



**PACIFIC WOMEN**  
SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT



# Shifting the Power Coalition: Impact Assessment Report

November 2021



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## Introduction

In February 2016, Tropical Cyclone Winston tore through Fiji, leaving significant damage and dozens of deaths. In Fiji, the government's post-disaster needs assessment found that women and girls were among the most deeply affected by the disaster. Their reliance on informal sector work and subsistence economic activities, which were essential for the health and wellbeing of their families, meant that they had few resources necessary to withstand, and respond to the crisis. At the same time, humanitarian responses in the aftermath of the cyclone often missed the mark, failing to provide the specific types of support that women and girls needed. The year before, Tropical Cyclone Pam had similarly devastated Vanuatu, with similar impacts on women.

Feminists across the region recognized that simply treating women as victims was not the answer; with support, they asserted that women had the knowledge, skills and capacity to articulate their needs, lead disaster planning and increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of humanitarian action for women and girls. With the support of ActionAid Australia, feminist organizations from Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, came together to establish the Shifting the Power Coalition. Together they outlined a vision for collective advocacy, capacity building, and action.

The Shifting the Power Coalition increases women's leadership, including that of young women and women with disabilities, in disaster preparedness, response, and humanitarian action. It uses evidence about women's needs and capacities in times of crisis to shape policies and humanitarian responses at the local, national, and regional levels. It is the only regional alliance focused on **strengthening the collective power, influence, and leadership of diverse Pacific women** in responding to crises, including climate change and COVID-19. Its current members include ActionAid Australia, ActionAid Vanuatu, the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (Bougainville), the Pacific Disability Forum (Regional), Talitha Project (Tonga), Transcend Oceania (Regional), Vanuatu Young Women for Change, Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association, Vois Blong Mere (Solomon Islands), YWCA PNG, YWCA Samoa, and YWCA Solomon Islands.

In 2018, ActionAid Australia received support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program to support the Shifting the Power Coalition's advocacy, training, and disaster response work. The project had three key outcomes:

1. 200 diverse women leaders in six countries will have increased capacity to engage in local and national disaster coordination mechanisms and to organise and influence decision making.
2. Diverse women's needs and capacities in times of crises will be documented and contribute to evidence-based disaster planning and response at national and regional level.
3. Platforms will be established to strengthen diverse Pacific women's voices in regional humanitarian and disaster resilience forums and their influence on policy and decision making.

Throughout this work, the Shifting the Power Coalition and its members committed to put intersectional feminist approaches into practice, supporting the leadership of women with disabilities and young women.

This assessment documents some of the impacts of the Shifting the Power Coalition over the past three years and the extent to which they have made progress towards their outcomes. Specifically, the assessment aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the most significant changes that have occurred due to the work of the StPC to build the capacity of women leaders, including young women and women with disabilities, to engage in disaster planning and response?
- What elements of the coalition's work have made the biggest difference?
- How has the Shifting the Power Coalition's work to document women's needs in times of crisis influenced national OR regional disaster planning and response?
- What are the most significant changes that have occurred because of the StPC's advocacy and leadership in regional and global policy spaces?
- What strategies used by the StPC have been most effective in influencing regional and global policy spaces?

In addition, the assessment takes stock of the functioning of the coalition itself and the extent to which it has the capacities needed to effectively achieve its outcomes. Drawing on evidence about what makes advocacy coalitions effective, the assessment examines the Coalition's leadership and governance structures, adaptability, management, and technical competencies.

The evaluation questions were harvested through online surveys of StPC members and refined with input from the Coalition's staff and steering committee.

## Methods

The assessment relied on mixed qualitative research methodologies to draw its conclusions, including a review of key project documents including the proposal and progress reports; research and documentation prepared by the coalition and its members; observation of a reflection workshop among StPC members that looked back on the working of the Coalition since its founding; online surveys of StPC members and key informants; interviews; and a focus group discussion with young women who had participated in StPC trainings. Surveys and interview notes were coded, compiled, and analyzed by the consultant to identify key themes and recommendations.

Shannon Kowalski, Consultant



## Results

### Outcome 1: Building the capacity of women leaders, including young women and women with disabilities to engage in national disaster coordination mechanisms, organize, and influence decision-making

#### Key outcomes:

- 189 women, including 110 young women, in six countries have participated in national trainings.
- StPC members and partners have participated in 2 regional trainings of trainers in November 2018 and September 2019.
- 11 rapid emergency response grants, totaling AUD 180,000 have been provided to StPC Partners to support women's leadership in disaster response and address urgent humanitarian needs in their communities. These grants included women-led responses to measles in Samoa (1), TC Harold in Vanuatu, TC Yasa in Fiji, TC Tino and Sarai in Fiji, and COVID-19 in Fiji (2), PNG, Vanuatu, Samoa, and with people with disabilities at the regional level.

#### What capacity-building strategies are the most effective at driving impact?

The StPC's work to build the capacity of women leaders to engage in national disaster coordination mechanisms and influence decision making has been both its core focus and its area of greatest impact. The mix of training and opportunities for peer learning, advocacy dialogues with government officials and other humanitarian actors, documentation of women's experiences in times of crisis, and financial support in the form of rapid response grants and dedicated focal points, has given StPC member organizations the tools that they need to influence policies and shape humanitarian responses on the ground and at the national and regional levels. When asked which of these elements were most critical in driving change, StPC member organizations noted that **these capacity-building and strengthening strategies are mutually reinforcing and each of them would be less effective if implemented in isolation.**

**Regional trainings of trainers and convenings**, where members have had the opportunity to learn how to navigate and engage in complex and highly technical discussions on disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, learn from each other about how to influence and engage with national and regional mechanisms, and strategize together about how to address crises, have been critical to the effectiveness of the work. Some members emphasized that it was the regional convenings that gave them the confidence to step up and lead at the national level. Others mentioned how innovations that were pioneered in one country, like Women's Weather Watch in Fiji, a woman-led early warning system, have now been implemented in other countries, like Vanuatu (Woman Wetem Weta) and Papua New Guinea (Meri Gat Infomesen). For others, the opportunities to take regional-level learnings to the community level and back up again has been transformative.

*With StPC they have built up that capacity on my end to be a leader and to be recognized to have a voice on the decision-making leadership team. With the StPC, with all the workshops we've been promoting and advocating on, the government has recognized us as leading a feminist approach to disasters. – StPC Member*

*I feel that we, as a local practitioners or individuals on the ground are able to engage at the regional level and having that platform to learn from others, and have them learn from us. Being part of this regional network is a big thing... That makes us be stronger advocates – we tend to understand the regional level and, bringing the national and community-based concerns, we are able to shape regional spaces. – StPC Member*

A significant impact of the StPC's work comes from the fact that it does not simply operate at a regional level: it **systematically takes regional learning and best practice down to the ground**. Its members have been intentional about translating their knowledge into information that is accessible and understandable to decision-makers and community actors alike and using it to transform community-led and national disaster preparedness and responses so that they are truly responsive to the needs of women on the ground. One member noted that a factor that has shaped their ability to lead gender-transformative disaster responses has been “the importance of localizing information to people in communities so they better understand what information is about – learning from them and hearing their voices and their realities on the ground as people living with disabilities and the needs that they have.”

The commitment to **localization**, “not just localizing the institutions, but recognizing the capability and capacity of Pacific women to lead and implement” as one StPC member noted, has been a key driver of the changes that the coalition and its members have spurred. It has been intentional and built into the design from the beginning:

*When we all formed this coalition, we tabled our thoughts and had discussions around the areas where our programs should be nationally sensitive and focused: everything should be adaptable to our own national standards and language. Therefore, it is indigenous – it's great that the programs have been adaptable to our own approach. – StPC Member*

The strategies to localize the work have been multiple, but one of the key elements has been **national-level trainings of trainers**, who then take their learning and strategies for humanitarian action back to the community level. A good example of this comes from the work that StPC members have done to ensure disability-inclusive disaster preparedness and response in Fiji. One member in Fiji noted that being able to have the first national-level training of women with disabilities was a milestone, that has since translated into tangible changes in their ability to lead responses on the ground.

*The preparation of our branches, knowing what to be aware of, learning the different weather updates has been important. With Winston when they mentioned category 1, 2 3 – all that type of jargon was not really understandable at the community level, they didn't understand how powerful it was. StPC training helped to unpack the terminology and help them understand what it means. This explanation guided the community-based members to understand and then able to respond. – StPC member*

Now, much of the immediate preparations, needs assessment and mobilization for people with disabilities in the wake of disaster, whether it is TC Harold or COVID-19, is being led by local women leaders, many with disabilities themselves, who then coordinate with those at the district and national level to ensure their needs are heard by decision-makers and met.

With additional support via the DFAT supported Australia-Pacific Climate Partnership, the Coalition was able to secure dedicated resources to support **training of young women** and this has enabled them to mobilize and determine their priorities to engage in climate change advocacy, as well as disaster preparedness and response. In countries where training of young

women has been implemented, young women who have participated in them have described having their eyes opened, feeling empowered, and driven to advocate for, and implement programs that will improve the preparedness and resilience of their communities in the face of disaster.

*Going through these StPC workshops made me realize, sometimes you don't need the whole community, or whole country, you just need a small group of people with the same passion to make a difference. Women, we can always make a change – we can achieve something on our own. That's the beauty of it for me. – Participant, National training*

In Fiji and Tonga, StPC members described how giving young women the power of knowledge has also shifted power within local communities, challenged patriarchal and traditional gender norms, and shown that young women can lead.

