

## Everyday Developmental Leadership: How Pacific women drive change

### CASE STUDY

Ann Hubert,  
Nauru

**This case study is one in a series exploring how ten Pacific women working in diverse roles and contexts understand and practice ‘everyday leadership’. Regardless of their formal position or title, these women are undertaking the day-to-day work that helps influence positive change for their communities, organisations and countries.**

Ann Hubert — Nauru’s ‘Queen of Organising’ — is a community leader and environmental advocate. Over the last 20 years, Ann has played a key role on the Executive Board of the Anabar Community, where she has mobilised community-led action on climate change and sustainable development and promoted community participation and self-reliance. Much of Ann’s career was spent working for the Ministry of Health, where she supported Nauru’s fight against diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. She currently manages Nauru’s National Anti-Doping Unit, working closely with the Nauru Sports Department, National Federations and local sports clubs to promote clean sports at both national and regional levels.

In this discussion with Ruth Faleolo, Ann shares what leadership means to her and how she leads to achieve change. For Ann, leadership is about improving her community, particularly through youth development and environmental initiatives. She doesn’t see herself as a leader because of her formal roles; rather, the community recognises her leadership. She focuses on offering guidance and advice, helping others make decisions and take action for the good of the community.

## Can you tell me the story of how you got into leadership?

I started by working within my own community, and from there I expanded to working with young people. I ran the Youth Council for about 10 years until we handed it over to the next generation. I'm still working with both my own and other communities on development, and I also assist government entities and departments with community concerns such as the environment, solar power, and renewable energy.

### KEY LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Everyday leaders cultivate leadership in others by building their capacity and confidence.

For me, it's always been about community development. In a small country like ours, there's a lot of dependency on government, so we're trying to shift that—to help communities stand on their own and become more independent.

## What does 'leadership' mean to you?

Basically, it means good governance. Without that, we become prone to corruption and other negative things. There's also a lot of confusion about who a community leader really is, so we try to educate people about the difference between NGOs and government. We each have different roles and shouldn't overlap. People should be able to choose their own community leaders and make their own decisions about community development.

## Can you tell me about a really difficult or complex change that you've tried to implement?

Every year—or even every quarter—we organise community clean-ups to promote a clean environment. These used to be volunteer-led, but then the government decided to pay people to do the cleaning. That created a shift in attitude, especially among the youth, who started saying, "I'm not going to volunteer because others are getting paid."

In my community, the people employed to clean are all women—our mothers, aunties, and sisters. They work for good reason: to support their families. When we need extra help for a big clean-up, we remind the youth that even though these women are being paid, they're still our family and we should help them.

We delegate the work. Those who are employed do their regular cleaning, while the youth come in at a different time to help with other things—like decorations. Community leaders handle refreshments, transportation, and equipment. If anyone complains, we explain: "Yes, they're paid to clean, but we're decorating and supporting them." The community leaders provide incentives to make sure everyone feels appreciated.

### KEY LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Everyday leaders derive legitimacy from their relationships and their embeddedness within communities.

## Have there been times when the change you have been advocating for has involved risks?

### KEY LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Everyday leaders define their leadership not in reference to their formal role but by their ability to influence change that benefits their community.

Yes—especially during election campaign seasons. In terms of community development and voter influence, there are always groups going around telling young voters, "You should vote for us because we'll give you this or that." We try to remind people that their vote belongs to them, and no one should be telling them who to vote for. But it does become a bit of a clash.

## How have you navigated that challenge?

We avoid getting into political debates, but we make sure new voters understand their rights and responsibilities. We tell them, "No one—not even us—can tell you who to vote for. Choose candidates who care about Nauru as a whole."

## As a woman leader, have you faced challenges linked to your gender?

Not really. Mostly, it's just silly comments during discussions. It's normal for them to say things like, "You women, you're always complaining too much." They just make jokes about women always complaining.

### Has that ever affected your leadership?

Not personally, but I've seen it affect others. We have strong women leaders at both community and government levels, but when it comes to top positions—like becoming a member of parliament—they rarely make it through. Out of 19 members of parliament, only two are women.

A recent policy also adds to the challenge: anyone wanting to run for election must resign from their job 12 months beforehand. That's a big risk, especially for women who need financial independence. If you have children and depend on your income, it's difficult to resign, and if you don't get elected, you're left without work.

### When you think about all the areas you're leading, which have been the most successful and which the most challenging?

Success for me has been in collaborating with the Environment Department to develop policies and legislation on climate change and water management. At the community level, I'm proud of helping youth find employment and develop leadership skills. I remind them, "One day we'll be gone—who will run the community then? You need to step up now." These days, I handle most of the paperwork—writing project proposals and budget

### Would you consider that a challenge—getting people to see the long-term impacts of their behaviour, especially around the environment?

I guess years ago, not many people knew what climate change was, and getting them on board was pretty difficult. People would say things like, "What's climate change? No, it's not happening." But now there's a lot more talk about climate change in the Pacific, and many government projects are focused on addressing it. There's more understanding now, and people actually support the initiatives.

#### KEY LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Everyday leaders listen to people's concerns and views, and offer guidance to others when sought out.

### How do you manage your energy levels and care for yourself?

I've experienced burnout once or twice before, so I've learned to set boundaries. Sometimes I just say, "This weekend is mine—don't disturb me." Spending time with friends doing things unrelated to work helps a lot. Family and friends keep me going.

### What do you think makes you a leader, and where do you see your leadership as most valuable?

I guess it's how the people in my community think of me. They approach me for advice, and they rely on me to help them make decisions or to help them find work. I guess I'm only a leader because it's how the people think of me and how I support them. If they need my assistance, I'm there.

At the moment, I manage the Anti-Doping Unit, working with Nauruan athletes and national federations on education and drug testing. Between that and my community work, I often find myself in leadership roles.

### Would you say that's what drives or inspires you?

Yes. I find it rewarding to help people—whether it's a group or an individual. At the end of the day, knowing that you've made someone's life easier or supported their future is what keeps me going.

Interested?  
Want to know more?

To learn more about WLI,  
please contact us:

 [info@wliprogram.org](mailto:info@wliprogram.org)  
 [www.wliprogram.org](http://www.wliprogram.org)