



WHY IS CLIMATE CHANGE A GENDER ISSUE?



BACKGROUND

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will expire soon and to plan for after this time, a common set of internationally agreed targets – Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – are being developed. The Pacific region now has the opportunity to identify key priorities and goals relevant to the region, as well as highlight the ways in which various issues will influence the achievement of these goals. In addition to experiencing some of the same development issues as other small island developing states (SIDS) the Pacific region has a unique environmental, cultural, and geological context that must be taken into account in the SDGs. Two of the major challenges facing the Pacific are climate change and gender inequality, both of which have a bearing on the achievement of the current MDGs and future sustainable development.

As the climate changes, the region will experience: rising sea levels; ocean acidification; changing rainfall patterns resulting in increased droughts and floods; and increased severity of disasters and extreme weather events. The impacts of climate change are likely to include: loss of lives; increased food insecurity; decreased ability to earn income and grow food; less arable land available; less access to clean water; and more disease and health problems, with overall negative impacts on economic and social development.¹ People living in many Pacific island countries and territories (PICTS) are already experiencing some of these impacts.

This brief is part of UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office's series on the links between climate change, gender, and a number of development issues including women's economic empowerment, health, food security, and energy. UN Women would like to acknowledge contributions from Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and Secretariat of the Pacific Community in drafting these publications.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Pacific region is experiencing increasingly severe impacts of climate change, which will undermine achievement of the MDGs, and future sustainable development.
- Pacific Women face persistent inequality relative to men, including in access to decision-making, high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, and limited economic opportunities, which makes them more vulnerable to climate change impacts.
- Women are raised with gender-specific roles and responsibilities in their families and communities. The unique knowledge held by women should be respected and effectively utilised in responding to and managing climate and disaster risks.
- Adopting gender-responsive approaches is essential in achieving cost-efficient adaptation measures, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development for the region.
- More Pacific specific research is needed to analyse the linkages both between climate change, disaster risk reduction and gender, and with a number of other development issues in order to better plan for the Post-2015 agenda.

16.8 million

The aggregated increase in the number of people living in the Pacific affected by weather-related disasters since the 1980s³ - note: the same person may be affected several times.

14

The number of times more likely it is for women and children to die or be injured during a disaster than men⁴.

\$1 billion

The cost of damage caused by extreme weather events in the Pacific in the 1990s⁵.

DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS

Climate change will affect all people across the world, however, the Pacific region is among those likely to be first and worst affected. Within the Pacific, certain groups are likely to be more vulnerable and experience more severe consequences than others. Poor communities will be more acutely affected by climate change than higher-income communities, partly due to their limited access to information and financial resources, as well as their increased dependence on natural resources. Gender also plays a critical role in individual vulnerability, with women typically more likely to be negatively affected by the impacts of climate change and access to power and resources than men. Women, men, girls and boys are therefore differently affected by, and find different ways of coping with, and adapting to, disaster and climate impacts.

Persistent gender inequalities and power differences in the Pacific region include high rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), limited participation of women in politics and decision-making, lack of employment opportunities for women, the unequal share of unpaid work done by women, and limited access to resources and opportunities. A large body of research indicates that gender inequalities have undermined the achievement of the MDGs². This means that without substantial changes in policy, behaviour and thought across all sectors, the Pacific region will be confronted with the same challenges.

Inequality limits women's ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change. This vulnerability is exacerbated by viewing women as victims, rather than key actors who have critical knowledge of their society, economy, and environment, as well as practical skills, which, when recognised and used, can be effective in risk reduction and adaptation. Half the people living in the Pacific region are women and girls. If they have a limited say in decision-making and their skills are not fully utilised, half the population is unable to contribute adequately to climate change adaptation and overall sustainable development.

Existing, albeit incomplete, data for the Pacific region demonstrates the gendered impacts of climate change on a range of development issues. It is clear that the impacts of climate change undermine sustainable development, however, to fully understand the impact of this, gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis must be implemented across the region. The data that illustrates the likely trends, based on projected climate change scenarios, is outlined below.

What is Climate Change?

Climate is all weather occurring over a long period of time in a given place. Climate includes: average weather conditions; regular weather seasons; and special weather events, such as cyclones and floods. Climate tells us what it's usually like in the place where you live. Historically, Kiribati is known to have a hot, dry climate, and Suva, Fiji a wet, humid climate.

Climate change is when the average weather over a long period of time begins to change. This means that past patterns no longer accurately predict future weather. Scientists agree that the earth's climate is now changing due to global warming. Global warming is the rise in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans caused by unsustainable human activity. Global warming is the cause of current observed changes in climate.

For more information see the United Nations portal at <http://www.un.org/climatechange/>

What is Gender Equality?

Gender describes the characteristics associated with being male or female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned behaviours, influenced not only by our biological sex, but predominantly by the society we live in. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context and therefore varies over different cultures and time periods.

Gender equality means that women and men have equal value, rights, and opportunities to participate in every aspect of life, at every level of society. Equality does not mean that men and women will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality means that the interests, needs and priorities of both men and women are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON WOMEN IN THE PACIFIC

Disasters: Global research shows that women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be injured than men due to a disaster, an effect that decreases or disappears as social inequalities between men and women decrease⁶. In addition to high fatalities, loss of homes and livelihoods, women and girls also experience more intangible losses. They are subject to a number of secondary impacts, including SGBV and trauma, loss or reduction of economic opportunities, and increased workloads. Increased rates of SGBV, including rape, for example, were reported in the Solomon Islands after the Gizo tsunami in 2007⁷.

