

Media Release

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FIJIAN CHILDREN ASK TO BE LISTENED TO ABOUT DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

What do you get when you bring eight child advocates into a room with 18 Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) club members from disadvantaged communities and let them mix for three days? Lots of positive energy, inspiring discussions, giggles and pertinent points.

Save the Children Fiji CEO Iris Low-McKenzie said, “As part of the Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CDRR) project we have established DRR clubs for children in 30 target high-risk communities and schools, where 10-17-year-olds regularly come together to learn about risk reduction, plan for action and have fun.

“On 3-5 May we brought children from DRR club and Kids Link Fiji together for a children’s consultation workshop in Lautoka.

“While the children are not so confident in speaking up and contributing to decision-making, they already have a good understanding and firsthand experience on disaster risks and the impacts of climate change particularly in coastal settlements,” said Ms Low-McKenzie.

“The initial shyness and nervousness started to wane when the mixed groups got into discussions, and by the third day all the participants were speaking up.”

As DRR policies and laws seem very heavy and complex even for adults, the activities were transformed into drawings, drama and games seeking out the genuine views and priorities of the children.

Kirsi Peltola, Save the Children Project Manager – Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction said, “We find we get the best results when we keep things simple and fun; as complex, text book language strengthens the children’s tendency to reply with what they have learned at school rather than bringing out their own concerns.”

The children highlighted several concerns and actions such as involving children at community meetings, the possibility of planting more mangroves and trees, the need for maritime communities to relocate, and that children can be agents of change.

“An unexpected bonus was that the chaperones, who had sat in the hall during the three days, were really impressed by the children’s ideas, confidence and contributions and can now testify that the children should be listened to. A key point when summing up the workshop came from 17 year old Leeroy summed it up brilliantly: Please – listen to us.”

After Suva and Lautoka, Save the Children Fiji will be conducting the next DRR workshop in August in Labasa.

Ms Peltola said, “It is crucial to ensure these events are not only held in the capital; to empower the children but also to let the adults across the country see what children are capable of when given the opportunity.

“As today’s children in the Pacific Islands will be facing more and more disasters and impacts of climate change than the previous generations have, we need to involve them also in developing local solutions to these global problems already. The children in Fiji have proven that their ideas and thoughts are worth listening to!”

ENDS

Caption: From left (where they are from in brackets): Attendees at the workshop - Akosita Adi (Navutu), Arkie Tagabale (Natawarau), Maria Domitila (Navutu) and Elizabeth Adi (Navutu)

About Save the Children

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In New Zealand and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children’s unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

For more information please visit our website at www.savethechildren.org.nz or contact: Ally Clelland, Communications Specialist, Save the Children NZ, phone 022 531 9514 or email ally.clelland@scnz.org.nz