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Sesheeni Selvaratnam (right), UNV Programme Officer, sets up promotional material (Andrea Nyberg/UNV, 2011)

International Women's Day celebrations in Suva, Fiji

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Suva, Fiji: On Monday 7 March UN Women organized an awareness-raising event in UN Park, Suva, where information about various gender issues was distributed from a number of different organizations and UN agencies, including the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), where I am currently serving as a UN Volunteer. Monday morning was hot and sunny, and music contributed to the festive mood at the Park. A quiz about women's progress was organized by UN Women, and a banner was set up to be signed by participants. Paintings and photographs by artists from the region were also on display. I am happy to say that almost all of OHCHR's publications were taken home by interested participants!

Other events included a drawing competition for children on gender equality, organized by the EU Delegation at Suva City Library, on Tuesday 8 March. The prize was 1000 EUR, which will be allocated to a project which the winner will choose. 12 children from different schools participated in the contest. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) organized a tree planting event in the afternoon on Tuesday 8 March. The aim was to plant

100 trees in Suva in order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. A "reclaim the night" event for women and girls in downtown Suva was also scheduled. Friday 4 March UNDP organized a panel discussion on the role of Women in integrated forest management.

The speakers included Ms Leba Mataitini, an NGO representative, Ms Karen Bernard from UNDP and representatives from the Small Grants Programme. The overall conclusion of the panel was that women traditionally have specialized knowledge of forests, such as which wood can be used as fire wood and which plants can be used for medicinal purposes. In the Pacific, women have also traditionally been in charge of such activities as canoe building, by firstly identifying suitable trees. One important issue, however, is the fact that it is often men who make the most important decisions on forest management, and women's voices are not properly heard. Overall, it is absolutely vital to examine the different roles of men and women in forest management programmes, and to understand how a given project will affect men and women in the long run, as well as what added value a project can bring to men's and women's lives respectively.



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