



Tonga Feminist Forum 2022 Outcomes Statement

The inaugural Tonga Feminist Forum on redefining feminism for Tongan women. Bringing together Tongan women and girls in all their diversities for a Tongan approach towards feminism.

The Tonga Feminist Forum, Tanoa International Dateline Hotel, 9th December, 2022.

The Tonga Feminist Forum convened by Talitha Project Tonga, Women and Children's Crisis Centre (WCCC) and Tonga Leiti's Association (TLA) brought together women leaders and activists from non-government organizations and government institutions across Tonga who work exclusively and directly with women and girls in all their diversities to redefine Feminism for Tongan women. This is informed by the struggles, achievements, barriers and opportunities over the past 10 years that women have faced to create a way forward for Tongan Feminism.

We, Tongan women leaders including transwomen, women living with disabilities, LGBTQI women, rural women, young women in all our diversities affirm our power as implementers and contributors of positive change, decision makers, partners and leaders of today and the future. Our strength is in our numbers and in our diversity.

We acknowledge and recognise the work of the many women who have gone before us and the opportunities they have created for women today. We note the rich history of women's activism and advocacy in all spaces including social movements and we call for more recognition of this hard fraught journey.

The forum precedes the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF). Feminism in the Pacific has often been dominantly defined by a few Pacific Island countries, namely Fiji. The approach taken for the 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum differs from the first two PFF's with an opportunity for members to host their own national feminist forum's to define how their countries view and practice feminism in order to embrace the theme of the 3rd PFF: *Embracing the collective power of our movement*.

Defining Feminism for Tongan women and girls in all their diversities.

We acknowledge that the term *feminism* is not a new concept for Tongan women and girls working in this space. We also acknowledge that our view and perception of Feminism is shaped by what we have seen and heard through media and social media. It is generally understood as the struggle for and the achievement of equal rights and opportunities for women and girls in all their diversity. We know the different types of feminism and how we identify with aspects from each.

We recognize that Tongan feminists and feminist organizations have operated under this generally accepted understanding of feminism. With this forum, we have sought to define feminism through a Tongan lens so that not only feminists and feminist organizations can advocate for women's equal rights and opportunity but the everyday Tongan woman. However, we accept that we cannot do that overnight or over one single event. Therefore, we have attempted to find common "values" by which we agree and accept as our guiding values in advocating for equal rights and opportunities for Tongan women and girls in all their diversities.

1. The Four Tongan Core Values: Mutual Respect, Reciprocity, Humility, and Patriotism

Tongan women and girls in all their diversities will uphold the four Tongan values that underpin our society in all their conduct and duties. They will respect everyone without discrimination. They will reciprocate and keep relationships with everyone irrespective of political, economic, or social status. They will in their advocacy and activism remain humble in achievement and struggle. They will demonstrate that the wellbeing and advancement of the nation is the first priority in pursuing equal opportunities.

2. Culture & History

Tongan women and girls in all their diversities acknowledge the importance of our Tongan culture, the “nofo ‘a kainga” familial values, village and community structures and hierarchy, class structures, and stewardship of the our environment. We also acknowledge the strength and power in our Tongan history with the “tamaha” female leadership of our ancestors. We use this to guide our movement forward.

3. Faith

Tongan women and girls in all their diversities acknowledge that faith and Christian doctrines are an integral part of our Tongan society and practices. Our Tongan values are deep rooted in our beliefs and Christian values and we recognize that we need them to guide our conduct in this movement.

4. Autonomy

Tongan women and girls in all their diversities have the right to make decisions for themselves regarding any aspect of their life including how to lead it. They have autonomy over themselves and their resources, their opinions, social groups, partnerships, political affiliations, financial resources, and anything they have a right of ownership over.

5. Access

Tongan women and girls in all their diversities have a right to access equal opportunities in all aspects of society; education, healthcare, career opportunities, political leadership, land ownership and traditional or cultural leadership roles. They have the right to be treated fairly and justly as equals to their male counterparts

Tongan Feminists’ Activism and Advocacy

We recognize what feminists and feminist organizations are doing in Tonga to advance and advocate for equal political, economic and social rights, opportunity and power for Tongan women and girls in all their diversities.

We recognize the status of women in Tonga in a patriarchal society and a need for the dissolution of barriers and discrimination against women in all aspects of the Tongan society. These barriers come not only in the form of social stereotypes but also systematic through our legislatures and discriminatory legislations that are still in place from the past century especially with our land system and laws. We also acknowledge the brain-drain problem amongst Tongan women looking elsewhere for opportunities. We recognize that in order to



address these discriminations, women and girls in all their diversities as well as feminist organizations must put their differences aside and work together in spite of their differences in beliefs, stature, political affiliations and agendas.

Way Forward

Although we face many barriers and in our personal experiences we have identified that we have been discriminated against in one way or another, we understand that feminism is about listening to those experiences, recognizing them and standing next to each other through them and fighting for equal rights and opportunities where there have been none.

We agree to move forward together in solidarity with all Tongan women and girls in all their diversities; our strength is in our numbers. We recognize that our personal experiences and our stories contribute greatly to that sense of solidarity, identifying with each other's struggles and achievements. However, we also understand the importance of evidenced-based research and data that supports and proves the discrimination we are facing in our society. So, the processes and procedures that we have in place now that are not working need to be unlearned and new ones learned and implemented for a fresh new approach. Awareness and Education based on facts and figures coupled with the personal stories of women across our country, we can move towards a more fair, equal and just society. Our approach need to show firmness but also show empathy, love and dignity in all we do to advance the feminist movement in Tonga.

Observing the different dynamics, approaches, and aspects as a Tongan feminist, understanding the way paved for us and what we are doing now, is all moving towards accessibility for women to more spaces, opportunities and acknowledgement that women's right are equal to men's. It is not something we can define overnight, but it can definitely help shape our perspective and how it's influenced our position/role in the feminist movement.

- **End of Outcome Statement** -

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