



GENDER EQUALITY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



As a collection of small, low-lying island nations, the Pacific region is among the first to feel the effects of climate change – from extreme weather events to rising sea levels and increased soil and water salinity. In fact, many Pacific Island countries and territories are already experiencing some of these impacts.

A temperature increase of as little as 2% is expected to increase the intensity of tropical cyclones in the north-west Pacific by 12 to 15%, and decrease the average rainfall by 12 to 28%¹. It is also estimated that, since 1950, disasters in the Pacific region have caused almost 10,000 deaths and US\$3.2 billion in damage².

The impacts of disasters are felt differently by different members of the society, with gender being a critical determinant. Global research has shown that women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be injured in a disaster than men³. This was reflected in Tonga and Samoa, where 70% of the adult deaths from the 2009 tsunami were female⁴. This gap decreases or even disappears as gender equality increases and women are more involved in decision-making processes.

Women and girls also experience a number of secondary impacts, including violence and trauma, loss or reduction

in economic opportunities, and an increased workload. For example, after two tropical cyclones hit Vanuatu in 2011, the Tanna Women's Counselling Centre reported a 300% increase in new domestic violence cases⁵.

An increase in weather-related disasters compounded by environmental degradation impacts on economic and social development. These impacts are likely to include: reduced food availability and food security; less ability to earn income; less arable land; less access to clean water; and more disease and health problems.

Inequality limits women's ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change; they are often poorer than men and have limited or no access or rights to productive resources that could help them overcome this imbalance. UN Women has completed significant research documenting this relationship between gender, climate change and disasters in the Pacific.

Viewing women as victims exacerbates their vulnerability; they have unique knowledge and practical skills that are critical for climate change and disaster adaptation. Women and girls represent half the population and their equal participation and skills will lead to a more effective overall response to climate change.

IREACH PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Timeframe: 2013-2017

Countries: 14 Pacific Island countries and territories, with a focus on Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

Focus areas:

- Advocacy for gender-responsive climate change and disaster management policy & governance.

- Research, technical advice and capacity development to support key actors
- Community governance support on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction
- Disaster response and protection cluster support
- Strengthening social mobilisation, community leadership and prevention.

9m

The number of people living in the Pacific who are affected by disasters between 1950 and 2013.⁶

“I BELIEVE THAT WOMEN ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE GIVEN THEIR ALREADY LOWER SOCIAL STATUS IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.”

*Christina Ora, Climate Change Activist, Honiara Youth Council, Solomon Islands.*⁷

13%

The estimated annual cost of climate change to GDP in the Pacific by 2100.⁸

IREACH PROGRAMME

Through its Increasing Community Resilience through the Advancement of Women to Address Climate Change and Natural Hazards (IREACH) programme, UN Women recognises the Pacific region’s vulnerability to the impacts of disasters and climate change, how women and girls are disproportionately affected, and how women and their views, priorities and skills must be included in decision-making processes that shape climate change and disaster risk reduction agendas.

Climatic changes can jeopardise and even reverse development gains; they also exacerbate gender inequality. Inversely, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment lead to positive development outcomes for both women and men.

The IREACH programme is designed to ensure that Pacific women become full, equal partners in, and beneficiaries of, all disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, as well as overall sustainable development. As part of this, UN Women supports intergovernmental processes by working with governments and partners to ensure the needs and priorities of women are highlighted at every stage. In 2015 this work included the Sendai Framework Action in Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in Japan, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Regional Consultation in New Zealand and the UN Conference of the Parties on Climate Change in France.

UN Women collaborates with and helps coordinate regional development partners, governments and non-governmental organisations in efforts to increase the understanding of, and encourage effective response to, the gender implications of disasters and climate change.

In 2015, UN Women co-hosted a pre-WHS consultation workshop for women delegates. Participants developed a coherent communiqué on the issues that affect Pacific women and girls in humanitarian settings, gaps and trends in cluster response, and recommendations for reform to improve the responsiveness of Pacific humanitarian programming to the needs, risks and capacities of women. Consequently, gender equality was substantively discussed in the WHS Consultation.

Similarly, prior to the 2015 regional Pacific Humanitarian Partnership meeting, UN Women hosted a side event attended by the protection cluster leads of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. This pre-workshop allowed lessons to be shared and a network to be created to enhance the individual capacities



IREACH PROGRAMME

of these national protection clusters. The workshop participants produced an outcome document and their own Protection in the Pacific community of practice. Their attendance at the regional meeting meant that gender equality and protection was better represented and that key issues could be raised.

UN Women also provides capacity building in disaster response. Through the IREACH Programme UN Women has supported government partners and UN agencies in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga and Solomon Islands in mainstreaming gender in humanitarian needs assessment processes. In particular, UN Women has provided support to national authorities in conducting protection assessments, the collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data, and identifying and addressing gender-specific safety and protection gaps during emergencies.