*One of the most significant moments, being with StPC from April 2020, was going to visit the Fiji Met office because we took a rural young woman into that space as well, and that shifted the power in that village. We took her in that space and she took it back to the village, showing them the apps that they could use before and during disasters. When we go back and visit their village, they talk about during TC Yasa the traditional knowledge and the climate science is working together. The older generation were saying that they think a cyclone is coming – the younger generation goes with their phones to verify whether it's true what their traditional leaders are saying. Both parties are now listening to each other. Now they are able to prepare earlier, using both climate science knowledge and traditional knowledge. – StPC Member*

This story demonstrates again, how the mix of capacity building of women, including young and disabled women to lead, the deep commitment to localization, and ongoing mentoring and support, which has been built into the model of the StPC from the beginning, is driving change. The ability of the coalition and members to sustain young women's engagement in the work was raised as a concern by a number of members and informants, however, and specific strategies may be needed to ensure that young women have clear opportunities to participate in advocacy and other activities moving forward.

Building capacity and leadership has little impact if feminist leaders do not have the resources to be able to respond to crises when they arise. The **rapid emergency response grants** have enabled members to implement ground-breaking women-led responses, including by carrying out rapid assessments, feeding information back to provincial and national leaders, and meeting the immediate needs of communities. StPC members and key informants have deeply valued the flexible funding to address gaps in responses and to strengthen their capacity to lead.

In Fiji, for example, one member reported:

*The rapid response grant has benefited close to 100 women and girls with disabilities, with relief during Harold and TC Yasa. This support has assisted women and girls with disabilities, including their families and carers with food rations, dignity packs, and covid-relief supports. Included a few extra items needed by women and young women with disabilities, like adult and children's diapers, for those needing those items.... We were thankful that the funding was flexible in terms of involving volunteers – our volunteers were able to work alongside us in implementing the distribution.*

In doing so, members of the StPC have also been able to build their reputations as humanitarian actors that are leading effective, transformative, and feminist responses on the ground.



As one member noted:

*The emergency response grants have been instrumental in being able to address the immediate needs and unfunded work that women need to do to save lives on the ground. For example, the Samoa measles response was crucial to understand women's issues, to influence the Ministry of Health and create awareness on the importance of vaccines. It was critical to give immediate relief to communities during Tropical Cyclone Yasa and Tropical Cyclone Harold. In Vanuatu, Young Women for Change had no money to give their constituencies for relief... it makes a huge difference, especially when they are in very dire situations."*

Another member noted that the financial support from the StPC enables them to stand on their own and lead when there is a crisis: *We don't do just what we can do, what we're trained to do, when disaster happens. That is why it's important to have these emergency grants to support the advocacy, to support what we do, to make an impression on people – we make a promise to come back – it's our follow up.*

As an indicator of the impact of these grants, StPC members in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea have been able to secure separate humanitarian funding to scale up women-led response efforts by working together with other Coalition members and with the support of ActionAid.

The grants also help StPC members to ensure that women's needs and priorities are integrated into longer term recovery strategies. One key strategy that has been funded through the grants is work to **document women's experiences in the face of crises**, in order to influence and shape gender-transformative responses.

*With the support that StPC has given us through rapid response grant, it helped us to get the narrative from the remote villages to the national places to ensure that the recovery plan integrates the voices of women and women with disabilities in all the thematic areas. – StPC member*

The documentation of women's experiences during the Samoa measles crisis, and the rapid assessments in the face of TC Harold and Yasa in Fiji and Vanuatu, have provided powerful tools to drive advocacy and change. In Samoa, the Ministry of Health has drawn on this work to improve its COVID-19 response. In Fiji and Vanuatu, members have used the assessments to advocate for improvements in disaster preparedness and responses, including for women with disabilities.

*We collected stories from women and girls with disabilities in pre- and post-disaster, the report findings are our advocacy tool. – StPC Member*

These skills are also being used at the local level, to monitor responses, and advocate for change:

*Local advocacy has made a difference because the women human rights defenders are encouraged to do what they are doing to improve their lives, their families, and community as a whole. When the monitoring is done, we can tell that they are making use of the training received. They are using the concepts and the skills. – StPC Member*

The rapid emergency response grants, while key, have sometimes not been able to meet needs identified by members. For example, TC Yasa caused heavy rainfall in Samoa, leading to extensive flooding. Yet, because the Samoan government had not called a national emergency, partners in the country were not able to meet the eligibility criteria for a grant or respond to local

needs. The StPC may want to continue to consider greater flexibility in the criteria for emergencies.

Beyond emergency funding, the StPC has also recognized that to have long-term impact, **its members need financial support to sustain national-level engagement** and replicate the kind of coalition-building work that is happening on the regional level at the country level. Responding to the needs articulated by members, in 2020 the StPC established and funded national focal points in each of the countries. It also established a regional hub in Fiji in 2021, to cement the leadership of Pacific women, ensure closer coordination among coalition partners, and increase the ability to engage with regional partners based in the country.

*StPC has given us more financial stability for us to create and make sure we have a wide network so that we can work and stand on our own when it comes to disasters. – StPC member*

*[Our organization] does not have core fund to run its activities, women and girls with disabilities are always left out. But with the STPC they are coming out to speak up for themselves. - StPC member*

The support has helped to institutionalize women's leadership in humanitarian spaces, setting the grounds needed to for sustained impact. Many partners pointed to the fact that having a **strong regional hub and leaders** to support their work at the national level was a key factor of their success.

Although not an explicit capacity-building strategy, the **solidarity** that has been built between the organizations within the Coalition has been a significant contributor to the strength and influence of the Coalition. Simply knowing that there are organizations that are facing similar challenges, doing similar work, and who are willing to share lessons, resources and strategies has been an important motivating factor for organizations within the StPC.

*I believe our joint voices has strengthened our network and collaboration. There is a certain relief that we are facing the same issues in regards to climate change, et cetera, and overcoming them in our own unique way. – StPC member*

*It provides the opportunities to share from each national hub how they do things, why do them, what [they are doing] and applying practically the learnings within our context. How [it is] important to shift powers from the normal or usual way to make it more appropriate and relevant. – StPC Member*

*It is a really valuable thing, to be able to talk, find out what's happening in other countries, see some of the challenges, and have the opportunity to provide support and solidarity to each other. – StPC member*

Finally, a number of members pointed to the fact that being part of a regional coalition, having the backing of a strong regional hub and technical support from organizations like ActionAid Australia has increased their credibility and influence at the national level.

*It increased our influence at the national level, made our movement stronger. It has a great reputation with our national governments and has given support in safe ways for our young women and girls to experience the work on the ground and to be leaders, and to work with leaders of the country. – StPC member*

## What are some of the most significant changes brought by the capacity-building work?

The work of the StPC has led to significant change on many levels, from increasing individual empowerment to shifting the power within communities and at the national and regional levels as feminists step up to lead humanitarian action. However, three broad and overarching changes have occurred as a result of the coalition's capacity-building work.

First, the StPC has increased the role, visibility and influence of women in disaster planning. StPC members and key informants noted:

- Greater awareness among the humanitarian community of the strength of women's movements, particularly in remote and rural areas;
- More women, including young women and women with disabilities, speaking up and taking leadership in gender and disaster coordination spaces and participating in decision making. In Vanuatu and Fiji, for example, coalition members have played a key role in advocating for specific bodies within national emergency operations centers that respond specifically to the needs of people with disabilities. And most importantly, women with disabilities at the community level are playing a key role in leading local responses, identifying the needs of their community, and advocating for them to be met.
- Increased visibility and recognition of the expertise and leadership of coalition members at the national and regional levels. Many members described being recognized for their work leading feminist responses and being asked by national and regional humanitarian actors and government ministries to partner with them, participate in coalitions, or take leadership roles; and
- National and regional policies and programs that reflect women's priorities, such as Vanuatu's establishment of a pillar on the role and leadership of women in disaster preparedness, planning and response in the new Gender Equality Policy 2020 - 2030 and Provincial Plans on Gender Equality, the outcomes of Pacific Resilience Meetings, and the Pacific Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Second, the StPC has demonstrated that when Pacific women are supported with technical knowledge and resources, they can lead responses. The Coalition's work has contributed to:

- The first women-led response to TC Harold in Vanuatu, which ensured that the needs of women, including women with disabilities on the ground, were heard and responded to.
- Women-led preparedness efforts and responses to TC Yasa in Fiji, which documented diverse women's needs and helped to provide immediate relief to communities affected; and
- Women-led COVID-19 responses in Fiji, PNG, including Bougainville, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu that are contributing to increased awareness within communities and support for vaccinations.

