups are advocating for the need for some form of equity in the communication and in ICT fields to ensure that the resources and benefits of the information and communication society are distributed equally between men and women. So even though today there are a number of ICT initiatives to network for the

defense and advancement of women's rights at local, regional and international levels, we need to ensure a Pacific-specific form of collective participation which also serves to empower women to take control of their own lives and that of their communities" (FemLINK, 2005).

FemLINK advocates the development of ICT policies that acknowledge the specificity of needs of the women of Fiji Islands. The factors affecting these women's access to and understanding of ICTs are a product not only of the state, economics, and society, but also of cultural issues as well.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND WOMEN

The first women's organisation in Fiji was the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). They took on several progressive issues, such as the anti-nuclear movement, but it appeared that they were not yet ready to engage a "women's platform" (Jalal, 2002). Feminist ideas first emerged in Fiji at the University of the South Pacific, where the Women's Crisis Centre was formed in 1984 (Jalal, 2002). The establishment of the Fiji Women's Rights movement occurred in 1986 (Jalal, 2002). These events formed the "timeline" for the emergence of the women's movement in Fiji. The following sections elaborate on the issues surrounding this political movement.

Ethnic tensions, the culture of "ratuism," and kinship systems are factors that not only greatly affect Fiji Island media, but also its economy, culture, and politics. These factors help us take into account Fiji's coups, the corruption of its government, land rights issues, and poverty. They also contextualise the challenges that media and women's groups must face. We will also explore the passivity of women, their relegation to traditional gender roles, and how mainstream media reinforces these positions.

ECONOMY

TOURISM

Tourism is the most successful sector of the Fijian economy. The country remains isolated from world markets, with low levels of aid and foreign direct investment (FDI). In a way, these factors have limited its development (Robertson, 2006). However, these same factors have also worked in favour of Fiji's tourism industry, and today it is one of Fiji's largest sources of income, with over half a million tourists visiting Fiji annually (Robertson, 2006). Many Fijian websites cater to the tourism industry, highlighting hotel accommodation information or travel guides. However, alongside these positive aspects, the tourism industry also brings with it the potential for exploitation (United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM], 2006).

GLOBALISATION

The effects of globalisation and the homogenisation that media espouses has increased consumer culture while eroding traditional value systems (Hannan, 2002). Fiji is also encountering a “brain drain,” a phenomenon that began with revisions made in its 1987 constitution. Due to these revisions’ biases against Indo-Fijians, more than 12,000 members of this and other minority communities have immigrated (UNIFEM, 2006). However, Fijian Prime Minister Quarase believes that this brain drain is a good thing for Fiji in terms of the economy, opening jobs to otherwise unemployed Fijians. Furthermore, he adds that Fiji can compensate by training more people to come in the different fields (Fiji Live, 2006a). However, many industries feel the effects of this loss of labour - for example, the Fiji Island media often has to import media specialists.

POVERTY AND COLONISATION

The issue of growing poverty also affects Fiji Island media and women, as evidenced in a weak media industry composed of under-paid and under-trained journalists. It also results in an advertising and popularity-driven media, the monetary demands of which remain inaccessible to many intermediary groups. For example, according to PIANGO, a Fiji-based regional intermediary group, a paid advertisement in magazines and newspapers in general are very expensive. Lack of funding also results in a shortage of locally produced shows in television as well as lack of relative autonomy.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that poverty affects the multiple cultures within Fiji in the same way. While statistics demonstrate that indigenous Fijians make, on average, less than their Indo-Fijian counterparts, recent literature suggests that economic differences within ethnic groups are more important than those *across* ethnic groups (Sriskandarajah, 2003). Furthermore, gender divisions within these ethnic divisions create different needs for women of Fijian and Indian descent. In an interview, author and lawyer Imrana P. Jalal notes differing needs among Fiji Island women, in terms of economic status:

“Well, the indigenous Fijians feel a strong sense of obligation to look after the ‘strays’ of the family. [Fijian culture] is much more accepting of illegitimate children, for example, than are Indians. If you’re an Indian woman who breaks the rules of marriage in any way or, say, gets pregnant outside of marriage, you’ll get thrown out, literally, right away. Considering that one-fifth of Indo-Fijian girls are pulled out of school at 16 to marry in an arranged marriage, this custom leaves them with no education to fall back on. They basically have to turn to prostitution just to feed themselves. At least a Fijian woman can rely on her

matagali, her extended family, to look after her, so she will always be in a better-off situation because of this.”

As such, these demonstrate the differing needs of women in the Fiji Islands, who are separated not only by income, but also by ethnicity. In addition, women of Indian descent in Fiji do not live in a collective situation; most often, if they are not in an urban area, they are located in an isolated farm, with fewer social networks. As Jalal notes, organisations such as church clubs, sewing clubs or handicrafts groups, enable these women to build networks through which they can access information, leading to community-organising and fund-raising (Jalal, 2002). However, the relative isolation of Indo-Fijian women living in poverty renders affiliation with such groups more difficult.

POVERTY AND SUICIDE

Poverty in rural areas leads to increasing anxiety and desperation, manifesting in high suicide rates and substance abuse. Alongside Samoan women, Fiji Island women have the highest suicide rate in the world. Usually committed by ethnic-Indian women, suicide has become Fiji's biggest killer. The death rate from suicide was already high before the May 2000 coup and continues to rise. Forty-one percent of suicides reported in 1992 were related to domestic violence, a common problem in Fijian households (UNIFEM, 2006). In 2001, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre reported that 66% of all women in Fiji had been a victim of domestic violence (UNIFEM, 2006). High levels of stress, anxiety and desperation due to high levels of domestic abuse appear to be prevalent, which in turn contribute to high suicide rates. The feminine face of poverty is also clearly visible in women-headed households, which comprise one-seventh of Fijian homes (Fiji Labour Party, 2004).

AGRICULTURE

Poverty is rife in Fiji's mushrooming squatter settlements. Since the most recent census in 1996, the squatter population has grown by an unprecedented 73%. By June 2003, there were 182 squatter settlements with an estimated population of 82,350, or 13,725 households. Many of these squatters are displaced Indo-Fijian farmers whose land leases have expired and have not been renewed (Fiji Labour Party, 2004). There are also large numbers of ethnic Fijians who have moved to urban centres from the outer islands and rural areas in search of work and a better life. Poverty in Fiji also ensues because of landlessness, as Fiji is largely an agricultural society, with many families depending on farming for both cultural and economic survival.

CULTURE

UNEQUAL ACCESS

Though women have a literacy rate of 94%, which is very close to men's 96%, the unequal distribution of access to services such as health, education, and the media widens the economic and digital divides. Frequently, women are underrepresented in subjects such as the physical sciences and information technology. Studies by Isis International Manila and Asian Women's Resource Exchange attribute this absence to a lack of role models and social conditioning (Isis, 1999; Shivdas, 2001). As in many developing countries, gender-bias in the employment market leads many impoverished women into "occupational ghettos" such as domestic work, cleaning, waitressing, teaching, nursing and garment construction (Nicole, 2006). Furthermore, many more affluent working women acknowledge that they only have better access to media and new ICTs because they are educated and are in good positions, while disadvantaged housewives and poverty stricken women barely have access to any media beyond the radio (Rahman and Naz, 2006).

PASSIVE CULTURE

In Fiji, "ratuism" holds an important place (Nicole, 2006). Utmost respect is given to elders, chiefs or superiors, while a culture of sharing, reciprocity and silent obedience is promoted (Williams, 1999). Conflict must be avoided at all times and a high priority is given to loyalty, obedience and harmony. Open criticism and the questioning of actions and decisions of elders and chiefs are greatly discouraged (Williams, 1999). Women, in particular, prefer to remain silent (Williams, 1999). They are also highly underrepresented in the media, and this exclusion has led to the lack of awareness of the roles that women play in the community. Though women's participation in the peace process has been vital, with women running schools, health clinics and farms, there is a dire lack of data regarding women's contributions during and after conflict (UNIFEM, 2006).

KINSHIP

The kinship system also exhibits the ways in which public shaming or public embarrassment is used as punishment. Rajeli Nicole of Isis International relates how, before the advocacies of FWCC, rape issues were dealt with by one family offering a whale's tooth to another, rather than reporting the incident to the police. Punishment is collective and the shame that one brings to the family is the warrant against such actions (Nicole, 2006). Public shaming operates in the media council and in media regulation where oftentimes, when a movie regulation or rating is not followed, films are only reprimanded publicly (Isis, 1999). This also has deep implications in politics, where criticism of the government is discouraged and the kinship system leads to a parochial mentality, which often leads to

corruption. In Fiji, corruption and ineffective governance is high and transparency and accountability are hardly practised (Rahman and Naz, 2006).

POLITICS

Ethnic tensions resulting from Fiji's colonial heritage continue to plague it, leading to political instability and failure of connectivity (Robertson, 2006). Ethnic tensions pervade a sharply polarised Fijian politics. Agricultural land rights and other divisive issues continue to drive a wedge between ethnic Indian leaders and indigenous Fijians, the country's two main ethnic groups (UNIFEM, 2006). In 1987, a military coup, led by then Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, cut short Fiji's democratic rule. This was followed by a four-month interim rule by the Governor-General, which also ended with a second coup led by Rabuka on the 25th of September 1987. Following this, Rabuka abrogated the 1970 Constitution and declared Fiji a republic. There occurred a short period of military rule, followed by two temporary administrations. A new constitution was approved and disseminated on the 25th of July 1990 and elections were held in May 1992 (UNIFEM, 2006). In 2000, there occurred a political crisis that resulted in an economic decline of 2.8% in Fiji during that same year. Extensive job losses and the exodus of skilled and professional workers were brought about by this decline. To this day, the exodus of Fijian workers continues to persist, albeit in a declining trend (UNIFEM, 2006).

EFFECT OF COUP

The coup had both positive and negative effects on the media. The 2000 coup saw growth for the Fiji Island media by providing a challenging scenario for investigative and interpretative reporting. However, although the media's dedication to bring the news out into the public was commendable, news was sensationalised and unbalanced. During the coups, journalists and media organisations were also under threat of both verbal and physical violence. Some were beaten up, held hostage by the rebels or detained by the military after releasing critical information. The critical capacity of media to either heighten or heal conflict was highlighted. Media was discovered to have the capacity to initiate dialogue or polarise communities.

WOMEN AND THE COUP

These massive, racially motivated political upheavals in 1987 and 2000 have derailed feminist progress and given rise to questions of campaigning priorities in times of instability, pitting gender against political issues (Jalal, 2002). The attempted coup in 2000 negatively impacted on women's advancement by aggravating direct and indirect discrimination against women. The passing of legislation supportive of gender equality was halted, legal

processes became disorganised, poverty increased and democracy was curtailed, thereby exerting tremendous harmful effects on women (UNIFEM, 2006).

GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA REFORMS

Though Fiji is considered to have one of the freest presses in the Pacific, authoritarianism penetrates all levels of the political process (Moala, 2003). Politicians constantly criticise the media's lack of responsibility, either calling for censorship or propaganda on the citizens' behalf. They were often tempted to impose gagging or licensing laws as critical media reports were seen as rebellious. Three Fiji Governments (led by Sitiveni Rabuka, Mahendra Chaudhry and the incumbent, Laisenia Qarase) have vowed reform since the 1990s, including the introduction of the Freedom of Information legislation. However, though legislation has been drafted and revised at various stages, no government followed through on these plans (Robie, 2003b as cited in Moala, 2003). In contrast, the media were guarded concerning media legislation and licensing (Robie, 2003b as cited in Moala, 2003). In addition to these reforms, the Fiji government also hired a foreign investigative body to examine its media industry and provide insights and recommendations. This led to the creation of the Thompson report in 1996. Recommendations included the need for a responsible press, with a relationship to the government that is inquiring and doubtful, rather than familiar, comfortable and patronising (Morgan & Thomas, 1996 as cited in Moala, 2003).

COMMUNICATION TOOLS USAGE BY CIVIL SOCIETY

Members of the media reported that intermediary groups and government departments contact them with news information as they do not seek them out, except to solicit commentary on specific issues. Furthermore, few intermediary groups in Fiji have a formal process of evaluating the impact of their media advocacy, instead using informal feedback tools such as school visits, talks, workshops, letters and calls, and personal interaction (Davis, 2005). The Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) is the umbrella body of all intermediary groups in Fiji. Of the 229 intermediary group affiliates, around 17 produce regular media content. The Executive Director of FCOSS also stated that Fiji's intermediary groups tend to take media for granted, feeling that successful projects will generate their own publicity (Davis 2005). However, this has not been the case.

FIJI COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES (FCOSS)

The Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) is an active organisation in Fiji that aims to support people-centred development initiatives in the community in view of fostering strength and self-sufficiency of local organisations (Fiji Council of Social Services [FCOSS], 2006). The organisation wishes to enhance social equity and quality of life by

ensuring social development through sustainable livelihood, economic development, full employment, fair sharing of national wealth and justice for all people (FCOSS, 2006).

LIVE AND LEARN

Funded by the European Union, Live and Learn launched an educational project called *Imagining Tomorrow: Towards Peace Building Education for Children in Fiji Islands*. It used a *peace bus* to go around various areas in the country, targeting over 15,000 primary students in over 100 schools. The project aims to heighten awareness about peace and multiculturalism (Fiji Government Online Portal, 2006).

PACIFIC ISLAND ASSOCIATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (PIANGO)

The Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) is a regional network of intermediary group focal points. Dubbed the “National Liaison Units” (NLUs), they are based in 22 Pacific Island countries and territories. The organisation’s main purpose is to motivate collective action and to strengthen the regional impact of intermediary groups (Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations [PIANGO], 2006).

PIANGO produces a bimonthly newsletter called *PIANGO Link*, a website, and monthly electronic updates. Their governance focus includes human rights such as indigenous rights; women’s and children’s rights and self-determination, especially of French Polynesian countries; economic and trade issues; environment and development issues; law, order and security; and major public policies that are of importance to individual countries or the region as a whole (Davis, 2005).

ECUMENICAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY (ECREA)

Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA) is an intermediary group based in Suva, Fiji Islands. Founded in 1990 by the late Reverend Paula Niukula, it aims to address the social, religious, economic and political issues that confront Fiji (Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy [ECREA], 2006). ECREA produces newsletters, a website and press releases, and contributes regular features to the newspapers and a segment on the FemLINK Pacific community radio. All its publications are based on governance issues such as human rights, economic and trade policies in Fiji, the environment, law and order, security issues, good governance and corruption, poverty, reconciliation, and development issues (Davis, 2005).

CITIZENS' CONSTITUTIONAL FORUM (CCF)

According to the CCF Executive Director, the role of CCF is to serve as a watchdog on a number of governance issues, including corruption, the Constitution, land, human rights, and economy and trade. CCF advances its advocacy through press releases, press conferences, regular newspaper opinion columns and a website. In addition, CCF is very active in sending letters to editors of various publications and in participating in radio talkback shows and television programmes (Davis, 2005).

It was during the difficult times brought about by the coup that the Citizen's Constitutional Forum, a civil society organisation, increased its campaign to educate the people of Fiji about the 1997 Constitution. Their booklet entitled *Your Constitution, Your Rights* was published in three languages and became the basis for educating people on their Constitutional Rights. It was an answer to a lack of initiative from the mainstream media's part in educating people about this important issue. The booklet also aimed to ease the fear in the minds of the indigenous community (Hannan, 2002).

NGO COALITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The NGO Coalition of Human Rights is an umbrella body of 14 intermediary groups that mostly deal with human rights issues. The organisation's Secretariat is based at the CCF. While the Coalition does not produce much media content, it is very active in advocating human rights issues in the mainstream media through press releases, television guestings and radio talkback shows and editorial opinion contributions (Davis, 2005).

PACIFIC CONCERNS RESOURCE CENTRE (PCRC)

In advocating for human rights, sustainable development, trade and economy, environment and security, PCRC utilises its monthly publication, *Pacific News Bulletin* (500 copies) as well as monthly media releases on various campaigns and its own website (Davis, 2005).

FOUNDATION OF THE PEOPLES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL (FSPI)

FSPI consists of a network of 10 Pacific Island organisations and has a regional secretariat based in Suva. It has its own website and a monthly electronic newsletter, *FSP Eye*, which mainly concentrate on issues such as health, environment, good governance development issues, land, water, poverty and human rights (Davis 2005).

THE FIJI NURSING ASSOCIATION (FNA)

The Fiji Nursing Association (FNA) deals with governance issues covering domestic problems, HIV/ AIDS, non-communicable diseases, nutrition, cleanliness and any other information that listeners are interested in. However, its main focus is advocating for workers' rights, particularly the rights of nurses. It publishes an annual magazine called *Isa Nasi* and also provides press releases when required. Its members, who are nurses, guests on weekly health programmes on almost all radio stations located in Suva (Davis, 2005).

THE FIJI PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION (FPSA)

A trade union organisation of civil servants in Fiji, the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA) is composed of more than 3000 members. Even though the FPSA doesn't have its own website or newsletter, it continues to have a strong presence in Fiji's mainstream media. Putting out press releases on an almost daily basis on a range of issues such as graft and corruption, economic issues, and government policies on labour and poverty, the FPSA remains to be one of the most popular organisations sought out by the media for alternative opinions on issues that affect Fiji (Davis, 2005).

