





INTERSECTING CRISES AND PACIFIC WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



A Shifting the Power Coalition Report



This publication draws on the work of our Coalition partners including the members of the Pacific network of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) as well as recommendations developed through the Women Shaping the Pacific COVID-19 Recovery project implemented in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum with funding from the European Union through Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building Facility (TECCBUF). The production of this report was made possible with support from Australia through Pacific Women Lead at the Pacific Community (SPC).



“I look at the Pacific region and I see the many issues that we deal with in terms of human rights, or women’s rights for that matter. And I see that many times we still have a lone voice. But I see that in instances where partners have brought organisations together the echo is greater”

*- Agnes Titus Advocacy Coordinator,
Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, Bougainville*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pacific Islands are the most vulnerable to climate change and other intersecting crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, political instabilities and other humanitarian crises continue to have severe and disproportionate impacts on women and girls in a region with deep levels of gender inequalities. Despite increased attention and investment across the Pacific on women’s leadership in decision making, women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of leadership and are still notably absent from visible leadership roles within mechanisms focused on responding to climate change and resulting disasters and peace and security processes.

In the past two decades, Pacific governments have committed to several international and regional frameworks and mechanisms to respond to gender inequality, climate change and related disasters, peace and security and the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, Pacific Forum Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, Women, Peace and Security, Boe Declaration and the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19. Almost all these frameworks recognise the vulnerabilities, exclusion and marginalisation of women, the importance of improving gender equality when responding to crises and enhancing opportunities for women’s leadership.

Women’s organisations are a core part of local systems in crises and women play a vital role as first responders in times of disaster and conflict; a role which frequently goes unrecognised, undervalued and under-resourced. Learning from and building on women’s leadership in recent natural disasters in 2015-2016, the Shifting the Power (StP) Coalition was formed bringing together 13 women-led civil society organisations in six Pacific countries, supporting diverse women’s leadership in humanitarian action at local, national and regional levels.

The feminist Coalition is the only women-led regional alliance focused on strengthening the collective power, influence and leadership of diverse Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change. This report will highlight how StPC partners have been responding to intersecting crises and progressing the peace-humanitarian nexus agenda; prompting Pacific

women's leadership and amplifying their collective strategic recommendations in the context of the Boe Declaration and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and other key frameworks.

“It starts with movement building – the power of the collective to have a stronger voice and start to get visibility and recognition from those who have the power. When we started, we had to listen to the voices of diverse women. In creating that safe space for women, we allowed them to build it themselves to organize, strategise and mobilise and plan. So, we’re bringing rural women together and build that agency, information, skills and link their collective vision together. Women’s role in responding to climate security is often overcast and misunderstood, and yet, women’s knowledge, participation, and collective action are crucial to the climate mitigation and adaptation dialogue. Women are already working at the frontline of building more resilient communities.”

– Flora Vano, Action Aid Vanuatu, Country Programme Manager

Drawing on the leadership, knowledge and expertise of the StPC and their members across the Pacific, the report outlines recommendations under the four pillars (Participation, Prevention, Protection, Relief and Recovery) of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The peace-development-humanitarian nexus (Triple Nexus) is the key vehicle for advancing inclusive peace given the intersecting security, humanitarian and development challenges facing the Pacific which specifically impact women and girls.

CONTEXT

The Pacific Ocean makes up one third of the planet's surface area, covering more than 165 million square kilometres. It is the oldest, largest and most bio-diverse body of water, containing over 50 per cent of all our water.¹ Most Pacific Island countries have Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that cover vast swaths of the Pacific ocean, collectively making them the dominant custodians of the region's marine life and ocean health. This has helped the region's leaders develop a bold new conceptual framework- the Blue Pacific Continent, to reposition Pacific Island countries as "large ocean states," rather than "small island states."² The Blue Pacific narrative counters the framing of the Pacific exclusively as a site for geopolitical competition and incorporation by China, the United States and other players. It highlights the importance of regional identity, solidarity, the centrality of the ocean – the 'Blue Continent' – and the responsibilities that Pacific Islands governments and peoples have to the region and the world.³ The region is home to three ethnogeographic groupings- Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia- with diverse groups across the Blue Ocean States. The region's States cooperate economically and politically through the Pacific Islands Forum comprising 18 members including Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand.⁴

PEACE AND SECURITY

Post-colonial Pacific Island countries have struggled with serious problems of state capacity, including poor leadership, poor governance and weak links between state institutions and community life and values. Security forces in the region have played a leading or complicit role in crises in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and (to some extent) PNG, as well as helping spark conflict in Bougainville.⁵ Pacific women had led various peacebuilding efforts since the 1960 through collaborative advocacy campaigns on peace and security, including responses to armed conflict, political crises and gun violence in Bougainville, Fiji, and Solomon Islands in the late 1980s to early 2000s, and pro-democracy riots in Tonga in 2006.⁶ The Pacific Islands Forum serves as the most significant regional organisation focused on politics and security and since the early 2000s, several declarations and statements have recognized that the region is facing 'an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges.'⁷

¹ UNICEF: The Ocean State of Fiji- Turning the tide, <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/ocean-state-fiji-turning-tide>

² The Diplomat: Paying Attention to the Blue Pacific, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/paying-attention-to-the-blue-pacific/>

³ Fry, Kabutaulaka & Wesley-Smith, Partners in the Blue Pacific' initiative rides roughshod over established regional processes, <https://devpolicy.org/pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705/>

⁴ PIFS: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, <https://www.forumsec.org/>

⁵ M Brown, Development and Security in the Pacific Islands, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipa_e_report_pacific_151107.pdf

⁶ Rolls & Evans, Feminist Peace and Security in the Pacific Islands, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621056/dp-feminist-peace-security-pacific-islands-210920-en.pdf>

⁷ Wallis, J et al, Security cooperation in the Pacific Islands: architecture, complex, community, or something else?, <https://academic.oup.com/irap/advance-article/doi/10.1093/irap/lcac005/6609199>

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is the single biggest threat facing humanity and the Pacific Island region is recognized as one of the most vulnerable to the consequences of the ongoing global climate crisis, including environmental disasters, intense variations in temperatures, and extreme storms.⁸ The entire Pacific region contributes to only 0.03% of total greenhouse gas emissions, however millions of Pacific Islanders are subjected to bearing the severe impact of climate change, which is undeniably an existential threat to their homeland, culture, livelihoods and their Pacific identity.⁹ According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s 2021 report, changes in the environment are already and will continue to be the single greatest threat to the security and well-being of Pacific people. Ocean acidification will increase affecting the health of reef ecosystems impacting the livelihood of fishing communities and reduce the defense against storm surges and strong waves.¹⁰ Furthermore, rising seas will have the most severe consequences, posing a threat to habitability, existence and survival of nations. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events will have severe consequences on Pacific Island states, which due to their geography, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of cyclones, king tides and other natural hazards. The reduction of available land will likely also cause a contraction of the Pacific Small Island Developing States exclusive economic zone (EEZs), essential for regional stability and resource management.⁶ Thus Pacific governments and communities have consistently identified climate change as one of the biggest threats to the region and have accelerated leadership and advocacy on the issue at the global level.¹¹

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic brought most of the world to standstill in 2020 and initially Pacific Island countries were mostly isolated from the devastating effects of the crisis, with most nations remaining COVID free. However, the economic consequences continued to spiral with differential impacts within and across the Pacific. Although isolation had initially proven to be an effective preventative strategy, the border closures and travel restrictions took a severe toll on the fragile and fledgling economies of the Pacific. It disrupted the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable which in turn gave rise to increases in poverty, hardship, and malnutrition, shattering all hopes of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The near total collapse of the tourism industry, leading to slower trading and economic activities together with the scaled-down business operations in turn resulted in increasing job losses, public and private sector debts and a significant reduction in government tax revenues over the period.¹²

⁸ Feminist Peace and Security in the Pacific Islands, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621056/dp-feminist-peace-security-pacific-islands-210920-en.pdf>

⁹ E-International Relations: Climate Change and the Sinking Island States in the Pacific, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/01/09/climate-change-and-the-sinking-island-states-in-the-pacific/>

¹⁰ IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

¹¹ Pacific Islands Forum (2018) Boe Declaration on Regional Security, <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

¹² SPC: One-year-on from the first wave of the pandemic: what do the statistics tell us about the Impacts of COVID-19 on PICT Economies, <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/blog/2021/10/what-do-the-statistics-tell-us-about-the-impacts-of-the-covid-19-on-pict>

From 2021-2022, most Pacific Island countries intensified their vaccination programs with countries such as Fiji, Tonga and Samoa managing to inoculate over 90% of their target population.¹³ Other countries such as Solomon Islands and Vanuatu did not have similar success and have had stagnant vaccine rollouts, whilst PNG's worrying total vaccination rate of 3% amongst the lowest in the world. Furthermore, countries that were COVID-free for almost two years such as Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Kiribati, and Samoa- all experienced outbreaks in their capitals in the first quarter of 2022, and the virus spread quickly to vulnerable outer island communities which lacked basic treatment and vaccination facilities.¹⁴ As of June 2022, there had been 383,264 cumulative COVID cases and over 3136 deaths in the Pacific.¹⁵

The economic impact of COVID-19 continues to affect vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in the areas of education, employment and access to public health services. With key industries such as tourism affected by travel restrictions, unemployment numbers have skyrocketed in some countries. In 2020, Vanuatu's tourism lost 70% of jobs; Fiji's tourism industry released 115,000 workers, and a survey in Samoa reported 26% of business workers lost jobs. For Pacific tuna fisheries, COVID-19 reduced the operations of domestic longline fleets which saw falls in employment, income, exports and related activities.¹⁶