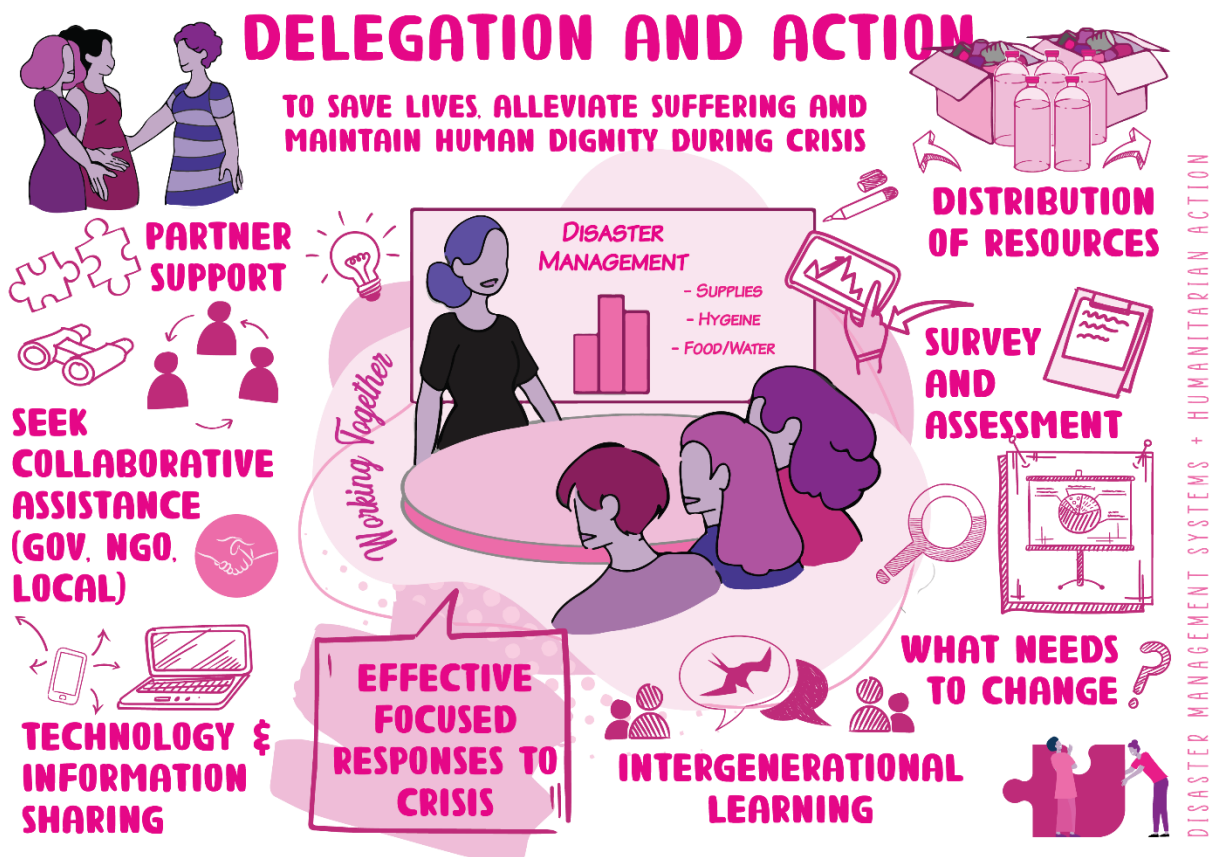
Third, the StPC has transformed the work of its member organizations, building a strong basis from which to ensure continued change in the long-term.

- It has prompted feminist organizations to be more intentional about including women with disabilities and young women in their work.
- It has encouraged organizations led by people with disabilities to address more specifically the needs of women with disabilities in their work and ensure that their programs and advocacy are gender responsive. For some of them, it has influenced efforts to better address the needs of young women with disabilities.
- Some StPC members have taken on new areas of work, such as climate change. In Samoa and Solomon Islands, for example, taking on climate change has opened up new interest among young women to engage in advocacy on the issue through the YWCA:

*This is the most interesting topic – it has gained their interest... the generalized and gender approach to climate change by StPC is unique. Not many programs have that. – StPC member*

- It has spurred some members to adapt and implement programs pioneered by their peers in their own countries, like the adaptation of Women’s Weather Watch in Fiji to the Solomon Islands and Woman Wetem Weta in Vanuatu.

The **stories of impact** at the end of this report describe in more detail five of the most significant changes that members and informants attributed to the StPC. These include: the first women-led response to Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu; putting intersectionality into action through support for the leadership of women with disabilities; empowering young women to lead in Papua New Guinea; responding to health emergencies in Samoa; and young women working in partnership with the Tongan government to lead in disaster preparedness.



## Outcome 2: Documentation of women’s needs and capacities in times of crisis and its use for advocacy

### Key Outcomes:

- The StPC published the report [Mobilising Women’s Leadership: Solutions for Protection and Recovery in a Time of COVID-19 and TC Harold](#) and an accompanying [advocacy brief](#).
- Rapid assessments were conducted after TC Yasa in Vanuatu and TC Harold in Fiji, which helped to document women’s needs in times of crisis.
- The woman-led assessment of the measles response in Samoa has helped to better inform the national response to COVID-19.
- The StPC has brought attention to Pacific Island women’s leadership in localization through a [case study](#) that draws attention to the way in which women leaders are navigating through traditional structures and cultural barriers. This case study was prepared in the context of the implementation of Grand Bargain commitments—an agreement among the 50 biggest donors and aid providers to get more aid into the hands of people who need it—and the Generation Equality Forum process.

StPC members and key informants were asked to give their views on how the StPC’s documentation work has influenced national and regional disaster planning and humanitarian responses. As one member noted, research and documentation are a critical strategy because it helps build the narrative around women’s work in this space and their capacity to lead:

*One thing that we lack is our own stories and narratives, and the StPC is contributing to changing this, so that the narratives of Pacific women are heard. Sometimes studies are not always representative of what Pacific women need. We need to listen to Pacific women. When we sat with technical experts in countries, they were saying that this information is so rich and undocumented. We are bringing to surface the knowledge of Pacific women.*

The regional hub and members have contributed to research and documentation of women’s needs in crisis situation in a number of ways. At the regional level, they have produced the report *Mobilizing Women’s Leadership in Response to COVID-19 and TC Harold*, along with an accompanying advocacy brief, which documents the work that StPC members have undertaken to address the dual crises, what Pacific Women say that they need in terms of support, and makes recommendations for action.

In addition, as noted above, StPC members have led rapid assessments after TC Harold and Yasa, and a gender assessment of the measles epidemic in Samoa. In Bougainville, a COVID-19 assessment is in the process of being implemented. This work has had important impacts:

- The rapid assessments after TC Yasa and Harold helped to determine what was needed to support women and girls at the community level, including those with disabilities and ensure inclusive responses.
- The survey on the measles pandemic in Samoa helped to increase understanding about women’s realities, concerns and needs, especially those of young and single mothers and is now shaping the COVID-19 response in the country.
- In Vanuatu, the evidence generated by coalition members through their TC Harold assessment helped to inform a pillar in the country’s gender equality policy 2020-2030 on the role and leadership of women in disaster preparedness, planning and response.

In addition, StPC members and other key informants noted that supporting communities to better communicate their needs has translated into faster and more appropriate responses. Further, the ability to gather data about what is happening at the community level has increased the credibility and recognition of StPC members, expanding their opportunities to drive changes in humanitarian action, as well as disaster preparedness policies and strategies.

At the regional level, evidence generated by the StPC Coalition has helped to shape the Pacific Action Plan of the UNDRR, as well as the outcomes of the second Pacific Resilience Meeting. Despite the importance of this work, this is one area that was less known by key informants, pointing to the need for stronger strategies for dissemination.



### Outcome 3: Platforms to strengthen diverse Pacific women’s influence in regional humanitarian and disaster resilience spaces

#### Key Outcomes:

- A regional hub was established in Fiji, staffed by a Regional Manager and a Regional Young Women Focal Point.
- 9 national focal points were established in 6 countries.
- 2 gender and disability rights focal points were established in Fiji and Vanuatu
- StPC members participated in and helped shape the outcomes of key regional meetings, including the first and second Pacific Resilience Meetings and the Pacific Triennial, and participated in the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster.

Across the board, informants pointed to the greater visibility of diverse women leaders at the regional level, particularly in key forums like the Pacific Resilience Meeting and the Pacific Triennial, both key forums for regional-level policy making and strategy setting on disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action. One key informant noted:

*The engagement of women has created a movement which means that humanitarian action does not work effectively unless there is genuine co-working relationships and partnerships. Instead of lip service to women and young people's engagement, it has become a 'non-negotiable.'*

Another recognized that greater engagement of young women and women with disabilities in particular in these spaces, including “more opportunities to speak during conferences and these influence the planning.”

StPC members noted that their strength is bringing the perspectives and experiences of women on the ground to these forums, which can be a powerful reminder of the need to include them meaningfully in shaping and implementing policies and humanitarian responses:

*We have opportunities to be at different events – regional and international events. We're able to sit in panels and contribute effectively and talk about our lived realities, which are mostly different from others, on the other side of the globe. We are connecting and linking voices to the national and regional spaces. – StPC Member*

*What we have been able to do is show the need to be at the table, that we need to bring the local and national experiences, and we need to be at the regional table. – StPC Member*

As an indicator of the recognition of their power, StPC was asked to organize a learning lab, which focused on promoting Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to support Women's Leadership and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action. The lab featured the experiences of StPC leaders from the region.

As a result, they are beginning to change the narrative:

*When ActionAid Australia first did that kind of landscape survey on women's participation in decision-making on disaster risk reduction and in the humanitarian space, it was clear in the convening spaces that women were seen as beneficiaries, vulnerable. My experience of engaging in these regional meetings was that it was overwhelmingly technical. To even try to talk about accountability to gender equality let alone women's rights was not possible. That space was not there. As we tracked commitments in terms of regional commitments, gender was not being infused into these regional processes. It was clear we needed to learn - it was not just the rapid response or the care-giving work, but if we wanted to influence the practice, we had to learn about the politics of disaster management and how that works; politics of humanitarian action, cluster system, and how do we hold them accountable to women's rights commitments. – StPC member*

Through their learning about how to navigate these spaces and their sustained engagement within them, they have begun to impact policies and decision-making at the regional level. In particular, the StPC has:

- Contributed to the Asia Pacific Action Plan of UNDRR and ensured gender was mainstreamed throughout.
- Shaped the outcomes of the Pacific Resilience Meetings. While the first acknowledged the importance of addressing gender equality and ensuring gender-responsive approaches to disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, the outcomes of the second meeting reflected a much deeper commitment to addressing gender and the

needs of young women and women with disabilities in their climate change and disaster risk reduction plans and strategies, and in humanitarian action. While women are still referred to as being vulnerable to multiple crises, there is a much stronger focus on strengthening diverse women's leadership, addressing and dismantling gender bias, and building on and strengthening local women-led responses, among other key advocacy priorities of the coalition.

- Influenced the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Compact as a key outcome of the Generation Equality Forum at the global level, drawing on the knowledge and experience of StPC members.

Despite their positive influence at the regional level, the StPC needs to continue to do work to **build awareness about the Coalition itself and its work** within disaster risk reduction and humanitarian spaces. Some key informants that were contacted during the assessment noted that while they saw some greater engagement of women's groups and influence in national- and regional policy-making spaces, they were not familiar enough with the StPC's work to be able to share perspectives about it or how that contributed to some of the changes that they did see.