THE PACIFIC NETWORK ON GLOBALISATION (PANG)

The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) concentrates on issues concerning the economy, trade, and globalisation and its effects on Pacific Island countries. In dealing with these issues, PANG utilises its website, issues press releases, conducts press conferences and also writes regular opinion columns in different publications (Davis, 2005).

FOUNDATION FOR RURAL INTEGRATED ENTERPRISES 'N' DEVELOPMENT (FRIEND)

FRIEND mainly deals with issues of poverty and economy. Its activities include micro-enterprise and small business training, especially for elderly persons in rural areas. It operates in the Western Division of Fiji's largest island Viti Levu. It communicates with other groups, the media and its beneficiaries through newsletters, press releases and press conference (Davis, 2005).

FIJI MEDIA WATCH

In 1993, the Fiji Media Watch arose from the public's protests against the media's irresponsible procedures and cultural insensitivity. In 1995, Fiji Media Watch began its

operations by conducting media awareness workshops in Suva and in other major population centres as well as in some tertiary institutes. Fiji Media Watch organises workshops for Fiji Film censors and aims to educate the media industry while also facilitating dialogue between media users and the media industry.

THE PACIFIC CONCERNS RESOURCE CENTRE INC. (PCRC)

Based in Suva, the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre Inc. (PCRC) acts as the secretariat of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) Movement and represents over 100 affiliated intermediary groups and community groups around the Pacific. Its main thrusts include advocating for issues regarding demilitarisation, decolonisation, environment, human rights, good governance, and sustainable human development (Pacific Concerns Resource Centre [PCRC], 2006).

NGO COALITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The NGO Coalition of Human Rights organises activities to raise awareness on human rights issues. Their recent activities include a *Human Rights Education Tour* around the country to promote outreach schools to provincial centres and rural areas. The tour involves theatre, speeches, and displays in Sigatoka, Ba, Lautoka and Nadi. They also employ a media outreach campaign that includes ads and articles in newspapers as well as radio spots. Aside from arranging rallies, they also utilise cinema advertisements, video screenings and mural competitions on human rights issues (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre [FWCC], 2006).

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS USAGE BY WOMEN'S GROUPS

The following lists the women's groups in Fiji, together with their strategies for forwarding their advocacy through the media.

THE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA (DAWN)

The Development Alternative with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is a network of women scholars and activists from the economic South who engage in feminist research and analysis of the global environment. Working for economic justice, gender justice and democracy, DAWN works both globally and regionally and has links with Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific on the following themes: political economy of globalisation, political restructuring and social transformation, sustainable livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Development Alternative with Women

for a New Era [DAWN], 2006). DAWN uses the media to publish letters of support or advocacies regarding women's issues.

THE WOMEN'S ACTION FOR CHANGE (WAC)

WAC is an organisation that has been working for 13 years in the promotion of human rights of women, children, sexual minorities and other diverse groups in Fiji (FemLINK Pacific, 2006).

In 2005, Fijian Assistant Minister for Culture and Heritage Nanise Nagusca called gay relationships an abomination against cultural and biblical tradition while blaming the women's movement for the erosion of Fiji's national identity and the promotion of short skirts and short hair. WAC coordinator, Noelene Nabulivou, responded through the media saying that all cultures change and are never stagnant (FemLINK Pacific, 2006). She added that diversity should not be attacked but celebrated. The WAC Theatre Troupe was founded on the principle of equality for individuals regardless of sex, race or sexual orientation (Thompson, 2000).

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF FIJI (NCWF)

The National Council of Women of Fiji (NCWF) promotes multi-ethnic diversity as a key strength of the Fijian people. During the 2000 crisis, the NCWF formed the Women's Action for Democracy and Peace, which conducted daily peace vigils as a form of protest. Amidst threats of violence from Speight supporters, the NCWF distributed petitions and media materials worldwide. The Council expressed worries over the lack of gender and racial equality in the organisation and legislation of the Interim Administration and appealed to the government to revert to the 1997 constitution (WILPF, 2006).

THE FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT (FWRM)

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) produces newsletters, press releases and opinion columns in the newspapers and also holds press conferences. FWRM mostly deals with women's and children's human rights issues, poverty, governance, economic and health issues (Davis, 2005).

THE FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE (FWCC)

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is the oldest and one of the most vocal, feminist intermediary groups in Fiji. It is on the frontlines in stopping violence against women and is very active in fighting negative images of women in the media. It uses its high media profile to raise public awareness against women's negative images in the media,

particularly in sexist advertising and in film and news items. It does this by writing letters to the editors, releasing statements to media organisations, and giving interviews all over radio and television (Isis, 1999).

THE SOQOSOQO VAKAMARAMA (SSV)

The SSV is a conservative women's group that works closely with Christian denominations. Leaders of the SSV branches in villages are usually women of high birth or marriage and are 'elected' by members through consensus (Durutalo, personal communication, February 2005 as cited in Norton, 2002). The Soqosoqo Vakamarama (SSV) serves the interests of the three major institutions: the church, the state and the *vanua*. The SSV also overlaps in membership with the Methodist women's organisation within the church (Norton, 2005). Nonetheless, the SSV is one of the first as well as the largest indigenous women's groups in Fiji.

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

Starting from a very conservative background, Fiji's Young Women's Christian Association has evolved to become one of the most outspoken and progressive groups committed to the advancement of local women (Nicole, 2006). When it was just starting out, the focus of the organisation was to provide opportunities for socialisation and wholesome instruction for young women in the areas of arts and crafts, sport and games, and sewing and cooking. However, in only a few years, these two functions of the YWCA were extended in a dramatic fashion. The organisation began to broaden its reach and engage at a more concrete level with the specific challenges facing women in Fiji (Nicole, 2004).

FEMLINK PACIFIC

FemLINK Pacific is a major media-producing intermediary group that works with a number of other women's intermediary groups in Fiji. The organisation emerged from the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil of the 2000 crisis. According to their website, the group exists to empower women and communities by providing them with a voice in order for them to contribute in the decision-making process for equality, development and peace (FemLINK Pacific, 2007). They seek to fulfill these goals through the development, production and distribution of suitable communication tools and materials (FemLINK Pacific, 2007). For instance, the group produces a monthly electronic news bulletin targeting regional and international contacts, where it posts women's media action alerts to women's programme producers and presenters in mainstream news media and to women's media networks (Davis, 2005).

It also has its own mobile women's community radio project, *fem'TALK 89.2FM*, as well as a monthly women's community radio broadcast in Suva. It also develops and produces mainstream radio campaigns in partnership with other women's groups such as ISIS Manila. In addition, the organisation develops, produces and distributes community videos, as well as a quarterly regional women and peace magazine (Davis, 2005).

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CHAPTER 18

HOW INTERMEDIARY GROUPS USE COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN FIJI

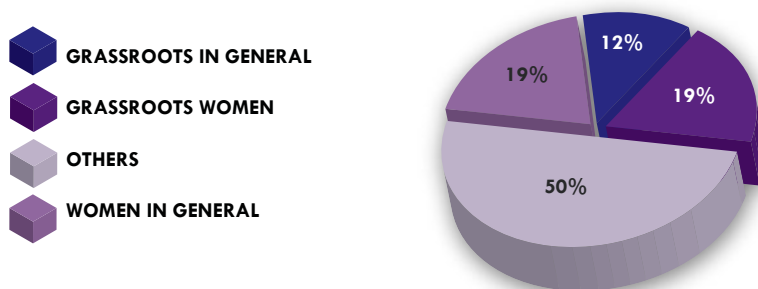
THERE WERE 16 Fiji organisations which served as key informants for this study. Their responses were sorted and content analysed, the results of which are described in this report. While the first two sections of the report were based on a content analysis of the data from the Organisational Information Profiles (OIP), the rest of the sections were based on a content analysis of the interviews. A complete summary of figures can be seen in the Annex.

It is important to note at the outset that since some organisations are network/umbrella groups or even regional organisations, they do not communicate directly with grassroots women. Their answers to some questions therefore should be understood within this context.

It must also be said that a few interviews lacked the necessary probing that would elaborate on the answers given.

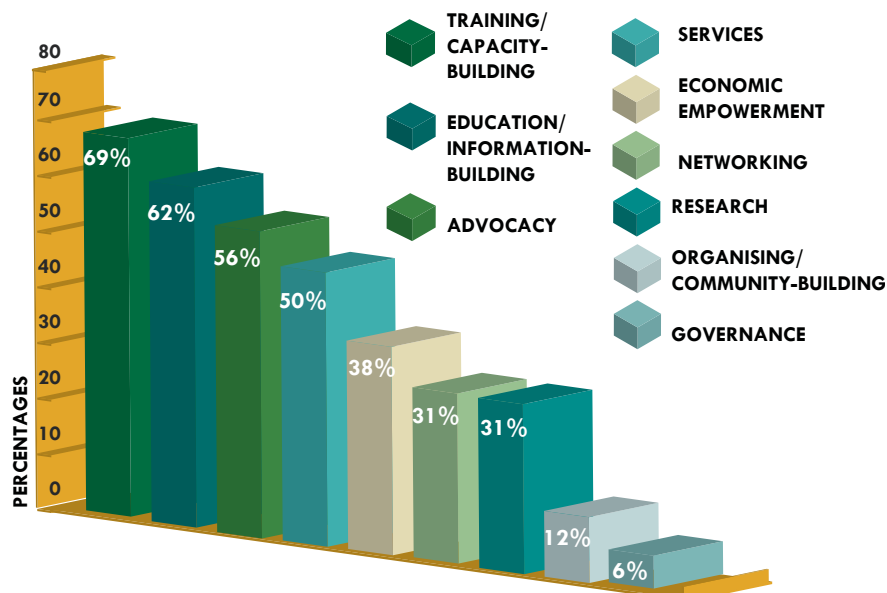
TYPE OF INTERMEDIARY GROUP

A content analysis of the Organisation Information Profiles revealed that half of the sample (8 out of 16 groups or 50%) consists of groups representing a broad sector (e.g. senior citizens, people with disabilities) that counts grassroots women as only one of its many beneficiaries. A few of these organisations are regional groups or networks that have many different intermediary groups as its members. Grassroots women are a part of their target beneficiaries. All these aforementioned groups are grouped together as "others." Those organisations that do focus on grassroots women or on women in general each comprise 19% (3 groups each) of the sample. Groups whose services are directed to the grassroots in general are the fewest (2 groups or 12%). Figure 1 shows this breakdown according to the organisations' type of beneficiaries.

FIGURE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (BASED ON BENEFICIARIES) (N=16)

MISSION / THRUST OF THE ORGANISATION

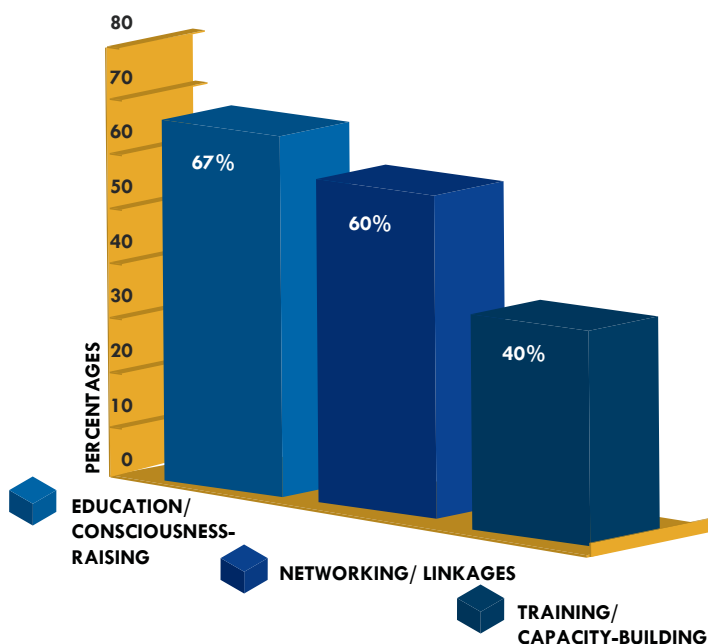
Based on the OIPs, majority of the groups had a training and capacity-building component as part of their mission or thrust (11 groups or 69%). This is closely followed by organisations whose thrust includes education and consciousness-raising (10 groups or 62%), advocacy (9 groups or 56%), and services (8 groups or 50%). The rest were set up for purposes of economic empowerment (38%), networking (31%), research (31%), organising/ community-building (12%), and governance (6%). See Figure 2 for the breakdown according to the mission/thrust of the organisation.

FIGURE 2. MISSION/THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=16)

STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN

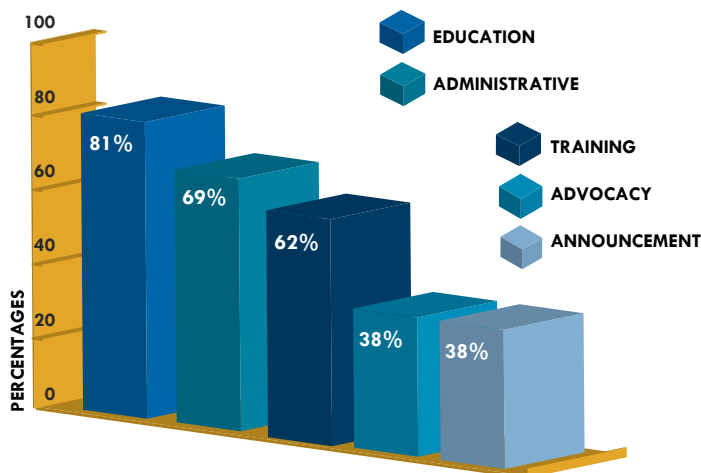
Only 15 organisations were able to indicate their concrete strategy in communicating with grassroots women. These top 3 strategies, as culled from the answers of the respondents during the interviews, were education and consciousness-raising (10 out of 15 groups or 67%), networking (9 out of 15 groups or 60%), and training/capacity-building (6 out of 15 groups or 40%). For the most part, these answers are consistent with the top thrusts as discussed in the prior section. However, the high percentage of ‘networking’ as a specific strategy may be due to the fact that several organisations in the sample are either network or umbrella organisations or regional organisations. Communicating or interacting with grassroots women necessitates then that these respondents link up first with their partner or member organisations. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of these strategies in percentages.

FIGURE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=15)



USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

All 16 respondent-groups mentioned at least one function of the tool/s that they use. Most of them answered that the tool was for education or information-dissemination, administrative purposes, and training. The percentages for each are presented in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=16)

The tools were mostly used to increase the awareness of and educate the grassroots on a variety of issues (13 out of 16 groups or 81%). They consider the tool as a means to inform and to make the people understand more about their respective organisations, their activities, and other relevant social issues like human rights, health and sexual abuse:

“I think the general purpose is to provide women with information, and we use it to... it’s a... you try to use diverse means or techniques to present information instead of one person standing and talking... the women will probably get bored so if you have different tools... communication tools to actually give information, you know; it increases some kind of excitement when women use different techniques and tools extending their knowledge and making them aware.”

Many groups also said that the tools were simply for administrative work (11 out of 16 groups or 69%). When communicating with partner organisations or point persons in communities to arrange for meetings or organise workshops, they usually use the email, cellular phone, landline or fax. Notably, most of these tools used for administrative purposes are the new ICTs. This could be because these tools help facilitate arrangements and communications, thus saving time:

“Electronic media is good for administrative purposes... and even umm... you know... it’s good for administrative purposes... when you want to fast track time.”

Training is another popular use of the tools (10 out of 16 groups or 62%). This time, the tools of choice tend to be laptops/ computers, overhead projectors (OHPs), and film/videos. Perhaps, during trainings, the organisations deem it best to enhance the presentations by making the visuals of the materials more interesting for the participants:

“... I think one of the most frequently used ones are laptops and overhead projectors... for showing movies or doing presentations during a workshop or training ... and I think we need to get it out and let it be known to the audience.”

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS

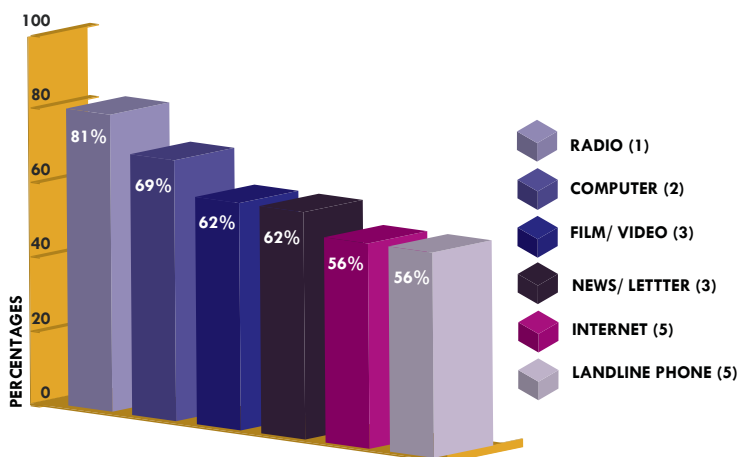
When interacting with their beneficiaries - grassroots women in particular, the groups in the sample mostly mentioned radio, computer, film/video, newsletter, landline phone, and Internet. Figure 5 shows these top tools with their corresponding percentages.

