A Tongan Woman in Land Transport

My Journey, My Purpose, and My Hope for Tonga

Women in Transport Sector Webinar

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April 2026

Presentation Focus

Overview

Personal and educational background

where my story began

Professional journey

technical growth into leadership

Motivation and responsibilities

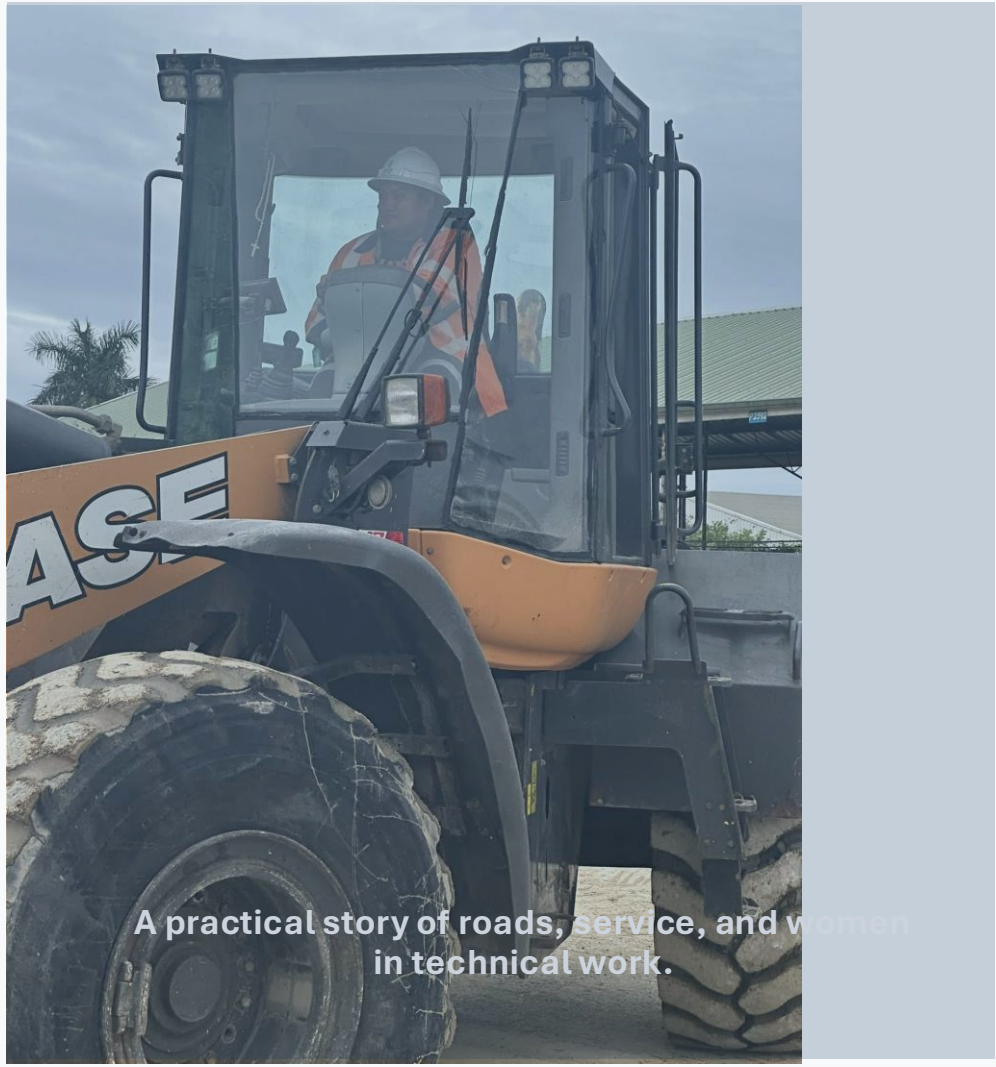
why land transport matters to me

PQIP and road practice

principles connected to local realities

Women in transport

inclusion, leadership, value, and hope



Personal and Educational Background

My foundation

Personal

- Civil Engineer in Tonga's Land Transport Sector
- Youngest of seven siblings
- Queen Salote College - Tonga's only all-girls school