“When we heard of the crisis, COVID, it was very challenging for us particularly when we were coming out of our crisis. We were still recovering from the many losses that we had during the Bougainville crisis and also that we are facing the challenges of climate change which TI see as a crisis as well. Having COVID we really needed to step up to try and help so that COVID did not do harm to women and their families” - Barbara Tanne – Bougainville Women’s Federation

INTERSECTING CRISES

While Pacific Island countries were already dealing with climate-induced disasters with annual economic losses of USD500 million, COVID-19 had worsened the stress on small public administrations. Globally, including the Pacific, development and humanitarian settings pose challenges for infectious disease prevention and control. For the Pacific, COVID-19 presents a range of contextual challenges including multiple islands, vast distances and limited resources. In most Pacific Countries, access to quality health services is limited, due

¹³ Asia and the Pacific Policy Society: Two years of COVID-19 in the Pacific, <https://www.policyforum.net/two-years-of-covid-19-in-the-pacific/>

¹⁴ IFRC: Vaccinations vital as COVID cripples Pacific countries, <https://www.ifrc.org/press-release/vaccinations-vital-covid-cripples-pacific-countries>

¹⁵ SPC: COVID-19: Pacific Community Updates, <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2022/05/covid-19-pacific-community-updates>

¹⁶ Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific Region, <https://www.undp.org/pacific/publications/socio-economic-impact-assessment-covid-19-fiji>

to a lack of infrastructure, equipment, and qualified personnel. Services are easily stretched or overwhelmed, and provision of specialised services and intensive care is limited.¹⁷

The effects of natural disasters in some Pacific countries during COVID-19 contributed to further social and economic impacts. In April 2020, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold hit Tonga and Solomon Islands at category 3, strengthened to category 4 for Fiji, and category 5 for Vanuatu, leaving devastation in its wake. TC Yasa, also category 5, hit Fiji again in December 2020. Shortly after, TC Ana at category 5, destroyed homes, schools and businesses in the Northern division of Fiji. TC Zazu caused significant flooding and landslides in Samoa.¹⁸ These examples are likely to increase the debt burden on Pacific Island countries, impact community livelihoods and threaten safety and security for vulnerable groups, and are further exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19.

STATUS OF PACIFIC WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Pacific region has some of the highest rates of violence against women recorded in the world – twice the global average with an estimated two in every three Pacific women impacted by gender-based violence.¹⁹ There are pronounced gender disparities in labour market participation and wages, occupational segregation by gender, and differences in the types of work that women and men perform. In Samoa, the labour force participation rate for women is 23%, compared with 58% for men. Significant disparities are also seen in Fiji (37% participation for females, compared with 71% for males), Solomon Islands (61 female, 74 male), and Tonga (62 female, 81 male).²⁰ The region also has the lowest level of women’s political participation in the world. Women make up 8.6% as members of parliament in 15 Pacific countries whereas the global average is 23.8%. Vanuatu, Federated States of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea have no women MPs at all.²¹

IMPACT OF INTERSECTING CRISES ON PACIFIC WOMEN AND GIRLS

Crises can compound existing forms of marginalization on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, class, religion, and geographic location. This is no different in the Pacific where pandemic has had severe and disproportionate impacts on women and girls - increasing economic insecurity, rising levels of gender-based violence, and reduced access to essential health, education, justice, police and other social services. COVID-19 has exposed inequalities globally and even more so in the Pacific with the added interrelated crises of climate change and disasters, derailing efforts to accelerate gender equality.

¹⁷ CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region, <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pacific-RGA-FINAL-APPROVED-26March2020.pdf>

¹⁸ Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific Region

¹⁹ UNWomen: Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girl, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/ending-violence-against-women/pacific-partnership>

²⁰ The Asia Foundation: The Future of Work for Women in the Pacific Islands, <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/the-future-of-work-for-women-in-the-pacific-islands/>

²¹ Pacific Women in Politics: Women MPs, <https://www.pacwip.org/>

“The difference is when women talk to women, women know when women are not talking. You see the gap you see the benefits; you see the future; you see the possibilities. That’s the difference when women interview women”

-Taimalelagi Ramona Tugaga, YWCA of Samoa

Gendered impacts of COVID-19 include those related to regional trade and food security, especially in countries reliant on imported food with limited community food production systems, resulting in women either spending more time producing food or increasing their incomes to pay for higher priced foods. Women are more likely than men to work in low-paying, informal and precarious work, without safety nets, job security, paid leave or insurance for economic shocks. Likewise, women who sell produce and/or market primary produce have reduced incomes due to shrinking economies as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The pandemic has seen women take on more unpaid work with the ‘opportunity cost’ of women not having spare time to engage in income generating activities that would have allowed them some economic independence. Taking on increased childcare and domestic labour responsibilities due to closure of school and workplaces has added to their existing unpaid workload.²²

During a crisis such as COVID-19, gender-based violence intensifies with women less able to seek help, medical care, temporary shelter, or escape abusive and violent partners. Service providers and shelters have had to, in some cases, scale down services and close, leaving a shortage of shelter options for women and children escaping family violence.²³ Girls with disabilities are more at risk of gender-based violence and less likely to have access to health services or family planning. Research from the Pacific Islands indicates that before COVID-19 women and girls living with a disability were two to three times more likely to be victims of physical or sexual abuse than those without a disability and this is likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic.²⁴

Women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities plus LGBTQIA people tend to be uninformed on important disaster management and respective adaptive measures in place due to their lack of involvement in these processes, which puts them at higher risk, making them more vulnerable. This lack of involvement, in turn, is a result of their exclusion on the basis their sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, LGBTQIA people, particularly trans people and youth, also experience a great deal of displacement from their original families and households. Those experiencing homelessness often find it difficult to gain access to shelters and welfare resources and tend to face difficulty and discrimination when trying to access emergency

²² 14th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women’s Economic Empowerment Brief, <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Overview-Pacific-Womens-Economic-Empowerment-SPC2.pdf>

²³ Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific Region

²⁴ Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Girls’ Education and Wellbeing in the Indo-Pacific, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-literature-review.pdf>

facilities during climate disasters.²⁵ A research on Fijian sexual and gender minorities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Response found LGBTIQ people were usually blamed for natural disasters and that government, organisations must interrogate underlying assumptions about sex, sexuality and gender that exclude sexual and gender minorities, and that make specific inclusion measures necessary.²⁶

Despite increased attention and investment across the Pacific on women's leadership in decision making, Pacific women are still notably absent from visible leadership roles within mechanisms focused on responding to climate change and resulting disasters. According to UN Women's A Time to Act (2016), Pacific climate change ministries and National Disaster Management Offices (NDMO) have few and weak mechanisms to integrate gender issues and as a result, key response mechanisms do not effectively support gender responsive policy and planning. With limited access to decision-making, women, including young women, are often invisible in policy-making. Without adequate representation in these discussions, the default approach is techno-centric and ignores the realities of climate change and disasters for women, which include the changing burden of unpaid work, increased prevalence of gender-based violence and food insecurity, and institutionalised marginalisation of women's voices and leadership.²⁷

An estimated 15% of people in the Pacific have some form of disability as reported by WHO. Persons with disabilities are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to barriers to information, access to clean water and sanitation, and reliance on physical contact with the environment or support persons. The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) has highlighted that public health advice, such as social distancing or home isolation, may not be options for people who rely on assistance to eat, bathe and dress. Furthermore, people with disabilities are often unemployed and living in poor living conditions.²⁸

²⁵ Facing Intersecting Crises: LGBTIQ+ Resilience in Fiji, <https://www.openglobalrights.org/facing-intersecting-crises-lgbtqi-plus-resilience-in-fiji/>

²⁶ Edge Effect- Down By The River: Addressing the Rights, Needs and Strengths of Fijian Sexual and Gender Minorities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Response, <https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Down-By-The-River-May2018.pdf>

²⁷ UNWomen: Time to Act on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/11/time-to-act>

²⁸ Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific Region

BACKGROUND

Amidst the intersecting crises and their impacts on Pacific peoples, governments have committed to several international and regional frameworks and mechanisms to respond to COVID-19, climate change, natural disasters, peace and security. Almost all these frameworks recognise the vulnerabilities, exclusion and marginalisation of women and the importance of improving gender equality when responding to crises. Some of the important frameworks and studies are outlined below including highlighting opportunities for women's leadership.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda was well defined before the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Across the globe there is very clear evidence of how women have mobilized for peace and security – from addressing decolonization and nuclear free action to building peace between communities and warring factions. At the time of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, much focus was given to women's role in moving from armed conflict towards achieving peace and security.

The five years following the Beijing Conference catalyzed the need to expand the WPS agenda. This was done through the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 which placed women's participation as central to conflict prevention and resolution efforts. UNSCR1325 provides an opportunity to delve deeper into what local women activists have continually said of the reality of being activists in a geographically diverse region, and the barriers to their ability to participate in political institutions and implement national and regional WPS mechanisms. The adoption of 1325 also demonstrated what is possible when women, member states (governments) and UN agencies collaborate.⁵

Each of the resolution's mandates is related to one of the four basic pillars:

- **Participation:** Calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making, including in national, regional, and international institutions; in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict; in peace negotiations; in peace operations, as soldiers, police, and civilians; and as Special Representatives of the U.N. Secretary-General.
- **Protection:** Calls specifically for the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations, such as in refugee camps.
- **Prevention:** Calls for improving intervention strategies in the prevention of violence against women, including by prosecuting those responsible for violations of international law; strengthening women's rights under national law; and supporting local women's peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes.
- **Relief and recovery:** Calls for advancement of relief and recovery measures to address international crises through a gendered lens, including by respecting the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps, and considering the needs of women and girls in the design of refugee camps and settlements.²⁹

²⁹ United State Institute for Peace: What is UNSCR 1325?, https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325

REGIONAL ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The adoption of UNSCR1325 propelled Pacific women's engagement in peacebuilding and humanitarian action in key regional intergovernmental processes. In December 2010 as part of the 10th anniversary commemoration of UNSCR 1325, a Pacific Regional Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was established with members from Forum Members, CROP and UN agencies, and civil society. In June 2011, the Forum Regional Security Committee gave the group the policy task of developing a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This was subsequently supported by Pacific Women's Ministers in August of the same year.³⁰

The Regional Action Plan provides a framework at the regional level for Forum Members and Pacific Territories to enhance women and young women's leadership in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, mainstream gender in security policy-making, and ensure women and girls' human rights are protected in humanitarian crises, transitional contexts and post-conflict situations. It also sets out a regional mechanism that will support regional and national efforts.²⁷

Under the Action Plan, the protection of women's and girl's human rights during humanitarian crises and in transitional and post-conflict contexts is a key focus area and the plan calls for EVAW (ending violence against women) policies and humanitarian response plans to ensure women and girls' access to health, psychosocial, legal and protection in times of humanitarian emergency and in reconstruction and rehabilitation after conflict and crisis.