Radio, as seen in Figure 5, is a popular choice among the groups in the sample. As used by 13 groups (81%), the radio is a good tool to announce information about the organisation and its activities and programs:

“We think that radio is a good (way) of communicating because umm... we get time slots in radio so... it's radio Sargam and Z FM... yeah... so most people listen to those stations... so its easier for us to inform them... we have talkback shows... so it's easier for the community members to understand about our organisation and what are the workshops about and what we are intending to do...”

Many organisations also used the radio for advocacy and promotion either by hosting their own radio programs, acting as guest speakers in other groups' programs or using paid advertisements.

FIGURE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=16)



Mainstream radio has been used at times. However, many organisations used the community radio to reach out to the people. Regardless of whether it is mainstream or community radio, respondents have attested to the radio's popularity among the grassroots, specifically the women. As one respondent put it, "they like listening to radio and they are looking forward to it every week..." In particular, women in the rural areas make radio a part of their everyday routine. As one participant states:

"and also when you are in the rural areas... you know the time for... when the radio is on... especially in the evening for socialising... we'd turn it on and they listen to music and the program..."

Many groups are confident about information reaching their targets because of the radio's wide coverage and fast reach. Its popularity is further maintained by the fact that it is considered one of the cheapest forms of media as well. However, one respondent commented that the radio is not interactive enough. According to her, "radio is about listening." Because it relies on listening, "you can't expect everybody to remember what they hear... or [if] even what you hear is going to change your attitude."

Interestingly, the second and fourth most-used tools among the groups are the computer and the Internet, respectively. While these are new ICTs not often associated with the grassroots, the groups still found some ways how these can be of use in their interaction with the women.

For instance, computers are being used by eleven groups, or 69% of the sample, mainly because these have helped them produce PowerPoint presentations for the community. These presentations had been particularly effective as visual aids that kept women interested and awake:

"We have PowerPoint presentations at the moment... it is very visual and you get quite good feedbacks... this is where we are able to demonstrate pictures and stuff."

Therefore, it is not a learning tool in itself, according to one respondent, but more of an enhancement tool. It is basically used to enhance presentations:

"it's enhancement of learning... it's enhancement of presentation...it's really mechanism... assist presentation... make it user friendly and learner friendly..."

In one case, however, the Internet was not used as an enhancement tool, but simply to make lives easier for some people, albeit temporarily. This organisation subscribed to wireless Internet to make it easier for their training participants to access their emails while attending the workshops which the organisation sponsored:

"... So people out there who attended the course actually have access to emails and everything ... without coming to the city to access from cyber cafes but they have ... everything there for them."

While the computer is a relatively popular choice, some organisations admitted that the computer is appropriate for select audiences only. One respondent said that these PowerPoint presentations were used mainly for literate communities. Another said that visually-impaired people would understandably not appreciate this and only “able-bodied” ones would. Senior citizens are free to use the computers in one organisation’s office but as one respondent lamented, “... I think 95% of them do not know how to use the computers.” Urban communities that have access to electricity have benefited from this as well.

As the third most-used tools, films and videos can cover a variety of issues such as reproductive health, STD, HIV/AIDS, family planning, human rights, and disabilities. Among the 10 organisations (62%) which mentioned this, quite a number produce the videos themselves. Some organisations, on the other hand, collect DVDs produced by other groups and have an extensive resource library from which they could get materials to show to the grassroots women. For one organisation, though, short video clips sent over the Internet have also helped women to connect more with the messages:

“... so that instead of just us reading the message to our recipients we actually project the person whose message is being read... so that we are being... its being more realistic... somehow people can identify with this message if they actually see the person reading to them in person.”

These videos were deemed best for education and training activities: “When we have ... education and training ... that’s when we use audio visual as an information tool.” For others, these videos gave their beneficiaries a chance to express themselves, their difficulties and their issues. As was the case with people with disabilities:

“The human rights video... it has all people with disabilities actually acting on the video... you’re talking about real life situation... like you have a person on a wheel chair saying what his problems are... what he or she does about it... what does the law say about it... so you have the various people...like for me... I’m a person with visual impairments or I guess for me to be talking to people who are deaf is really not appropriate so the video has got like people telling their stories as it is I should say...”

Alongside film and video, the newsletter was the third most-mentioned tool. Ten organisations or 62% have also used this tool mainly to inform people from all walks of life about their organisations and about their focal issues. Grassroots women are merely one of the sectors that they hope to reach through the newsletter, as one organisation had hoped to do:

“Our commission newsletter every quarterly... so we have four issues in a year and for this quarterly we post them to government departments... to all

schools... from kindergarten right up to tertiary level... we send them to all NGOs... we are just about send to everybody in Fiji... so that's one way of making sure that everybody in Fiji who is a taxpayer or a non taxpayer... they get to know the work of the commission... what we are doing... what we stand for and how their rights are guaranteed in the commission... which is our legal mandate to protect."

A few organisations put out their newsletters in electronic form, although it has been admitted that newsletters in this form can only be accessed by partner intermediary groups and networks. Other organisations produce hard copies for people who do not have access to the new ICTs. But even with such access, some groups acknowledged that many from the grassroots still do not really read these newsletters. Thus, for one group, newsletters are there in the hope that the women would pick one up and read it.

Those who use Internet, on the other hand, comprise 56% of the sample (9 groups). It is primarily used for email and for construction of websites. However, most of those who can directly engage the organisations via this tool are mostly other civil society organisations, donors, and literate individuals or groups.

Acknowledging that the Internet has limited accessibility among the grassroots, some organisations, particularly the network and regional ones, enlist their member or partner groups to bring the benefits of the Internet to the latter's grassroots constituencies:

"Exactly in terms of ICTs... it's only to those who can access it... usually with the affiliates or the partners who then take it down to their target grassroots communities."

Other respondents use the Internet to research for information that they can pass on to their beneficiaries. In one case, an organisation employed the Internet to gather information about possible techniques to use in a project:

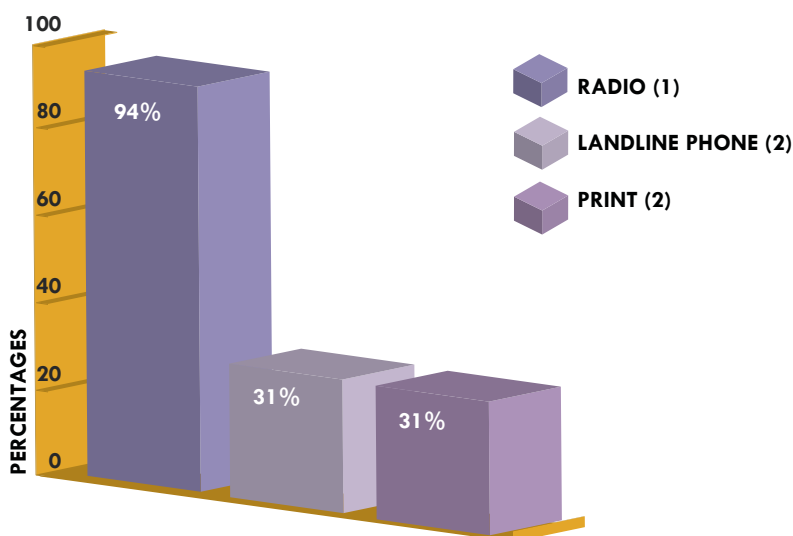
"Through Internet... because I think whatever we research... for example we take our deaf project... the card making project... I have been able to research on hand made cards and the techniques that's been used there and we have been able to deliver those techniques to the deaf community... using sign language and... what we have been doing is the techniques that's already on the Internet... we have been using that in a local manner... so that our cards are unique... and its... sellable in the market... and that community is being able to benefit from that..."

The landline phone was mentioned by 9 of the groups in the sample (56%). Many organisations consider the landline as a basic and "very essential" tool to have and use in the office. But as one respondent said, the landline phone is mainly to arrange for logistics and "to keep contact over time."

COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

The communication tool most accessible to grassroots women is the radio, with landline phone and print materials coming in at a far second. Only 16 organisations provided an answer to this question during the interviews. The percentages of these topmost tools are seen in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6. COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN
(N=16)



According to 15 out of 16 groups (94%), radio is by far the single most accessible tool to the grassroots women in Fiji. This is not surprising, since radio is the most accessible means of communication in the whole of the Pacific. Many organisations had commented that almost every household in Fiji has a radio. People listen to the radio all the time, “even while they are busy doing something.” The radio has a very wide reach which few other tools possess. This wide coverage allows the organisations to reach out to many women, particularly those in the remote, rural areas: “If we can announce... you know meetings over the radio... it would reach the grassroots women because they listen to the radio.”

What separates the radio from the other tools with wide-reaching coverage is that it is cheap and easy to own for the grassroots. Moreover, it does not require electricity which many remote areas lack:

“so basically it’s the most simple communication tools like radio... and television at times... and most of the communities that we work with... are squatter settlements and then... we can see that they don’t have electricity.”

Furthermore, it is easy to use because no special skills are needed to operate it. In Fiji, accessibility is enhanced because of the use of all three official languages -- Hindustani, Fijian and English – in the radio.

Due to the radio’s accessibility, women are known to like listening to it. Moreover, by calling the stations, they are able to give their feedback and comments to the programs they listen to. The entertainment value also adds to the radio’s popularity, with women enjoying the wide variety of music and educational programs they can listen to. More importantly, women have always wanted to hear themselves on air and the radio – the community radio, specifically -- has afforded them that opportunity:

“And we also have Femlink community radio visits at least once or twice a year... so that is where we usually have women... expressing their views... we’ve had cases where older women said...they’ve always wanted to talk on radio... or hear their voice on air... and the community radio has helped them fulfill their dream...”

The landline phone and print materials in general are accessible to the grassroots women, too. But only 31% of the respondents (5 groups) attested to this. Some of these groups said that there are many places in Fiji where one can access a phone, with women even from the outer areas able to communicate well using this tool:

“Yeah they use telephone and RT...women from the outer islands...RT... radio telephones... they use that... oh! They are very good in communicating with us... through telephones and through... from the remote islands... they don’t have cellphones... they just use normal landline phone... and the RT... because they have the sessions... the timing on talkback shows... so yeah... they use it”

However, one respondent claimed that in some rural areas, telephones are still few in number, but because access to such is important among the communities, they use whatever phone is available in their areas:

“A lot of tools telephones are quite easily accessible like in some rural areas you find you don’t even have telephones... so, you have to use the school headmaster’s telephone or the religious leaders’ pundits’ telephone or the church minister’s phone... so they don’t even have phones and, but it’s very important for them to have access to the telephone.”

Another 31% of the sample found that print materials are accessible to grassroots women. According to one respondent, the print form is still the “cheapest form in the Pacific.” With the high cost of other new ICTs, the print form thus becomes important to emphasise.

“... And the cheapest form in the Pacific is print form... because electronic... through sharing information... through electronic means... actually the coverage is not actually... the coverage is very low... and people do not have the enabling environment for these things... so that’s why print is still the main thing in the Pacific... well you know why we emphasise on print one... as I said the enabling environment.”

Without an enabling environment for the digital and electronic means and with illiteracy in the Pacific quite high, going back to the basics seems to be a good idea.

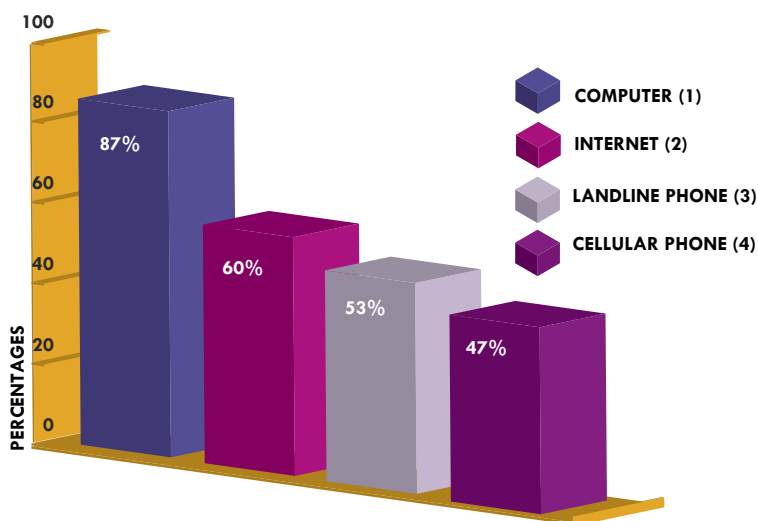
The accessibility has been further increased because, as one organisation shared, the vernacular was used in their publications or, as another group revealed, they used existing structures and institutions to distribute their publications:

“I guess there has been an increase in... in the print form that we distribute to the rural areas... even if we don’t go... even if we use the infrastructure that is already there... the government infrastructure... so we send them to schools to distribute or public libraries to distribute the print information... yeah for rural outreach... it’s print, it’s more effective...”

COMMUNICATION TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

Not surprisingly, the tools least accessible to the grassroots women as perceived by the respondents are the new ICTs, namely, the computer, the Internet, the landline phone, and the cellular phone. There were only 15 groups that provided their thoughts on this. The percentages for each are shown on Figure 7.

FIGURE 7. COMMUNICATION TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN
(N=15)



For 13 organisations (87%), the computer appears to be the least accessible. The reasons most often cited for this low accessibility include the high costs of the computer, the lack of electricity or power supply in many areas (“These are all the new technologies which the grassroots just can’t afford... there’s so much other expenses related to it... like electricity and so on...”), and the lack of skills to use the tool:

“No, not at the grassroots level, because it’s strange to them and its not very... how should I put it... it’s not very nice of us to use those technologies in front of them which they are not familiar with or relate with.”

The inaccessibility of the computer holds true for the whole of Fiji and the Pacific. But as one respondent puts it, increasing the number of computers may not be the solution. Instead, going back to the basics may be more appropriate. According to her:

“But if they are still cooking over open fire... in a leaking kitchen... is it morally justifiable that we provide them computers?...[laughs]... when they are still using pit toilets... or even toilet in the bush or somewhere... you know...we haven’t addressed basic things...”

Nine organisations out of 15 (60% of sample) agreed that the Internet is also among the least accessible tools. One respondent explained that the Internet in Fiji can only be accessed by a very small percentage of the population and therefore by an even much smaller percentage of the grassroots women:

“Mostly I think for our grassroots the website is not accessible because... umm as you know Internet in Fiji... maybe only 5% or 10% of the population has access to it... yeah only very little percentage of population has access to Internet so its not a very viable communication tool for the communities.”

Similar to the computer, the Internet lacks users among the grassroots because of the lack of affordability of electricity in some areas:

“And then for Internet... we can not use Internet without electricity so... during that time... during power cuts we do not have access to these tools.”

In addition, there is a lack of the proper skills to operate the tool:

“... computer... Internet... no... not unless they have a focal point... who you can say... you know go to town and access Internet... but how many of them actually know how to use computers... is another thing...”

The third least accessible tool is the landline phone (8 out of 15 organisations or 53%). The high cost of the phone was cited as the biggest reason for this: “And yes telephone itself has not reached most remote areas... and with the increasing telecommunication cost... I guess it will be just hard for the grassroots to access one.”

This seems to contradict an earlier finding that saw the landline phone as one of the most accessible tools for the grassroots. It is possible that in some cases, respondents lumped the landline and the cellular phone together when they commented on the landline’s inaccessibility. As we will see, others find the mobile phone hard to access.

The cellular phone is the next least accessible tool (7 out of 15 organisations or 47% of sample). The costs and skills needed in operating one were once again cited, along with problems in the network signal, as reasons for this. However, many have observed the increasing number of grassroots people who own one. But their usage still reflects the difficulty of the grassroots in managing its high cost. They are still held back by the expenses incurred, as is evident in this statement:

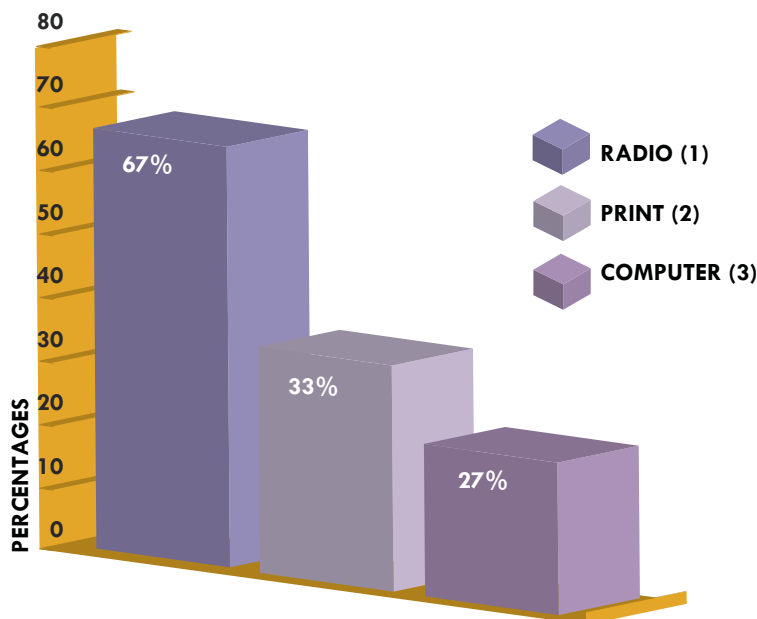
“... we generally use telephone and cellphone... its outreach is increasing and a lot of people are having a cellphone these days... however at the grassroots level... they usually have cellphones to receive calls because of the high call rates... It’s too expensive for them... but yeah we do communicate with our field officers who are ... working in the communities...”