UN Women provides ongoing support to the Protection clusters of these countries through a newly created Pacific Protection knowledge network, and to disaster management specialists through training and resources that enhance understanding of the linkage between gender equality and DRR and develop practical skills for mainstreaming gender equality in DRR. In 2015, UN Women provided training to Samoa's National Disaster Management Office and supported the Tonga Ministry of Internal Affairs in developing Community Protection Committees in cyclone-affected Ha'apai Province.

THE WAY FORWARD

In addition to its current efforts in these areas, UN Women is developing a long-term programme focusing on the following areas:

- Generation of evidence-based advocacy data on current and potential climate change and disaster impacts on gender;
- Supporting key actors in mainstreaming gender into disaster and climate change policy, risk assessments, monitoring frameworks and project design;
- Implementation of community-based climate change and DRR measures.

14

The number of times more likely it is for women and children to die or be injured during a disaster than men. More women involved in decision-making processes helps to close this gap.³

300%

The increase in new domestic violence cases reported by the Tanna Women's Counselling Centre after two tropical cyclones hit the Tafe Province in Vanuatu in 2011.⁵

CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE PAM, VANUATU

Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu in March 2015, destroying 96% of crops and affecting around 171,000 people, more than half the population.

UN Women deployed specialist staff to Vanuatu as part of a wider effort to ensure the voices of women and girls, and their needs, are incorporated at all levels of recovery and reconstruction. UN Women's Gender and Protection Advisor and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Advisor supported the government in mainstreaming gender equality through humanitarian and post-disaster assessments, including the Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report.

UN Women also co-organised and contributed to a national 'Lessons Learned' forum. This included a video and booklet documenting the lives of women and men before, during and after Cyclone Pam, and their roles in cyclone response and recovery.



DISASTER RESPONSE ASSISTANCE

The people of the Pacific region are particularly vulnerable to climate change and disasters. These disasters affect everyone, however, women, men, boys and girls experience their impacts differently and therefore have different needs in the aftermath.

In its capacity as part of the UN Gender Group Gender Surge, which falls under the Pacific Humanitarian Team cluster, UN Women deploys specialist staff to support countries affected by disasters in ensuring the needs of women and girls are actively considered.

Over the past three years this has included support after flash flooding in Fiji in early 2012 and Solomon Islands in 2014 as well as four tropical cyclones: Evan in Samoa and Fiji in 2012/2013, Lusi in Vanuatu and Ian in Tonga, both in 2014, and Pam in Vanuatu in 2015.

The Vanuatu government, for example requested UN Women's assistance after the country received a direct hit from Category 5 'super cyclone' Pam. The storm damaged or destroyed around 90% of the infrastructure in the capital and left thousands in evacuation centres across the islands. Outlying islands, especially Tanna, were badly hit and could only be reached several days after the storm had passed. Through specialist staff, UN Women supported the mainstreaming of gender equality through needs assessments (see page three for more information).

UN Women has also provided training in Samoa and Tonga on gender in emergencies, including gender mainstreaming and gender-based violence.

Even when UN Women has not been actively deployed, the organisation is poised to provide remote technical advice to any national authority in any humanitarian emergency situation, in order to support the overall gender-responsiveness of disaster response.

FOOTNOTES

¹ IFAD, 2012. Climate Change Impacts: Pacific Islands.

² <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Pacific%20Islands/climate-change-pacific.pdf>

³ Peterson, K., 'Reaching Out to Women when Disaster Strikes', White Paper, Soroptimist, 2007.

⁴ Tonga National Assessment Report to the 2014 SIDS Conference

⁵ UN OHCHR, 2011. Protecting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Natural Disasters. Challenges in the Pacific.

⁶ UNISDR, 2014. Ten-Year Review on Progress Towards and Contributions Made by the Pacific Region to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) from 2005-2015.

⁷ <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/06/fiji-multi-country-office-annual-report-for-2014>

⁸ World Bank 2012. World Development Report. Gender Equality and Development

CAPTIONS

Page 1: Re-opening of Marobe Market, Vanuatu 2015. Credit: UN Women/Ellie van Baaren.

Page 2: Drought conditions on an island in Tuvalu, 2015. Credit: UN Women/Martin Child.

Page 3: Shaline Nimal next to what remains of her house after Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, 2015. Credit: UN Women/Ellie van Baaren

Page 4: Village representatives and government staff assess climate change vulnerability, Fiji 2015. Credit: UN Women/Allanah Kidd.

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INTEGRATING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION INTO LOCAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In a region that is as seriously affected by climate change as the Pacific, climate change adaptation measures and disaster preparedness measures are very closely linked.

It is important that climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are incorporated into a sustainable development approach. UN Women has partnered with other agencies in the Pacific to ensure that the needs of women, and indeed all members of the community, are heard and taken into account at the local level, for example during community development planning.

In Tonga, UN Women has assisted with the design and format of community development planning meetings facilitated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs across Tongatapu, to ensure that women's concerns are raised and that the different development needs and priorities of women are reflected in community development plans.



In Fiji, UN Women supports the gender-responsive implementation of an integrated framework for vulnerability assessment of all Fijian communities by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once completed, these assessments will form a baseline measure of the relative resilience of communities across Fiji and the data will inform planning and decision making at the national and provincial level across sectors of government.

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