Another focus of the Action Plan is on gender mainstreaming and women and young women's participation in security sector oversight and accountability. The Plan aims to achieve WPS commitments and obligations incorporated in the development and implementation of national security, defence and justice policy through regular engagement between women's groups, including young women, leaders and gender equality advocates with PIFS, FRSC Officials and CSOs on WPS. However, in recent years the Action Plan has been criticised for its relative silence on the growing regional challenge of gender and environmental insecurity and failing to demonstrate how Pacific women can legitimately enter debate on regional security within the 'architecture of entitlements' that is deeply rooted in Pacific Island politics.^{5:30}

GLOBAL STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL 1325

In 2015 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption and implementation of resolution 1325, the UN Security Council commissioned a study to identify the gaps and challenges, as well as emerging trends and priorities for action. The study affirmed that the principles of gender equality in humanitarian assistance are not limited to conflict-affected settings but equally relevant to natural disasters. Increasingly, natural disasters leading to emergencies and humanitarian crises have a complex relationship with conflict and gender inequality. Lack of access to information and resources, entrenched gender stereotypes and inequalities and cultural restrictions make women and girls among the most susceptible to natural disasters—particularly in conflict-affected settings.³¹

³⁰ Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/pacific_region_regional_action_plan_2012-2015.pdf

³¹ The Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, <https://wps.unwomen.org/#:~:text=Global%20Study%20on%20the%20Implementation,Council%20Resolution%20>

The study identified that while resources have gone into formulating state-centric national action plans and increasing women in parliament and the military, women's needs at the local level have largely gone unmet. A number of obstacles remain that limit the action plan's effective implementation, preventing human security from being a reality for women of all diversities and their communities. They include:

- A focus on action planning rather than actual action and implementation;
- Endurance of a militarized concept of security;
- An emphasis on reaction rather than conflict prevention;
- A lack of resources to support women's participation in enhancing prevention strategies or in advancing a human security agenda.⁵

Women and girls experience the nexus between climate change, and peace and security in direct and profound ways. Thus, the study recommends that all relevant actors, including Member States, the UN, donors, and civil society, should ensure that women affected by humanitarian crises, including refugees, internally displaced and stateless women, are supported to participate meaningfully and equally in community decision-making, in leadership roles and in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian interventions. Obstacles to their participation should be addressed within programme design. Furthermore, donors, including UN Member States and private foundations, should increase current levels of targeted funding for women's and girls' programming to a minimum of 15%. Current levels of approximately 1% funding for local women's organizations, including women's human rights defenders, should be increased until they reach at least 5% in the next three years, before setting progressively more ambitious targets in the following years. Funding for core operations, advocacy and capacity building should match funding for projects. Collaboration and partnership are key, thus the UN, Member States and civil society should work together with affected women and girls when designing, implementing and monitoring climate-change and natural resource-related strategies, in order to harness their local knowledge and community-level networks for information-sharing.²⁵

FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC

The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) was adopted by Forum Leaders in 2016. The FRDP provides high level voluntary strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development. The FRDP advocates for the adoption of integrated approaches, whenever possible, for coping with and managing climate change and disaster risks, in order to make more efficient use of resources, to rationalise multiple sources of funding which address similar needs, and for more effective mainstreaming of risks into development planning and budgets. Some of the key principles in the implementation of FRDP include the protection of human rights to ensure that every person has equitable access to humanitarian and development assistance; prioritising the needs and respect the rights of the most vulnerable, including but not limited to women, persons with disabilities, children, youth

[1325%20%7C%20UN%20Women&text=The%20Global%20Study%20on%20resolution,over%20the%20past%2015%20years](#)

and older persons, and facilitate their effective participation in planning and implementation of all activities; and the integration of gender considerations, advocate and support equitable participation of men and women in the planning and implementation of all activities.³²

Recognizing that building resilience has to be an inclusive, genuine and active multi-stakeholder partnership, Forum Leaders in 2017 endorsed a set of governance arrangements for the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) to support and facilitate effective implementation of the FRDP. To synchronize guidance and advice towards a consolidated leadership that empowers the successful execution of resilient development, a PRP Taskforce was set up which includes representation from member states, civil society, private sector, regional organisations and development partners.³³

BOE DECLARATION

In 2017, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders on the recommendation of the Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting, agreed to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum security related declarations and expand the concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change. As a result, the Boe Declaration was developed and subsequently endorsed by Forum Leaders in Nauru in 2018. Further to this, Forum Leaders in 2019 endorsed the Boe Declaration Action Plan in Tuvalu. The Action Plan gives a broad framework to aid Members in the implementation of the Boe Declaration on Regional Security.³⁴

Importantly, the Boe Declaration elevates climate change as a stand-alone regional security priority which is seen as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. Under the Strategic Focus Area of Human Security and Humanitarian Assistance, a proposed action is the eradication of gender-based violence and provision of space for participation of women based on merit in security processes. The Plan aims to measure the success of this action with the reduction in the number of reported cases of gender-based violence in Member Countries and Members who have a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security aligned to UNSCR 1325.³⁵

PACIFIC HUMANITARIAN PATHWAY ON COVID-19

In April 2020, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders invoked the Biketawa Declaration, to collectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as a major crisis to The Blue Pacific – its peoples, wellbeing and economies by establishing a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C). The PHP-C under the Biketawa Declaration is the Region's mechanism that would provide the enabling political environment and commitment to expedite assistance and cooperation

³² Pacific Islands Forum: The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, <https://www.forumsec.org/frdp/>

³³ Pacific Resilience Partnership, <https://www.resilientpacific.org/en/about-prp>

³⁴ Pacific Islands Forum: Boe Declaration on Regional Security, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

³⁵ Pacific Islands Forum: Boe Declaration Action Plan, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BOE-document-Action-Plan.pdf>

between member countries in preparing for and responding to COVID-19, by enabling the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance from regional, international and development partners in a timely, safe, effective and equitable manner.³⁶

WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION COMPACT

In 2021, the adoption of the Generation Equality Forum's WPS and Humanitarian Action Compact further reaffirmed the need to bridge the gap between the pillars of the WPS agenda. The WPS-HA Compact seeks to drive a global inter-generational movement to implement existing commitments on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. The Compact aims to do this by the development of a voluntary monitoring and accountability process, based whenever possible on existing reporting, to realize existing WPS-HA commitments, strengthening coordination across existing WPS-HA mechanisms, and promoting financing for and visibility of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and on Humanitarian Action. The Compact provides a clear path for Member States, United Nations entities, regional organizations, private sector actors, and civil society – including women-led organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions – to take concerted action on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.²⁴

The Compact calls for an investment in and enhancement of the coordination supporting women's leadership at all levels in all decision-making structures on peace, security, and humanitarian action. For Member States, the Compact calls for the adoption of specific financial commitments to increasing women's leadership across peace, security, and humanitarian sectors, including inter alia Local and National Action Plans on WPS, national DRR/resilience strategies, and support legislation that codifies these financial commitments.

Furthermore, regional organisations must allocate funding to develop, implement, and monitor regional action plans on women, peace and security, as well as regional resilience and refugee responses.²⁵

The Compact calls on CSOs to invest in inclusive sustainable approaches and equitable partnerships to increase the influence, visibility, and resource base of local women leaders - including young women- in humanitarian, political and peace processes and decision-making. Furthermore, the Compact also calls for the championing of inclusive, sustainable approaches and equitable partnerships to increase the influence, visibility, and resource base of women leaders, in all their diversity. Member States can do this by striving to ensure that perspectives from women's rights and women-led organizations inform all peace, security and humanitarian

statements, policy briefs, and information-sharing, and are sensitive to protection issues faced by contributors. Regional organisations can do this by advocating for, implementing and tracking specific actions for women's leadership and meaningful participation in regional processes on women peace and security, crisis preparedness and humanitarian/refugee response and recovery.²⁵

³⁶ Pacific Islands Forum: Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Agree to Establish a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID -19, <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/08/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-agree-to-establish-a-pacific-humanitarian-pathway-on-covid-19/>

CLIMATE SECURITY AND WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL MOBILISATION

By 2019, the UN Security Council had adopted 10 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS): Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2008), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019); UNSCR2242 is particularly significant because of its reference to human security with a specific reference to climate change and health pandemics.³⁷

The subsequent resolutions have enabled women's movements to be innovative and redesign processes to address the nexus of the pillars of participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery - tackling persistent social, economic and political barriers perpetuated by climate change and COVID-19. Women have collectively brought attention to the need for a redesigned table where women must be present to enhance conflict prevention and the prevention of sexual gender based violence, to ensure the protection of women's rights in all crisis situations including humanitarian crises.