Education

- Diploma in Architectural Technology - Tupou Tertiary Institute
- Bachelor of Engineering Technology in Civil Engineering - Unitec, New Zealand
- Master of Engineering - Western Sydney University, Australia

Education and Professional Journey

Academic and career path

2013-2014	2015	2015-2016	2016-2019	Summer 2018	2019-2023	2023-2025	2025-now
Diploma in Architecture	Trainee Lab Technician	Lab Technician	Bachelor in Engineering	Intern	Civil Engineer	Master of Engineering	Acting Director
Tupou Tertiary Institute	Ministry of Infrastructure	Fua'amotu Airport Resurfacing	Unitec, New Zealand	PCREEE / SPC	Land Transport Division	Western Sydney University	Road Maintenance Division

"My journey did not begin in leadership. It began at the technical ground level, and gradually grew through education, field exposure, supervision, and service."

Motivation to Join the Land Transport Sector

Purpose and motivation

Why This Sector Matters to Me

- Contributing to Tonga's road development
- Motivated to make a difference in a male-dominated field
- Moved by road conditions and their impact on daily life
- Committed to improving safety, access, and daily life
- Believing lasting change begins with small steps

"I did not want to only talk about the problem - I wanted to be part of fixing it."

Key Responsibilities and Areas of Work

Professional Practice

- Material testing and lab coordination
- Periodic and routine road maintenance
- Site supervision
- Contract management
- Planning, coordination, and delivery oversight

Projects and Leadership

- Footpath Project
- Tonga Integrated Urban Resilient Sector Project
- Flood Management Project
- Nuku'alofa Seawall Upgrade
- Leadership in the Road Maintenance Division

Insights from Road Practice in Tonga

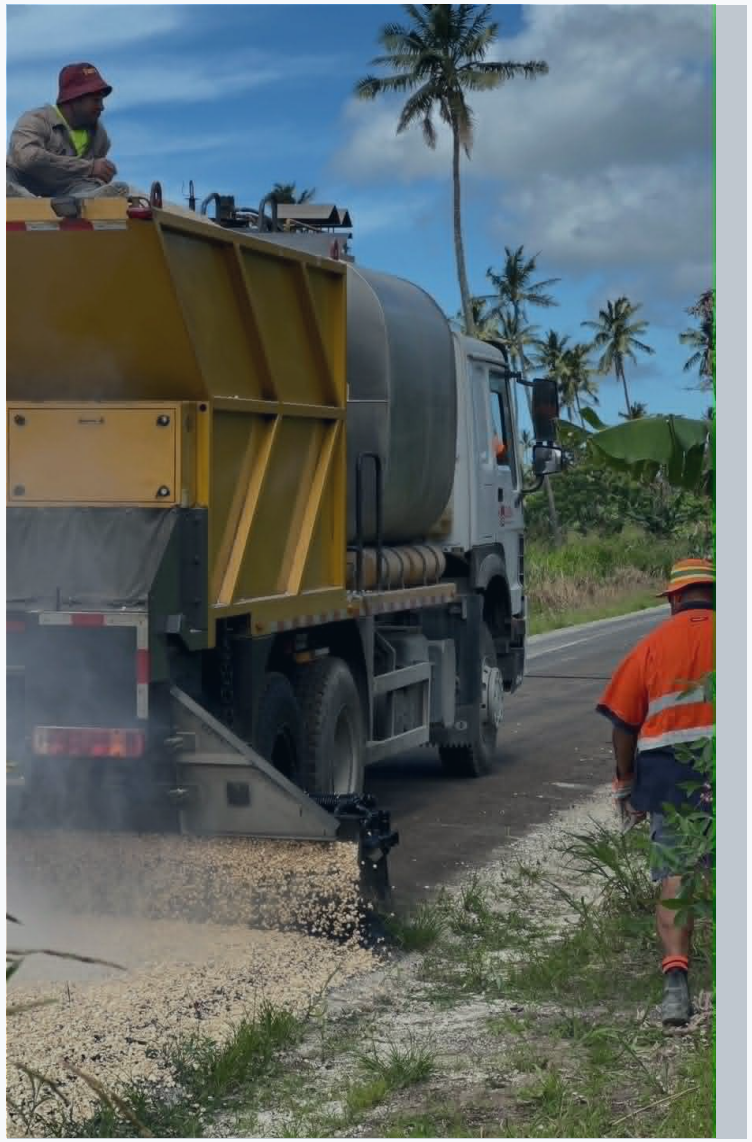
Local context and engineering perspective

Local Context

- Local challenges and competing priorities
- High public expectations with limited budgets
- Practical, people-focused engineering
- Political and operational pressures
- High expectations for returning scholars

Engineering Perspective

- Good engineering starts with understanding the real problem
- Drainage often matters as much as pavement
- Small interventions can prevent bigger failures
- Real progress comes through steady, practical action



"When we fix the small issues affecting the road system, the bigger picture begins to move in the right direction."

Pacific Quality Infrastructure Principles (PQIP)

Principles in practice

How PQIP Relates to My Work

- Local content - local people are part of the solution
- Value for money - every investment must make a meaningful difference
- Climate resilience - roads must respond to flooding, drainage, and coastal exposure
- Safeguards and governance - quality, safety, and accountability remain essential
- Inclusivity - women belong in technical work too

PQIP reminds us that infrastructure should be inclusive, resilient, accountable, and useful for people.

Women in Transport and Engineering

Professional realities and key lessons

Professional Realities

- Women can be underestimated in technical environments
- Technical ability may be questioned before it is proven
- Women are sometimes expected to remain in office-based roles
- The field can be demanding and highly pressured
- Balancing work, family, and wellbeing is a real challenge

Key Lessons

- You do not have to be loud to be tough
- You can be calm, clear, and still carry authority
- Real strength is staying grounded under pressure
- Mental health matters too
- Leadership should not cost us our peace

Promoting Women’s Inclusion in Technical Work

Tiueti S. Kaihau

Inclusion in practice

What Inclusion Means

- Supporting women’s technical growth
- Encouraging site exposure and active learning
- Building confidence through practical experience
- Helping younger women see engineering as possible

How Women Add Value

- Organisation, consistency, and patience strengthen delivery
- Calm, people-centred communication improves teamwork
- Women and men working together produce stronger outcomes
- Equality is partnership, not competition

Inclusion is not just about being present - it is about being given the opportunity to grow technically.

Leadership development

Leadership Development

- Women's Leadership Influence (WLI / WLDP)
- Australia Awards leadership opportunities
- Growth through challenge and reflection
- Leadership grounded in self-awareness and authenticity
- Lessons applied in professional practice

A leadership journey shaped by challenge, reflection, and connection.

My Contribution and Impact

Organisational and national impact

Organisational Impact

- Leading teams and supporting delivery of road maintenance programmes
- Combining technical knowledge with practical decision-making
- Promoting safety, accountability, and environmental awareness
- Supporting women's technical confidence in the workplace

National Impact

- Serving the people of Tonga through transport infrastructure
- Supporting safer, more reliable roads for communities
- Contributing to long-term road improvement step by step
- Showing that Tongan women can lead in technical and infrastructure roles

Hope for Tonga's Roads

What Keeps Me Going

- A road network our people can be proud of
- Progress may be slow, but progress is still progress
- Teams, road workers, supervisors, and safety people are part of the journey
- Development partners help keep that hope alive

"There is space for us in engineering, on site, and in leadership."

My Closing Message

I joined the land transport sector because I looked at the roads in Tonga and felt that I did not want to only talk about the problem - I wanted to be part of fixing it, step by step, for my people.

If we keep moving forward, even in small steps, women and men working together can help build a stronger road system and a better future for Tonga.

Malo ‘aupito