Finally, while the work of the StPC has increased awareness of the strength and importance of engaging with women's movements among humanitarian actors at the regional level, key informants stressed the **need for continued and ongoing engagement**. One pointed to continued barriers, such as the perception that humanitarian spaces were no place for women: *"Many people still believe that DRR is for men, that women have to stay home."*

A key informant noted that more needed to be done to actually shift the power from government leaders and donors to women: *Power still rests within donor agencies, within governments - gender and protection still gets the least amount of funding in humanitarian response. Finally, another urged continued networking and coalition building: "increased alliances across CSOs and UN and donor partners are needed so that members of the Coalition are visible and non-negotiable."*



## How does the Shifting the Power Coalition meet criteria for an effective coalition?

### Key outcomes:

- The StPC has an established **governance structure**, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the Steering Committee, Secretariat, Regional Hub and partnership organizations, set out in a partnership agreement.
- The StPC has a clearly defined **vision** for their work and **values** that guide it, as outlined in their Partnership Principles and which are understood and embraced by member organizations.
- The StPC has been able **to adapt effectively** to respond to the needs of partners and to changing contexts, including COVID-19.
- StPC members feel that they have **ownership over, and can shape the work** of the Coalition, although more needs to be done to effectively integrate newer members.
- The StPC has strong **technical strength**, which comes from both the diversity of its membership, and its intentional focus on ongoing learning and capacity building.
- The StPC actively attends to **differences in power** and takes steps to address them.

### Feminist Movement Building

There is a growing body of evidence about how feminist movements drive change on gender equality and women's rights. Five factors are critical: the presence of autonomous and independent feminist organizations and movements; coalitions that bring together feminist organizations around a common vision and set of values; funding that is adaptable, sustainable and long-term and which enables feminist organizations to set their own priorities and act upon them; the ability of women's organizations and movements to build alliances with other sectors and movements in order to advocate for change; and that their work includes consciousness raising, rights training, and building solidarity among women.<sup>1</sup> The outcomes described in the previous section demonstrate how by bringing together diverse and independent organizations around a common vision, being intentional about joint and peer learning and creating regional solidarity, and being responsive to national and regional priorities and needs, this coalition is contributing to feminist movement building within the Pacific. As long as the Coalition and its members have sustained, flexible funding that enables them to continue to adapt and be responsive to needs and opportunities on the ground and at the regional level, the Shifting the Power Coalition should be powerfully positioned to help drive change.

There are some key features of the Coalition that make it unique at the regional level, and which have contributed to their impact. The first is their commitment to feminism and putting intersectional and intergenerational feminist principles and practices into action through their work. The second is their commitment to localization and ensuring that national and grassroots organizations and women at the community level have the power to be able to influence policies, programs, and humanitarian responses that impact their lives, health, and wellbeing. This commitment to localization is reinforced through the structure of the coalition, which clearly centers Pacific Women's leadership through the establishment of regional and national hubs. The combination of the commitment to intersectional feminism and localization has helped to establish their authenticity and build trust in their leadership.

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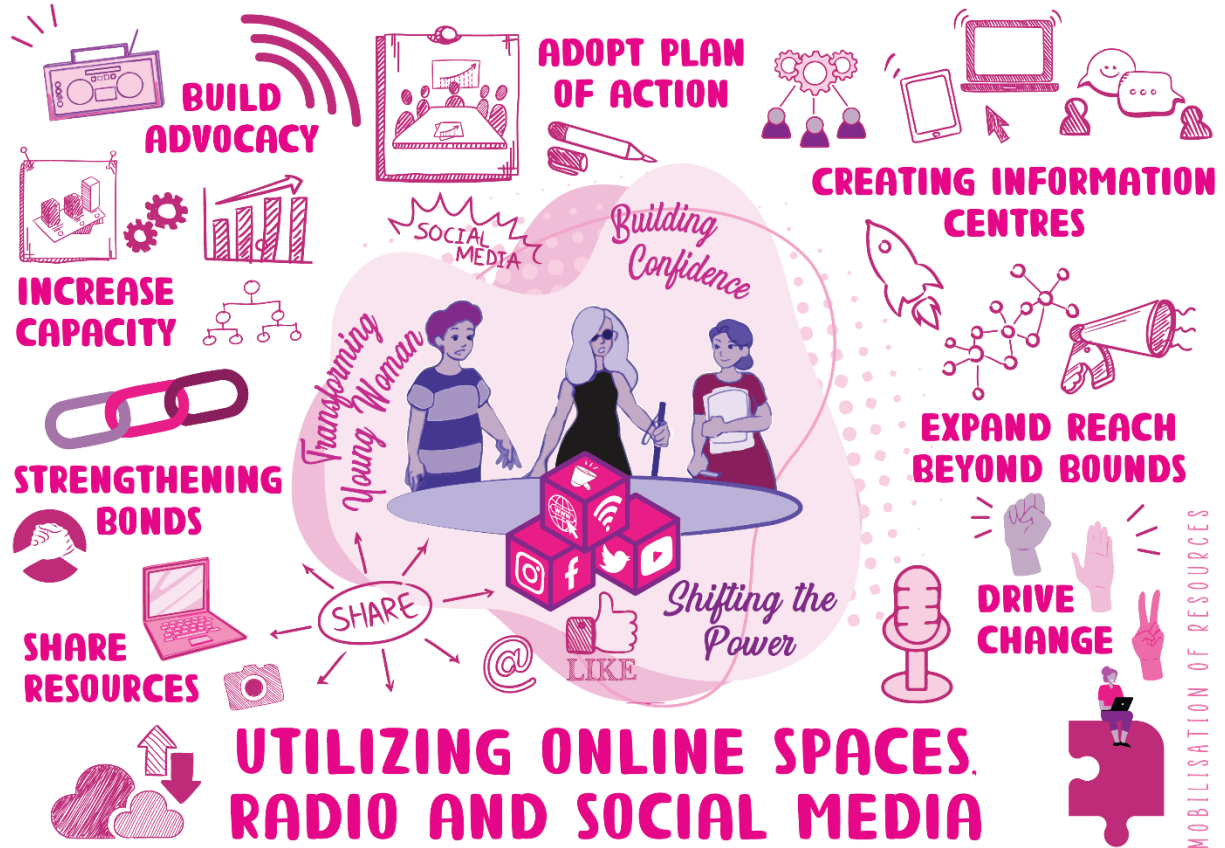
<sup>1</sup> Maya Lorey, A Literature Review on the Effectiveness of Feminist Movements and How to Support Them, June 2019 (Unpublished, on file with Author).

## The Shifting the Power Coalition's Partnership Principles

StPC is building an inclusive, feminist model of partnership and collaboration. This requires listening to diverse women's voices and creating safe, intergenerational spaces in which to learn and develop together. The Coalition helps women get the resources they need—including the time and space to meet and the funding to drive their own priorities—to participate, deliberate, design, and deliver what works for women and their local communities.

Our Feminist Partnership Principles are:

- Feminist collaboration – listening to, and learning from, one another
- Diversity – leading to new values and perspectives
- Equity – leading to respect
- Openness – leading to trust
- Mutual benefit – leading to commitment
- Courage – leading to innovation



## Creating an effective coalition

Beyond the evidence about what makes feminist movements effective, there is a growing body of literature about what makes coalitions effective. This often centers on three factors: the capacity of members of a coalition to be good coalition members; the capacities within the coalition itself; and the impact that they have.<sup>2</sup>

The capacities of good coalition members include the skills and knowledge to be able to work collaboratively; a demonstrated commitment to the coalition; the ability to articulate what they contribute to the coalition, as well as why they participate in it and what they need from it; a willingness to share power and resources and speak as one; a willingness to explore alternative ideas and approaches; and a willingness to dedicate staff to participate at a high enough level to make decisions and to implement tasks, among other factors.

Coalition members who participated in the reflection workshops, participated in interviews or completed online surveys were able to clearly articulate what the Shifting the Power coalition aimed to do, what motivated their organization to be a part of the coalition, how it benefitted them and their work, what values they shared, and their commitment to learning together and implementing collaborative work.

*We needed women's voices in space that matters, a seat at the table and [to] redesign the table to fit our agenda and address our solution [to] the ongoing issues [we] face before, during and after a crisis. – StPC member*

*Making a difference in the community, knowing that we can add value to our people during times of crisis. – StPC member*

As discussed previously, many of the organizations that are part of the StPC had made changes to their own work in order to better align with the Coalition's priorities and focus areas, either taking on new issues or implementing new programs and/or areas of work, demonstrating a commitment to collaborative learning and joint action.

One newer coalition member articulated a need to be better integrated into the coalition's work, which had been challenging due to the impact of COVID as well as the difficulties of participating actively in online spaces while facing technological challenges and bandwidth issues. Another coalition member expressed some differences in overall alignment between her organization's work and the work of the coalition, but nonetheless saw the value of the coalition's focus and approaches. Her organization was able to take forward coalition efforts to respond to COVID and increase the leadership of young women in disaster preparedness, despite having different organizational priorities. Moving forward, if the StPC expands, it will need to develop intentional strategies to effectively onboard new coalition members, strengthen alignment of vision and goals, build trust and solidarity, and integrate them into work.

When it came to effectiveness of the coalition itself, this assessment focused on four key capacities—leadership and governance, adaptability, management, and technical skills—as well as some key cultural capacities that contribute to overall effectiveness and impact.

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<sup>2</sup> Jarod Raynor, *What Makes a Coalition Effective? Evidence-Based Indicators of Success*, Los Angeles: The TCC Group, March 2011.