The adoption of UNSCR2242 on WPS reflected women's call to the Security Council to be more accountable to an inclusive human security agenda as it brought the language of health pandemics and climate change. It is a resolution where the Security Council acknowledges the changing global context of peace and security, including the impacts of climate change, noting that "the impacts of climate change and the global nature of health pandemics". It is a further opportunity to make the shift from responding to conflict and crises to inclusive preventative action.⁵

Combining human security, WPS and sustainable development may seem complex but there are clear synergies. Inequalities in human security, including gender inequalities, not only indicate uneven development outcomes, but can also provide for the root causes of conflict which further undermine development. In the context of the vision articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a WPHS approach provides a critical forward pathway for parliaments in all development and peace settings. That is why women peacebuilders have incorporated the human security agenda into the WPS agenda – to shift the power from a militarized notion of security – recognizing the need to transform the traditional security approach to a human security approach.⁵

³⁷ United Nations: UN Security Council Resolution on Women Peace and Security, <https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The intersecting crises of Climate Change, Disasters and COVID19 require greater accountability to Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Inclusion Commitments. Building Back Better requires an Inclusive Human Security Approach in line with the Boe Declaration (2018) because crisis prevention, response and recovery must be inclusive and transformative:

I. GENDER, CLIMATE JUSTICE, PEACE AND SECURITY

The peace-development-humanitarian nexus can serve as a foundation of building peaceful, inclusive and secure communities together and bring the Boe Declaration to life. It is grounded in the experiences of living with the slow onset of climate change as well as intensifying disasters. Investing in inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, local leadership and flexible funding for early warning and preparedness to redefine humanitarian and climate action at the local level can address the gaps in access to power and decision making and promote and enhance women's leadership without replicating patriarchal systems of practice.

II. A WOMEN, PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY PATHWAY

Over the last several decades, there has been increasing recognition that inclusive efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, mitigate its effects, and build sustainable peace are more effective and durable. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach is a recognition of how sustainable development – or lack thereof – can be a driver for mitigating or exacerbating humanitarian crises, shocks, conflict, disaster risks and complex emergencies. And yet, despite the work many women do to build peace and respond to humanitarian crises, despite the proven need for gender analyses to effectively address the root causes of conflict, and despite the rights obligations that mandate inclusive peace efforts, women and gender considerations remain overwhelmingly excluded from these efforts.

A global security threat such as COVID19 requires stronger institutions and multi stakeholder partnerships that enables cooperation and support from enabling the safe passage of medical, sanitary and food supplies to addressing the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Intersectional response and recovery must address the generations of women, youth, children and others at risk of being left behind and strengthen preventative actions rather than delayed reactions to what are already threats to escalating social unrest. Importantly, there is an urgent need for parliamentary leadership to advance and accelerate a WPHS agenda.

III. INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Women's organisations and networks must be effectively engaged in regional policy making, development and implementation processes under the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19. This will strengthen linkages and harmonisation of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific and Boe Declaration. This will also support grassroots organizing, national coalition building and galvanize collaboration with local and regional networks.

The current multi-stakeholder approach of the PRP Task Force must be localised to promote resilience building at all levels, including regional, national and sub national and community levels. Localisation and a gender, age and disability inclusive model can support diverse women's leadership that is already visible in grassroots organising such as those supported by StPC.

IV. PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Integrating a conflict prevention and human security approach and taking a nexus approach to development and humanitarian agendas, can ensure that social infrastructure responds to the goals of sustainable development, equality and peace by contributing to the transformation of structures to bring about peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies. This can be achieved by tackling root causes of conflict through enhanced early warning and early response measures as well as national budgeting and security sector governance processes.

These measures also need to ensure women, including young women, are able to meet and share their experiences, build capacity together as well as inform the development and production of knowledge products and information to collectively strengthen the goals and objectives of the peacebuilding and prevention movements.

Women's organisations must be resourced to conduct community education on Women Peace and Security that encompasses a holistic understanding of security as opposed to a militarised definition of security.

V. PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's human rights are non-negotiable in humanitarian response programming. Commitments to women's rights and disability inclusion, including the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, CEDAW, Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Rights, must be integrated in prevention, early intervention and response, as well as long term recovery efforts such as the Boe Declaration Action Plan.

VI. AN INTERSECTIONAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY RESPONSE

A multi-stakeholder process must be implemented to ensure Pacific women's rights and feminist organisations and networks provide gender oversight and analysis to the Pacific Humanitarian Partnership and national response and recovery measures. Furthermore, it is critical to apply a conflict and GBV prevention lens to the intersectional crisis response and recovery actions.

MOBILISING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AT REGIONAL LEVEL

In 2016, governments and humanitarian actors adopted the Agenda for Humanity with a commitment to work differently to end need in humanitarian crises. This included recognition of the importance of reinforcing local systems and the need to invest in local capacities. Women's organisations are a core part of local systems in crises and women play a vital role as first responders in times of disaster and conflict; a role which frequently goes unrecognised, undervalued and under-resourced.³⁸

SHIFTING THE POWER COALITION

Learning from and building on women's leadership in response to TC Pam in Vanuatu in 2015 and TC Winston in Fiji in 2016, the Shifting the Power Coalition (StPC) was established in 2016. It brings together 13 women-led civil society organisations in six countries working together to support diverse women's leadership in humanitarian action at local, national and regional levels. Partners of the Coalition include the following diverse groups-

Fiji- Transcend Oceania and Fiji Disabled People's Federation

Vanuatu- ActionAid Vanuatu, Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association, and Vanuatu Young Women for Change

Solomon Islands- Vois Blong Mere and Young Women's Christian Association

Bougainville- Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation and Bougainville Women's Federation

Papua New Guinea- Young Women's Christian Association

Samoa- Young Women's Christian Association

Tonga- Talitha Project

Regional- Pacific Disability Forum

ActionAid Australia provides technical expertise and is the secretariat of the Coalition. In 2021, a regional hub was established in Fiji 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. The hub is staffed by a Regional Manager and a Regional Young Women Focal Point. Furthermore, 9 national focal points were established in 6 countries with 2 gender and disability rights focal points in Fiji and Vanuatu. To be an effective coalition, StPC established a governance structure, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the Steering Committee, Secretariat, Regional Hub and partnership organisations, set out in a partnership agreement.

³⁸ ActionAid Australia, The Voices of Pacific Humanitarians, <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/StPCBooklet2019v5INTERACTIVE-FINAL.pdf>

Partners of the Coalition are involved in community, local and national decision-making spaces and are bringing the perspectives of diverse women (including women with disabilities, LGBTQIA women, young women and those in remote/rural communities) to these forums. These endeavours are recognising the rights of women and girls and their protection needs, as well as increasing the strength and agency of women to engage with and transform the humanitarian system.

It is very important for women to be in the decision-making space. Because women are there, their presence is in the communities, but yet their voices are ignored...I believe in women. And I believe in the journey we started. I believe that if we continue providing spaces like we do...I believe there will be a change.

-Mary Jack, Co-Country Program Manager, ActionAid Vanuatu.

The Coalition is the only women-led regional alliance focused on strengthening the collective power, influence and leadership of diverse Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change. It has a focus on strengthening women's capacity to engage in policy and decision making, driving evidence-based and women-led innovations from the region, as well as engaging in national and regional advocacy.

A gender-responsive approach is more than simply getting women to the table. It is time to shift the power. Greater accountability is needed to address the realities of climate change and disasters for women. Sustained investment in women's organising, capacity enhancement, and solidarity is essential to tackle power and gender relations so that women can collect and bring our evidence based recommendations to the table.

-Sharon Bhagwan Rolls- Technical Adviser, Shifting the Power Coalition

Recognising that women's leadership is vital throughout the planning, prevention and response cycle of humanitarian action, StPC uses a feminist and rights-based approach that recognises the capacity of women to lead change in their own lives and communities and focuses on building women's individual and collective power to influence change. This combination enables StPC to be effective in supporting localised, women-led action on issues critical to diverse Pacific women and their communities. Rather than replicating existing patriarchal systems of

practice, StPC aims to build an inclusive, feminist model of partnership and collaboration. Thus the Coalition is “feminitarian” and driven by feminist partnership principles: collaboration, diversity, equity, openness, mutual benefit and courage.

Furthermore, to ensure there is accountability to and compliance by national and regional response mechanisms to women’s rights and gender equality commitments, the Coalition’s efforts are aligned with Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of all-forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCPRD), the Pacific Forum Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Agenda for Humanity and the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Thus the Coalition also engages with state actors such as Ministries of Women’s Affairs and Climate Change and National Disaster Management Authorities to enhance accountability across the government sector to women’s rights in the context of climate change and disasters.³⁹

Since 2019, the Coalition has become a member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network, joining a global network of women leader’s committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist agenda. Five country partners are members of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). The Regional Secretariat is hosted by Transcend Oceania.

THE COALITION IN ACTION

In 2019, the Coalition’s messages reached the UN Climate Change Summit as well as a panel convened by the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund coinciding with the 19th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR1325. Together the messages had been clear on Participation, Prevention and Financing:

- Strengthen the capacity and accountability of the humanitarian sector to ensure the protection of women’s rights in times of crisis in a meaningful way—i.e., with women’s rights organisations involved as key stakeholders;
- The prevention of all forms of violence, and ensuring the protection of women’s rights should be central to any humanitarian planning response. It must be integrated into early warning, response, recovery and resilience building;
- Ensure equitable allocation of resources towards the strengthening of women’s networks and coalitions that support women leaders to take up leadership and coordination roles alongside other national actors in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.³⁷

³⁹ Shifting the Power Coalition, Strengthening and Localising Women’s Leadership and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action

Through its membership in the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), the StPC has collaborated to influence national, regional and global agendas on integrating and localising the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into peacebuilding, climate change and humanitarian approaches. This is reflected in the report of the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR1325.

