

SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH and R2P



Lautoka Youth Empowerment Training: Capacity Building Training for Young People

On 25-29 April 2022, the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP), an APPAP partner based in Fiji, conducted a peacebuilding training program for 120 young people in Lautoka. Participants ranged from 15-35 years old, and are residents of five different Public Rental Board (PRB) flats in the area. This followed a comprehensive community consultation process carried out by PCP that asked young people to identify some of their priority issues. Some responses included: security/safety, a lack of spaces for dialogue, lack of communication channels to decision-makers, community conflict (eg intergenerational conflict), ethnic relations, criminal activity and drug abuse, influx of people from other communities to attend school or live with family, truancy, teenage pregnancy, housing management, and the stigma of living in public housing.

Based on these findings, PCP developed a training program aimed to strengthen the capacities of young leaders living in public housing in conflict prevention and resolution, including how to better manage local disputes, and empowering them to become productive, self-reliant, and law-abiding citizens.

As one participant shared: “The name of our flats may be different, and we live on different streets, but our issues are the same”. The program received support from, and was carried out as, a partnership between the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Fiji Sports Commission (FSC), Fiji Police Force (FPF) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS).

Young people constitute approximately 32 percent of Fiji’s population. Urbanisation, increased need

for services, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, have contributed to growing social problems, which have spread to the PRB estates. For example, brawls began to emerge among residents of Nabua PBR estates in April 2021, leading to street fighting and intervention by the military. Among escalating conflict, PRB officials began monitoring public housing in Lautoka for early warning signs of conflict. In 2022, FPF and MYS approached PCP to carry out prevention and early intervention in Lautoka to reduce the risk of violence.

Responding to issues on the ground, stakeholders in Lautoka joined forces in the hope of creating a safe space for young leaders and their communities. The PCP workshop focused on conflict resolution, managing stress and trauma using a restorative justice lens, leadership, anger

management, mediation and negotiation, active listening and mindful communication. Sessions included one on the process to apply for sports facilities in the estates, and another on sexual and reproductive rights, which created awareness of issues of consent, and sexual and reproductive safety. Such sessions empowered young people with knowledge to assist them in making informed healthy lifestyle choices.

The Minister for Youth and Sports, Parveen Bala, spoke at the opening of the training, stating that the workshop is a way to address increasing incidents of youth violence. "Fiji's laws provide numerous rights and protection for its citizens," he said, adding that young people can be vulnerable to a range of protection risks and to deviating to the wrong side of the law.

The program also aimed to strengthen relationships between young people and the Fiji Police, whose officers spoke about drug abuse, sexual crimes and cybercrimes. During the earlier consultation, discussion had been held about the difficult relationship some young people have had with authorities, a perceived lack of responsiveness to calls for assistance, and the importance of building trust with police and other authorities. The FPF encouraged participants to be role models for youth in the community, and to work towards a safe environment for all. One participant, who was remanded in custody for resisting arrest, shared how he, after attending the

training, came to understand the role of police officers in the maintenance of law and order. Another participant said: "From now onwards I will make sure to only share what will bring out the best in people when using Facebook".

The Asia Pacific Centre for R2P delivered a session on the role of young leaders in peacebuilding from a global and regional perspective. Highlighting the importance of young people's voices in building community cohesion, the Centre outlined the growing attention on youth, peace and security (YPS) at the UN, and presented examples of youth-led projects in the region on hate speech and other issues. An overview was given of the Four Steps Closer to World Peace program, which has been specifically developed to support young people involved in peacebuilding and has been delivered to youth in Myanmar and elsewhere in the region.

A monthly support network has been established including representatives from all five PRB flats. The network will enable young people from the five estates to share and understand common issues and to better work together to address them. PCP continues to provide support to the network, and also subsequently facilitated a dialogue with women from the five housing estates who had requested a safe space to discuss priority issues and ways forward.



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