

Why is gender an important consideration in the context of adapting to climate change and Disaster Risk Management in the Pacific?

Hona Holan-Hako Women Collective (Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom) (PNG) representing the Pacific Delegation, consisting of:

- Hon. Alisi Taumoepeau, Minister of Justice of the Government of Tonga
- Kuiniselani Tago, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa
- Tautala Mauala, from the Samoa Red Cross Society
- Aliti Vuniseya, Secretariat of the Pacific Communities
- Cheryl Anderson, from the University of Hawaii
- Lisa Staruszkiewicz, from Australian Agency for International Development
- Dr Netatua Pelesikoti from the Pacific Islands Applied Geosciences Commission, Suva
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Gender in adapting to climate change and Disaster Risk Management in the Pacific

- It is well acknowledged that because the economies and small communities of Pacific Island Countries are highly dependent on natural resources, they are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and associated increases in the occurrence of natural hazards
- Despite the vulnerability of Pacific Island Countries to the impacts of climate change and disasters, research shows that women and men of Pacific Island communities have successfully utilized specialized knowledge of their environments to mitigate disasters through the management of their natural resource bases for generations. They have done this through a variety of traditional and cultural practices that have been maintained through informal education and oral tradition across generations. These include food preservation, housing construction, traditional systems of exchange, and most importantly the management of our natural resources.
- Studies indicate that women and men have different skills and knowledge that can assist in adapting to climate change, preparing for disasters and reducing disaster risk, stemming from gendered divisions of labor present in non disaster periods. For example, the everyday responsibilities of women and men in fishing and gardening translate into gender-different response to warnings of oncoming climatic hazards, such as typhoons and droughts.
- Gendered divisions of labor, women and men's specialized traditional or local knowledge, far from being static, shift over time in response to a range of external factors including: development processes; urbanization;

environmental degradation; and climate change. As a result of these pressures the relevance and use of traditional knowledge and practices among the women and men of Pacific Island Communities has significantly eroded.

- There is increasing evidence that successful adaptation and coping capacity relies upon measures based on the understanding of underlying causes of vulnerability that address the livelihood activities of poor and vulnerable communities. This not only requires an understanding of how livelihoods are conducted and sustained by men and women, it requires a strong appreciation of how climate change will impact upon available natural resources and the different roles that men and women play in managing these natural resources.
- Understanding gendered divisions of labour within Pacific Island communities can therefore assist in providing more in-depth understanding of community perspectives on changes to climate and the environment. It can also provide a useful entry point for harnessing the specialised knowledge held by women and men in developing strategies for adapting to climate change.

What is the Pacific Region doing at the global, regional and national levels to ensure that gender issues are integrated into climate change agendas and disaster risk management?

At the international level, the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women in February this year, the Pacific Delegation made an intervention stating the fact that despite the fact that women in the Pacific make a significant contribution to the informal economy particularly in agriculture, fisheries and micro-enterprises the nexus between gender and climate change in the Pacific has not gained much traction. It therefore recognized the importance of the inclusion of gender in both strategies for mitigation and adaptation and called for efforts to address the gender specific impacts of climate change in areas such as energy, water, food security, agriculture, fisheries, health and disaster management.

At the regional level, the UNDP Pacific Centre and AusAID jointly sponsored a regional forum on the *Gendered Dimensions of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Pacific*. The forum brought together practitioners from the fields of natural resource management, disaster risk management and climate change to explore and share issues relevant to gender, to identify gaps in practice and research, best practices, and lessons learned, and to initiate an ongoing dialogue among stakeholders. A number of priority areas were identified and these included collaboration, future research and programming in these areas within the Pacific to ensure that programming is gender responsive.

Some of the potential future directions on gender, climate change and Disaster Risk Management in the region are:

- Initiatives designed to address issues on gender and climate change that give consideration to the gendered vulnerabilities of both women and men and ideally involve both women and men in partnership in both design and implementation.

- Deeper understandings of existing social systems and the cultural contexts of gender are crucial for donors and programmers to factor into the design and implementation of adaptation strategies.
- More awareness to be raised among wider development practitioners on the intersections between gender, development, climate change and disaster risk management
- Undertake more research in order to learn more about how risks and impacts of climate change are gendered by collecting gender disaggregated data.
- Assist communities by translating information on climate change into easy to understand, local languages so that women and men can understand how climate change will impact their everyday roles and livelihoods and be better informed to choose appropriate strategies for adaptation.

Finally we would like to express our appreciation to CAPWIP for organizing this congress and UNDP Pacific Centre for facilitating the formation of a Pacific Delegation to attend the 3rd global Congress on Women in Politics and Governance focusing on Gender in DRR and ACC. Thank you also to AusAid for financial support.

The Pacific delegation which is comprised of representatives from government, non-government and regional organizations, working in the fields of gender, climate change and disaster risk reduction, will share experiences from the CAPWIP Congress and take forward priorities for the Pacific region.

Thank you very much.