**On leadership and governance**, the coalition has a clearly stated goal that members understand and can articulate, as well as shared values and principles that guide its work. As one member noted, *“We are shifting the power together as strong women leaders and are also building capacity to our upcoming young women to take up leadership roles in disaster and humanitarian action and not leaving no one behind.”* Members and key informants noted that it has a clear value proposition—advancing Pacific women’s leadership in humanitarian action—that does not duplicate the work of other coalitions in the region, and which motivates member organizations to engage and a focus on action with clear strategies for driving change. One key informant noted that “the strategic nature of the networks and providing and sharing information that would not otherwise be available were it not for the network” was a clear contributor to its impact. This value proposition, and the principles that drive the work of the coalition, are

The Coalition has a strong **leadership team**, comprised of the steering committee and a regional manager, with ActionAid Australia serving as secretariat. The leadership of and support provided by the Regional Manager and the secretariat to coalition partners is recognized not only by coalition members, but also by key informants.

As mentioned above, the Coalition is deeply committed to strengthening diverse Pacific women’s leadership and its own leadership structures represent this. The steering committee, for example, includes young women, a representative of women with disabilities, and is primarily comprised of women from the region, and is the primary oversight and decision-making body. The establishment of the Regional Hub in April 2021 further demonstrates a commitment to building that Pacific Women’s leadership and ensures that the Coalition is better positioned to engage in regional-level processes and with regional-level organizations.

While an Australian organization, ActionAid Australia, acts as the secretariat, respondents noted that it has worked to ensure that its engagement strengthens Pacific women’s leadership, rather than undermines it. For example, they helped to support initial meetings to explore the potential for a coalition with regional organizations in response to a need that Pacific women themselves identified, before specific funding was available for the work through DFAT’s Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative. This has helped to ensure that every aspect of the Coalition’s work, from its vision, goals, and partnership principles to its activities, were co-created with diverse Pacific women and their organizations in the lead. Further, many appreciated that the secretariat carries much of the administrative burden for the coalition, including fundraising, reporting and interfacing with donors, which many if its members, with limited resources and capacity, would otherwise struggle with.

The **management capabilities** of the coalition are strong on most fronts. It engages members meaningfully in the work, evidenced by the depth of collaboration between members, the implementation of joint projects and advocacy. It has frequent and purposeful meetings, and clear channels for communication with members. The development of regional and national focal points, including disability and gender focal points and young women focal points, has helped to increase management capacity and ability to implement the coalition’s work at both the regional and country levels. While most members seemed to have a clear sense of their responsibilities and tasks, **some articulated a need for greater clarity**. One need expressed by members was clarification of the roles of focal points and support them to take leadership of national responses. Similarly, **young women** who were engaged **expressed a desire to take more responsibility and ownership** over their work.

Coalition members recognized that the coalition was able **to adapt effectively to changes in the advocacy and policy environment**. Many pointed to the ways that the coalition was able to shift in response to COVID-19, by transitioning its work online and providing support for members to engage through virtual meetings and trainings, while taking steps to ensure that they could accommodate and address the needs of members with disabilities. Coalition members also described how ongoing evaluation and learning was built into the culture of the coalition, which led to changes in strategies to respond to needs on its members. One example that coalition members provided was the use of monthly surveys, which allowed them to provide feedback and address challenges and gaps. Another example was the Coalition's use of reflection meetings and other means to assess their work and shift course as needed. The establishment of gender and disability focal points, in response to the need articulated by member organizations representing people with disabilities, was cited as another example of the Coalition's willingness and ability to adapt.

One of the key advantages of the coalition is its **technical strength**. The commitment to establishing a culture of learning and creating ongoing training opportunities at the regional and national levels has contributed to the development of a range of skills among its members, including the ability to navigate and engage in complex and highly technical and political humanitarian spaces, implement gender assessments, and advocate with decision makers. At the same time, members have been generous in sharing their expertise with their peers. Many members described how they had learned how to better respond to and address women with disabilities within their organization's work because of the expertise brought to the table by organizations of people with disabilities and their willingness to share it.

The **diversity of its membership** contributes significantly to its technical strength as different partners—whether they are young women focused organizations, peacebuilding organizations, organizations of people with disabilities, or international organizations—bring diverse expertise, experience, and capacities. Some members recommended further diversifying the membership of the coalition to include greater representation of LGBTQ+ organizations, recognizing that the needs of the LGBTQ+ community are often not met by humanitarian responses. Some also recommended expanding the coalition to include countries and organizations in the Northern Pacific.

The **technical support** provided by ActionAid Australia has been particularly valuable, coaching members to conduct rapid assessments and contribute to shaping national disaster responses. The policy and advocacy expertise within its membership is also particularly strong—its leaders are well positioned to influence regional spaces and bring the expertise of local partners to bear, while its national members bring expertise about what is happening on the ground and have been able to position themselves as experts and drivers of change within national responses. For young women, the **exposure to leaders from throughout the region** has been particularly powerful and inspiring.

*At the regional level, the value of the coalition means I can take all of those learnings into my interventions with the different regional stakeholders and explain in the context of Vanuatu, or Bougainville this is what it means, so that they do not homogenize women. I can demonstrate the ways in which financing has got to get to women. – StPC Regional Manager*

The coalition has proven effective in advocating for and raising resources that do not compete with those sought by its members, but which strengthen financing for the coalition as a whole and gets additional funding into the hands of its members. A number of members also mentioned that the credibility that comes with them being a part of the Shifting the Power Coalition has helped them to attract and raise new resources and develop new partnerships on their own.

Finally, members described a real sense of **ownership over the work of the coalition** and a **culture that fostered trust, respect and the ability to share different perspectives**. They described how they have been able to shape the priorities of the coalition, from the inception workshops to the present, including by participating the development of coalition strategies and plans, participating in monthly meetings, and voicing the needs of their constituencies and communities.

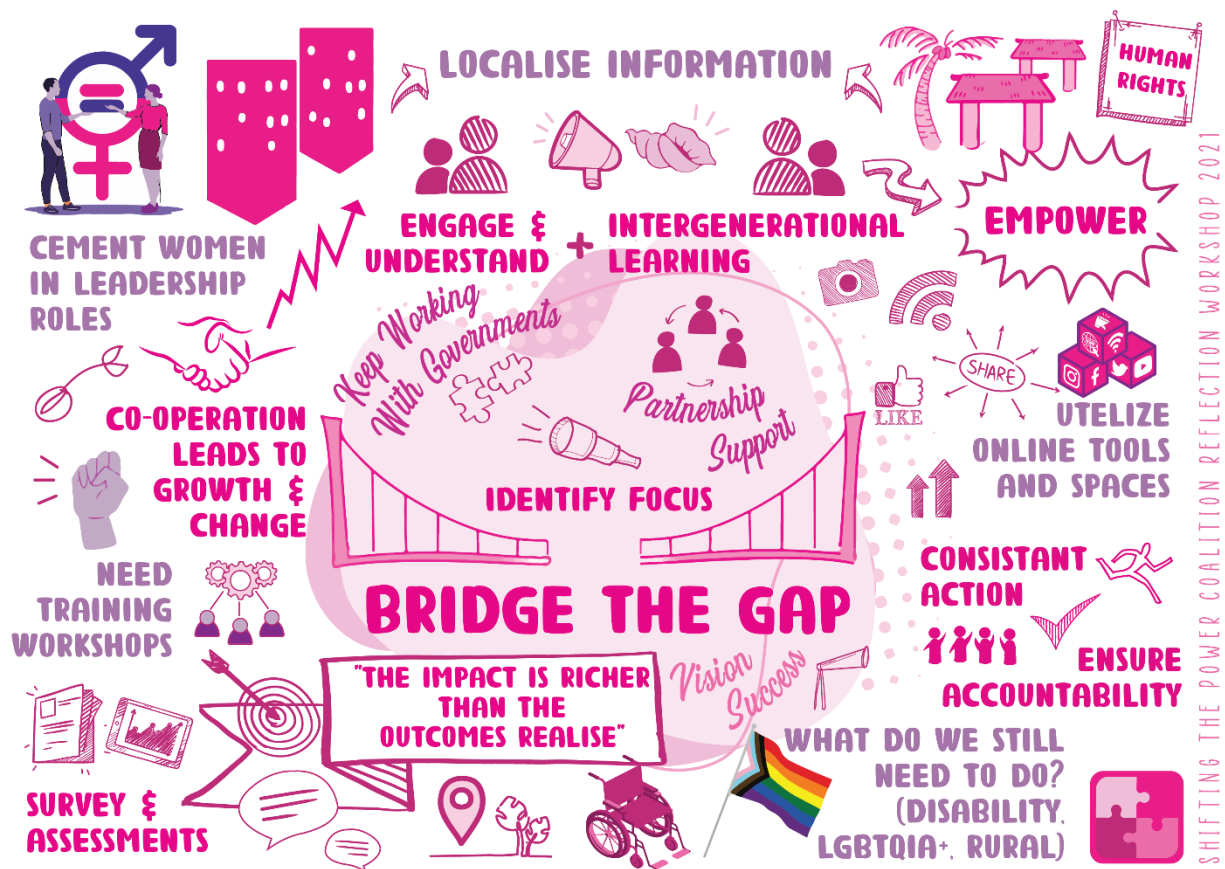
Finally, coalition members noted the intent with which the coalition paid attention to differences in power and took active steps to address them:

*It is really driven by the feminist principles. We wanted to make sure we were being very intentional. Getting teams to unpack that in their mind has been a process, it has been an attitude and a practice. – StPC member*

Some ways that the coalition has done this have included ensuring that young women had roles within the Steering Committee and the opportunity to serve as national focal points and being intentional about ensuring that women with disabilities had accommodations to participate on an equitable basis in the Coalition's meetings and work.

Overall, the coalition meets the criteria for an effective coalition. To ensure its longer-term success, it will need to develop strategies for onboarding new coalition members and strengthening the infrastructure of the coalition so that members have the resources to be able to effectively engage in its work. StPC members also recommended further diversifying the membership of the organization to include other countries, particularly in the Northern Pacific, and more national level organizations of people with disabilities.