But while there is an increasing visibility of the mobile phones, there is likewise a gender difference in its ownership, with more grassroots men observed to have access to it than women. Grassroots women, particularly those in the rural areas, do not usually have ownership of these phones: “I’d also assume it’s anecdotal... from seeing people... quite often in squatter settlement they will have a mobile phone but it’s usually with the male head of household who hold it.” Urban and rural women seem to have a difference in accessibility as well. As one respondent explained:

“In urban areas... yes women do have cellphones... I think it’s that literacy gap... umm rural women are not as literate so they become very domesticated while urban women are educated, empowered... have their own job and are very much independent... so yeah these could be some of the reasons.”

MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

With 15 organisations expressing their thoughts on this section, radio, print materials, and computer emerged to be the most effective tools. Figure 8 displays the percentages of these topmost tools. It is important to note that when asked to identify the most effective tool, some respondents indicated what they thought were the effective tools in general and not necessarily what was effective among the tools that they used to interact with the grassroots women.

FIGURE 8. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=15)

Majority of the organisations (10 out of 15 organisations or 67%) believe that the radio is the most effective tool in their interactions with grassroots women, mainly because many from the latter actually have access to it and more importantly, actually listen to it. As mentioned earlier, almost every household has one because it is cheap to own. The radio works because it cuts across sectors, areas and divides. One respondent eloquently explained:

“But in terms of reaching the grassroots women... I would have to say radio would be the most effective tool just from anecdotal evidence from people within my family who are grassroots women... I know that radio is something that is part of the tapestry of their daily lives... they got it going on in background and they are listening... they like listening to talk back particularly... my experiences particularly with the Hindi language... public broadcasters... I think that's quite an effective way to reach the communities... even in you know peri-urban areas... so with grassroots women radio is probably the most friendly form for them yeah.”

Some radio sessions are particularly effective because they allow women to share their thoughts on issues. And even those without phones to use for feedback also get to hear and comment about the issues through other women in the community who have the means to feedback:

“Talking about ... you know these kinds of issues and because it was an interactive radio session... they were able to also then receive and kind of discuss it in a human rights framework on radio... so I think that’s like... sounds like a pretty effective tool... so even those without phones were not able to phone in their own thoughts... they are listening to their peers and fellow women in the communities talking about these issues and I think that would have probably been effective so from the sounds from that report I read... it is effective.”

Print materials are also effective tools, according to 33% of respondents (5 out of 15 organisations). Many groups remarked that print is especially effective in the rural areas where the power supply is not a certainty or where there is a dearth of reading materials “because in the rural areas the only reading materials they use there is the bible... now apart from the bible... now they have a lot of materials that they can read... they access from workshops.”

Print is likewise effective among women because the form is something they can keep with them for later reading and re-reading. The absorption or comprehension of the content thus becomes more effective. Because it is concretely in their hands, they can also distribute or share it with other women:

“The grassroots people... we find that the print form is most effective and ... most useful... and women sort of... they sort of absorbed it faster and better... and they know they have something concrete to use later or to distribute or even to share with colleagues or counterparts or anybody else who comes around to explain... oh we’ve received this from human rights commission and we are using it for this... and for them to be able to transfer the knowledge that we’ve passed onto them and for them to pass on to others... we find that ... they sort of readily accept the print information.”

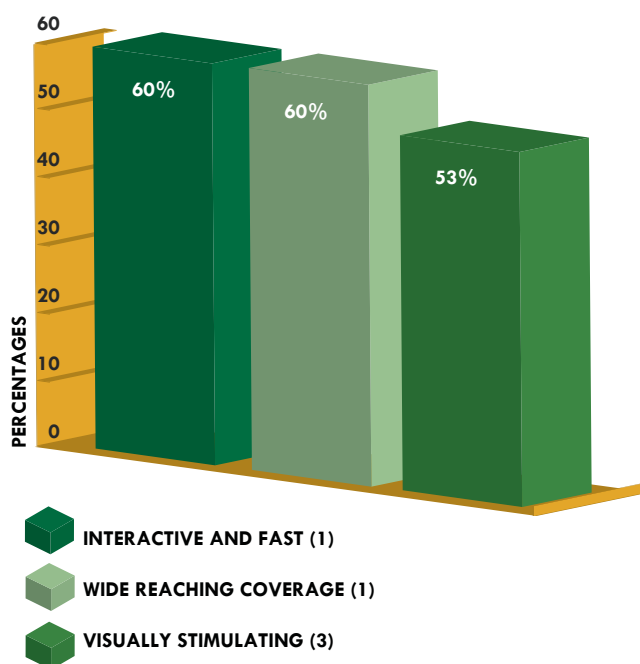
Only 4 organisations (27%) felt that the computer is an effective tool. Since the PowerPoint presents powerful visuals, the attention of the grassroots women is easily sustained. It is most effective in urban centers where electricity is a given:

“We also use PowerPoint slides... laptops... we use it... I see the visual aid is... makes them interested and awake and they are not sleepy... I think this is one of the teaching aid that ... I see as very effective and ... and when I run workshops in place like... in the urban areas is very useful... like in Savusavu... we use it in the boys town where they provide electricity and things like that.”

REASONS WHY A TOOL IS EFFECTIVE

The top reasons cited for a communication tool's effectiveness are its interactive quality, its wide-reaching coverage, and its visually stimulating nature. The number of organisations that responded to this question is 15. Figure 9 shows the percentages of organisations according to these topmost reasons.

FIGURE 9. REASONS WHY A TOOL IS EFFECTIVE (N=15)



A communication tool is considered effective if it allows the women to comment and share their ideas and feelings about an issue being presented. This interactive quality of a tool was cited by 9 organisations or 60% of the sample. Since talkback radio is quite popular in Fiji, the women are afforded the chance to discuss with the guest radio speakers the issues that affect them the most. And the organisations, on the other hand, get to receive feedback about their programs and their presentations:

“[S]he got a lot of positive feedback because it was talk back... on Hindi radio there are a lot of Fijian women calling up ... talking about sexual harassment

in the streets... talking about ... you know these kinds of issues and because it was an interactive radio session... they were able to also then receive and kind of discuss it in a human rights framework on radio... so I think that's like... sounds like a pretty effective tool."

The theatre, as employed by some organisations in the sample, uses a participatory approach as well. With the women becoming a part of the play, the participation becomes more meaningful and effective:

"And it is the theatre of the oppressed drama... which is very interactive... say people... our staffs act it out... and then the people are encouraged to come and say... oh this needs to be done like this and that needs to be done like that... so its very interactive, participatory form of learning... it not only educates people but... also allows them to contribute in the decision making process..."

Having a wide reach is another often-mentioned reason for a tool's effectiveness (9 out of 15 groups or 60%). Once again, the radio is the best example for this because of its ability to reach women living in even the remotest areas:

"Because radio has that reach... that outreach so even if people are not able to call from a particular area and tell us right there and then... that I think this... so when we go to that particular area for example Taveuni then people tell us... oh we heard Reverend talking on the radio about this and this is our view... so when we actually visit communities then we get to gauge what people think about our programs and all that and radio helps yeah."

One respondent also appreciated how a newspaper can have a wide circulation, able to reach faraway places.

Based on 53% of the sample (8 out of 15 groups), the effectiveness of a tool relies on its visuals and its ability to capture the grassroots women's interest. Visual aids shown on PowerPoint presentations, overhead projectors and videos help sustain attention and facilitate the process of learning and advocacy. As one organisation did on the issue of HIV/ AIDS, they showed many slides and documentaries whose visuals made a significant impact on the women:

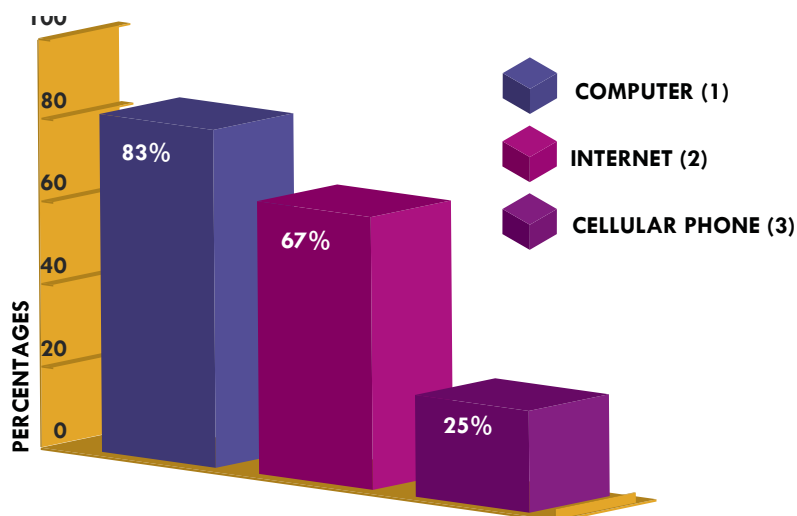
"These were basically given by the Ministry of Health and... that was very useful because... the women were quite alarmed to see... what it is like because they don't know... you know... so... they haven't seen things... they really... so we found that documentaries and slides and basic things that really affect women on day to day life is very useful... I mean they like to see the display and they are very happy that they have seen these things."

Another example of a creative and visually appealing tool is the puppet whose movement and colors can aid in getting the message across. For the grassroots women, good visuals are “much easier and much more comfortable to look at” and make them “grasp more” the issues.

LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The new ICTs -- computers, the Internet and cellular phone – emerged as the least effective tools. Only 12 organisations weighed in on this question. See Figure 10 for the percentages of organisations which answered each tool.

FIGURE 10. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=12)



The majority of the groups viewed the computer as the least effective tool. Ten organisations (out of 12) or 83% felt that the computer is not effective among the grassroots women. As a tool for administrative work, for lobbying with policymakers, and for dealing with other civil society groups, the computer appears to be effective. But as a tool to reach out to grassroots women, it is “a bit of a dud.”

For the grassroots, computers pose many limitations. It is an expensive tool. It requires a set of skills to operate it. It is too cumbersome to carry around and to set up. It requires electricity which not all areas have on a sustained basis. And it is too intimidating for some people to use which leads them to comprehend information at a slower pace:

“It gives this kind of big city... feel to something where it’s difficult to actually absorb the information because you’re too much thrown off by the medium and where it’s coming from.”

For instance, many senior citizens find it difficult to operate one and are thus resigned to letting the youth do all of the computer work:

“It’s very hard for them to get around to know how to use a computer... even turning it on... yeah and they would rather leave it to the younger generation to learn... you know what happens... empower themselves to learn...”

It needs to be explained that while computer was also mentioned earlier as one of the most effective tools, it was only perceived as such by a mere 27% of the sample.

Because the computer is deemed one of the least effective tools, then it is no longer surprising to see the Internet as among the least effective as well (8 out of 12 organisations or 67%). As one respondent put it, “list serves, email groups, the Internet, we’ve got a website but once again that’s not so appropriate for grassroots people in the Pacific...”

To be able to operate the Internet means that you also need to have a computer which, as stated above, is not easily accessed by many grassroots women. The same reasons that were cited earlier for the ineffectiveness of computer also apply to the Internet – lack of power supply, high cost of subscription and other associated costs, and the lack of skills. The lack of an enabling environment is also a major factor since telephones and computers are still inaccessible in many villages in Fiji.

Some organisations related that even if they have sent documents via email, women still ask them for hard copies later on. It seems that some women do not know how to download attachments and thus could not maximise the benefits of the Internet:

“I mean even sending it from here... even with our urban based women... some of them come back to me and say... can I have the document... so I say... I had attached it... oh I didn’t see that... [laughs]... so even some of them don’t know how to... you know... look at the emails... yeah... so it’s the least effective... because they can’t get all the information...”

And even if they have the ability to download these attached documents, not many people read them. One respondent elaborates:

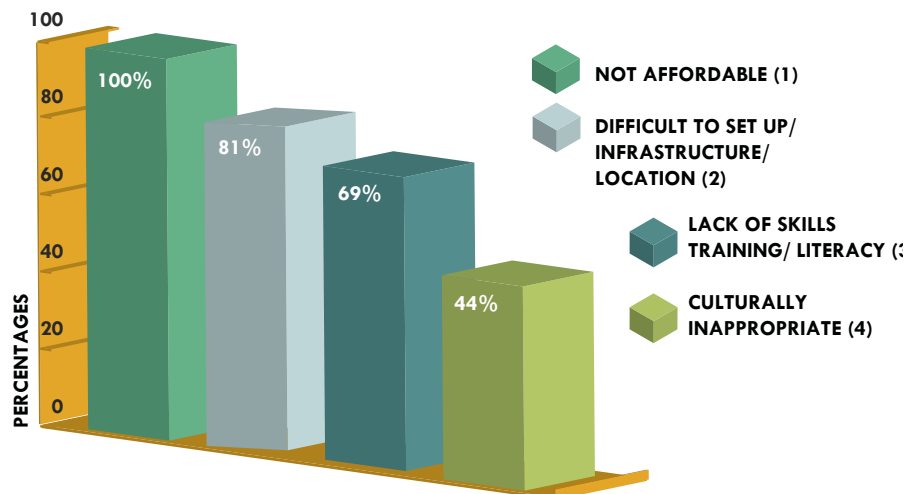
“The second issue is do they even stop to read what we send them...the culture of communicating person to person is still there...you know I can send it out ...saying that this is from here through the Internet....but only one of two would respond saying that they’ve read it...a majority of them would call me again and ask me for...what I’ve sent weeks ago... yeah...so its not the most effective I’d say.”

The cellular phone as a least effective tool gets the vote from 25% of the sample (3 out of 12 organisations). Since it is not yet accessible to many grassroots women primarily due to its high cost, a few organisations deemed that its effectiveness as a tool is diminished. In addition, network problems still exist: “Mobile phones... maybe sometimes... but then again there’s network problem, and it’s also very costly.”

REASONS WHY A TOOL IS INEFFECTIVE

Affordability, lack of infrastructure, and lack of skills comprise the top three reasons for a communication tool’s ineffectiveness (see Figure 11 below for the percentages of each reason). Interestingly, what makes a tool effective is quite different from what makes a tool ineffective. Looking at the reasons for a tool’s ineffectiveness, it appears that these act as strong demotivators for people when it comes to using and making the most out of the communication tools. In addition, these are mostly external to the tool. On the other hand, the reasons that make a tool effective appear to be factors inherent in the tool (e.g. its interactive nature and its visual appeal).

FIGURE 11. REASONS WHY A TOOL IS INEFFECTIVE (N=16)



All 16 respondents agreed that the costliness of a communication tool reduces its effectiveness. New ICTs like computers, the Internet and mobile phones are all still beyond the reach of the grassroots. Simply reading emails from a cybercafé proved to be costly as well:

“You will be surprised that people would prefer to talk to us rather than to email us... because they have to pay... it’s the use of pay services and ... we prefer they come to us.”

Even the traditional communication tools like TV (“TV is limited but we don’t use TV as our communication tool... a lot of our target groups are very poor... and they can’t afford it”) and newspapers (“You know very well that a loaf of bread is cheaper than newspaper... so if there’s a choice... people will buy a loaf of bread... why should they buy newspapers... they can’t eat it...”) tend to be hard on the pocket for most people from the grassroots.

For some organisations, using the radio and TV to promote their issues is also a costly endeavour. The power of these media could not be maximised because money, which they do not have in abundance, is essential in buying slots:

“Radio... radio and television... yes... we hardly ever use them... as we use it for promotion... but like I said... it really depends too on financial resources... if we had the finances... we’d use it every week... if we had the free time slots... you know... we could continue.”

