



IN BRIEF



GENDER AND PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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What's the Issue?

In the Pacific, cyclones, floods and droughts are becoming increasingly unpredictable and extreme, with devastating effects. Disasters not only cause death and injury, but destroy homes, infrastructure, assets and crops, compromising food security and livelihoods. Women are often the first responders to a crisis, and they play a central role in the survival and resilience of families and communities. Disasters affect people differently, so people's needs differ, as do their resources, capacities and coping strategies.

Global research has shown that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die or be injured in a disaster. In emergencies, women also face increased risks of gender-based and sexual violence; unequal access to food, water, medical and humanitarian assistance; a loss of economic opportunities; and an increase in their workload.

These realities are rooted in existing gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms, which are exacerbated during disasters. Women are not consistently consulted in preparedness planning, recovery, and resilience measures. The same is often true for people with disabilities, diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, the young and elderly, and groups with specific vulnerabilities.

The skills Pacific women possess are often underutilized in the recovery phase. Such skills include community decision-making, securing economic opportunities, sourcing clean water and food, and agricultural recovery. Despite this, gender is not systematically considered in the Pacific region's humanitarian responses, either at the national or regional level. Data are not always disaggregated by sex, age and disability, rendering the unique protection needs of different groups invisible. In the initial response, there is often a focus on distribution of tangible commodities such as food, water, first aid, without consideration of human factors.

Our Solutions

Ensuring that humanitarian action is responsive to gender and protection issues requires a shared understanding of its importance and a firm commitment to action of all stakeholders – government, civil society and humanitarian sectors.

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

In a first for UN Women, the Multi-Country Office in Fiji has been designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as lead for coordination of humanitarian protection efforts in the Pacific region. In taking on the regional cluster-lead role, UN Women has seized the opportunity to support the protection of people affected by disasters in the Pacific region. This includes attending to the specific needs of certain groups, such as people with disabilities and those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. In the course of this work, UN Women promotes women and men having equal voice, inclusion and participation in these efforts, both as beneficiaries and partners.

In the Pacific, the role of UN Women in the humanitarian space is fourfold: (a) coordination of protection actors during preparedness and response, to support safety and dignity for disaster-affected populations; (b) coordination of actors preparing for and addressing gender-based violence in emergencies; (c) mainstreaming gender and protection across sectors preparing and responding to the disaster with shelter, food, water, etc; and (d) adapting UN Women's existing programming for emergency response activities. UN Women works closely with other key agencies, such as UNICEF, and within existing government structures and processes, to leverage comparative advantages, harness synergies, avoid duplication and encourage local participation.



How We Make a Difference

UN Women's role in humanitarian response in the Pacific:

UN Women provides leadership to the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster (PHPC) that works on enhancing regional and national capacity for gender and protection-sensitive disaster preparedness, response and recovery. It does so by coordinating the humanitarian protection efforts of UN agencies and regional and international organizations by awareness-raising, capacity development, and provision of technical guidance and support.

As a member of the PHPC and in partnership with national disaster management offices and women's ministries, UN Women has facilitated capacity building on gender and protection in humanitarian action in five countries: Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

In addition, UN Women leverages its strong field and programme presence in Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, working closely with women's ministries to provide technical support as part of the national protection cluster and committee in these countries.

Examples from Tropical Cyclone Winston response in Fiji

- UN Women played a number of important coordination roles in the cyclone response. The Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster led by the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation was co-led by UN Women and UNICEF; and the Gender-Based Violence Sub-cluster was also led by the Ministry and co-led by UN Women. When the cyclone hit in February 2016, the Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster:
 - Conducted a cluster-led sectoral assessment (and was the only cluster to do so). The protection issues identified in the inter-agency assessment provided important information for other clusters and agencies and guided their response.
 - Developed a code of conduct for all humanitarian workers which was adopted and endorsed by the Fiji Government.
- UN Women secured funding to support its existing development partners to provide protection-related responses.
 - The Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation was able to identify people with disabilities who were in need and provided disability-specific 'dignity packs' to 563 out of the 900 people identified.
 - The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Empower Pacific and Medical Services Pacific were able to provide 18,891 women and girls with psychological first aid after the cyclone.

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Timeframe: Ongoing

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

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

Focus areas:

- Leveraging existing programmatic strengths and field-office presence. Providing support for local partners working with UN Women's programmes to enable them to move into humanitarian emergency preparedness and response in their respective specialties.
 - UN Women's Ending Violence Against Women programme supports partners to prepare for and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies.
 - Under its Women's Economic Empowerment programme, Markets for Change project partners are supporting the re-establishment of women's livelihoods following disasters. For example, after TC Winston in Fiji, UN Women provided temporary market shelters and equipment in ten markets, repairs to five markets, and agro-supplies to over 1,580 cyclone-affected market vendors.
- Supporting national humanitarian actors, systems and processes.
 - Providing support for government ministries and authorities responsible for gender and protection in coordinating protection preparedness and response in emergencies.
 - Supporting the incorporation of gender and protection across government-led sectoral responses.
 - Coordinating preparedness and response to gender-based violence in emergencies.

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