A report published by Transcend Oceania and GPPAC – *And She Persisted for Peace: Redesign the Table* (2020) – highlighted the importance of valuing traditional/customary knowledge and practices and including diverse women and other groups in all decision-making spaces. The report called for going beyond National Action Plans, that largely focus on gender mainstreaming, to address the underlying causes of gender inequality and redefine power relations and existing processes to enable a more gender-inclusive approach at all levels, that also integrates faith-based and indigenous practices. As highlighted in this report, women leaders' experiences in TC Pam (2015) and TC Winston (2016) further catalysed collaboration among humanitarian partners, women with disability networks and young women led organisations to establish the StP Coalition. The purpose was to collectively address diverse women's underrepresentation in formal spaces where key decisions are made on regional peace and security, disaster management and humanitarian response.⁴⁰

This approach is an opportunity to address the intersecting challenges of reaching remote communities, capturing and driving responses to the impacts and needs of the most vulnerable groups, and addressing the absence of diverse women's voices and leadership in crisis response and recovery. While focused on humanitarian action in response to COVID-19, the proposed project affirms the nexus between climate change, disasters and the WPS agenda as StPC includes the Gender Focal Points network of GPPAC⁴¹ Pacific.

This approach is also supported by evidence-based findings from Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre in collaboration with ActionAid, which identified that valuing women's localised knowledge, increasing women's participation and collective action in forging community networks provides the groundwork for a more integrated, gender-responsive approach to intersecting crises.⁴² The Framework for gender responsive alternatives to climate change and related crises identifies four core approaches:

1. value women's knowledge;
2. support women's participation;
3. recognise women's collective action; and,
4. underpinning the first three approaches, address unequal gender norms.

⁴⁰ *And She Persisted for Peace: Redesign the Table*, Transcend Oceania and GPPAC, <https://www.gppac.net/resources/and-she-persisted-peace-redesign-table>

⁴¹ GPPAC is the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, <https://gppac.net/>

⁴² Maria Tanyag and Jacqui True (2019) *GENDER RESPONSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO CLIMATE CHANGE: A COUNTRY REPORT ON VANUATU*, Melbourne: Monash University. Available at: <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Monash-GRACC-Report-Vanuatu.pdf>

The Framework is designed to foster a shift from crisis responses to sustainable, long-term development outcomes, promote integrated approaches and drive transformative change in gender relations. The Government is encouraged to consider this framework in its development and humanitarian programming in the Pacific.

EMERGENCY GRANT MECHANISM

In response to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of the 2019-2020 cyclone season and recognising the vulnerabilities and marginalisation of women and girls, the Coalition established the Emergency Grant mechanism with the support of DFAT's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development programme. The mechanism provided a much-needed avenue for StPC members to quickly access funds and continue to drive accountability to women's rights in disaster management and crisis response.

An emergency grant of up to 5000AUD supports an immediate and rapid, short-term response to a significant humanitarian disaster or emergency through the following actions: local women's leadership in emergency response e.g. undertaking baseline assessments; increased human resource capacity; enhanced communications between women's organisations and affected communities; and women-led responses targeting the specific needs and protection of diverse women in the response.⁴³

From December 2019 to July 2020, a total of 36,500AUD was disbursed to 7 StPC partners in response to the Samoa measles epidemic, COVID-19 and the Tropical Cyclone Harold emergency response. The next phase of the emergency grant roll-out is to support medium and long-term recovery in response to COVID-19 as well as provide access to funds during 2020/2021 cyclone season.

Collaboration in crisis situations is vital and since 2016, the Coalition has been working together to bring about change so that humanitarian action does not regard women as vulnerable beneficiaries but rather builds on our indigenous and localised knowledge. The Coalition is committed to a Pacific women-led south-south collaboration that focuses on shared learning and mutual capacity development; resourcing of locally-led emergency response; supporting innovations in early warning and protection; and collective engagement in regional and national disaster planning.⁴¹

INFLUENCING THE PACIFIC HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR COVID-19

Issues of climate change, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, peace and security and gender equality are interrelated, yet due to existing gender inequalities and institutional barriers, women and girls are often invisible in decision-making in the response to these complex challenges. This severely affects their economic capacity, mobility and resilience to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises. This persists, despite increased attention and investment across the Pacific on women's leadership in decision making, women are still notably absent from visible leadership roles within the humanitarian sector and disaster planning mechanisms

⁴³ Shifting the Power Coalition, Shifting the Power Together- Pacific Women-Led Responses to COVID-19, <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/FHN-PROJECT-web-version.pdf>

as well as peace and security processes. Additionally, while the lived experiences of women and their communities are not bound by these categorisations and are cross-cutting, national policies and regional agendas remain largely siloed rather than enhancing the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace/security actors for more effective responses.⁴⁴

In 2020, the impact of COVID-19 combined with other disasters and pre-existing gender inequalities had exacerbated three critical challenges for a gender-responsive approach to the pandemic in the Pacific:

1. The institutional marginalization and exclusion of women in decision-making spaces on humanitarian action and broader security debates;
2. The absence of diverse women's voices and experiences informing inclusive disaster planning, response and recovery; and
3. The increased threat of protection risks facing women, which is particularly acute in remote and rural communities with limited access to timely and relevant information and services.

In their Framework for Pacific Regionalism (2014), Pacific Islands Forum Leaders endorsed a Pacific Vision calling for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives.⁴⁵ The Framework sets out several ways in which ambitious and transformative initiatives best addressed through a regional approach can be identified including the regional public policy consultation process. Since 2018, the Boe Declaration has become a key policy framework to progress the vision for the Pacific under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, especially as Pacific leaders work together to deliver a collective regional approach through the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19.

With the overall objective to achieve gender-responsive national and regional policies and plans on COVID-19, resulting from increased influence of women-led organisations on the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 prevention and response, StPC has supported diverse Pacific women's ability to engage in, and access, key national and regional policy-making regional and national spaces to advocate for gender mainstreaming in the COVID-19 prevention and response.

⁴⁴ Shifting the Power Coalition, Pacific Case Study, <https://glocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PacificCaseStudy2019.pdf>

⁴⁵ Pacific Islands Forum- Framework for Pacific Regionalism, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/>

The project objectives include:

1. Women's collective power strengthened in 3 forum countries with women-led national CSO platforms influencing gender responsive actions and inclusive policies on national COVID-19 recovery programs.
2. Shifting the Power Coalition members influence regional policies and plans under the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 prevention and response.

The project has supported the 3 partners, ActionAid Vanuatu (AAV), Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF), and YWCA Samoa to conduct baseline assessments on how COVID-19 and associated lockdowns have affected diverse Pacific women, which thematically highlight the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women in emergency situations and how vulnerabilities are exacerbated due to a lack of gender-responsive COVID-19 response and recovery plans. The baseline assessment findings, alongside secondary research that has been undertaken to examine the gendered impacts on COVID-19, will support the collective recommendations made by the 3 Coalition partners on promoting gender-responsive and inclusive policies and plans.⁴²

DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCACY

In the Pacific Islands region, there are an estimated 775,000 women with disabilities. Most Pacific Island countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), both of which recognize equal access to rights for women with disabilities, including

during crises. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also have a focus on achieving gender equality (Goal 5) and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (Goal 16).

From the beginning, the Coalition has been 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 create spaces where they could learn from each other, co-create tools that are 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.

StPC is amplifying the voices of women with disabilities at all levels and empowering women with disabilities to advocate on the challenges they face in different spaces of leadership & decision making. It is making change for an inclusive society.

-Lanieta Tuimabu, Fiji Disabled People's Federation

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 and continuously learning to effectively engage women with disabilities in their work, and been more systematic about doing so, even beyond the coalition's activities for example - 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.

COALITION INNOVATION

Women-led early warning information and communications mechanisms have had a dual impact in delivering access to information for communities to better prepare for extreme weather events and health emergencies; and supporting the realization of gender equality. Technology has been an accelerator of change for women in the existing initiatives by amplifying their voice and outreach, as well as enabling their leadership in community-led responses.⁴⁶

The Australian Aid Program has been a critical partner in this work providing funding for the Coalition's advocacy, training and research agenda through Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development since 2018. In 2020, the Coalition also received funding through the Australian Pacific Climate Change Partnership to support young women to increase their access to climate services and information and provide leadership in supporting their communities to adapt to climate change.

One significant achievement of the Coalition has been the development of Pacific women-led early warning communications systems. This began with FemLINKPacific's Women's Weather Watch in Fiji, which provided a vital two-way communication channel between communities affected by Cyclone Winston in 2016 and humanitarian relief efforts. With the support of DFAT's Gender Action Platform and later the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, this model was adapted to the Vanuatu context. The Women Wetem Weta platform managed by ActionAid Vanuatu has supported young Ni-Vanuatu women to learn about weather patterns, understand reports coming from the Bureau of Meteorology, and be able to develop early warning messages to inform their communities of impending cyclones and other extreme weather events. This mechanism was critical in warning communities of Cyclone Harold and raising awareness of COVID-19 prevention and response actions. Through the use of bulk SMS, WWW now reaches half of the Vanuatu population via the Digicel mobile phone network.

⁴⁶ Bhandari, N; How Some Pacific Women are Responding to Climate Change and Natural Disasters, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/pacific-women-responding-climate-change-natural-disasters/>

In 2021 the WWW model was adapted to the PNG context with the support of AHP and in partnership with Coalition partners, YWCA PNG and Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Meri Gat Pawa, Meri Gat Infomasen (Women Have Information, Women Have Power) was launched in July and managed to circulate 5.6 million SMS alerts to over one million people on COVID prevention and response, as well as prevention of gender-based violence.

