



IN BRIEF



GENDER AND PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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What's the Issue?

In the Pacific, cyclones, floods and droughts are becoming increasingly unpredictable and extreme, with devastating effects. Global research has shown that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die or be injured in a disaster. In a disaster or emergency, women also face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence; unequal access to humanitarian assistance such as food and shelter; loss of economic opportunities; and increased workloads. As these crises affect women, girls, boys and men differently, humanitarian action must take into account people's different needs, resources and capacities.

Disasters cause death and injury, but also destroy homes, infrastructure, assets and crops - compromising food security and livelihoods and worsening existing vulnerabilities. In the Pacific region, up to two out of three women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime - double the global average and known to worsen in disasters. These realities arise from existing gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms, which can be exacerbated in times of crisis, while at the same time protective responses (such as police) and referral pathways for support may be disrupted.

In the Pacific, women are often the first responders to a crisis and play a central role in the survival and resilience of families and communities - yet they are often excluded from decision-making. Women are not consistently consulted in disaster preparedness, response or recovery, which means their voices are not heard and their skills may be underutilized. The same is often true for people with disabilities; people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression; the young and the elderly; and other groups with specific vulnerabilities.

Currently, gender is not systematically considered in the Pacific region's humanitarian responses, either at the national or regional level. Data is not consistently disaggregated by sex, age and disability, rendering the unique protection needs of different groups invisible. Furthermore, in the initial response, there is often a focus on distribution of tangible commodities such as food, water and first aid, without consideration of human factors that impact effective recovery of individuals and their communities.

Our Solutions

Ensuring that humanitarian action is responsive to gender and protection issues is critical and can be life-saving. It requires a shared understanding of the importance of gender and protection, and a firm commitment to their inclusion by all stakeholders including government, civil society and humanitarian actors.

Planned and coordinated responses by government, non-government organisations, the military, UN agencies, civil society and other actors facilitates effective information sharing and helps to avoid both gaps and overlaps in assistance. Involving local community actors, including women and affected groups, in preparedness and response efforts places people at the centre of their own response and recovery. It promotes culturally and is socially appropriate. It also ensures that humanitarian assistance preserves dignity, promotes self-reliance.

In a first for UN Women globally, in 2016, its Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Fiji was designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as coordination lead for the regional Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster (PHPC) Support Team. As lead agency, UN Women is working closely with other key agencies to support existing government structures and processes, leverage comparative advantages and encourage local participation and ownership. This includes advocating for the needs of specific groups, such as people with disabilities and those with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. UN Women is promoting localized and inclusive humanitarian action with women and men having equal voice and opportunity to participate in, and lead, disaster preparedness and response.

In the Pacific, UN Women is supporting national humanitarian actors and systems in the: (a) coordination of protection actors during preparedness and response to ensure the safety and dignity of disaster-affected populations; (b) coordination of actors addressing gender-based violence in emergencies; and (c) mainstreaming gender and protection across other humanitarian sectors including shelter, food security etc. UN Women also adapts existing programming as needed for emergency response.



How We Make a Difference

UN Women's role in humanitarian action:

UN Women provides leadership to the PHPC Support Team to enhance regional and national capacity for gender and protection-sensitive disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The PHPC coordinates the humanitarian protection efforts of UN agencies and regional and international organizations with a focus on awareness-raising, capacity development and provision of technical guidance and support.

The PHPC supports national protection clusters or committees, led by national disaster management offices and women's ministries or departments, with capacity building on gender and protection in humanitarian action in five priority countries: Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. These countries are prioritised based on frequency of natural hazards, existing protection challenges that may be exacerbated in emergencies and the opportunity to further improve protection capacity.

For example, PHPC supported the Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster during Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston in 2016 to conduct a cluster-led sectoral assessment identifying protection issues; to develop a Code of Conduct for all Workers in Emergencies; and to secure funding for national partners' disaster response activities including psychological first aid for 19,000 women and girls and provision of disability-specific 'dignity packs'.

Key humanitarian preparedness initiatives:

- Supporting local organisations in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Palau through the rapid financing mechanism Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, and engage in peacebuilding, engaging in disaster preparedness, early warning and response to crises.
- Supported Tonga Safety and Protection Cluster to conduct an After Action Review of its Response to TC Gita in 2018, and supported the refinement of its Terms of Reference, Standard Operating Procedures and workplan.
- Co-facilitated a landmark five-day regional workshop on Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE) with the Regional Training Institute of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, hosted by the Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women and including key participants from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. A joint Outcomes Statement was produced with recommendations to address GBV as a priority from the outset of an emergency.
- Supported the newly established Solomon Islands Protection Committee to develop a Terms of Reference, Standard Operating Procedures and workplan as well as facilitated a sub-national workshop on Gender and Protection in Humanitarian Action for Makira Province.
- Organised and co-facilitated a session on local and diverse humanitarians at the annual regional Pacific Humanitarian Partnership (PHP) Meeting that provided a platform for Pacific women and marginalised groups to advocate for improved inclusion in humanitarian action.

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Timeframe: Ongoing

Countries: Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu

Objective: Protecting the rights of disaster-affected people in the Pacific to access needs-based assistance that promotes safety, dignity, gender equality and women's empowerment.

Focus areas:

Supporting national humanitarian actors, systems and processes:

- Assisting government ministries and authorities responsible for gender and protection to coordinate protection preparedness and response in emergencies.
- Supporting the incorporation of gender and protection across government-led sectoral responses.
- Coordinating preparedness and response to gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE).

Leveraging existing programmatic strengths and field-office presence to enable local partners working with UN Women's programmes to shift into humanitarian emergency preparedness and response:

- Deploying staff to countries in times of emergency to provide technical assistance on placing gender and protection considerations at the centre of response
- Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE), through UN Women's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) programme.
- Re-establishing women's livelihoods following disasters through UN Women's Markets for Change (M4C) project under the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programme. For example, M4C provided temporary market shelters and equipment in ten markets, repaired five markets and distributed agro-supplies including seeds and tools to over 1,580 farmers and market vendors affected by TC Winston in Fiji.

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The Multi-Country Office headquartered in Fiji covers Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

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