## Recommendations



### For the Shifting the Power Coalition:

- **Expand opportunities for peer learning:** Much of the strength of the StPC comes from the opportunities it has created for Pacific women to define their own vision for inclusive women's leadership in humanitarian action and learn from each other about how to approach it from their own work. The Coalition should:
  - continue to create opportunities for peer learning, sharing and storytelling to build solidarity and shared feminist narratives, particularly through regional convenings and trainings of trainers; and
  - continue to support members to document their work and impact.
- **Increase recognition of the StPC:** While women's increased involvement and influence in regional and national spaces was recognized by key informants, the specific work of the coalition was often less known or understood by external stakeholders.
  - Enhance coalition visibility within regional processes by strengthening relationships with key regional and international organizations, including UN Women, UNDRR, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and the Pacific Community, among others.
  - Organize events and workshops with peers and decision makers at the regional and/or national levels to share learning from the work of the Coalition and demonstrate the power of feminist movements in humanitarian spaces.
  - Continue to document and promote women's needs in times of crisis to support advocacy efforts and increase influence of the StPC through case studies and

- stories of change as well as other innovative communication platforms to demonstrate the impact of the Coalition and feminist movements.
- Continue to participate actively in and advocate to influence outcomes of regional processes, like the Pacific Resilience Meetings.
  - At the national level, support increased coordination between members for advocacy and response, to both strengthen their own leadership and influence, as well as demonstrate the impact of women's movements in humanitarian action.
- **Support the leadership of young women and women with disabilities over the long term:** Continue to create opportunities to build the next generation of feminist leadership and the leadership of women with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action by developing concrete strategies to engage them in the work over the longer term, such as through the project Pacific Young Women Responding to Climate Change. The Coalition should consider:
    - Continuing national trainings of trainers;
    - Providing financial and technical support to enable training participants to take their knowledge and skills to the community level;
    - Offering opportunities for them to help shape and engage in advocacy activities, including campaigns, awareness raising, storytelling and advocacy with disaster management councils or offices at the community and national levels as appropriate.
    - Creating opportunities for them to expand their networks, including through the participation in events at the national and regional levels.
    - Sharing information with training participants about other regional and/or global advocacy networks or opportunities; and
    - Expanding of gender and disability and young women focal points to ensure continued capacity to support these activities.
  - **Build the infrastructure of the coalition.** StPC members need support to be able to sustain their engagement in the work of the coalition, which goes beyond funding for emergency responses and includes responding to climate change and COVID-19.
    - Expand, where possible, formal focal points at the national level, including gender and disability and young women's focal points.
    - Clarify the roles and expectations of national focal points, versus other coalition members in the country, and ensure that they are supported to take ownership over the work.
    - Continue to support the involvement of women with disabilities in the work of the coalition at the national level, including by expanding partnerships with organizations of people with disabilities in countries where such organizations are not already members.
    - Explore opportunities to channel longer-term, more sustainable financial resources to StPC members, as well as technical support and capacity building, in order to ensure members, have the capacity to coordinate at the national level, engage in advocacy, participate in disaster management committees, and lead responses to emergencies when they arise.
    - Consider the establishment of a regional rapid response team, to deploy Pacific women as first responders and support other women leading responses to crises throughout the region.
  - **Strengthen onboarding of coalition members:** Develop intentional strategies to effectively onboard new coalition members, including through regional convenings, to strengthen alignment of vision and goals, build trust and solidarity, and integrate them more effectively into the work.



- **Consider expanding the coalition to bring in new countries and communities**, including countries in the Northern Pacific and LGBTIQ communities, in order to strengthen Pacific feminist movements and leadership in humanitarian action.

**For DFAT and other donors:**

- **Expand long-term, sustainable, and flexible funding, including general operating support**, for the Shifting the Power Coalition and other women's and feminist organizations and movements as a critical part of funding for climate change, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, including COVID-19 recovery, and not only as part of initiatives focused on gender equality;
- **Fund existing coalitions**, to the extent possible, to support and strengthen feminist movements over the long-term, rather than creating new coalitions for short-term projects or funding initiatives;
- Support feminist and women's organizations and movements to **define their own priorities for local and regional advocacy and action** on climate change, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, rather than respond to donors' priorities or perceptions of need.
- **Minimize administrative burdens** for grantee partners, including by streamlining funding applications and reporting requirements; and
- **Create opportunities for dialogue** and learning with members of the Shifting the Power Coalition and other grantee partners, as well as support that goes beyond funding such as technical assistance and opportunities to showcase their work to other donors.

# Stories of Impact

## The First Women-Led Response to Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu

*We are creating new spaces, making histories and breaking the chains and barriers to women's inclusion in those spaces. It's critical for us as partners to work together to move mountains. We all bring different expertise and insight into those spaces. – Coalition Member, Vanuatu*

After Tropical Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu, ActionAid Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association, and Vanuatu Young Women for Change came together to lead the first localized women-led response. With coaching and support from regional partners, and funding provided through an StPC rapid response grant, they were able to conduct a needs assessment in East and West Malo.

Together, the Coalition partners interviewed 167 women, most of whom had never been consulted about their needs in response to crises. The women were able to clearly articulate what support and resources they needed in the short-term and in the longer term to rebuild and build resilience to withstand future disasters. Through those interviews, the partners were able to identify key protection issues, including gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy for girls, food insecurity, disruptions to livelihoods, lack of access to safe and clean water, the need for shelters that can withstand cyclones, and the specific needs of people with disabilities.

The results of their assessment were fed into a larger gender assessment that was conducted by the Gender and Protection Cluster, which is led by the Department of Women's Affairs and sits within Vanuatu's National Emergency Operations Center coordination structure under the National Disaster Management Office. One key informant within the government noted that the work of the Coalition resulted in women trained by the Coalition taking "lead in the decision making in their communities during the recent TC Harold Cyclone." Their assessment helped to shape the type of support that was provided, and ensured that more vulnerable women and girls, such as widows and women with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, were provided with the resources and food that they needed.

*When our governments are doing their planning for recovery, they know from women's perspectives what their needs are in the mountains, coastal areas – in terms of services, distribution and transportation. We came in with the perspective of getting women's voices there – it's men distributing and men making decisions, but we are the ones on the ground dealing with it. We are women with information, power, and we drive it to the table. It is a dynamic partnership – we have been very head on in transforming the lives of women. – StPC member*

As part of the assessment, the Coalition partners documented the specific impacts of the crisis and response on women with disabilities. As one coalition partner noted, "We saw members being discriminated against and left behind in the rapid response." Many women with disabilities were left without assistive devices and supplies to meet their hygiene and sanitation needs and were faced with evacuation centers that were either not accessible, lacked privacy, or both. They advocated with the National Disaster Management Office to establish a disabilities sub-cluster. In addition, they advocated with the Ministry of Health to establish Disability Officers at the national and provincial levels to respond specifically to the needs of people with disabilities. Members that they trained have also started participating in Provincial Emergency Operations Center cluster meetings, ensuring greater attention to the needs of people with disabilities. According to one StPC member, "the data validation was useful – now they call people with disabilities to come first to get their supplies, before others."

*Women are being supported to lead humanitarian response and to raise their voices through training and empowerment workshops. Women leaders can demonstrate their power and potential to lead in humanitarian actions during a disaster. – Key informant*

**The Coalition’s work, including their training of community leaders and advocacy, is leading to broader and more systemic changes in the way that Vanuatu’s national and provincial governments prepare for and coordinate humanitarian responses.** For example, the Coalition partners’ advocacy contributed to the establishment of a pillar on the role and leadership of women in disaster preparedness, planning and response in the new Gender Equality Policy 2020 - 2030 and Provincial Plans on Gender Equality. And women, including young women and women with disabilities, are now more routinely engaged in disaster preparedness and response at all levels.

*Women now bring agendas for discussions compared to before and in particular perspectives, issues and reasons for inclusion in disaster planning and responses. – Key informant*

*Now in our days more women take leadership position in the communities on the committee on disaster and climate change committee in the villages and also in urban areas and they are more effective than men. - Key informant*

The three coalition partners have been able to work together—reinforcing each other’s skills, capacities and knowledge—to change the national platform and ensure more systemic consideration of women’s voices and issues in disaster planning, response and implementation. The model that they forged in response to TC Harold in Vanuatu, helped shape the response of coalition partners to TC Yasa in Fiji. The experience has made it clear:

*When we get the resources right, when we are working with women from that early warning stage, we can do this. We get the authentic voice for women: what their immediate needs are, what their priorities are for recovery. – StPC member*

## Putting Intersectionality into Action: The Leadership of Women with Disabilities

*There are a lot of people who talk about intersectional feminist analysis – this coalition does it. Women are not homogenous – they have diverse experiences based on different intersecting factors. – Coalition Member*

From the beginning, the Coalition committed to ensure that women with disabilities had a seat at the decision-making table, recognizing that their inclusion was a critical element of an intersectional feminist approach to humanitarian action. Members of the coalition actively created spaces where they could learn from each other, co-create tools that were inclusive of women with disabilities, and support women with disabilities to play a leadership role within the Coalition, in national and regional advocacy, and in humanitarian responses. The creation of safe and supportive spaces allowed women with disabilities within the coalition to voice their needs, including for funding to support their engagement.

*We have gained trust in our partnership with women with disabilities. That one word of leaving no one behind means a lot to them and I think we have achieved that through the StPC in having diverse people in the house. – Coalition Member*

Representatives of organizations of people with disabilities commented that a key barrier they often face is not a lack of willingness to include people with disabilities in humanitarian action, but a lack of knowledge about how to engage them effectively, plan and budget for their inclusion in projects and implementation and better respond to their needs. Further, while people with disabilities may often be consulted, they are rarely resourced or provided the necessary accommodations to be able to participate and engage in humanitarian action. They noted that this was not a barrier in their work with the StPC.