Increasing access to climate services and information is vital in managing climate risks and building community resilience. However, there is a persistent gender and disability gap or disconnect between institutions that develop climate information and community-based organisations representing women and other diverse constituencies. Investing in the leadership and agency of women as key resource people in building community resilience is critical, given their gender role in managing food, water and health security in families and communities. These models facilitate access to weather information, particularly early warning information to enhance inclusive disaster preparedness and can play a critical role in gathering feedback from local network leaders to ensure inclusive response and recovery measures.⁴⁷

PACIFIC ISLAND FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

In 2022, the Coalition co-founded and convened the Pacific Island Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice (PIFA for CJ) to weave together feminist organizing by civil society organizations and activists in response to the impact of climate change on the lives of women, girls and LBTQI+ individuals in the Pacific. The alliance aims to enhance visibility of Pacific Island women-led and feminist organising for climate justice; co-create a space for regional and national learning and collaboration to draw attention to local priorities; and opportunities for advocacy and engagement to amplify collective messages of the movement.

PIFA for CJ is coordinated by a movement led committee that reflects the diversity of Pacific women's leadership across the breadth of Pacific Island civil society led climate justice movement with the aim to scale up collaborative CSO, and feminist programming led by Pacific women-led and feminist networks and coalitions working for climate justice. Members of the Committee are Diverse Voices in Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji, the Pacific Conference of Churches, Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN), Talitha Project (a member of the GPPAC Pacific network), Vanuatu Disability Promotion & Advocacy (representing the Pacific Disability Forum) and YWCA of Samoa represent the Shifting the Power Coalition which is hosting the movement-led alliance.

Informed by the November 2021 landscape survey, PIFA for CJ will also demonstrate how a feminist funding model for climate action can be supported by multiyear, longer-term funding, alongside well-coordinated rapid response funding windows for feminist groups to mobilize around key moments or crises. The alliance will support the availability of grants for: Feminist Climate Justice Innovation; Movement Building; Climate Emergency Preparedness and Response including Urgent Action.

⁴⁷ Shifting the Power Coalition- Mobilising Women's Leadership in Response to COVID-19 and TC Harold March – June 2020, <http://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/STPC-Mobilising-Women%E2%80%99s-Leadership-in-Response-C-197TCHarold.FINAL-Pagess.pdf>

PIFA for CJ believes that it is vital to ensure resources and support reach women when they need it, to deliberate, participate, design, and deliver what works for diverse women and in their communities through untied, flexible and core funding. Such an approach supports a people centred approach while ensuring stability and sustainability for feminists and women's rights and women-led organizations to drive a localization agenda, ensure dedicated resources for young women-led initiatives which is critical for sustaining and growing a vibrant feminist movement in the region.

AN INCLUSIVE PEACE-DEVELOPMENT-HUMANITARIAN NEXUS APPROACH

Since the formation of StPC, Pacific Forum Leaders have adopted the Boe Declaration, which broadened the definition of security to include human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, and regional cooperation. The declaration reflects successive Pacific Forum statements during previous open debates on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that amplified the need to address the growing climate crisis.

This expanded notion of peace and security is a welcome development and an opportunity to enhance multi-stakeholder collaboration at both regional and national levels, as well as enhance a peace, development and humanitarian nexus approach for the Boe Declaration Action Plan in line with the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This regional WPS plan had the foresight to recommend that relief and recovery “must meet women and girls specific relief needs and to ensure that women’s capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery are reinforced in humanitarian crises and conflict and post-conflict situations.”⁵

Coalition engagement in regional processes such as the 2019 Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), representation in the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) Task Force and the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster (PHPC) as well as engagement in the PIFS-Non State Actors program. Combined with the national and regional outputs planned for this project, PIF member states will be provided with community-led, evidence-based recommendations to drive a more inclusive approach to national engagement in regional public policy development. The project outputs will also provide content for national and regional media organisations to amplify recommendations from women leaders and their networks.

However, while the Boe Declaration Action Plan identifies the triple nexus approach, the implementation of Pacific Forum Leaders commitments to gender equality and national gender policies in PIF member states has remained siloed.

The peace-development-humanitarian nexus (Triple Nexus) is the key vehicle for advancing inclusive peace given the intersecting security, humanitarian and development challenges facing the region, which specifically impact women and girls, including in the remote islands. The situation suggests the need to undertake coherent and comprehensive action across the Triple Nexus that integrates the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and regional commitments to gender equality.

A Triple Nexus approach provides a practical framework to operationalise a regional WPS architecture in line with member state commitments particularly in regional intergovernmental

processes. For example, the Boe Declaration can bring together key stakeholders working on the pillars of national action plans to build knowledge, capabilities and understanding from the field to the policy table that ultimately increases women's leadership and engagement and the application of WPS across the development, security, disaster management and humanitarian sectors.

For local women peacebuilders and first responders bringing together the peace and humanitarian nexus also responds to feminist coalitions and humanitarian networks, such as the StPC and the Feminist Humanitarian Network who are collaborating to address the inter-linkages to the commitments to the women's rights and a feminist agenda to ensure the humanitarian system, humanitarian and crisis response are accountable to women's rights and the WPS agenda to ensure planning, response and recovery efforts contribute to a realisation of a transformative agenda that supports localised action including access to resources by diverse women's groups and networks.

Pillar 4 of the Sendai Framework, reiterates that investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience requires a strengthened collaborative approach on the Humanitarian- Development-Peace nexus and the integration of disaster risk reduction in Humanitarian Response Plans to ensure long-term resilience building through all actions.⁴⁸

The Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP WPS) 2021-2031 builds on existing efforts to protect and promote the human rights of all women and girls, and increase the full and meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes. It identifies four outcomes that will guide Australia's international peace and security efforts, and support coordinated action across government. These include:

- Supporting women's meaningful participation and needs in peace processes;
- Reducing sexual and gender-based violence;
- Supporting resilience, crisis, and security, law and justice efforts to meet the needs and rights of all women and girls, and
- Demonstrating leadership and accountability for Women, Peace and Security.⁴⁹

“Women apply an intentional gender lens to the design of fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance programmes to achieve greater equality and social protection. There must a gender audit on the impact of COVID19”

⁴⁸ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

⁴⁹ DFAT: Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/australias-second-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security>

As the global COVID-19 pandemic heated up, women in Vanuatu took the response into their own hands to develop the first national public health message about the virus. The message, in simple non-technical language, was sent to more than 77,148 people on five islands across the Digicel mobile network – directly reaching more than one quarter of the Vanuatu population. SMS translation: ‘Avoid close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections. Frequently wash hands with soap and water. Cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.’

COVID-19 has added to the challenges of the 2020 Pacific Island region cyclone season. But with Woman Wetem Weta, the ActionAid Vanuatu team was ready to also respond to TC Harold, another category five cyclone that made landfall on April 4 after wreaking havoc in Solomon Islands. Harold was the first Category 5 severe tropical cyclone to occur in the South Pacific basin since Cyclone Gita in 2018 and was also the second-strongest tropical cyclone to ever affect Vanuatu, behind Cyclone Pam in 2015.

From Vanuatu it made its way to Fiji and then on to Tonga whereas Ofa Fa’anunu, Director of Meteorology tracked severe Tropical Cyclone Harold (category 5) so was StPC Steering Committee member Vanessa Heleta, the Executive Director of the Talitha Project:

“As we face the reality and fear of COVID-19, TC Harold is increasing the burden of women first responders to ensure community safety and resilience. But we persist to cultivate resilience to ensure protection measures are in place”

Heleta further added that at such times solidarity and support through women-led networks and partnerships provide the necessary support to work together in new and innovative ways that are needed. According to Heleta, Cyclone Gita showed the insurmountable resilience of the girls and young women of Tonga. And it is vital that regional responses, including to the COVID-19 crisis invest in women’s leadership.

Members of the Coalition have taken the 2019-2020 Pacific cyclone season update seriously, sharing their experiences and working together to support women at local, national and regional levels to mobilise and enhance preparedness, response and recovery. Strategies are being updated to also take into account the COVID-19 crisis at national and local level.

And as a feminist network, Coalition partners recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic would change the way humanitarian action is organised. Subsequently the Coalition partners organised to support their engagement in humanitarian action, building on indigenous knowledge, and existing good practices and capacities with the goal to gradually reduce dependence on international actors for humanitarian assistance and protection.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Feminist Humanitarian Network, Women-led responses to COVID-19: Report from the Pacific Islands, <https://www.feministhumanitariannetwork.org/blog/women-led-responses-to-covid-19-report-from-the-pacific-islands>

In July 2020 the Shifting the Power Coalition published the report Mobilizing Women's Leadership: Solutions for Protection and Recovery in a Time of COVID 19 and TC Harold

The report had 10 key recommendations drawing from partners strong community networks and lived experience, with the intentions to inform and drive localized, women led recovery efforts in the immediate to medium-term through organized advocacy and the provision of gender responsive services. This report was an urgent call from the Shifting the Power Coalition to our Pacific Leaders to ensure the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway (PHP) tackles the drivers of gender inequalities in areas such as access to healthcare and economic recovery, including access to natural resources.

Recommendation 1: Women's rights are non-negotiable in COVID19 response programming.

Recommendation 2: The Coalition further recommends a multistakeholder process that ensures Pacific Women's Rights and Feminist Organisations and networks provide gender oversight to the PHP and national response and recovery measures.

Recommendation 3: The Coalition amplifies the call for increased funding and capacity development to local and national women's groups as equal partners in humanitarian action with targeted and direct support through both development and humanitarian programming

Recommendation 4: The Coalition calls for dedicated funding for localized, women-led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence

Recommendation 5: The Coalition alongside the Pacific Disability Forum urges all levels of government, agencies, health ministries and the private sector throughout the Pacific to work with Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) to ensure that persons with disabilities, in particular women, children and young persons with disabilities are not left behind in the COVID-19 response.

