



IMPACT STORY



CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN FIJI USE FAITH-BASED APPROACHES TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Photo: UN Women/Miho Watanabe

“I knock on people’s doors. If they want me to come in, I go in. We introduce ourselves, and we pray. If they don’t want me to go in, I invite them to meet me in churches or community halls,” said Alisi Dari, an activist who passes the teachings she has learned on to other members of her community in the Newtown settlement in Suva, Fiji. “It can be hard to get men to come, and it can be hard to have men and women together because men blame women for causing violence.”

Since 2018, the faith-based non-governmental organisation, House of Sarah, has been partnering with UN Women to pilot the “Preventing Violence against Women in Fiji’s Faith Settings” (PVAWFFS) project in three Christian communities by adapting and implementing the internationally recognized SASA! Faith approach. The project aims to foster a community that rejects violence against women altogether by focusing on how community members influence each other, for example through Biblical teachings, to reshape the power imbalance between men and women that drives violence. The project receives technical support from UN Women and Raising Voices, the Ugandan-based non-profit organisation that developed SASA! and co-developed SASA! Faith in partnership with Ireland-based Trocaire. It is implemented

Photo above: Alisi Dari (right) is making a positive influence in her community and at home. She poses with her husband, Tomu (left) who followed her footsteps to become a community activist with the House of Sarah in Newtown, Suva.

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

The “**Preventing Violence against Women in Fiji’s Faith Settings**” initiative (2018-2022) is part of the **Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls** (Pacific Partnership), a programme that brings together governments, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls, and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

The programme’s three outcome areas are jointly implemented through a partnership between the **Pacific Community**, the **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat** and the **UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office**. Through the Pacific Partnership, **UN Women** provides funding, technical advice and coordination assistance to partners, including **House of Sarah**.

The **EUR27.6 million** partnership is funded primarily by the **European Union (EUR12.7m)** to support all three outcome areas of the programme, with the Governments of **Australia (EUR11.1m)** and **New Zealand (EUR3.2m)** providing targeted funding to the second outcome supported by **UN Women (EUR0.6m)**.

under the framework of the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership), a five-year, multi-country programme coordinated by UN Women and partners. In addition to being supported by the Pacific Partnership primarily through the European Union, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and UN Women, House of Sarah is also supported by the Women's Fund Fiji (also through the Government of Australia).

The training UN Women provides to House of Sarah includes how to implement the programme in the community, data collection, database training, monitoring and evaluation, how to conduct rapid assessment surveys, and selfcare for House of Sarah and the communities.

“We are proud to partner with House of Sarah in this community-led initiative. Accountability and commitment are key components of this approach, which is based on faith and community as drivers to shift the attitudes to encourage positive behaviour to improve gender equality and to end violence against women and girls,” said Sandra Bernklau, UN Women Representative in the Fiji Multi-Country Office.

“We as community activists use [SASA! Faith] to have discussions,” said Dari, noting that one of the tools they use is the image-based Power Poster. “I ask [my group], ‘What do you see happening here? How are they using power? How do you use your power with others? What does the Bible say?’ With violence, there is no peace inside the family, community, or even inside the church. First, we learn that everyone has power, but some use it in a good way while others use it to hurt.”

Dari also recounted that on weekends drunken men and boys from the village would harass women and that her husband used to swear at her when he was drunk. Though she ran away many times, even with her children, she thought violence against women and children was normal. It wasn't until 2019, when her sister-in-law invited her to a workshop held by House of Sarah, that she learned that these behaviours were not right. There, she was encouraged to become a community activist so that she could discuss the issue of violence with her husband.

“The project helped me change my mindset,” said Dari. “I tried to get to know people in my community. I knocked on people's doors and sat down with boys standing on the side of the road. My husband was thinking, ‘What would people say if she is discussing power and violence while her

USING FAITH-BASED APPROACHES TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN FIJI

In Fiji, a national prevalence study on intimate partner violence* shows about two-thirds of women who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. When emotional violence is included, the rate rises to 74%.

Supporting faith-based approaches to promote gender equitable social norms at individual and community levels is one of several key focus areas for UN Women in Fiji.






The programme advances a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls in the Pacific region, with the following key aims:

- Transform the social norms that allow violence against women and girls to continue (implemented by UN Women);
- Ensure survivors have access to quality response services; and
- Support national and regional institutions to meet their commitments to gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls

* [Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business](#): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji. Conducted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), 2013.

husband hasn't changed?' So he said he'd better change. Now, when we go around in the community, they see my husband and say, 'Uh-oh, a man in a skirt!' And he responds, 'Just come and sit down. Let's discuss. It will help you to know what is going on.'”

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