*Most of the time what we've come across is that partners want to support disability inclusion, but don't know how to do it. We have to play that role in explaining how to do it... Being part of StPC with other partners is that even if we're not at the table, they are raising the issues of women with disabilities. Sometimes we can't be there, but now our partners are raising those questions for us. That is a great achievement. – Coalition Member*

Now the inclusion of women with disabilities is a core part of the way the coalition works:

- Women with disabilities are members of the StPC steering committee.
- Gender and disability focal points have been established in Fiji and Vanuatu to ensure sustained support for and engagement of women with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response;
- Women with disabilities are engaged systematically in project activities, including national trainings and regional-level advocacy; and
- Accommodation, including transport, sign language interpretation, and accompaniment are planned for and resourced so that women with disabilities can participate on an equitable basis.

*“When we have disability technical advisors within the StPC, it is an example of how their voices have been heard.” - StPC member*

The impact of engaging women with disabilities as equal partners within the coalition and in its work been profound: it has influenced coalition members' own work and strengthened their

capacity; improved community-led responses to disasters; and changed national and regional policies.

For example, member organizations that are run and led by people with disabilities have adapted their programs to make them more gender responsive or to take on new areas of work. The Pacific Disability Forum worked to increase the number of women with disabilities who were part of resource teams working on national level emergency preparedness and response. National organizations of people with disabilities have broadened their work to take on climate change, as well as disaster risk reduction. It has also strengthened their capacity to do this work by building knowledge, expanding networks, and creating new opportunities.

*It has helped us to connect with other disaster stakeholders and international agencies. It's like a bridge that has made us grow and be stronger. – StPC member*

At the same time, other member organizations have learned how to effectively engage women with disabilities in their work, and been more systematic about doing so, even beyond the coalition's activities.

*We have been more of a focal point with women with disabilities, especially with the blind and deaf organization. It has been a key strategy for us in terms of our sisters with disabilities. They find it more inclusive when they join our YWCA movement.... That is power shifting and why I highlighted our inclusive approach. – StPC member*

Across countries, StPC members and key informants reported that women with disabilities were more engaged and more prepared to engage in disaster planning and response, because of the trainings of trainers led by the Coalition. Making the training accessible in terms of information, format, and venues enabled women with disabilities to take what they learned back to their communities, and advocate for themselves in local disaster responses.

*We could see that women with disabilities who attended the workshops by StP were empowered to engage in the different cluster groups, in the disaster management groups. Empowerment is not something to measure – but the engagement, particularly from young women, and changes in the levels and quality are. – StPC member*

*During TC Yasa, I was in doing a training with our partners. Straight after I received a call from [a trainee] who mentioned that the region is flooded – flash flooding. She called and mentioned there were a lot of people with disabilities stuck in their homes and not able to leave... For me sometimes with the position I hold, I just have to hold it out there – that I'm working for an organization of people with disabilities, and this is the situation on the ground. Within five minutes, police and fire teams were on the ground and were assisting people with disabilities coming out from their homes. There was no evacuation center yet. We coordinated straight to the Commissioner West office... he responded quickly and opened the school as an evacuation center. Within a few minutes the school was opened by management and people with disabilities were able to be in that space. – StPC Member*

In addition to increasing women with disabilities' engagement in disaster preparedness and response, the inclusion of women with disabilities in StPC trainings has broader impacts: it is raising the awareness of other advocates about their needs, building solidarity and strengthening an inclusive, feminist movement. Young women who have participated in StPC trainings have made a point of appreciating the inclusion of young women with disabilities within their cohorts, providing opportunities for mutual learning and support for their leadership.

StPC members have shaped policies and practices on disability inclusion at the national level. In Fiji, for example, the National Disaster Management Office has established a disability emergency operations center, which is activated during disasters to ensure more disability-inclusive responses. Members of the coalition actively work with these centers to share information about what is happening on the ground, how it is affecting people with disabilities, and to help coordinate and implement emergency responses. They have also advocated to ensure that the information that is being shared by officials is understandable and accessible to people with disabilities.

*As part of our work, there is now sign language interpretation whenever the director of the NDMO does a press conference, to ensure the deaf population gets the same information about weather updates or the situation with different disasters. – StPC member*

In Vanuatu, Coalition members' advocacy has resulted in the establishment of a disabilities sub-cluster as part of the National Emergency Operations Center, as well Disability Officers within the Ministry of Health at the national and provincial levels to address the specific needs of people with disabilities in disaster response. People with disabilities are now more routinely engaged in cluster meetings, resulting in greater attention to their needs.

*Inclusion was not really coming up in cluster meetings. I used to go with an officer from the Dept. of Women's affairs who is part of the [gender and protection] cluster... When reports were coming in from other clusters, we did not hear anything about the inclusion in the response... [The organization] got their partners together to advocate for inclusiveness in response. Thirteen members with disabilities went to different clusters. Some have been afraid to speak up, but when they saw them sitting there, they said let's not forget people with disabilities. – StPC Member*

At the regional level, StPC members have led powerful advocacy to advance the leadership of women within disabilities and ensure inclusive humanitarian action. Most recently, coalition members with disabilities participated in the Pacific Triennial and the Second Pacific Resilience meetings, both key forums for regional decision-makers on disaster risk reduction, response, and humanitarian action. StPC hosted a learning lab at the Pacific Resilience meeting focused on supporting women's leadership and disability inclusion. Members of the coalition, including people with disabilities spoke of their experiences during the lab and lobbied to shape the outcomes of the forum. The Coalition's influence can be seen in strong recommendations that reflect their priorities, including a commitment to "address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and provide support in terms of accessibility, assistive devices, community based inclusive development, support services, and social protection to enable them to become active agents for transformation and resilience."

An outcome of regional-level advocacy is that StPC member organizations of people with disabilities are being asked to partner with a broader range of actors within the humanitarian space. As one StPC member noted, "It's a two-way process: we have the lived disability experience, while they have the humanitarian experience... It is improving the way that humanitarian work is being done."

StPC members and other key informants emphasized that the consistent and ongoing support for women with disabilities to engage and lead was a key contributor to the coalition's impact in this area. They pointed to a desire to deepen this work, including by establishing disabilities and gender focal points in other countries within the coalition, expanding the StPC to other countries within the Pacific, and ensuring continued opportunities for training, support and advocacy for women with disabilities at multiple levels.

## Empowering Young Women to lead: Papua New Guinea

*Our societies are patrilineal: men take most of the decisions and women are expected to be submissive. But through these StPC workshops and meetings, we have realized that women play an important role in decision-making in our respective societies. It's time to change mindsets, time to make a change, time for us women to lead.* – StPC training participant

A key strategy of the Shifting the Power Coalition has been building the next generation of feminist leaders in humanitarian action. Through trainings, ongoing mentoring and support, young women, including young women with disabilities, are being equipped with knowledge, skills and networks that will enable them to take leadership roles within their communities, countries, and in regional spaces.

In Papua New Guinea, for example, coalition members have led a series of three workshops for young women. The workshops create safe spaces to explore issues that they care about and provide them a platform from which to take action to improve their communities.

*When we go to these trainings it helps us to realize, understand and identify these issues and we are able to share our experiences, talk about them, and also try to find solutions to these issues or challenges.* – StPC training participant

A key part of the training strategy is giving young women the opportunity to learn from and build relationships with other women in the region. For many, it was their first opportunity to connect with women outside of their country and learn about the experiences of others in the Pacific.

*Not a lot of young women get to be introduced to these platforms to discuss climate change and how to help other women, inclusive of young women with disabilities. Working with young women with disabilities has really helped me to see how special they are. They have given me the opportunity to connect with and learn from other women, not just in PNG, but in the Pacific.* – StPC training participant

*I get to help young women from PNG to connect with women across the Pacific. It's been a great experience, especially for young women in the PNG hub. They get to learn, share ideas and experiences, and it changes their way of seeing things and empowers them.* – StPC member

The workshops have explored the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change in the country and region and given young women the space to work together to develop and implement initiatives to address them. In response to COVID-19, for example, young women helped to develop messages that could be sent via SMS to raise awareness, combat disinformation, and encourage other young women to be vaccinated. In the final workshop they developed a campaign plan to support a coastal community in PNG to prepare for and develop strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Young women who participated in the training expressed a strong desire to put what they had learned into action:

*My experience with StPC really changed my way of thinking towards climate change and working with young women inclusive of disabilities. It has really changed my way of thinking. – in the future I'd like to work very closely with [YWCA PNG] and to see how the campaigns and everything that we have discussed in the workshops be carried out. My goal is to see the ideas that we've discussed come to life – to help young women especially in our community and get the messages*

*into the rural communities, so they know how important it is, how climate change is affecting us, and how we can help ourselves. – StPC training participant*

StPC members in Bougainville shared similar experiences:

*Access to information is transformative for young women. As recently as last month, four young women attended a workshop – the young women’s forum. They just opened their eyes and didn’t want to sit still. They came to me and wanted me to teach them more and more so they could express in local vernacular what they learned. They went on air in Bougainville to talk about these issues that were really touching them. These young women were able to recognize that and we are encouraging them to continue to speak up as young women, so that people get to hear young people sharing their ideas and advocating for their priorities.*

Young women that have been trained by StPC are looking forward to continuing to partner with members in order to raise awareness among their peers, change patriarchal mindsets and gender norms, and show that young women can lead the response to climate change within their communities

*Going through these STPC workshops, you realize sometimes you don’t need the whole community, or whole country, you just need a small group of people with the same passion to make a difference. Women, we can always make a change – we can achieve something on our own. That’s the beauty of it for me. – StPC training participant.*

*The young women are growing in this space and feel that they are able have input to take lead. It’s been an exciting journey for us here in the PNG STPC Hub, despite the challenges we have continued to push to shift the power and break barriers slowly. – StPC member*

Similar trainings have now taken place in Samoa, Tonga and Solomon Islands. One challenge of working with young people can be engaging them in the movement over the long term, particularly if there are few resources or concrete opportunities for them to act upon. Providing opportunities to implement campaigns or programs in their communities, participate in advocacy, serve on committees, develop relationships with mentors or find employment in the field could be ways to sustain young feminist leadership. Given the economic stressors that young people often face, providing stipends or other funding to compensate them for their time is important. The Coalition’s employment of a young feminist as a young women regional focal point at the regional hub, for example, is a best practice to build upon. StPC members have recognized that this is an area of work that is still in early stages and will need to be nurtured to have concrete impacts in the long term.