Recommendation 6: Have dedicated funding for women-led livelihood and food security programmes

Recommendation 7: Resource women-led violence prevention and protection oversight in economic recovery programmes particularly at the sub-national level

Recommendation 8: Invest in women's access to healthcare, ensuring the availability of gender-responsive health services and vital sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs at district and community/village level

Recommendation 9: Invest in women-led Infrastructure development including WASH programmes

Recommendation 10: Invest in Innovative and Community-led Information and Communication strategies

FIJI

While Fiji was initially able to control COVID-19 for most of 2020, breaches in quarantine borders in March 2021 led to a deadly Delta variant wave. As of June 2022, there had been 65,103 cumulative cases with 864 deaths.⁵¹ Compulsory vaccine mandates also ensured that by the end of the 2021, most of the eligible adult population had been double vaccinated.

One thing to take into account is that – we are currently at a phase of global transitional change because of COVID-19. There are probably going to be some major changes as we’re currently experiencing. We might return to normal and it may be a new normal. The question is – How can we ensure that women are part of the decision making of policies that depicts the new and ensuring inclusivity in the changes?. These are just my thoughts and may we pay close attention to all discussions and meetings

-Adivasu Levu- Executive Director, Transcend Oceania

In the early days of the pandemic, a paper by the COVID-19 Response Gender Working group identified women working in the tourism, transportation, manufacturing, retail, natural resources and agriculture sectors as well as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises as most vulnerable to COVID-19-related impacts. The pandemic had exacerbated the current situation for women, girls, LGBTQI and others who are marginalised and vulnerable in Fiji. The most at risk and vulnerable are identified as below: women, women survivors of violence, children, people with disabilities, women and girls living in urban and rural and maritime settlements, older women, single mothers, LGBTQI people, sex workers, people living in poverty, young women, women and girls with limited access to technology and women who depend heavily on the informal economy and precarious work.⁵²

In addition to the pandemic, Fiji was also struck by Tropical Cyclone Harold in April 2020, causing States of Natural Disaster to be declared for COVID-19 and for TC Harold within the same week. Although Fiji is used to cyclones, prevention and movement restriction measures in place for COVID-19 made it difficult to respond to the trail of destruction left by the Category 4 cyclone.⁵³ In the 2020-2021 Cyclone Season, TC Yasa and TC Ana affected the Western and Northern divisions of Fiji and the associated floods increased the incidence of Leptospirosis,

⁵¹ WHO COVID-19 Dashboard: Fiji, <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/fj/>

⁵² Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Women in Fiji, http://www.fwrn.org.fj/images/Gender_and_COVID_Guidance_Note_-_Rapid_Gender_Analysis.pdf

⁵³ Fiji Gender, Disability and Inclusion Analysis COVID-19 and TC Harold, https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Fiji-GDIA_COVID19TCHarold_30Jun20-FINAL-signed-off.pdf

Typhoid, Dengue fever, and Diarrhoea (LTDD)- communicable diseases which are common after cyclones.⁵⁴

On December 17, 2020 Category 5 TC Yasa made landfall 2 hours ahead of schedule on Fiji's second island of Vanua Levu, while heavy rain and winds and coastal inundation and tide surges affected the whole of the Fiji group. Cyclone Yasa, with winds at its centre gusting as high as 350km/h, made landfall on the island of Vanua Levu. The category five storm was over the province of Bua, but a hurricane warning was in force for nearly the whole country. A state of disaster was declared with a curfew coming into effect for the entire country. The National Disaster Management Office said at least 600,000 people were in Yasa's path.

An initial assessment across the 3 Fiji-based StPC partners found that evacuation centres had been operationalized in the Northern and Western Division and the Fiji Disabled People's Federation Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated as an important base for the coordination of information to and from their local branches. Initial reports from women on the ground suggested that the destructive force of the winds, rainfall and coastal inundation and coastal surges were nothing like it was experienced during Cyclone Winston. There was widespread damage particularly to food gardens and farms as well as homes and shelter. It was clear that a women-led response was needed to ensure the protection of women's rights remain central to the cyclone response and to prevent the deepening of gender inequality and poverty.

Subsequently six diverse women leaders from the three Fijian member organisations of the StPC– FemLINKPacific, Fiji Disabled People's Federation and Transcend Oceania were resourced to undertake a rapid needs assessment across the Central, Western and Northern Divisions of Fiji. The response ensured an intersectional feminist approach to focus on the specific priorities of some of the most vulnerable and excluded groups, including women with disabilities, LGBTQI communities and rural women.

The TC Yasa Rapid Response was the first rapid response for the multiple partners of the Coalition in Fiji. The response reflected the priority focus of the Coalition to support Strengthening and Localising Women's Leadership and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action:

- The rapid response supported the mobilization of women's leadership and solutions in response to the health and climate change crises. This was important as women leaders identified the need to not only address the drivers of violence and conflict but also enhance protection from coercion and exploitation as well as ensure that women of all diversities did not face further discrimination or exclusion from participation in disaster response and long-term recovery plan.
- All women leaders in the western division are experiencing the multiple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and for many of the leaders who participated in the focus group discussions, this was a first opportunity to contribute

⁵⁴ Fiji Gender, Disability and Inclusion Analysis COVID-19, TC Yasa and TC Ana, https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/TC-Yasa_GEDSI-Analysis_2-pager-April2021-PDF.pdf

to a women-led assessment that also was able to address the social and economic impacts of COVID19.

- In the northern division, in particular the Naviavia Village the impact of TC Yasa is bringing additional stress to the women in the village already affected by the impact of climate change
- As a result of the engagement by the Shifting the Power Coalition with local partner networks there is a recognition of the opportunity that the Coalition can build capacity of women first responders.

People with disabilities and their families are disproportionately impacted by intersecting crises. The Fiji Disabled Peoples' Federation and the Pacific Disability Forum have shaped policies and practices on disability inclusion at the national level. As a result of their efforts, 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.

TONGA

While Tonga initially did not report a case of COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic was still 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. Young women from the Talitha Project had the opportunity to reflect on the impact of border closures on their lives and shared their experiences of TC Gita in 2018 and TC Harold as part of training funded under the Shifting the Power Coalition. They mapped out community disaster management systems, discussed ways to enhance Safety and Protection measures and appointed a Humanitarian Focal Point who will be driving national organising efforts under the Shifting the Power Coalition. The workshop also helped young women to understand national disaster management and how humanitarian coordination mechanisms operate, as well as identify ways they could creatively and proactively influence and engage with these actors.⁴⁵

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 understood how to prepare for and respond to disasters, but they were also taking what they have learned to the community level. The Project was active on the ground and 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.⁴⁵

On January 15, 2022, there was a massive eruption of the undersea Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano about 65km north of Nuku'alofa. It was the most ferocious eruption in 140 years generating a tsunami that killed 5 people, flattened islands and villages, and damaged up to 600 buildings.⁵⁵ All communication to Tonga was initially cut off for several days and as the international humanitarian response arrived, eventually two COVID-19 cases were identified among port workers at the wharf in the capital. A lockdown was initiated which hampered relief efforts. However, community transmission still spiralled and as of June 2022, there have been 11,909 cumulative cases of COVID-19 with 12 deaths.⁵⁶

Gender-based violence is a lived reality for Tongan women and girls and many were already escaping violence which worsened during recent COVID-19 lockdowns. The Women's Crisis Centre handles between 20 and 30 domestic and family violence cases each month, but after Tonga's 26-day lockdown in early February, it began receiving more than 50 cases.⁵⁷

The Talitha Project team mobilised after the volcano and tsunami response and provided emergency assistance, including water, masks, and clothing, to girls involved in their programs in the villages of Kanokupolu and Haau as well as to families in evacuation centres on Tongatapu Island. Women trained as emergency first responders in Tonga through the Talitha Project's partnership with the Shifting the Power Coalition and ActionAid mobilised rapidly to distribute clean water to their communities after water sources were polluted by the volcanic eruption and tsunami. The Project continues to work closely with the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) to drive an inclusive emergency response to the current crisis.⁵⁸

The Talitha Project also developed a radio campaign to amplify messages of disability inclusion, safety and protection as well as COVID prevention and protection guidelines by working closely with StPC partner YWCA Samoa.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Despite historically holding a valued position within society, women in Solomon Islands now face widespread discrimination, gender-based violence and inequality. The Islands have one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world, with approximately two thirds of women aged between 15 and 49 reporting having experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner at some point in their life. Within this, over a third of women report having been sexually abused before the age of 15, most often by a male acquaintance.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ CNN: Tonga volcano was the most ferocious eruption in 140 years, <http://www.cnnphilippines.com/world/2022/5/13/tonga-eruption-biggest-in-more-a-century.html>

⁵⁶ WHO COVID-19 Dashboard: Tonga, <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/to/>

⁵⁷ ABC News: Domestic violence cases rise in wake of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption, as women call for a power shift in humanitarian response, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-17/how-disasters-tonga-hunga-tonga-haapai-volcano-impact-women/100989638>

⁵⁸ ActionAid: Clean Water, an Urgent Priority, <https://actionaid.org/news/2022/clean-water-urgent-priority-tongan-tsunami-response>

⁵⁹ UN Women: Solomon Islands, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/co/solomon-islands>

Solomon Islands was COVID-free for much of 2020 and 2021 but experienced widespread transmission since January this year and as of 2 June 2022, there have been 21,237 cumulative cases of COVID-19 with 149 deaths reported to WHO.⁶⁰ Violence against women increased as a result of the pandemic. The fear and anxiety caused by extended lockdowns have forced women to isolate with their abusers, in addition to the increased economic strain on families it has brought about, has led to increased levels of domestic violence.⁶¹ In Honiara, the Family Support Centre, an organisation providing support to survivors of gender-based violence has also increased their advocacy on COVID-19. Through newspapers, radio announcements, social media and television programs, they are also raising awareness of the links between COVID-19, restrictions on movement, the loss of livelihoods and the likelihood women and children will experience violence during this time.