ANNEX

COMPLETE TABLE OF FIGURES

TABLE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (N=16)

Type	f / %
1. Others	8 50%
2. Grassroots women	3 19%
3. Women in general	3 19%
4. Grassroots in general	2 12%

TABLE 2. MISSION / THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=16)

Mission/ Thrust	f / %
1. Training/ Capacity-building	11 69%
2. Education/ Information-building	10 62%
3. Advocacy	9 56%
4. Services	8 50%
5. Economic Empowerment	6 38%
6. Networking	5 31%
7. Research	5 31%
8. Organising/ Community-building	2 12%
9. Governance	1 6%

**TABLE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING
WITH BENEFICIARIES (N=15)**

Strategy	f / %
1. Education/ Consciousness-raising	10 67%
2. Networking/ Linkages	9 60%
3. Training/ Capacity-building	6 40%
4. Service delivery	2 13%
5. Advocacy/ Mobilisations	1 7%
6. Research, Publication & Documentation	1 7%
7. Organising/ Community- building	1 7%
8. Others	1 7%

TABLE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=16)

Uses	f / %
1. Education	13 81%
2. Administrative	11 69%
3. Training	10 62%
4. Advocacy	6 38%
5. Announcement	6 38%
6. Networking	4 25%
7. Research	4 25%

**TABLE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED
BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=16)**

Tools	f / %
1. Radio	13 81%
2. Computer	11 69%
3. Film/ Video	10 62%
4. Newsletter	10 62%
5. Landline Phone	9 56%
6. Internet	9 56%
7. Print	8 50%
8. Fax	7 44%
9. Miscellaneous Papers	7 44%
10. OHP	7 44%
11. Oral	7 44%
12. Pamphlets	7 44%
13. Theatre	7 44%
14. Newspaper	6 38%
15. Book	5 31%
16. Leaflets	4 25%
17. Letters	4 25%
18. Others	4 25%
19. Poster	4 25%
20. Magazine	3 19%
21. Songs	3 19%
22. TV	3 19%
23. Photo	2 12%

TABLE 5. CONTINUED

Tools	f / %
24. Cellular Phone	1 6%
25. Dance	1 6%
26. Placard/ Streamers	1 6%
27. Puppet	1 6%
28. Slide	1 6%

TABLE 6. COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=16)

Tools	f / %
1. Radio	15 94%
2. Landline Phone	5 31%
3. Print (general)	5 31%
4. Film	4 25%
5. Oral	4 25%
6. Letter	3 19%
7. Theatre	3 19%
8. TV	3 19%
9. Book	3 19%
10. Computer	3 19%
11. Leaflet	2 12%
12. Newsletter	2 12%
13. Newspaper	2 12%
14. Pamphlet	2 12%
15. Song	2 12%
16. Cellular Phone	1 6%
17. Miscellaneous Papers	1 6%
18. Internet	1 6%
19. OHP	1 6%
20. Others	1 6%
21. Poster	1 6%

TABLE 7. COMMUNICATION TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=15)

Tools	f / %
1. Computer	13 87%
2. Internet	9 60%
3. Landline Phone	8 53%
4. Cellular Phone	7 47%
5. Newspaper	4 27%
6. TV	4 27%
7. Fax	1 7%
8. Film/Videos	1 7%
9. Letter	1 7%
10. Magazine	1 7%
11. Newsletter	1 7%
12. OHP	1 7%

TABLE 8. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=15)

Tools	f / %
1. Radio	10 67%
2. Print	5 33%
3. Computer	4 27%
4. Film	2 13%
5. Letter	2 13%
6. Miscellaneous Paper	2 13%
7. Newspaper	2 13%
8. Oral	2 13%
9. TV	2 13%
10. Landline Phone	1 7%
11. Magazine	1 7%
12. Internet	1 7%
13. Newsletter	1 7%
14. OHP	1 7%
15. Others	1 7%
16. Poster	1 7%
17. Slide	1 7%
18. Theatre	1 7%

TABLE 9. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL IS CONSIDERED MOST EFFECTIVE (N=15)

Reasons	f / %
1. Interactive	9 60%
2. Wide-reaching coverage	9 60%
3. Visually stimulating	8 53%
4. Affordable	6 40%
5. Culturally appropriate	5 33%
6. Easy to set up/ Infrastructure/ Location	5 33%
7. Lasting Impact	5 33%
8. Clear Target Focus	4 27%
9. Others	4 27%
10. Written Form	3 20%
11. Has skills/ Training/ Literacy	2 13%

TABLE 10. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=12)

Tools	f / %
1. Computer	10 83%
2. Internet	8 67%
3. Cellular Phone	3 25%
4. OHP	2 17%
5. Landline Phone	1 8%
6. Letter	1 8%
7. Newsletter	1 8%
8. Print	1 8%
9. Radio	1 8%
10. Slide	1 8%
11. TV	1 8%

TABLE 11. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL IS CONSIDERED LEAST EFFECTIVE (N=16)

Reasons	f / %
1. Not affordable	16 100 %
2. Difficult to set up/ Infrastructure/ Location	13 81%
3. Lack of skills/ training/ literacy to use it	11 69%
4. Culturally inappropriate	7 44%
5. Limited coverage	6 38%
6. Not interactive	5 31%
7. Written Form	2 13%
8. Diffused target focus	1 6%
9. No lasting impact	1 6%
10. Not visually stimulating	1 6%

CHAPTER 19
HOW INTERMEDIARY GROUPS VIEW EMPOWERMENT
AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN FIJI

EMPOWERMENT

The following summarises the responses of the intermediary groups' when asked about their notions of empowerment. Five themes emerged from the responses of the respondent groups regarding their notions of empowerment. The themes were: (1) economic independence, (2) political participation, (3) community organising or solidarity building, (4) individual agency or self transformation, and (5) societal transformation.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE
DEAL WITH SPECIFIC ISSUES OF LAND

According to ECREA, "to empower people, one must first know the context they live in." Since Fiji is an island with limited land, making communities more economically stable often means dealing with the issues regarding land and poverty. Tackling poverty in Fiji is often tantamount to tackling the issue of squatter settlements.

ECREA's Social Educational Empowerment Program, for example, works in educating the community so that they can stand up for their land rights and look out for developers who are usually only after their own selfish interests. They cite the case of a hotel industry in Wailekutu Lami as an example of this. ECREA's Economic Justice Programs also work with squatter settlements towards advocating for a more just allocation of land. Aside from this, they also teach the community how to seek for employment and sources of livelihood.

PRS also accentuates the need to invest in education and provide adequate funding to students so they can finish their studies. This involves supporting them in the specialisation that they wish to pursue regardless of whether or not their parents can afford to send them to school. Empowerment is seen as providing urgently needed outreach and support to interior communities and teaching both youth and adults everyday ethics and values.

Empowerment is also seen as providing a solution to people's lack of income and financial resources, thus eradicating poverty. This means addressing the lack of access to basic goods such as education, health, employment, land, services and infrastructures through information communication tools.

This preoccupation with the basic means of survival is also why PRS is more focused on "helping people meet their basic needs with food and even with basic information," rather than with new ICTs. Without the necessary infrastructures in place, PRS believes that the grassroots have "a long way to go" before they can have access to them.

FRIEND also believes that communities must first develop action plans that reduce poverty in order to be empowered. In order to do this, they must focus on skills-building. This involves teaching the youth how to write letters and competitive resumes in order to be able to secure jobs. FRIEND also spearheads income-generating programs, assisting the community in putting up small scale businesses so that they can utilise their skills and talents in creating financial stability.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

LEGAL ADVOCACY

RRRT also believes that empowerment is related to having legal knowledge, citing female lawyers with whom they interact as examples of empowered women.

FWRM, which is primarily concerned with legislative change, also agrees that the law can achieve women's empowerment; therefore, legislative transformation is their main advocacy. Additionally, FWRM understands that while lobbying for legislative change on a national level, they also need to train and educate women on a local scale in order to effect social change. In line with their mission, they believe that this transformation would make women fully aware and able to realise their rights and goals. The group also empowers women indirectly by empowering their intermediary group partners through training, as they did with RRRT in their community paralegal project.

FACILITATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT

NCWF believes that empowering women at the grassroots level involves informing them of what is happening in the national level.

Using the *Qoliqoli* bill hearing, they cite the ways in which language is also an important issue in this struggle. The groups asserted that the bill would have been more accessible if translated into the local languages. The bill was presented in English, however,

prompting a Fijian woman to stand during the presentation to request that the bill be delivered in Fijian.

Since NCWF understands the importance of making women understand how these bills impact their lives, NCWF empowers them by having someone who can speak their languages explain the bills to them. They've done so by organising a plenary of experts to talk about the *Qoliqoli* bill, corporal punishment, and the strategic development plan. They gather information from the experts and disseminate it, allowing their affiliates to simultaneously dialogue with these experts and seek clarifications. NCWF then relays the women's views to the concerned authorities, as in the case of the employment relations bill, for which they recently held consultations.

NCWF also sees empowerment as participating in decision-making at the national level. Thus, empowerment lies in making the women realise that their voices are important and should be heard in different public arenas, instead of staying in the villages or in their homes.

Among CCF's main advocacies are also education about the constitution and facilitation of dialogue between the government and the community; therefore, they also believe that political participation is the way to empowerment.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RRRT believes that empowerment lies in making those at the top level more accountable, ensuring that they both abide by and uphold human rights.

PCDF also believes that empowerment lies in knocking on the doors of government institutions and asking for the development they need. They argued that empowerment is recognising this right to appeal for progress as legitimate. They cite a particular pro-poor radio project, wherein communities were interviewed about the kind of development they need.

LOBBY TO GOVERNMENT

PIANGO also sees empowerment as lobbying to the government to uphold their responsibility to provide infrastructure. This includes building roads, which would ease shipping services and trade markets. According to PIANGO, electricity is not fully provided up to this day, with some villages still using kerosene and benzene lamps, thereby hindering the establishment of a strong ICT environment. ECREA also believes that the government should uphold its responsibility to make ICTs more accessible by subsidising the acquisition of computers and the setting up of Internet access in villages.

PRS also agrees that the government should allocate a part of the budget to establishing Internet kiosks, especially in the rural areas. They believe that the building of these kiosks in supermarkets, hospitals, shops and town councils would greatly contribute to developing more jobs, especially for the younger generation, many of whom are currently unemployed despite being promising and qualified.

PARTICIPATION IN LARGER ARENA

WAC believes that it is a matter of “thinking globally, but acting locally.” They wish for grassroots women to become involved in the international process and have a say in the issues that affect them at a macro level: “When you have the capacity for nuclear destruction and you have the capacity for transglobal issues, all of those things impact on women at a macro level.” In order for this to happen, they state that it is important to listen not only to the voices of consultants and experts, but also to those of the grassroots women themselves.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING/SOLIDARITY BUILDING

There is also a notion of empowerment as working and assisting the community from within.

With FRIEND’s governance programs, officers go into the communities and help them identify what they need, thereby working together with the community to achieve their goals. CWL also believes that empowerment is linked to community-building. To empower women is to empower them to make decisions “in the club, parish, community, and national levels.”

WAC believes that their programs tackling the elimination of VAW and issues of HIV and AIDS, as well as their squatter empowerment program unite under the central issue of “empowering decision making.” They believe that at the heart of community development is ensuring that it is the communities themselves that make the decision for change.

SOLIDARITY AMIDST DIVERSITY

Fiji’s boundaries encompass many ethnicities. Therefore, empowerment also means creating spaces wherein diversity and creativity can flourish. This is the case for WAC, an NGO that sees empowerment in terms of creating safe spaces where women are unafraid to express themselves. Moreover, they believe that encouraging this freedom of expression takes time, patience, and trust.

As a part of community building, they stress the importance of “having a gender-balanced group and a fair representation of different classes and different ages.” For this reason, WAC tries to be inclusive of the grassroots, while at the same time “acknowledging the importance of building contacts and tries to maintain good relations over time.”

For IFS or InterFaith Search, empowerment also lies in appreciating the commonalities among all faiths. It is realising that “diversity needs to be respected and understood.” This means making people live happily and comfortably amidst differences in religion. By making people recognise the similarities amidst their differences, their hope is to be able to initiate a conversation. They also wish to demonstrate that it is appropriate to ask questions and “step out of the box.” IFS also aims to foster open mindedness, citing a

protest against temples being built on Christian land as examples of actions they are trying to work against.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY/SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Empowerment is also seen as something which acts on the micro-level, influencing individual's habits, beliefs and behavior.

CONFIDENCE

FWRM views empowerment in terms of giving women confidence and improving their self-esteem. To them, this involves giving the women access to basic services and raising their awareness.

PRS also defines empowerment as making people feel safe and comfortable enough to share their stories. They do this by asking the women to talk to them in confidence, especially face-to-face, if they notice that the women are not comfortable speaking in public. PRS believes that this is particularly important in cases of domestic violence.

PCD also believes that one can empower by allowing people to realise their potentials: "Empowering people is also letting people realise [that] they have the resources with [in] them to develop themselves."

AWARENESS OF THEIR RIGHTS

Naturally, for the FHRC or Fiji Human Rights Commission, empowerment comes from people knowing their rights and how to responsibly exercise these rights. It also involves teaching people how to access and implement them, believing that these precisely are "guaranteed by the constitution in order to access justice."

For WINET, empowerment comes with women claiming their right to their own body in that "every woman should know about their body." This belief connects to health rights and having the capacity to access basic health services. WINET reasons that if women are displeased with the services of the doctor, they should also have the right to express this. They also link agency to the right to stand up for one's choices regarding one's own body. BSCC also agrees that the senior citizens' rights link to their awareness of how to maintain proper health.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

PIANGO also defines empowerment in terms of building capacity, developing in women leadership skills and teaching them how to "engage with their stakeholders, whether it's the government or other non-governmental organisations or international donors or volunteer agencies."

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

For most intermediary groups, empowerment also involves developing in society members a culture of concern regarding social issues. These social issues include the promotion of peace, active non-violence and justice. For example, the PEACE Program in Fiji works with the security forces, the military, the police and other communities in Vanua Levu and in Viti Levu. The program, which also tackles trauma awareness, is concerned with conflict transformation and the creation of a culture of peace.

WAC also believes in peace-building and restorative justice as central to their work in empowering society. Specifically, WAC promotes non-violence in their campaigns, calling for the end of corporal punishments in schools, homes and prisons. They are also hoping to launch 'the code pink initiative.' 'The code pink initiative' is comprised of a small group of women doing advocacy, lobbying and networking.

EMPOWERING INFORMATION

6 themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information for Fijian intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue, [5] useful, and [6] readily available.

1. Accessible or suitable to the community
2. Accurate or based on research from the ground
3. Transformative or leads to change
4. By means of interactive dialogue
5. Useful
6. Readily available

The majority of the groups in Fiji often equated empowerment to awareness of empowerment. These are their descriptions regarding when information is most empowering.

Many intermediary groups equated accessibility to speaking in the other's language. They were mostly concerned with facilitating dialogue. Such facilitation is inevitably linked to the issue of language, be it Hindustani, Fijian or English.

ACCESSIBLE

NCWF believes that empowering information involves accessibility. This involves speaking in the language that women can understand, minimising the urban and rural divide by exerting more effort to reach out to the rural areas – including the village women's groups and the Indian women's groups - through improvements in the delivery of information.

TALK IN THE LANGUAGE: TRANSLATION ISSUES

In Fiji, empowering information also often means delving in the issue of translation since Fiji is a country of diverse ethnicities and languages.

When CCF gets feedback about their conferences and workshops, for example, they discover that women often request a language that is not too “high level.” Because of this, CCF believes in the importance of speaking in their indigenous language. The group also believes that they are able to reach more people when speaking in their indigenous language through the Hindustani radio. To them, the language one speaks determines the breadth and depth of the message’s reach.

IFS also concurs that language issues are very important in the question of access. They explain that their newsletters are not translated because they aim them towards secondary schools, but acknowledge this limitation as well. They explain that there is also a danger in bilingualism as there is always the trouble of translating knowledge and concepts from Fijian to Hindi, even for people who are well-versed in both languages:

“If you’ve been brought up bilingual for instance, [being] very good in Fijian and very good in Hindi, but when you actually come to deal with concepts and so you find that the tools aren’t there, people can’t very easily conceptualise and put it into verbal form.”

Another problem that CCF encounters is English literacy. Human resources are often not enough to maintain and properly update a website. Many Fijians do not understand English, so the language barrier is also a problem. PRS uses Hindustani as the medium of instruction, since literacy in English is a problem.

CWL also relates the issue of the translation of CEDAW into Fijian as an example of increasing accessibility through language. In one community discussion regarding the Fijian version of CEDAW, participants referred to it as a “legal document of international level.” CEDAW, they explain, is a manifestation of the UN and globalisation. It is a document that can be used to prevent Violence Against Women (VAW). The participants of the meeting then tried to relate CEDAW to their homes and to their own lives, linking it to the Fijian constitution. CWL says that this project has been successful since the women knew their rights better and were able to cite these rights in court cases regarding violence against women.

Since BSCC acknowledges the importance of speaking in the language that the community can understand, they employ two trainers—one who speaks Fijian and another who speaks Fiji Hindi. They explain that this is necessary so that when they do a training in the community, they “conduct it in the language in which the participants [are] comfortable,” going on to say that translation is not an issue for them.

Though it is not an issue for BSCC, however, it is an issue for NCFW because of their lack of funds. Due to this, NCFW often relies solely on a pool of volunteer translators. This appears to be problematic, since NCWF sees empowering information as simplifying and

translating themes from English to Fijian so that you can bring it down to the *Tikina*¹ and provincial levels. The issue of translation, according to NCWF, also pervades the usage of telecommunication services as well as letters and publications.

CCF also agrees that there is a need to simplify and translate information to Fijian and bring it down to the *Tikina* level if it is to be better understood. This is because, for them, the *Tikina* level is how the village is structured and is where villagers converge and meet. They noted the relevant suggestion of a woman who said that important issues like the *Qoligoli* bill should be discussed in a *Tikina* meeting.

TAILORED TO THEIR OWN NEEDS: RELEVANT TO THEIR LIVES

FWRM also believes that empowering information should be tailored to the grassroots communities' own specific needs; it should not be intimidating. They cite the case of a program in Papua New Guinea that involved young women setting up their own program, patterning it from the program of the organisation ELF in Fiji. They relate that the project "turned out to be a mistake, because it was in fact intimidating." This prompts them to say that empowering information "has to be catered and tailored to the audience." It should be useful, relevant, and audience-friendly, as well as significant to their lives: "[We] can't just talk about Universal Declaration on Human Rights, we have to be able to relate it to their lives."

FHRC also agrees that empowering information should be appropriate to the target. This is why before visiting the communities, they "do their homework to try to find out if there's electricity or not so they know what communication tools can be used on them, adapting otherwise if electricity is not available."