## Responding to Health Emergencies in Samoa: From Measles to COVID-19

When measles hit Samoa in September 2019 it spread rapidly, infecting almost 3% of the population in a matter of months. It caused 83 deaths, most of them among children under the age of four. A state of emergency was declared in November, closing schools, limiting children's participation in public events, and imposing a curfew. The government launched an emergency vaccination drive, reaching 90% of the population by early December, after which restrictions started to be lifted. The causes behind the epidemic and dramatic decline in vaccination rates among children in Samoa in the years prior were not well understood; nor was the influence of traditional gender and cultural norms in that decline or in the effectiveness of the government's response.

StPC's regional hub, YWCA Samoa, and Le Teine Crisis Centre were monitoring the outbreak, as well as the response of the government and UN agencies in the country. They noted significant gaps, including responses that failed to address the specific needs of women; a lack of analysis of how the epidemic was affecting women, including their livelihoods and burdens of unpaid work; a lack of psychosocial support for women and their families, particularly to those who lost their children; support for people with disabilities and the LGBTQ community; as well as a lack of gender-responsive information and services that would help encourage vaccinations and offset future pandemics.

*The rapid response grant enabled an assessment on young women who were affected by the measles epidemic. It changed the lives of many over a two-to-three-month period. There were so many gaps. No one ever did an inquiry on the cause of the measles outbreak. We had found out that most of the victims affected were treated poorly or did not take their children to vaccinations due to mistreatment from nurses in the health system. That information was fed back to the health ministry as a gender response. – StPC member*

With rapid response funding and support from the StPC regional hub, YWCA Samoa and Le Teine Crisis Center developed a gender assessment tool and held focus group discussions with 50 women, of which 64% were between the ages of 18 and 30, and 20% were LGBTQI or women with disabilities. They provided participants with an emergency pack that included food, information and health guidelines for mothers, especially young mothers with newborns.

The women who participated in the focus group discussions voiced significant barriers to health care, as well as nonjudgmental information and education. Many discussed how they struggled to know what they needed to do to protect their children's health, including the fact that they lacked information about vaccines, or when it was appropriate to seek care. As a result, mothers, especially single mothers, were often scapegoated or poorly treated by health care workers when they did take their children for care. Some pointed to economic barriers, especially if they did not have or control their own money to be able to pay for transport to hospitals. They discussed how they were expected to take on a larger caregiving role during the state of emergency, and how that impacted their livelihoods and ability to provide for their families' wellbeing. Many also discussed how poverty and a lack of income security impacted their ability to ensure their children had nutritious and healthy food and their ability to keep them safe. The women also expressed a need for psychosocial support, particularly those who lost their children, as well as differentiated responses for people with disabilities.

The participants also clearly articulated solutions: the provision of economic support and the expansion of social protection systems; community-provided health education, vaccination and other services; partnerships with traditional healers and religious leaders to help disseminate

accurate information; and public health campaigns that provided understandable, accessible and clear information and guidance.

Now, YWCA Samoa are applying the knowledge they acquired through their measles response to the response to COVID-19.

*Now we know what we need to do and we know a more effective response to that crisis.... Thanks to our measles response [the government has] identified the effects specifically on women versus general public. That has been a change.... Now we are going to discuss a proposal with the Ministry of Health. They have picked up that YWCA should do a gender response and have some funding for us to carry on our response with COVID vaccinations. That's an outcome of the measles gender response: giving us more opportunity and support in trusting the YWCA to go forward with crisis response. – StPC member*

The lessons learned from Samoa are being applied at the regional level and in other Pacific countries as well. The Coalition's report, *Mobilizing Women's Leadership: Solutions for Protection and Recovery in a time of COVID-19 and TC Harold* highlighted critical impacts of the dual crises on women's health, livelihoods and economic well-being, food security, access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and access to information and education and provided ten recommendations for action. At the same time, their tool, *Shifting the Power Together: Pacific Women-Led Responses to COVID-19*, provides practical examples and guidance on how to support women's leadership within COVID-19 responses, drawing on powerful examples of their own work.

At the regional level, key decision-makers have taken note. Key informants pointed to their work as playing a key role in shaping policy responses, including a commitment to “[E]ncourage greater action to strengthen diverse women's leadership and resilience in an era when the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing issues of vulnerability, exposure, and risk” in the outcome of the second Pacific Resilience Meeting.

## Young Women Working in Partnership with the Tongan Government to Lead in Disaster Preparedness

The Talitha Project focuses on equipping young women to be disaster smart and take the lead in humanitarian settings. Through their partnerships with the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), the Tonga Meteorological Office (Tonga Met), the Ministry of Health and other networks, they have been able to ensure that young women not only understand how to prepare for and respond to disasters, but they are also taking what they have learned to the community level.

*We are citizens of our own country, and it is our job to educate, to share the information that we know, and that we have to people in our communities. When disaster comes, it affects all the people in the communities. We work together with other NGOs and government initiatives to build the connections. Some of our weakness is the government ministries' strength and maybe their weakness is some of our strength. We can help each other. – StPC member*

At one training with young women, the Talitha Project invited the deputy director of NEMO to share information about the types of disasters that they face in Tonga and discuss how to prepare and respond to them. They also organized a visit to the Tonga Met to help young women decipher and understand the technical terms used to describe the weather and climate-related emergencies, such as the strength and severity of cyclones. In doing so, they equipped young women with tools and knowledge they needed to be able to help their communities understand threats and prepare for them. Young women who participated in the training were able to talk to their families and communities and share the information with them.

The Talitha Project also supported girls to develop concrete plans to prepare for disasters, should they arise:

*Here in Talitha Project, we trained girls to map out their way in case disaster finds them, make plans, allocate different jobs to members of their family. When a tsunami warning comes to Tonga, they are already prepared. As all women in the Pacific, they are vulnerable to disasters. They need to have the things they need like clothes, the things that are important to us for protection and safety to put it in a little case, so that we can just take it and run; and know the location of evacuation centers. In this way, we are helping local government leaders in preparing for disaster, especially when we are a few months away from cyclone system.*

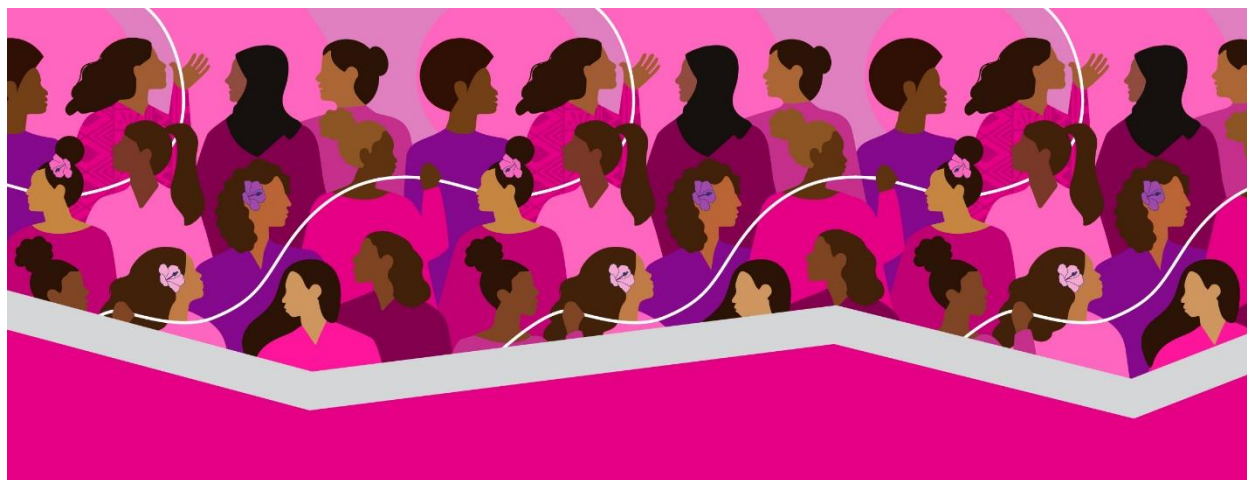
Ultimately, StPC members hope that these trainings will help to “make the work of NEMO and Met easier by conveying to communities the information that they need to know.”

*These networks feel that they have taken some burden off them – not in a negative way, but a positive way. We have created an avenue for young women to take ownership – whether its climate or humanitarian crises – by building their leadership skills and taking action in their communities.*

The Talitha project now has a dedicated emergency response officer, recruited from among the young women who participated in the trainings, who continues to support coordination efforts with government and the leadership of young women in their communities. The *Tonga Young Women Climate Changers*, who participated in the training, continue to connect on a group chat, where they share ideas on disaster planning and responses and update each other on the work that they are doing within their communities.

Although Tonga has yet to have a single case of COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic has still been profound, closing borders, causing job loss, increasing economic insecurity, cutting off access to family members abroad, and increasing the amount of time that young people spend online, including on social media. Talitha Project and young women on the ground have put their disaster preparedness strategies into action by distributing dignity kits to adolescent girls; rolling out health promotion strategies like teaching girls how to wash their hands properly, installing sinks in community centers and using media to disseminate understandable and accessible information about COVID-19; creating one-minute ads to support vaccination; and combating disinformation from social media sites by giving girls the skills they need to use the internet safely.

In Tonga, the work of the StPC is helping to shift power at the level of government by bringing community perspectives into their responses and at the community level by challenging and changing norms about who has the capacity and authority to lead. As one StPC member described, the StPC is “*reassuring the young women that they do have vital role to play in planning humanitarian responses.*”



**PACIFIC WOMEN**  
SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT

