



Report to Pacific Graduate Women's Network Council Meeting, Tonga, 19 September, 2008

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The number of national federations or associations of graduate women (NFAs) is growing globally and the number of small clusters of graduate women within the Pacific region is also increasing.

Since PGWNet's Virtual Conference/Council Meeting in November 2008, the status quo has prevailed in some respects. The now well established NFAs in Australia, Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, and Tonga have pursued their various priorities with vigour and success as outlined in their reports to PGWNet.

While the new IFUW rule that enables an NFA to affiliate to IFUW with a minimum of only 20 financial members is a big step forward for the Pacific's small island nations, the core cost can still be a hurdle and the demise of the Bina-Roy Partners in Development scheme is hurting them. Consequently, the sometime affiliates in **Vanuatu and Solomon Islands** have found it very difficult to make the next step and join IFUW as full international dues-paying members. The Graduate Women's Association in **Papua New Guinea** has been fluctuating in numbers and has its constitution written, but not yet formally approved, although they are close.

Shirley Randell, Vice-President, IFUW, has added her personal observations on the prevailing fragile situation in relation to women's safety in **Papua New Guinea**. Shirley noted and experienced the difficulties that women in PNG experienced, including difficulties in attending meetings because they cannot safely leave their homes after dark, when she was on a recent work assignment in PNG. Shirley also commented on the various problems that face members working on revitalising VAWG in **Vanuatu**.

We should all remain very mindful of each country's unique situation, continue to include these struggling groups in all circulations of newsletters, and study and conference opportunities, and try to provide the catalyst to assist them to get over their numbers and cost 'humps'. We also need to recognise that graduate women move around for study and employment, and that this seems especially so in the Pacific region. As a result, membership problems are often due to fluctuating numbers of members, as well as to the multiple calls on women's time, talents and energy. National Councils of Women, or their equivalent, exist in most Pacific nations, and needs and skills of graduate women are obviously very much in demand.

On the brighter side, I have made some significant discoveries within the last few months:

- **The Virtual Council Meeting**, November 2007, caused considerable interest and raised awareness of IFUW and PGWNet among graduate women in several smaller countries. It is clear that this method of holding an open meeting, in spite of some 'hiccups' with overlapping e-mail subject streams, definitely has its 'plusses'! In the Northern hemisphere, the two PGWNet contacts in the **Marshall Islands** conducted a census of resident Marshallese women with post-grad qualifications during the virtual meeting fortnight and found that there were 17 Masters grads and one PhD - all in responsible positions and involved in considerable NGO activity as well.
- In the Southern hemisphere, although the **Niue** grad who took part in the Brisbane Conference at which PGWNet Constitution was adopted moved to New Zealand soon afterwards and has taken up permanent residency in New

Zealand, the remaining link person has been circulating PGWNet e-mails to a loose network of 12 or so graduate women. As a result, several have taken advantage of support offered for various training opportunities that they would otherwise not have known about.

- Most recently, at the **Pacific CSOForum08**, at which I wore PGWNet and UNIFEM NZ 'hats', I found that there is a group of graduate women in **Kiribati** who have met several times and had approached the Director of KANGO about how to establish themselves and become a recognised NGO there. Her advice was –'Go away and write your constitution and then come back to me...' My new Kiribati contact went home with hard copies of PGWNet and SAWG's Constitutions, also the IFUW model one, as well as several NZFGW magazines and Shirley Randell's invaluable publication after the 2002 Brisbane meeting: *Pacific Women on the Move - Establishment of PGWNet*.

A couple of comments:

I have discovered that it is definitely worthwhile to list PGWNet as well as NZFGW on my card and to add my PGWNet affiliation when introducing myself at a meeting, with a one sentence explanation. This is valuable for membership in one's own country, as well as useful when travelling - a good 'ice-breaker'. One never knows when the word '*Pacific*' will 'click' with another attendee and a new connection is made. If this has happened to you already, I'd really appreciate some new contacts in the Pacific countries that I may not be reaching as well as we would like. So do ask if you may pass on to me the e-mail addresses of new acquaintances you make in any Pacific Islands who like the sound of what PGWNet can offer to them as graduate women.

Back in NZ I have built up a list of scattered grads of Pacific ethnicity or allegiance, who know that IFUW exists and in which Pacific countries its affiliates are active (or embryonic). I send these women the occasional 'Ra! Ra!' note along with a news item – from NZFGW or, more often, a news item about Pacific women, or a study or work opportunity from pacwin or femLINKpacific. None of the graduate women on this list receive these messages direct from any organisation.

Two entirely different matters:

Feedback indicates that naming PGWNet as one's allegiance in an official communication is definitely a good way of raising awareness of its/our existence.

Recently in the lead-up to a UN General Assembly session on UN Reform/System-wide Coherence in general and GEAR, 'Gender Equality Architecture Reform' in particular, an urgent request* was circulated for NGO input as soon as possible, preferably directly to one's own country's Permanent Representatives to the UN in New York.

I talked this through with Louise Croot, IFUW President, and an NZer, and she was happy that I wrote/e-mailed on behalf of the Pacific Graduate Women's Network** and alluded to NZFGW and IFUW. The NZ NGOs who made input in this way were acknowledged*** with thanks and on Tuesday, 16 September, there was fantastic news in from the UN – "It's All Go!" This augurs well for the more efficient progress of development programmes for women in less developed countries – "*Progress for Women is Progress for All!*"

The other matter is – PGWNet has a very good **Pacific Regional Action Plan**, developed collaboratively in 2006 at NZFGW's post-Conference, day seminar at Victoria University in Wellington. Unfortunately we were not able to explore the progress of our various NFAs in Manchester in 2007, when PGWNet's meeting time was unexpectedly cut. Now, in 2008, this PGWNet Council Meeting is the ideal time for some really

in-depth discussions as to how we can all work together – joining forces in moving graduate women’s groups forward and increasing their positive impact in their communities.

Notes

* from WEDO’s GEAR Campaign [Women’s Environment & Development Organization, USA]. A loose coalition of women’s NGOs in NZ has been working together on GEAR Campaign since early 2006.

** correspondence to be filed with this report in PGWNet archives

*** Kirsty Graham is Deputy Permanent Representative, New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York

Website: www.pgwnet.org will be hosted by AFUW during their Presidency of PGWNet, 2008-2010