

30 Women in Local Government: Celebrating CLGF's 30th Anniversary

Featured Interviewee #4: Hana Halalele
Councillor & Deputy Mayor Waitaki, New Zealand
CEO, Oamaru Pacific Island Trust



Profile

Hana Halalele is a committed community leader and social work professional with over 25 years of experience driving positive change. Passionate about community well-being and social justice, she applies social work theory to strengthen community capability and lead grassroots action.

Hana is currently serving her second term as a **Waitaki District Councillor** and first term as **Deputy Mayor**, alongside governance roles on local trusts, committees, and regional advisory groups.

Her career includes roles with **Otago University** (as a lecturer), the **Department of Corrections**, and the **Otago Youth Wellness Centre**. She is known for her practical leadership and deep understanding of systemic challenges.

Hana holds a **Bachelor of Arts**, a **Postgraduate Diploma in Social and Community Work**, and a **Master's in Consumer and Applied Science (Community and Family Studies)** from **Otago University**.

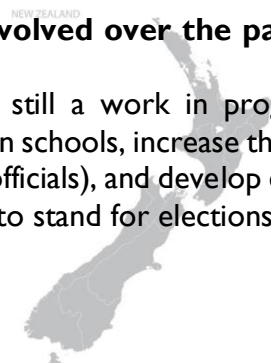
*Hana Halalele, Councillor & Deputy Mayor
Waitaki, New Zealand*

Interview Highlights:

1. How has the role of women in local government evolved over the past three decades?

Women bring diverse perspectives and input, although it's still a work in progress. To accelerate gender equality, we can encourage civics education in schools, increase the number of women in leadership roles (both as employees and elected officials), and develop capability-building and mentoring programs to encourage more women to stand for elections.

Hana Halalele, New Zealand





inspired your entry into local government? 2. What

While I didn't initially aspire to run for local elections, community building and development have been central to my upbringing. My early experiences, including time spent in a women's refuge with my mother and siblings due to family harm, deeply influenced me. Raised by strong feminist figures who established the PACIFICA Women's Branch, I was immersed in a culture of female empowerment, hence my involvement in establishing the Oamaru Pacific Island Cultural Group (OPICG), which supported Pasifika families in maintaining their cultural identity. My election as the first Pasifika councillor for Waitaki in 2019 was significant, and as CEO of the Oamaru Pacific Island Trust, formed under PACIFICA Women's auspices, I oversee the delivery of vital services in health, education, community outreach, mentoring, and research. My journey has aimed to bring a Pasifika voice to local government and support the broader community.

3. Your most rewarding experience as a woman leader in local government?

The opportunity to bring a different perspective to the Council table, sharing my culture, identity, social work background, and program offerings with staff and fellow councillors. Witnessing young people present submissions for our Annual and Long-Term Plans and grow their confidence in public speaking within a Council setting is also incredibly fulfilling. The Youth Council initiative has been another fantastic way to empower young voices and build community skills. Furthermore, having young Pasifika students participate in my inauguration ceremony as Deputy Mayor provided a powerful opportunity to normalize women, and particularly Pasifika women, in leadership roles – because representation matters.

4. Challenges you faced and how you addressed them?

As the first Pasifika woman in this role, navigating a predominantly Palagi/European environment while fighting imposter syndrome, and incorporating culture and Pasifika values into my governance approach was challenging.

To help future women leaders, we need to acknowledge the multiple responsibilities women often juggle – family, work, children, career, studies, church, cultural, and community commitments – which often lead to their own needs being deprioritized. Open family discussions about necessary support mechanisms are crucial. A collaborative leadership approach, rooted in compassion and service, helps build understanding and trust.

5. What advice would you give women pursuing a career in local government?

Be very clear about your 'why' and 'purpose' for entering local government, and reflect on the type of leader and values you want to embody in the role. Given the public nature of the position, staying grounded in your values is essential to maintain focus. Cultivate a network of champions, especially other supportive women, and reciprocate their support for their goals.



6. How can we encourage more young women to enter leadership roles?

Encouraging involvement in local community and strategic community building from a young age is key. Growing up in a grassroots community group that operated in service to others instilled important values in me. In schools, we should encourage young women to take on leadership roles and provide them with mentors. Exposing young women to diverse opportunities and leadership in action is also powerful. For example, taking my eldest daughter to Waitangi and allowing her to experience the significance of Te Tiriti and the place of Pasifika people and women within it was impactful. Governments can create more inclusive environments by actively promoting women's participation, addressing systemic biases, and ensuring equal opportunities for advancement.

7. Why is increasing women's participation in local government urgent?

Increasing the number and influence of women in local government is urgent because women bring unique perspectives on issues, decision-making, deliberation, and multi-tasking. Their ability to de-escalate tense situations and distinct approaches to policy-setting are invaluable for positive change in governance.

8. Role of digital technology in political inclusion?

We shouldn't underestimate the power of AI and social media platforms that women, especially young women, actively use. These platforms offer diverse ways to engage with other women, facilitate strategic networking, and provide mutual support. To make digital technology more accessible for women in leadership, we must ensure digital literacy, address the digital divide, and create safe and supportive online spaces for political engagement.

9. Innovative strategies to advance women's participation in local government?

I've involved my teenage daughters in discussions on local government topics to encourage their thinking and participation. Utilizing social media platforms and incorporating our Pasifika culture and dance have also been ways to bring them into local government spaces. The active engagement of our Mayor in Pasifika community events and celebrations, along with supportive Council staff, helps build relationships and broader community engagement.

10. Actions for CLGF to empower women in local government for the next 30 years?

Developing a 30-year strategic plan focused on growing female leadership within local government and other leadership spheres, supported by local government involvement, is crucial. Intensifying capability-building and mentoring programs, establishing clear outcomes, and integrating strategic community building across central and local government,



philanthropy, and the private sector are important steps. Additionally, providing governance training programs and tailoring scholarships to prioritise women and other underrepresented groups like Māori, Pacific peoples, and people with disabilities would be beneficial.

CLGF 30th Anniversary Commemoration

In celebration of CLGF's 30th Anniversary, we are honoured to spotlight the inspiring stories of 30 trailblazing women in local government from across the Commonwealth, all members of the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network. These interviews celebrate their groundbreaking contributions to gender equality and their transformative impact on building inclusive, empowered communities.

Stay Connected

Join the conversation on social media using the hashtags:

#AccelerateAction | #ComWLG | #LocalGov | #IWD2025 | #CLGF30Years | @CLGF_News

Visit **CLGF's** [website](#) for more inspiring stories and to stay updated on the 30th Anniversary campaign.

Thank you for being part of this important movement!