BASED ON RESEARCH

According to ECREA, empowering information is based on research. Before anything is done, people are first consulted and social analysis is employed. For them, "at the end of the day it's the people that matters."

FRIEND also believes that empowering information is based on data gathered from the ground, using the information coming from the communities to develop action plans.

Moreover, for PRS, empowering information is precise and clear information. It is also a responsibility to "know what you are talking about" and be prepared to answer questions.

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1. Fijian villages provide a geographical boundary for the community and these are grouped into districts (tikinas). The districts are grouped into 14 provinces, and the provinces make up four administrative divisions. The tikina typically represents three or four communities who share the same needs and interests.

G. Laverack, (2003) Building capable communities: experiences in a rural Fijian context *Health Promotion International*. Accessed March 20, 2007 Available <http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/18/2/99>

This is essential to having “good PR,” building trust and rapport, and making information “easy and accessible.”

LEADS TO ACTION

PRS also believes that empowering information is that which leads to action. It is information taken from the organisation to the communities, which allows them to develop action plans for reducing poverty and fulfilling their needs and wants. WINET also sees empowering information as making women aware of the choices that are available to them and enabling them to stand up for these decisions. For RRRT, empowering information is information that makes people more proactive, and hence, more confident. It also makes people more accountable in “abiding by and applying human rights principles.”

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

If translation is so important, it is because many Fijian intermediary groups believe that dialogue is important in empowering the community. FWRM’s idea of empowerment, for instance, is that it is a “two- way street.” They believe that conversation empowers. PRS also believes that “information and communication should be interactive and not just one way. [...] it should not be intimidating.”

This involves the ease that comes from being familiar with the other person, knowing their background, their history and the people that they represent. PRS also observes that they know that the exchange has been successful when the women come back to them asking questions and seeking clarifications, some of them even starting to speak in meetings.

ECREA also believes that empowering information should be done in dialogue in terms of what the people need and want. It requires asking community members if they see anything that needs to be changed. It involves asking the community: “Do you think this is right, or do you think it should be changed, come and show us.” They report that using this framework, people actually do approach them about their needs.

NCWF also believes that no matter what communication tools are used, what is important are the dialogues and exchange of opinions that they facilitate. The group also relies on feedback gathered from their affiliates in terms of what communication tool they find most useful. They remain in conversation with their affiliates so as to be regularly updated and knowledgeable about their affiliates’ projects. This includes talking about how they benefit each other. This is because NCFW also believes that empowerment is a two way process. “We cannot just be sending them information, we also have to know what they are doing.” Because empowering information is a dialogue, it also involves making sure that the other party receives the information that the other party sends.

NCWF also believes that empowering information should be done in dialogue with the groups one represents, especially in terms of bills. It also involves teaching the women how to frame their views so that it fits the discourse.

Aside from this role of the intermediary groups as mediator of information and discourse, WAC believes, moreover, that empowering information is a true conversation with the women on the ground and not just the experts and consultants. For them, to “really listen” means listening “with respect for the knowledge that the women in the community have.” They state, “It’s really listening to what the grassroots women are saying, not just the consultants and the experts.” In the future, WAC hopes to link these ideas to the work that they do.

The importance of dialogue is also why CCF considers the lack of feedback from the community problematic and why they try to remedy this by making sure they revisit the communities and do follow-ups on the information they have been given.

USEFUL

For FRIEND, empowering information is also something useful to their daily lives. It involves information that establishes livelihood projects and small businesses, like the jam, pickle and chutney industries, which in turn boosts the women’s confidence level. Because of this increased self-esteem, women are then encouraged to speak out.

For PIANGO as well, to make information empowering is to render it more user-friendly. One of the ways they achieve this is by disseminating it through a more affordable medium. In the Pacific’s case, they believe that this is the print that serves this purpose.

EASILY REACHED

For PCDF, empowerment involves “decentralisation” and making everything easier to reach, rather than “always having to run to Suva.” Women often lack access to information, so in order to be empowered, information must be available to them.

EMPOWERING TOOLS

COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN GENERAL

In the Fiji Key Informant Interviews, a common trend in the themes regarding the tools is that it is not the form or the medium that matters, but rather, the content. There is also the perspective that access to new ICTs is “far off” in the future. This is because of poverty, monopoly, and lack of necessary infrastructure, such as electricity. Intermediary groups recognise the value of new ICTs, but lament that they cannot use them, especially in the far-flung communities.

The intermediary groups also cited the divide between the rural and the urban as contributing to the challenges in the use of new ICTs. Further, there is a disparity of access between the young and the old, the men and the women, the non-disabled and the disabled, with the former having more access and control over media and the new ICTs.

The tools that intermediary groups consider as the most empowering in Fiji are print and radio. Print is believed to be most empowering because the literacy rate in Fiji is high,

and because of Fiji's status as a reading culture. The radio is also seen as most empowering by virtue of its wide reach.

"IT'S THE CONTENT, NOT THE FORM"

For ECREA, what matters is that their research and publications are disseminated, whether through schools, universities or communities. To them, the point is to get the information out there in order to empower the grassroots women, whether through TV, documentaries, laptops, overhead projectors, or any other research outputs. They use research and other outputs to inform and empower people.

FHRC agrees that "as long as you get the information across, any tool can be used." They believe that all that matters is getting people to understand human rights. It can take the form of newspapers, radio broadcasts, or discussion along the streets. The point is that "human rights information gets out there and is disseminated."

WAC agrees with this emphasis on content rather than on form, since their focus is educating and building the capacities of women, as well as giving them space to express themselves. It is a question of "how well-informed are the women at the end of the day." Whether this is done through the traditional means or the new ICTs is not of concern.

PIANGO also agrees that it is a matter of asking the women what information they need and making these as accessible and user-friendly as possible. To them it is not the mode that is important but what is being said: "I don't think we are talking about mode, we should be talking about content, it's not the mode, it's not an issue anymore here, it's content that is an issue."

This flexibility is perhaps a way to cope with the unreliable energy supply in Fiji. As FHRC explains, "[W]e use all forms of ICTs just in case one works and the other doesn't work; we are prepared all the time." This adaptability is a way to have a back up. They explain that they try not to be dependent on a single tool, just in case it doesn't come through.

FWRM also cites the digital divide as the source of their flexibility when it comes to using different tools. The huge digital divide causes them to deal with people in very different ways: "We're flexible enough to deal with people in different ways but it would be amazing if they were also able to access Internet and email networks that we are on."

FHRC believes that they have to be prepared all the time so when one medium doesn't work, there is back up. They also express wariness at using new ICTs since it might build up the expectation that the tool would be available all the time. As such they ask themselves: Can we keep that momentum going on all the time? Are we sure that power will always be there? Are we sure that nothing will go wrong while we are delivering the information?

PROBLEMS AND HINDRANCES: TRAVEL, EXPENSE, WEATHER AND INFRASTRUCTURE

PCDF recognises that, in Fiji, weather and lack of finances are major hindrances in building new ICTs. They lament how people still have to travel to the town to access emails

and to be interviewed, reaching as far as Suva. Transportation for this often costs a lot of money. They also often have to go through “third parties to reach them.” PCDF observes, moreover, that there appears to be no problems with ICT usage because of the non-usage of these tools.

IFS agrees that the difficulty and costs that travel entails also makes it hard to hold workshops outside Suva. As such, workshops are always held within Suva. This hindrance makes it hard to empower grassroots women outside Suva, thereby furthering the rural-urban divide.

IMPOLITE TO USE NEW ICTS

CCF also thinks that use of the new ICTS in the rural areas would not be very empowering since they would seem alien in that context. According to PRS, many women at the grassroots level find the new ICTs intimidating. They are also shy to use them, thinking that they will break the tool. CCF also believes it would not be very polite for the organisation to use tools that would baffle the communities further. The groups believe that the usage of new ICTs would distract the participants from the topic; as such, talking, drawing, markers and butcher papers are used instead.

WAC also notes the importance of appearing modest and accessible by using tools that require low resources that “the community can connect with.”

“IT’S STILL A LONG WAY TO GO”

As stated above, many of the groups in the Fiji Key Informant Interviews conveyed the belief that complete and easy access to the new ICTs is “still a long way off.”

For example, FDPA observes that other countries are well ahead of Fiji in terms of the Internet. Though many groups recognise the importance of the “information superhighway,” they acknowledge that Fiji has not yet reached that status, since basic needs have not yet been addressed.

PIANGO cites a lack of basic living requirements as the cause of these conceptions. It then becomes a question of priority - whether it is more important to focus on computer literacy or to work towards raising the fundamental standard of living. As the latter is deemed more urgent and important, it thus receives more emphasis.

With the grassroots women in the rural areas still grappling with school fees, health issues and domestic violence, WINET believes that access to media and new ICTs is “the last thing on their mind.” With many communities still using pit toilets and lacking access to adequate facilities, WINET believes that providing access to media is not the priority: “If they are still cooking over open fire...in a leaking kitchen...is it morally justifiable that we provide them computers?”

Although technology can be a productive tool for giving information on housing, health and education, the organisation observed that “we really haven’t reached the stage where women can actually have that.” In addition, PIANGO observes the absence of

enabling structures. They note that access to the Internet is problematic, since the villages in Fiji do not even have telephones. Moreover, they relate that the telecom companies set up a learning centre which provided fax, photocopiers and email services. However, the location was too far and proved inaccessible to women since “it’s going to cost more to travel to tele-centers on a bus.” Because of this, only the men have access to these centres, because women are not free during the day. To them, the learning centre, which had plans for USP online courses, was a good idea to start with but still needed further development.

RRRT also agrees that in the Pacific, for example in places like the Solomons where satellite Internet is available, the main problem is still access to electricity and landline, apart from having fresh water resources.

PROBLEMS OF ACCESS: THE DISABLED, SENIOR CITIZENS, RURAL DWELLERS AND WOMEN

Aside from the language problems one encounters due to diverse dialects, deaf and blind people experience a different hurdle according to FDPA.

Since in Fiji and most of the Pacific Islands, “even the basic information is not available,” it is therefore much harder to find alternative forms suited for people who are deaf or visually impaired. This, they said is the biggest challenge for them since they “are not just working with a marginalised group, but double marginalised group.”

FRIEND also acknowledges how language can either enable or hinder, acting as a barrier in some instances, especially with the deaf community they work with. Since they are still learning sign language and have no access to interpreters, they believe that the deaf community misses a great deal when they have workshops or trainings. They do hope that in the future, they can engage the deaf community by having interpreters and engaging in their sphere of communication.

BSCC also notes the inequality of access between young and old people. Seniors, they observe, think that new ICTs do not concern them: “Our seniors think that these modern technologies are not beneficial to them. They would rather have face-to-face communication.”

FWRM observes the reality of the digital divide in their experience with women in communities. They regret the ways in which the Internet’s potential to provide an inexpensive means of calling and communicating remains untapped. They express that the grassroots communities “need to be able to call Suva easier, cheaper” and that it would actually help tremendously if they had access to the Internet in order to facilitate this.

FWRM also relates that although they lobby for all the different women in Fiji and that even though they conduct community outreach activities in rural areas, their reach in the urban areas appears to be much stronger because they are an urban-based organisation.

NCWF and other intermediary groups note that the digital divide keeps electronic media useful only for them and not for communities they serve. NCWF also adds that

receptivity is a major issue in empowering women through technological advances. “Women ought to make themselves receptive to the new developments,” they added.

However, PCDF also acknowledges the importance of “going slowly” with the rural community, being patient with them and waiting for them to be open to change: “It is when they are ready for development, then development comes easy.” Because of this, PCDF wants to encourage women’s groups to come in for computer literacy trainings as everyone should be part of the development. Development should not just be left to the younger generation of women. The group also agrees that all kinds of tools are necessary, since networking is important to achieve their goals.

NEW ICTS: THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSCEND GENDER LIMITATIONS

Furthermore, for organisations like WAC, tools like new ICTs can also be a great equaliser. This is because their usage cannot be policed, unlike traditional modes of information: “Once you know it, men cannot stop you from using it.” Hence, new ICTs can allow one to overcome the gender inequality that is otherwise present in face-to-face interaction, wherein men tell the women that they should not speak. New ICTs then have the potential to foster greater respect among men and women for each other.

The inaccessibility of new ICTs is therefore unfortunate, since WAC believes that women’s access will educate them, urging them to “come out of their shells” and making them partake in shared decision- making and shared knowledge. New ICTs can also empower women and make a difference in their lives.

THE NEED FOR EVERY SINGLE INFORMATION TOOL

FWRM emphasises the need to make communications tools cheaper and more accessible, since they believe that all these are needed in the fight against discrimination through legislative transformation and campaign. While some tools are used for informing and others are used for lobbying, they believe every one of the tools are “all key to [addressing] our goals in different ways.”

Furthermore, they believe the campaign is only as successful as much as people are aware of it. For this, FWRM acknowledges that the Internet and websites are really necessary:

“[W]e need to be heard on radio, we need to be seen on television, we need to be seen in the mainstream media as well. We need to have our voices in the news stories of the day and you know preferably in the first five pages and not buried in the back.”

FWRM, as a service provider, recognises that tools have a wide variety of roles to play, with different tools meant to address the donor partners, the policy-makers, and the women themselves.

TOOLS EMPOWER AND FACILITATE LIVELIHOOD

ECREA also believes that tools can help people in their everyday lives, especially in terms of information dissemination. Women, for example, can sell chutneys and their other products through the radio, emails, mobile phones and other communication tools. Groups like CCF also believe that providing the tool itself is central to educating and empowering women and is part of women's action in standing up for their rights.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

DANGER OF LOSING THE PERSONAL:

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

IFS (Interfaith Service) warns, however, that because of new ICTs, there is the danger of losing the personal; this is unfortunate for them because "faith is such a personal thing." They believe that communication "without any ICT...is human communication in the very best way."

For groups like BSCC, direct face-to-face communication is still one of the most empowering methods. For instance, the senior citizens that they work with prefer to engage in direct face-to-face communication. They also related how the importance of direct communication was clearly seen in the case of a Fijian woman in Koroganga village. Though her legs were amputated, social welfare was still asking for a medical report. To remedy this, the group, their staff, and their president went to the social welfare department, bringing the *Fiji Times* with them to cover the story. From that point forward, the social welfare officer visited the woman, after which he gave her allowances.

NCWF also believes that no matter what communication tools are used, what is most important is the how these tools can facilitate dialogues and exchange of opinions. As such, they believe that face-to-face communication is still the best mode for this exchange. The method ensures that unlike using a manual, a booklet or a brochure, the information is really "sinking in:"

"That's the best way we can empower them. It is to go and sit down with them, explain to them and of course allow for that dialogue and exchange of opinions or views and opportunities for clarifications."

FWRM also believes that the radio is empowering, but what is even more empowering is if they themselves are immersed in the communities. They also remarked that the best tools are those that are "tried and tested," stating, "You can't beat direct interaction with the community. It doesn't matter if you just use butcher's paper, markers or cut outs from old magazines as long as you really interact with them."

PRS also believes that face-to-face workshops are the most effective. In this context, they can educate women on health issues like HIV and AIDS. For example, during

workshops, women are able to share their domestic experiences and refer places for health check-ups to one another.

RRRT also agrees that the mass media and trainings can make people in the top levels more accountable and proactive, while also enabling community leaders to be more confident, given that they have a better grasp of issues and laws.

INFORMAL SESSIONS BETTER

CCF believes that instead of formal workshops, which tend to be awkward and complicated, *Talanoa* sessions over bowls of *Kava* are actually more effective, since this format disarms the participants and makes them feel more comfortable, allowing a free-flowing exchange of ideas.

THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS

ECREA believes that theatre is an effective medium for empowerment since it is a “theatre of the oppressed,” depicting issues of discrimination and oppression and raising awareness about issues that would otherwise go unnoticed. They contend that theatre is successful in empowering people because it gives people the opportunity to see what is happening in the real world and reveals the oppressive structures within the government and the church. By depicting injustice, it makes people proactive, in effect inspiring them to stand up for their rights.

For IFS, drama empowers by facilitating interactions in which people can discuss their ideas. These interactions take place through small discussion groups and also through performances, as when women watch one another perform, which further facilitates interaction. To them, it is also effective because participants enjoy it.

For WAC, drama is a useful tool to employ in the communities as well. Through plays, WAC expresses its direct stance on specific social issues. Moreover, through the inexpensive medium of theatre, WAC projects itself as an accessible and modest group, further encouraging conversation. This identification of the communities with WAC’s low-level resources fosters a comfortable environment for discussion.

Additionally, WAC urges the community to create their own short plays, giving the participants the opportunity to write and locally produce their own works. This highly participative exercise enables people to talk about relevant local issues.

PRINT MEDIA

Fiji and the Pacific have a high literacy rate, thus making print media one of the most accessible forms of media, with print being affordable and accessible even without electricity.

NEWSPAPERS

CCF believes that one of Fiji's most effective communication tools is the news media, because through it, they are able to receive extensive feedback and replies to their press releases.

FHRC also believes that print is more reliable, especially in cases when there is no electricity. They say that among the tools, "the print form is the most effective and the most useful." Women also absorb it faster, readily accepting the information passed on to them, while also having something concrete to which they can refer to later on.

FHRC especially prefers the print form when they are working with women in urban centers. With urban women, they can use both electronic and print, but among the grassroots, it is more realistic for them to use the print form, knowing that there is the risk that there will not be any electricity. They use print "in order to manage that risk and not waste their time and our time."

NEWSLETTERS

FWRM reports that the limited distribution of their newsletters keeps them from empowering grassroots women: "We normally print about 250 copies of the newsletter in hard copy which would be accessible to people."

They also report that they do not use the newsletters to reach the grassroots women, since these women have problems with English literacy. As such, their newsletters are not directly aimed at them. Instead, they use radio as a medium to reach the grassroots women.

PIANGO identifies the high costs of shipping and postage as obstacles preventing newsletters from reaching the grassroots, thus hindering their empowerment. PIANGO also notes how expensive it is to distribute these newsletters nationally and overseas. Indeed, both PIANGO and CWL agree that there is the high cost of production involved in producing colorful and attractive newsletters, which in turn also poses difficulty to maximising the print form.

Funding can also prove to be problematic, as CWL relays, "We don't have the money to continue our newsletters." Despite funding concerns, CWL realises the importance of releasing their newsletter quarterly and is looking to doing this on a monthly basis. The group also views print as the tool which they find most empowering, especially because "in the rural areas, the only reading material they use is the bible." As such, apart from the bible, they can now read materials that they have accessed from workshops. CWL is proud to report that, because of their Fijian translation of the CEDAW, women can now use it as reference in relation to the Fijian constitution. CCF, moreover, also sees the need to revise outdated books.⁰

HANDBOOKS

PCDF sees the handbook as a way of giving the community the information needed to empower them.

To combat the kinship system at work in Fijian politics, ECREA published a handbook about democracy and its dangers. The book also cautioned against bribery and presented information on ensuring clean and fair elections. It also presented the qualities to look for in a good politician. This is to urge people to think beyond their own interests, which often involve voting for a certain party because they have friends, family or relatives there. This booklet was given free to the public, with about 18,000 copies distributed to the communities right before the elections.

FHRC agrees that it is very efficient to distribute a handbook, since this saves them the trouble of having to hold trainings constantly. As an example, in answer to complaints regarding abuse from the prisons department and the police department, they produced a reference handbook that contains guidelines on appropriate behavior. It also prevents the policemen from being defensive when FHRC calls them about the matter, because they can see the rules in the handbook. The new recruits also refer to this handbook all the time, considering it as a bible for the discipline force. The book, which is now also available in CD format, provides guidelines for the police so that they do not abuse the rights of the people they are supposed to protect. Because of this, FHRC believes that the handbook “empowers the specified group they’ve targeted” and is “one of the best tools they’ve ever used.”

BOOKS

Books, according to RRRT, are also useful both as reference and as teaching materials. They cite the specific case of the Tongan booklet or commonly asked questions about CEDAW, which is a “roadmap” used alongside trainings or workshops. Its benefit lies in people being able to use and refer to it as a follow-up to the workshop. This will help them “read more about it and understand more.”

The CEDAW Roadmap addresses both intermediary groups and the government about the process of writing a CEDAW report, including how to submit and present to the CEDAW committee in New York. The book is something readers can bring home, learn from, and perhaps even execute themselves. According to RRRT, government ministries, missions and intermediary groups are still requesting for copies of the roadmap which was put out years ago, with groups still asking RRRT to train them regarding its use. As a result, RRRT’s representatives, together with other intermediary groups, were able to put together an NGO shadow report which will be presented to the UN.

RRRT is also doing a booklet on the Right to Adequate Housing. The toolkit will be used in training intermediary groups and civil society organisations so that they can take it with them afterwards and refer to it for their activities and other initiatives.

FILM/VIDEO

CCF believes that though video is often overlooked, it has a huge potential for strongly impacting its audience. A video's capacity for empowerment lies in its capacity for strong emotional impact. For example, *Born Into Brothels*, a documentary about the lives of children in the brothels of an Indian slum, had a huge impact on women.

CCF also acknowledges the need to localise video content and improve the technologies used, enabling local video to keep up with international standards, while at the same time maintaining its hold on the national and community levels. There is also a call for subtitling and the production of videos in the vernacular.

BSCC also reports having bought tools such as video cameras and editing equipment. Although they claim it to be “low grade” and not “high tech,” we can take this to mean that they acknowledge the need to invest in tools such as these.

TELEVISION

In Fiji, the TV's impact is not as wide as can be expected since its coverage and reach is still limited. According to NCWF, it is not unusual for a community to have only one TV in a community hall.

FDPA, however, has used television ads successfully to raise awareness regarding the condition of people with disabilities. Their 12-month TV campaign was watched by people from the grassroots as well as by politicians.

RADIO

LIMITATIONS

Even though CCF wants to acknowledge the value of the radio, they admit that there are limitations to this because of the lack of resources: “We are now moving towards producing radio documentaries which we can use and get people to talk about. Before we didn't do that but now we realise that this can get people talking.”

IFS also observes that radio in Fiji, aside from being costly, is also subject to sensationalism. Access to radio coverage is often a matter of personal connections. If one wants to get on a radio talk show, for example, “you've got to get to know the right people, and you've got to be the flavor of the month.”

EMPOWERING POTENTIAL

IFS admits however, that though energy is expensive, the “radio is the only one that's really successful” among all the media. Television is not yet far-reaching, and the fact that radio can rely on batteries means that it does not rely on access to electricity. They observe, therefore, that the community tries to access batteries when there are shows that they really want to listen to. For example: “There's always batteries around when there's a rugby match.”

WINET observes that women, the majority of whom are housewives, often listen to the radio. CWL is also very happy to report that, according to their survey, 75% of the women listen to their program. CWL believes that though the FM radio has a limited reach, they also believe that this reach can be expanded. The group also wishes they had more airtime, since women love listening to radio. They acknowledge the need to strengthen campaigns for community radio in the manner of organisations like FemLINK, since this type of media really “touches the community.”

NCWF also admires what FemLINK is doing with community radio, citing the suitcase radio as a wonderful initiative, since “you take it out to them.” This empowers communities by involving them in the whole process, allowing them to broadcast their views. NCWF believes that the radio is the main medium of communication through which Fijians obtain information, aside from the daily newspaper.

While FWRM believes that interaction is still the most empowering, it also acknowledges that the radio is a more empowering medium based on its reach. According to FWRM, for women in the community, the radio is the medium that really addresses their needs.

PCDF states that the radio is also effective in calling on the attention of the government, especially when radio stations ask the grassroots for what development they need in their community as with their pro-poor project: “They have knocked [on] the doors of government institutions to say they need certain developments because it is their right.”

RRRT relates this story of a woman in Kiribati who has her own ways of disseminating information. This woman has a newsletter and a regular radio show. Although she has to wait for the women to come in from the islands and talk on the radio, its coverage is wide, reaching women in the outer islands, which can be 2000 kilometers away. The challenge with this, however, is how to make the talk show interactive, since “someone can’t call you from the outer islands.” Therefore, getting the information out is easy, but receiving feedback and reactions is another problem altogether.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

LANDLINE

FRIEND relates that whenever there are electric power cuts and breakdowns, telephones cannot be used as well. Fiji’s intermittent access to electricity thus makes telephone usage a problem.

BSCC also remarks that though they have telephone access, “there had been circumstances when we wanted to communicate with other organisations and were unable to reach them.” The lack of fax machines also makes it difficult to access information, since postal mail takes too long, while telephones are too costly.

PIANGO narrates that in Fiji, there is a need to ration electricity at times. Moreover, as in the classic example in Nauru, there was no communication for months because a power plant burned down. PIANGO also explains that the monopolies in the telecommunications

industry contribute to the high prices: “The telecom services are unreliable and expensive because they are monopolies.”

CELLPHONE LIMITATIONS

With the limited reach of telecommunication, more and more people are looking into cellphones because, according to NCWF, these offer more flexibility. For example, in the school canteen project they undertook with the Catholic Women's League Mothers group in Vanua Levu, they asked the people from the community how they can reach them since the village is quite far and it takes a one and a half-hour drive from Labasa to get to the school. The people then answered: “Oh Rosalia goes on horse back. She rides out to a certain point where she has reception then she gives you a call.”

NCWF reports that they find it much more flexible to have cellphones. Thus, as part of their project, NCWF gives their affiliates cellphones as a way to keep in touch with them. Because it is also difficult to find a signal and get in touch with them all the time, NCWF also tries to schedule and organise occasions when their affiliates can go to the area with the best reception and give them a call.

Moreover, for NCWF, a cellphone's reach is still limited and can be quite expensive, especially from the perspective of priorities. “Apart from expenses of buying a cellphone, there are also expenses of maintaining one,” they observe. They also recount that a recharge card costs a minimum of \$11, a price which is difficult for grassroots women to pay, even every three months.

CWL observes that there is also a need to teach people how to use cellphones. Even though some youths in Fiji have them, they are not using them to send SMS, but to make and receive calls. IFS also observes that though the mobile phone has become much more widespread than what was imagined, people in the rural areas still do not have access to them.

COMPUTER AND THE INTERNET LIMITATIONS

FHRC reports that some computers have been distributed to schools, but because they don't have a generator, these tools remain inaccessible.

According to BSCC, though children are more adept at using new ICTs, these youth do not teach these skills to the elderly, so new ICTs often foster divides not only between the rich and the poor or the rural and the urban, but also between the elderly and the youth.

NCWF also observes that new ICTs are not a necessity. According to them, if it costs \$3 an hour to go to an Internet cafe, grassroots women would rather spend the same

amount of money for things that they see as more practical, like a kilo of sugar or cans of tinned fish or rice. "That is priority," they state, "something that they can actually use."

This is why for NCWE, providing new ICTs for the grassroots women are still "a long way off": "A lot needs to be done before that can happen." They add that empowering women by taking empowering information to them directly entails really bringing it to them, "like what FemLINK is doing with its community radio."

For RRRT, Internet is still "slow and inaccessible," aside from being expensive. Moreover, having computers in Fiji is very rare such that most judges or magistrates don't even have their own computers. In the whole government department, RRRT observes, there might also be very few Internet connections.

CCF also relates the problem of having to constantly update their website: "When we talk about literal communities, then they talk about our website a lot, they tell us that, oh it's outdated, that you haven't changed this page and it's been there for ages, so those sort of feedback also comes in." This is why CCF is currently in the process of redesigning a website, giving it a new look and having their staff update it.

CCF also suggests that to address Fiji's growing IT needs, it is important to address the issue of electricity. Internet providers can also undertake expansion, addressing the perception of the Internet as a "business and intellectual" monopoly. Because of this, they reason, the "Internet is not seen as a very important tool at the moment." People should be made aware of its importance and realise that it is "not only for business houses and those who are educated," but for everyone. Part of this is addressing the issue of websites that are mostly in English, given the lack of literacy in the language.

EMPOWERING POTENTIAL

FDPA believes that emails are more effective in getting a message across as compared to faxing. The use of email and internet also appears to be expanding, with some people with disabilities in the urban areas gradually starting to get email accounts.

The Internet is also a source of new ideas, as in FRIEND's card-making project. Through the Internet, FRIEND was able to research on hand-made cards, including the various techniques to make them. In turn, the group taught these same techniques to the deaf community by using sign language, but added local color to them, so that the cards became more unique and marketable. FRIEND reports that the deaf community was amazed at the work that FRIEND was able to accomplish for the benefit of the whole community with the help of new ICTs. Aside from this, the organisation's members also view the Internet as a way to find solutions to important issues. As such, they hope that in the future, their community members can benefit from this technology, such as conducting ICT training and workshops for women.

Because of its amazing reach, FWRM finds Internet communication very empowering, especially for feminists and activists looking towards networking and lobbying. Because

much information is easily accessible from the Internet and because FWRM has many networks among women's organisations and knows which reputable sites to visit, this tool has proven to be very useful for them.

Poor Relief Society advocates having Internet kiosks or centers where women can access computers and Internet since, for them, "information is a basic human right and it should be made accessible to [grassroots women] in whatever form, or through whichever channel possible... whether it's through computers, print or face-to-face, it's time women start having access to all these new technologies."

CHAPTER 20

HOW GRASSROOTS WOMEN VIEW COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND EMPOWERMENT IN FIJI

FGD INTERMEDIARY GROUP PROFILE

The Foundation for Women (FFW) is a non-governmental organization providing services to women and based in Bangkok, Thailand. FFW implements activities by applying human rights principles aiming at respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of individual women and girl child.

BACKGROUND

FFW was formed in 1984 when we established a Women's Information Centre, providing advice to Thai women who were to go abroad. In 1986, we opened a women's shelter for victims of domestic violence. In 1988, FFW expanded its activities with the launch of a community-based education project (Kamla) to inform people about the problems of child prostitution and to counter the propaganda spread by agents working for international and national trafficking networks. The Kamla project was illustrated in the UN Plan of Action Combating the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 1992 as an example to combating child prostitution by launching public education.

In 1991, the experience gained from the community-based work led to the launch of the "Weaving New Life" project. The project combined the public education/media production work of FFW with the training of village residents as volunteer development

workers to assist women and children in their communities. While working for gender equality/equity and social justice, FFW encourages the participation of women and community in solving their problems and collaborating with authorities at all levels in shaping plans and policies that affect the lives of women and children.

FFW respects the right to self determination of individual women and aims to assist women to achieve equality and justice by providing information and support to enabling them to make informed decision and take control of their life. FFW produces educational material to publicise and promote the recognition of women's human rights. While the services at FFW are available to everyone, we give a special emphasis in our work to rural women, young women, women workers, women and children vulnerable to forced prostitution and international trafficking, victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Excerpt from: <http://www.womenthai.org/eng/aboutus.html>

IT WAS as if the 'divine hand' itself urged the women to join the Catholic Women's League. One member relates how she was just aimlessly moving along when the CWL bus appeared on the main road. The women inside were bustling and talking and laughing with each other. Even though she didn't exactly know them and even though she couldn't explain why, she just went inside the bus and followed the group to their destination. "I just wanted to go," she said, "because it's the Catholic Women's League." She was equally glad when the members also seemed excited to have her join them. She was elated after she came home from that trip, so much so that "since 1997, when I joined the organisation, I've never missed a single meeting. Wherever they go to Kadavu, Labasa, Bua, Tunuloa, I would just go with them."

The same spontaneous urge to join the group also happened to another member. With her husband gone and her children already grown up and living away from home, her life was mostly quiet and uneventful. One day, she felt the urge to walk up to the house of Susanna Evening, the group's president, which served as the venue for all the League's meetings. She asked if she could join the group. The group replied that, "yes, the doors are wide open for you." She has been enjoying the group's company and care since then. Most of the women couldn't describe the fulfillment and camaraderie they feel from being a member of the Catholic Women's League. To them, the feeling is simultaneously enervating and soothing. It is also very light and enjoyable, even as it teaches them to be more responsible and practical, thereby giving their lives weight and meaning.

As one woman described: "Some of the things which drew me to the organisation is that it teaches me a lot of things such as how to make a living out of flower arrangements, crochures and so on. It helps me earn for my family."

For the women, the group functions as a support group, supplementing or complementing their family lives. When the women asked their husbands' permission to join the league, most of them, they reported, were supportive. One woman's husband, who

was working in the Middle East, was even excited for her to join. The other women who told their children about the group also received their family's happy approval.

This support was not consistent for everyone, however. Other women's children were worried about the travelling that was required as part of the ministry. One woman's children even asked her to leave the group and never to join in the meetings again. Her defiant reply is a testament to the CWL's significance in her life: "No, I will never leave the group until the day I die."

Indeed, for many of the middle-aged women members of CWL, being in the league gives them a chance to enjoy and experience a kind of second youth: "My children thought that I was going to get married again because I've been a widow for quite a while now. I said, 'I'm already 70 who would want to marry me? No! I just want to enjoy myself.' In the [CWL] meetings, everyone enjoys themselves. We have dancing and all sorts of fun." The promise of adventure and travel also drew many of the members to the Catholic Women's League.

THE TRAVELLING LEAGUE

When we say that the future of Fiji's women's movement faces a rocky road ahead, it is more than just a figure of speech. Land travel is very difficult in Fiji. In the same way, communication by post and new ICTs is also hindered by several obstacles. Some women's groups even reported that to make use of their cellular phones, they had to ride on horseback to a place where the signal was clear. Only then would they be able to make a call or receive messages.¹

Thus, for the women of CWL who are often married or widowed, with children and who have sacrificed their wish for travel early on in their life to make a comfortable home for their families, CWL's touring missions provide a refreshing reprieve. Empowerment for them is literally and figuratively "going places." In Fiji, where access to transportation is difficult, travelling on the bus with fellow women provides thrilling new experiences. Exploring new places with women from a similar age range and social conditions also provides a strong connection and empathy. In addition, the comfort that the women give to one another gives them a feeling of being at home even when they are far away from their homes.

Travelling is also one of the reasons why the Catholic Women's League is known throughout Fiji. The group has become popular because of their missions and excursions, which also serve as marketing tools for potential members. They would march, walking across the flea market and talking to the people there: "For example, if the meeting is on Tuesday, on Friday, the Women's League will then march from the flea market to Sukana Park. The president is the central source of communication. She passes the message to the members, who then pass it on to other members. That's how we communicate and get in touch with other members."

1. This information was revealed in the Fiji Key Informant Interview.

PAMPHLETS AND NEWSLETTERS

The CWL has two projects in development. These involve the creation of pamphlets and newsletters, although, so far, the materials are not distributed to the women. The pamphlets target students from the University who come to the office to research on CWL's mission and projects, as well as on the nature of the organisation. The newsletter, called the *Catholic Newspaper*, is borne out of the women's fervent call for a medium that they can read for information. Although radio is still the most effective in terms of reach and accessibility, "most of the time the women also ask for newsletters" since "many of them just want to read." There is also the belief that "there will be more information in the newsletter than in the radio."

The group also believes that the newspaper will address communication deficiencies. As one FGD participant explains, "[I get in] the newsletter, information which I never get from anywhere else, except from the priest, our president, and the information from the women in Fiji." The group originally started producing newsletters using the typewriter and eventually progressed to involve the use of the computer. Before, the group used to borrow or rent computers, until the League's president, Susanna Evening, acquired one for CWL.

For those who have access to the Internet, some of the women members believe that the email is most empowering. The FGD, however, did not delve into the issues of new ICTs any further, since for them, these were not the primary modes through which they kept in touch. Up until 2002, only CWL's secretariat had access to email. For the group, face-to-face interaction is clearly the most important.

RADIO PIONEERS

The CWL women also recognise the immense potential of radio. Unlike the newspapers which are very expensive, the women reason that the radio only needs batteries for continued and prolonged use. The women believe that radio is still the cheapest and most accessible form of communication. This is why the FGD participants believe that for the rural people, who constitute the majority in a country comprised of mostly rural areas, the radio is the most empowering. The women also explain that for small organisations and hard to reach areas like Fiji's Northern Division, "where information transfer is really slow. The only way to reach them is through the radio."

Together with FemLINK, which is led by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, the CWL is also one of the groups that pioneered radio for women by women. Susanna Evening has a regular Monday radio show or *Talanoa* program. Although the show lasts for less than an hour, it packs in social issues, health programs, spiritual concerns and even traffic updates. The CWL was also given plenty of TV exposure when the suitcase radio was launched. According to the CWL FGD participants, a suitcase radio is literally a radio that you can fit in a suitcase. Its compact size makes it easy to bring around and this, in turn, makes it very accessible. "This is one way for us women to raise our issues," a participant said. The

radio is also something the CWL women regularly look forward to, as it provides a way for them to unwind after chores. As one woman explains: “When I’m tired from work, I just turn on the radio, looking forward to our programme in the afternoon. We all really like it. It brings me peace.”

In Fiji, the radio is also viewed as a necessity. Susanna Evening even relates an instance in which a woman claiming to be her relative called her up asking for a new radio: “I was in Tailevu at that time, in a village near Bau, and one woman who was trying to contact me through coconut wireless was requesting for a radio because her radio stopped working and this is something she keeps listening to keep her up to date for music and current events and women’s issues.”

Though the women concede that radio’s slow feedback limits its capacity for two-way communication, many of the women agreed that it is still provides a highly entertaining, relaxing and touching experience for them. They learn new things from the show, not only about women’s empowerment, but also about deepening their faith.

LEADER-BASED COMMUNICATION

The CWL FGD participants are also regular patrons of CWL’s radio show, which airs every Monday. In the FGD, it was evident that loyal followers of the group were also loyal followers of Susanna Evening. The women find Susanna Evening’s radio talk show very enjoyable, encouraging and fulfilling, especially for women looking to connect with others in their lives.

As one member relates: “Some of the women here are widows. When there is no one to whisper on our ears, we enjoy listening to the radio, like we forget most of the things. But most of those things we don’t remember. We learn a lot, our Spiritual Life, our life with each other, spreading the good news in interactions.”

Given her radio show’s following, going to her house and meeting Susanna Evening was therefore like experiencing the “Voice made Flesh” for the members. Most women had only heard her through the radio before. They relate how they were awe-struck to see her attend warmly to them and work closely with them. Thus, many CWL members volunteer to assist their president who is admired by most of the members.

The women’s respect and admiration for Susanna Evening stems from their appreciation of how she speaks from the heart, thus motivating the meetings and making functions livelier. As one member explains: “What I like about Susanna is the way she brings us together. She also does not discriminate us, she treats us equally. But if she sees something wrong about us, or notices our weakness, she directs us, she talks to us. That’s why we really like our president.”

Susanna Evening also contributes to CWL’s membership through her travelling and speaking engagements all over Fiji. For CWL, communication is centralised and free-flowing, with information coming from Susanna and then being disseminated to the members.

CONFERENCES AND FESTIVALS

For CWL, conferences and festivals are also an important tool for disseminating empowering information. The group, for example, was the one responsible for decorating the venue of the Regional Conference where the suitcase radio was launched. The members relayed how much they loved the experience. Furthermore, they also added that “those that work in hotels are usually young women. We are grandmothers, [so] it's training for young people.”

During the festival itself, they were delighted to see their fellow Fijians reveled in their culture through dancing freely and expressively. With vibrant music overflowing, the women reminisced how everyone felt so comfortable, dancing unselfconsciously and even laying down on the ground in the Inn. For them, the festivities would also not be complete without food. Food was an important way to encourage interaction and maintain smooth social relations. When asked what was an unforgettable project for them, they would constantly refer to the conference in Lami, narrating how after the mass, “we organised a big dinner on that day and most of the Lami members took part in it.”

Indeed, the women agreed that one of the league's most memorable projects was the *Asia Pacific Conference of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisation*, which was held in Lami, Fiji. All the women within the region came, along with Susanna Evening. Donning white garb and a printed *tapa* material, the CWL women proceeded to interact with women from all over Fiji and the Asian region. They also remembered how the singing was one of the most poignant and moving parts of the experience. They loved singing in communion with one another as the music makes them feel closer to one other, belonging to one international community.

The conference was also unforgettable because they met other people who they otherwise would not have met. Indeed, through activities such as travel, meetings and awareness-raising, the CWL makes its members learn things they never would have learned, and go to places they never would have reached on their own. One woman explained her experience of the conference: “For me, I feel a different kind of life, I can't explain in words to you. The excitement I feel, I can't express in words, you can just see from my expression. We sang there, Susanna was singing, as well as me [and] my younger sister. There is also one husband who came and stood in front of the CWL. That was a memorable experience I will take with me until I die. I will never forget it. I'm very grateful.”

The group is also quite proud of the scholarship program they launched for disadvantaged children during the *Year of the Child*. They also put up a disaster awareness-raising project, using the telephone and letters to reach people from all over Fiji and even Fijians overseas to solicit support. They used regular post because during that time, email was not yet available. The Catholic Women's League is also known for organising the peace vigils. It is an opportunity for Catholics all over Fiji to come together and pray for peace and serenity. It is also the main highlight of the league's general annual meeting.

EMPOWERMENT IS PEACE, LOVE AND FAITH

Empowerment, for the group is having a sense of belonging and a sense of being welcomed by a group which is going towards a similar path. While also working for a cause that they believe in, the group appreciates that CWL gives them a chance to show their affection for one another, a kind of maternal caring that extends even when a member's family member dies. This is perhaps why the women are urged to join the chapters in their own locales, so one could feel better at home. For instance, one woman, who used to be a Methodist, was glad she had converted to Christianity after marrying her Christian husband, as she was able to join the group.

EMPOWERMENT IN TRAVELLING

The group also feels that travelling with one's co-members reinforces the deep bonds they have with one another. Travelling also answers the group member's desire for adventure and knowledge, widening their vision and teaching them to uphold and appreciate diversity. Indeed, the promise of travelling has been one of the lures that encouraged women to join, especially in Fijian society where empowerment is viewed as literally "the capacity to go places."

As one participant narrates: "We recently had a tour to Yasawa, while last year we went to Ba. I've really enjoyed it, I've learned a lot through my interaction with other women, because otherwise, I will just stay at home, like I have for most of my life. After joining the Catholic Women's League, I socialise more with other women from the different provinces. [I get to see] their behavior, their culture, their dialect, their food. And also the love, the love we share in the Catholic Women's League." And as one woman said in the FGD in gratitude to the group, "I've been to places I never would have even dreamt of going."

COMMUNICATING YOUR FAITH

The CWL also sees empowerment as being given the avenue to hone and communicate one's faith, thereby fostering ones' love of humanity. They see the rich exchange that they experience as an opportunity to not just exchange information, but also to pass on "the Good News." They've been empowered by CWL because through the league, they admit: "we've learned a lot, about our Spiritual life, our life with each other. We share the good news when we talk with each other."

The women attribute this nurturance of peace, love and faith in each other to something higher than themselves, answering a call to be disciples and sisters in caring. As one woman believes, "The Lord encourages me to participate in this Catholic Women's League." Thriving in the compassion and solidarity exemplified in CWL, the women discover a communion which is also a source of salvation from the mundane, from loneliness and from meaninglessness.

CHAPTER 21

FIJI SYNTHESIS

CONTENT SYNTHESIS

- There were 16 Fiji organisations which served as the key informants for this study. Half of the sample (50%) consists of groups representing a broad sector that counts grassroots women as only one of its many beneficiaries. Other groups (19%) are regional ones or networks that have many different intermediary groups as its members, including grassroots women as part of their target beneficiaries. The organisations that do focus on grassroots women or on women in general each comprise 19% of the sample while only 12% provide services to the grassroots in general. Majority of the groups had a training and capacity-building component as part of their mission or thrust (69%). This is closely followed by organisations whose thrust includes education and consciousness-raising (62%), advocacy (56%), and services (50%). The top 3 strategies used by intermediary groups in interacting with their beneficiaries were education and consciousness-raising (67%), networking (60%), and training/ capacity-building (40%). The main uses of communication tools were for education or information-dissemination (81%), administrative purposes (69%), and training functions (62%).
- When interacting with their beneficiaries, the groups in the sample mostly mentioned using radio (89%), computer (69%), film/ video (62%), newsletter (62%), landline phone (56%), and the Internet (56%). The radio is a good tool to announce information about the organisation and its activities and programmes. Many groups are confident about information reaching their targets because of the radio's wide coverage and

fast reach. It is also considered one of the cheapest forms of media. Interestingly, the second and fourth most-used tools among the groups are the computer and the Internet, respectively. Intermediary groups used computers because these have helped them produce “PowerPoint” presentations for the community to enhance their presentations. Moreover, an organisation mentioned subscribing to wireless Internet to make it easier for their training participants to access their emails while attending the workshops that the organisation sponsored. Film and videos were also used by the groups in covering a variety of issues and were deemed appropriate for education and training activities. The newsletter was also used to mainly inform people from all walks of life about their organisations and about their focus issues. Many organisations also consider the landline as a basic and “very essential” tool to have and use in the office.

- The communication tool considered most accessible to grassroots women is the radio (94%), with landline phone and print materials coming in at a far second (31%). Radio is by far the single most accessible tool to the grassroots women in Fiji. Many organisations had commented that almost every household in Fiji has a radio. What separates the radio from the other tools with wide-reaching coverage is that it is cheap to own for the grassroots and it is easy to use because no special skills are needed to operate it. The tools least accessible to the grassroots women as perceived by the respondents are the new ICTs, namely, the computer (87%), the Internet (60%), the landline phone (53%), and the cellular phone (47%). The reasons most often cited for this low accessibility include the high costs of the computer, the lack of electricity or power supply in many areas, and the lack of skills to use the tool.
- Radio (67%), print materials (33%), and computer (27%) emerged to be the most effective tools. The radio is used by the intermediary groups in their interactions with grassroots women, mainly because many grassroots women have access to it and more importantly, are listening to it. Some radio sessions are particularly effective because they allow women to share their thoughts on issues. Print is likewise effective among women because the form is something they can keep with them for later reading and re-reading. Computer is an effective tool for PowerPoint presentations in urban centres because it presents powerful visuals, thus sustaining the attention of the grassroots women. The top reasons cited for a communication tool’s effectiveness are its interactive quality (60%), its wide-reaching coverage (60%), and its visually stimulating nature (53%).
- The new ICTs – computers (83%), the Internet (67%) and cellular phone (25%) – emerged as the least effective tools. For the grassroots, computers pose many

limitations. It is an expensive tool and requires a set of skills to operate it. It is also too difficult to carry around and to set up. Moreover, it requires electricity which not all areas have on a sustained basis. If computer is one of the least effective, then it is no longer surprising to see the Internet as among the least effective tools as well. Cellular phones are not yet accessible to many grassroots women primarily due to its high cost. In addition, network problems still exist. Affordability (100%), lack of infrastructure (81%), and lack of skills (69%) comprise the top three reasons for a tool's ineffectiveness.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

5 main themes emerged on the meaning of empowerment for intermediary groups in Fiji: [1] economic independence, [2] political participation, [3] community organising or solidarity-building, [4] individual agency or self-transformation, and [5] societal transformation.

- **Economic independence** for intermediary groups in Fiji focused on addressing the lack of access to basic needs of communities in general and not women in particular. A unique economic issue raised was land.
- **Political participation** was viewed in terms of women knowing their rights, effecting social change, taking part in dialogues with government, and participating in decision-making at all levels. Activities of intermediary groups in relation to legal rights and governance were cited. Specifically mentioned was informing grassroots women of what is happening at the national level.
- **Community-organising and solidarity-building** in Fiji was defined in terms of communities making their own decisions for change. This theme also entailed creating safe spaces for people of different ethnicities and faiths, in order for solidarity to flourish amidst these diversities.
- **Individual agency or self-transformation** had the following dimensions: (1) self-worth/awareness, (2) personality (e.g., develops confidence), (3) control (e.g., stands up for one's choices and claims one's right to one's body), and (4) rights/society (e.g., becomes a leader and engages with other stakeholders).
- Finally, **societal transformation** referred to developing in society members a culture of concern regarding social issues. Peace-building, restorative justice, and non-violence were also included in the meaning of empowerment in Fiji.

WHEN IS INFORMATION EMPOWERING?

6 themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information for Fijian intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue, [5] useful, and [6] readily available.

WHEN ARE COMMUNICATION TOOLS EMPOWERING?

Communication Tools In General. Intermediary groups in Fiji believed that all communication tools are useful; in effect, it is not the form or the medium but the content that makes tools empowering. Groups cited the need to make communication tools more accessible. They also mentioned the issue of receptivity to technology. Ultimately, communication tools were seen as having the power to change lives.

The main themes on the empowering potential of **Traditional Communication Tools** are outlined by tool:

- **Oral Communication** - oral communication is most empowering because of the personal interaction and the dialogue that takes place, in essence allowing intermediary groups “to go and sit down with them.”
- **Theatre & Performing Arts** - theatre is empowering because it facilitates interaction.
- **Print Media** - print is most empowering because it is accessible given intermittent power supply and its suitability to Fiji’s reading culture (of the different types of print media, **newspapers, newsletters, handbooks, and books** were mentioned).
- **Film/Video** - Film/video can be empowering given its emotional impact.
- **Television (TV)** - television is not empowering given limited reach/coverage.
- **Radio** - radio is most empowering because of its reach and women’s love for radio.
- **Telecommunications** – use of landline phone is a problem.

The main themes on the empowering potential of **New ICTs** are as follows:

- **Cellphone** – the use of cellphone is a problem, given network coverage and costs.
- **Computer and Internet** - the Internet is potentially empowering for grassroots women as it is viewed as an equaliser for women and men; however, at the moment, it is only empowering for intermediary groups that use it; new ICTs can be alienating and intimidating and is still a rarity in Fiji; new ICTs are largely inaccessible given lack of electricity and infrastructure; new ICTs are not a necessity given Fiji’s more basic

problems in meeting grassroots women's basic needs; new ICTs are empowering for intermediary groups but not for grassroots women.

In general, intermediary groups in Fiji viewed **oral communication** as most empowering for grassroots women. The key in empowering grassroots women was "to go and sit down with them." Most empowering as well was **print media** given its accessibility and suitability to Fiji's reading culture. Also most empowering was the **radio** given its reach and popularity among women. **Theatre and performing arts** and **film** were also considered empowering whereas **TV** and **telecommunications** were considered not empowering.

Intermediary groups in Fiji believed that **new ICTs**, particularly the **Internet**, could be potentially empowering for grassroots women. However, **new ICTs** are largely inaccessible given infrastructure problems. Using the **cellphone** is a problem as well. At the moment, only intermediary groups find **new ICTs** empowering for their own use. As such, **traditional communication tools** are more empowering for grassroots women compared to **new ICTs**.

FGD SYNTHESIS

For the FGD participants from the Catholic Women's League, traditional communication tools were still considered as the most effective medium for interacting with grassroots women and other beneficiaries given how these tools foster intimacy, camaraderie and enjoyment among women members. Among the traditional communication tools, face-to-face interaction appears to play a very important part in community development work.

The participants also cited the impact of intermediary groups and grassroots advocacy work as building a sense of community among women, enabling women to contribute to the family income, raising critical issues that involve women, and providing recreation and relaxation for women.

There appeared to be little mention regarding new ICTs, with the cellular phone being cited as least effective given problems with network signal. Email was mentioned as somewhat effective, provided that people had access to it.

The participants explained empowerment in terms of having a sense of belonging and solidarity, which they appear to gain through travelling together with other members, literally going places and widening their vision. The group also sees empowerment in terms of spiritual fulfillment, communicating one's faith and fostering one's love of humanity.