Vois Blong Mere Solomon, an StPC partner also increased their COVID-19 messaging through their Mere radio programme on Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC), newsletters, projects and by coordinating collective integrated systems of information sharing amongst rural, provincial and national women's organisations in the Solomon Islands.

Information is also vital for local communities. This must be in local language, as well as accessible for people with disabilities and focus on reaching more remote communities

-Lisa Horiwapu, Solomon Islands

Apart from climate change and COVID-19 crises, Solomon Islands is also prone to political unrest. In November 2021, civil unrest related to geopolitical tussles between China and Taiwan caused riots in the capital leading to 4 people dead. Solomon Islands switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China in 2019 and the recent unrest followed protests by residents of Malaita, the most populous province, which opposed this decision by Prime Minister Sogavare's government.⁶²

While research on gender-based violence from the recent unrest is not yet available, periods of war and civil unrest are often characterised by high levels of violence against women. Amnesty International estimated that during the earlier civil unrests between 1998 and 2003 (also known as "The Tensions), 75% of Solomon Islands women suffered some form of direct personal trauma, including rape, armed violence, threats of armed violence and the death of family members. Additionally, a large number of Malaitan women were raped in direct connection with

⁶⁰ WHO COVID-19 Dashboard- Solomon Islands, <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/sb/>

⁶¹ IWDA: This Gender-Based Violence Service in Solomons is Ensuring No One is Left Behind, <https://iwda.org.au/this-gender-based-violence-service-in-solomon-islands-is-ensuring-rural-women-are-not-left-behind/>

⁶² Reuters: Explainer: -What is behind unrest in the Solomon Islands?, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/what-is-behind-unrest-solomon-islands-2021-11-29/>

the inter-communal violence during this period, as a deliberate tactic designed to humiliate the enemy.⁶³

In reaction to the November 2021 unrest, a range of women's groups issued clear statements calling for respect, restraint and mediation and for women to be part of the dialogue between the Central Government and Malaitan leaders.⁶⁴

SAMOA

Samoa dealt with a deadly measles epidemic in 2019 and a state of emergency was declared. Within months 83 deaths were noted, most of them children under the age of 4. 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. With rapid response funding and support from the StPC regional hub, the two organisations 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 LBTQI 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 community 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.⁶⁵

The baseline survey was so crucial to have the women's voices. This is a climate crisis and when COVID came we wanted to (hear from) the women most affected by lay-offs in the hospitality and tourism sectors. They are the most vulnerable. These are the mothers"

-Taimalelagi Ramona Tugaga, YWCA of Samoa

While initially Samoa was able to control the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2022 the first case of community-transmitted COVID-19 was detected prompting a nationwide lockdown. As of June 2022, there have been 13,927 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 27 deaths.

⁶³ UN Multi-Country Office Profile- Solomon Islands, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/solomon-islands>

⁶⁴ Solomon Star: Malaita women appeal to leaders for peaceful resolution, <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/malaita-women-appeal-to-leaders-for-peaceful-resolution/>

⁶⁵ Shifting the Power Coalition- Mobilizing Women's Leadership and Solutions for Protection and Recovery in a Time of Crisis; <http://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/STPC-SamoaReport2020v3.pdf>

“The baseline assessment showed there was so much in need for women to survive. When we came in (for the baseline assessment) it was such an incredible experience, it was a challenging time for the women who were interviewed. We learnt a lot from the measles epidemic (including from) the survivors of violence and young mothers. We learnt that many mothers had neglected vaccinations. We knew from our 2019 assessment that young mothers needed to trust vaccination programmes. When COVID hit we had the data and after a year of counselling about the vaccination programme”

-Taimalelagi Ramona Tugaga, YWCA of Samoa

YWCA Samoa applied the knowledge they acquired through their measles response to the response to COVID-19 and worked with the government to ensure a gender-responsive vaccination campaign. YWCA convened young women leaders, including women frontliners, climate activists, and community leaders to inform a paper of recommendations, highlighting the role and contribution of women in response to the pandemic. The paper was used to present findings to the Ministry of Women and Social Development, UN Women, the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment MNRE and other stakeholders to ensure recovery efforts are inclusive and accountable to women’s rights, safety and protection, with a focus on addressing the needs of young women and women with disabilities. Aside from the consultations, YWCA also gave out packages and COVID kits to their members and networks.⁶⁶

PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND BOUGAINVILLE

Papua New Guinea has had one of the most devastating impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific. The country’s health system was unprepared- already stretched thin and struggling with serious issues with staffing, supplies, infrastructure and community health education. PNG’s maternal, child and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the region, and diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV remain prevalent.⁶⁷ As of June 2022, there have been 44,655 cumulative cases of COVID-19 with 658 deaths.⁶⁸ Furthermore, vaccine hesitancy is high and PNG has the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the world, with only 3.2 per cent of the population receiving one dose or more.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Shifting the Power Coalition- Impact Assessment Report, <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/StPC-Impact-Assessment-Report-25012263.pdf>

⁶⁷ The Strategist: Covid-19’s toll on Papua New Guinea, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/covid-19s-toll-on-papua-new-guinea/>

⁶⁸ WHO: COVID-19 Dashboard: PNG, <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/pg/>

⁶⁹ Asia and The Pacific Policy Society: Why PNG’s fight against COVID-19 starts with health workers, <https://www.policyforum.net/why-pngs-fight-against-covid-19-starts-with-health-workers/>

“The most important issue was having the right information. Social media actually came up with a lot of confusing stories. We stepped in (with Meri Gat Pawa, Meri Gat Infomesen) with our Department of Health to help awareness and advocacy” –

-Barbara Tanne, Bougainville Women’s Federation

In response to COVID-19, StPC 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. 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. To raise awareness on COVID-19, 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 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.

The ‘Meri Gat Pawa, Meri Gat Infomesen’ project (“MGI”) is a joint initiative of ActionAid Australia, StPC Secretariat and StPC members –the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCfR) in Bougainville and YWCA Papua New Guinea. The project is driving locally led and inclusive COVID-19 response across Papua New Guinea and Bougainville. MGI is not only about saving lives but also supports women, young women and women with disabilities to determine and drive the best and most inclusive response to the pandemic. This is even more critical because PNG is a country where there are no women in the national parliament. The project has enabled 15 local women leaders to use their local knowledge and expertise to develop lifesaving COVID-19 health messages.

“We have presented the recommendations from our consultations to the different meetings that we have through the Women, Peace and Security Technical Working Group and ABG women representatives. This work is ongoing. We want to see the partnership strengthened between the ABG (Autonomous Bougainville Government), the national government and the civil society organisations of Bougainville”

- Barbara Tanne – Bougainville Women’s Federation

The messages have focused on enhancing COVID-19 awareness and prevention and addressing vaccine hesitancy. The initiative is working closely with the PNG Department of Health’s Risk Communications and Community Engagement Committee to align with government-led public health messaging, as well as the broader Australian Humanitarian Partnership priorities in PNG, which is working to support communities to be disaster ready.⁷⁰

In Bougainville, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation explains how women realized that the state of emergency imposed by authorities did not really meet their needs, and pushed authorities to include women in the teams assessing the situation and determining measures to respond to COVID-19. Agnes Titus and her team at the Centre argued for the need to include women in the design of the disaster management and recovery.

VANUATU

COVID-19 hit hard in Vanuatu with the health crisis impacting border closures and the tourism industry. As of June 2022, there have been 10,390 cumulative cases of COVID-19 with 14 deaths.⁷¹ On top of the pandemic, Vanuatu is prone to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.

⁷⁰ ActionAid: Local women lead fight against COVID-19 in PNG and Bougainville, <https://actionaid.org.au/local-women-lead-fight-against-covid-19-in-png-and-bougainville/>

⁷¹ WHO COVID-19 Dashboard- Vanuatu, <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/vu/>

“We trained the women in women-led assessments, and these has enabled them to identify their issues and these issues have been brought to the policy actors. So, this actually allowed the women to identify the protection needs and allowed the solutions for the short term which is the rapid response and of course the recovery which is long term”

- Flora Vano, Action Aid Vanuatu, Country Programme Manager

In 2020 in response to the pandemic, StP partners, ActionAid Vanuatu, Vanuatu Young Women for Change, and Vanuatu Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association led the first-ever women-led Rapid Needs Assessment Survey. This provided a safe space for women to share firsthand how TC Harold brought destruction to their communities, as well as provide recommendations for a localized response that will put protection of their safety and dignity at its centre.

Coalition members’ advocacy also 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.

VYWC was able to access a rapid response grant through the StP emergency grant programme which were used to obtain life-saving supplies to women in Luganville and Malo who were severely affected by the impact of category TC Harold. It has also catalysed economic security programmes for young women, single mothers and women with disabilities living in the urban and peri-urban communities of Port Vila and North Efate.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and other intersecting crises in the Pacific have brought to attention the disproportionate impact on Pacific women and girls. Far from being victims, Pacific women are mobilisers and innovators and feminist alliances such as the Shifting the Power Coalition have demonstrated the collective power, resilience, influence and leadership of diverse Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change at local, regional and international levels.

Enhancing the participation of women's leadership does not require any new commitments as several key regional frameworks and mechanisms in the Pacific already articulate the importance of ensuring women's rights, women's peace and security and facilitate their meaningful inclusion at all levels of decision-making.

The peace-development-humanitarian nexus (Triple Nexus) is the key vehicle for advancing inclusive peace given the intersecting security, humanitarian and development challenges facing the Pacific which specifically impact women and girls.