Recurrent and expensive climate-related disaster relief, recovery, and reconstruction drain resources that could otherwise be used for social and economic development, including the advancement of gender equality. Cyclones, for example, damage critical infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. In response to the impacts of damage, girls are more likely than boys to be pulled out of school to help with domestic chores after a disaster, making the achievement of universal primary education more difficult. After the 2012 Fiji floods, for example, evidence suggests that girls were being taken out of school to help take care of younger children or solicit extra cash through sex work⁸. Damaged infrastructure also limits access to health resources from pregnant women, increasing the risk of maternal death.

Rising sea levels, erosion, and salinisation: Rising sea levels are directly attributed to climate change, which will likely lead to less land for living and less arable land for growing food, as well as less fresh water.

Pacifoc women are often responsible for water collection. A decrease in the availability of fresh water means women and girls will spend more time collecting water for their families. Additionally, the responsibility for caring for those who fall ill due to the increase in water-borne diseases associated with the inevitable decrease in water quality, will also fall on women and girls. This increase in workload results in women and girls having less time to spend on earning an income and education, or contributing to community-level decision-making processes, including climate change and disaster risk reduction.

Women also have specific knowledge of water systems in their environment, and can therefore find solutions to increase water availability. During a drought in Yap Province in the Federated States of Micronesia, women's knowledge of hydrology, due to their role in cultivating the land, meant they were able to find a good site for digging a new well which provided clean water⁹.

Agriculture and Aquaculture: Changing rainfall patterns combined with salinity intrusion are likely to have a significant impact on agriculture. Women and girls are affected the most when traditional crops begin to fail. Even though women are responsible for most of the agriculture production they often have limited land ownership and less access to productive resources to improve yields.

Women have particular skills and knowledge when it comes to growing certain crops and food preservation, which can help combat reduced crop yields. In Palau, saltwater intrusion is decreasing taro yields so communities are planting saltwater resistant taro. Women are traditionally responsible for taro cultivation and their knowledge of the hydrology of taro patches, drainage and managing floods¹⁰ is critical.

Ocean warming as a result of climate change inhibits healthy coral growth, which along with coral bleaching has reduced fish stocks in the region. Most PICTs rely heavily on aquaculture for nutrition and income¹¹. Women are key stakeholders in fishery management yet their contributions are often unrecognised, as these are done for home consumption rather than economic gain¹².

68%

of all disasters are climate change related¹³.

300%

The increase in new domestic violence cases reported by the Tanna Women's Counselling Centre after two tropical cyclones hit Tafe Province in Vanuatu in 2011¹⁴.

12% to 15%

The expected increase in the intensity of tropical cyclones in the north-west Pacific with a 2% temperature increase¹⁵.

80%

of all land in Majuro atoll in the Republic of Marshall Islands could be vulnerable to erosion if the sea rises by 1m¹⁶.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Climate change, gender equality, and sustainable development are highly inter-related. Progress on achieving the MDGs in the Pacific region has been mixed, and major gender inequalities persist. A number of Post-2015 consultations have taken place to identify regional priorities, including: the urgent need to respond to the impact of climate change, global warming and ocean acidification; renewable, sustainable, safe and accessible energy; sustainable environmental management, particularly of oceans; and economic development¹⁷. A stated commitment to gender equality is also emerging in the region through consultation around the SDG process. Pacific governments have called a stand-alone goal for gender equality¹⁸ and the inclusion of a new target to focus on gender-based violence for SDGs¹⁹.

The formulation of new SDGs requires an understanding of the linkage between climate change, gender, and development in order to address underlying causes of inequality, poverty, hunger, under-employment, and ill health, and to develop resilience. Any forward-looking goals for the Pacific that aim to address climate change

need to take into account at every stage its impacts on men and women, and the ways in which both can contribute, to make adaptation more successful. In the same way, all efforts to address gender inequality will need to take into account the ways in which climate change will affect everyone including men, women, trans people, girls and boys as well as the needs of those in society that are already marginalised and disadvantaged on any grounds. A stand-alone goal that addresses the underlying reasons why women are more vulnerable to climate change will empower women to actively participate in adaptation efforts. Gender and climate change considerations must also be taken into account in formulating goals for a range of other issues, including health, sustainable environmental management, food security, and economic development.

UN Women's series of briefs on gender and climate change demonstrates the how imperative integrating gender considerations into the Post-2015 agenda is in order to adequately address climate change issues for men and women living in PICT communities.



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2 UN Women, 2014. Pacific Brief: UN Women's Position on the Post 2015 Stand Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality.

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17 Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), 2013. 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report. August 2013. P 45.

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Photos

Front Cover: Palau Women's Conference, 2013. Credit: UN Women/ Olivia Owen

Page 4: Honiara Floods, 2014. Credit: UNDSS/ Trent Inness

For more information please contact:

UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office
Level 3, Kadavu House
Victoria Parade
Suva, Fiji
asiapacific.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomenpacific