

## MS KARIBAITI TAOABA (THE PACIFIC)



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*Ms Karibaiti Taoaba is the Regional Director for the CLGF Pacific Region, based in Fiji, and she has managed all activities for almost two decades.*

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### **What made you decide to enter local government?**

I decided to work closely with local government because it is the arm of government that is closer to the people, especially people that are most vulnerable to issues affecting us in this age. Issues like climate change, poverty, domestic violence, not always included in decision making and so on and on

### **What has been your most rewarding experience as a councillor/leader/local government practitioner?**

Being able to be a voice for women in local government in the Pacific and outside the Pacific to inform people of the issues that are affecting the community, especially the most vulnerable like women, young people and the old people.

### **What advice would you give to other women considering entering local government?**

I would encourage them to go for it. There are many challenges, but nothing is impossible. You can do more if you link up with male friends and colleagues, especially those who have the heart for community work. Start small and be committed in whatever you are doing, so people can believe in you.

### **Why do you think it is important to increase the number and voice of women in local government?**

I think it is important to increase the voice of women at local government level because they are the main group who are mostly quiet in any society, despite the fact that they are the ones who are the backbone of every community. If you look around the Pacific at the market place, it is always the women who do the marketing, selling whatever they can sell to get money for their family. Most of the time with children around them because they are also responsible for the wellbeing of their families at all times. The men will be at the background enjoying and telling stories with friends.

### **As a woman, what has been your biggest hurdle in becoming a councillor – and in your daily public life?**

My biggest problem is getting the respect I want from people, even from other groups of women. I found, in some instances, that it is the women themselves who are the greatest problem because they believe women are born to serve not to lead.

**What has helped you the most to continue in your role?**

By pursuing some form of qualification, comparable to men and making sure I am equal with my male counterpart in terms of what I have achieved academically. This assisted me to get the recognition I wanted, especially from my peers.

**As a councillor/leader in your community, how can digital technology be used to increase women's political inclusion?**

I think digital technology is one tool that must be used by women to move forward, faster. You do not need to be present in person, but send out information/ideas that can be read by a lot of people. It can assist you to avoid problems that women often encounter during their campaigns. With social media, you can reach every corner of the world. People will eventually believe you if you can show your capability and act smarter (could be from your existing practice or ideas for the future). I think this is one tool that women should learn to use, to be able to tell their stories without being disadvantaged or bullied. Learn to use social media to move faster.

**What innovative practices have you found useful in encouraging more women to become more involved in local government in your country?**

Allow the women to become more knowledgeable in areas of local government. Provide them with knowledge and tools that they can use to get more involved in issues of local government. Give them the confidence to speak in areas that they think are not for them.