



# Weaving a culture of resilience

A gender-sensitive approach to disaster risk reduction  
in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands



Humanitarian Aid  
and Civil Protection

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## **Weaving a culture of resilience.**

### **A gender-sensitive approach to disaster risk reduction in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.**

This report is an outcome of the study “Participatory Action Research – Gender-sensitive approach to Disaster Risk Reduction in Solomon and Vanuatu”. The study was supported by DIPECHO as part of a multi-hazard community-based disaster risk reduction project implemented by French Red Cross.



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and Civil Protection

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Photos: Heike Bill

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# ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CAP   | Community Action Plan (Vanuatu)                                      |
| CDC   | Community Disaster Committee (Vanuatu)                               |
| CRP   | Community Response Plan (Vanuatu)                                    |
| DRR   | Disaster Risk Reduction  |
| FA    | First Aid  |
| FRC   | French Red Cross   |
| HFA   | Hyogo Framework for Action   |
| HQ    | Headquarter  |
| IFRC  | International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies |
| LF    | Logical Framework  |
| MoU   | Memorandum of Understanding  |
| PAR   | Participatory Action Research  |
| PCM   | Project Cycle Management   |
| RCRC  | Red Cross Red Crescent   |
| RRA   | Community Rapid Rural Appraisal                                      |
| SBO   | Sub Branch Officer   |
| SIRC  | Solomon Islands Red Cross  |
| TBR 1 | Initial Phase “Together Becoming Resilient” project                  |
| TBR 2 | Consecutive Phase “Together Becoming Resilient” project              |
| ToR   | Terms of Reference   |
| VCA   | Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis                                  |
| VDRC  | Village Disaster Risk Committee (Solomon Islands)                    |
| VRC   | Vanuatu Red Cross  |
| VRP   | Village Response Plan (Solomon Islands)                              |
| VRRAP | Village Risk Reduction Action Plan (Solomon Islands)                 |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The knowledge and understanding of gender roles and the different responsibilities of women and girls as well as men and boys are vital for mainstreaming gender into the planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction (DRR) projects. Both sexes have different abilities and ways of responding - consequently, disaster impacts them in different ways. Since gender roles are socially defined, the potential to suffer risk, the vulnerability of women and men, as well as their related capacities to prepare for, cope with and recover from the impact of a disaster are also determined by physical, environmental, social, economic, political, cultural and institutional factors.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a profound understanding of the given sociocultural context is key to gender-aware DRR projects to customise disaster risk reduction to particular settings and make them more effective and sustainable.

With the purpose of the Vanuatu Red Cross (VRC) and the Solomon Islands Red Cross (SIRC) to successfully implement the consecutive phase of the community-based DRR project Together Becoming Resilient (TBR), both societies had initiated a research aiming at a more gender-sensitive approach to DRR in both countries.

This research gives insight on the situations in which women and men, girls and boys live in three selected communities in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. It provides information about their local behaviour patterns, belief and value systems, their daily life routines etc. - all necessary information to adapt ongoing and plan future DRR measures in this specific context.

The information is organized in the following way: The first part of the report informs about the background of the research and its context. It contains the objectives, a description about the methodology and the general context of the research. The second part focuses on the physical, natural, social, human and financial/economic factors, which influence and define roles and capacities of women and men on the community level and have implications for DRR.

In accordance with the terms of reference (ToR) of this consultancy, the next parts concentrate on the roles and capacities of women and men in food production and income generation as well as on Early Warning Systems, relating to communication systems and adaptation of early warning messages. Due to the limitations of this research, the latter is merely a summary of the very brief conversations with some community members regarding Early Warning Systems. Recommendations given for different fields such as Participation, Communication Patterns, Youth, Transitional change/change agents/attitudes etc. complement this part of the chapter.

To implement effective and sustainable DRR projects that take appropriate account of the different needs and interests, vulnerabilities and capacities of women and girls as well as men and boys, involves serious commitment to gender mainstreaming on (1) the organizational level, as well as (2) the programming level. The next two chapters focus on these two different levels.

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1. See Benson/Twigg (2007:15).



As regards the organizational level, this refers to the organizational culture, the policy level of the project. Recommendations will take into account policy and staff-related issues. The programming level concentrates on matters concerning Project Cycle Management. Recommendations for possible adaptation of ongoing and future projects complement the last part of this report.

# 1. INTRODUCTION





## Background

The Asia-Pacific region is by far the most disaster-prone region in the world, accounting for approximately 85% of all people reported affected by disasters in the last decade (2000-2009).<sup>2</sup> Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands are geographically situated in the Pacific 'Ring of Fire' and the 'Cyclone Belt'. This location makes both small island states rank amongst the countries with the highest exposure to multiple hazards including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and cyclones.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, their situation in the path of tropical cyclones exposes both countries to cycles of El Niño and La Niña, which increase the risk of floods and droughts respectively. Hazards that occur periodically in this region are largely due to climatic and seismic factors, however, climate change and sea-level rise threaten to aggravate these risks. Progress in the area of disaster risk reduction (DRR), as outlined in the indicators of the Hyogo Framework for Action, is thus critical to the alleviation of suffering and sustainable development in the region.

## Gender – A guiding principle in DRR

*A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training.*<sup>4</sup>

The Hyogo Framework for Action emphasizes that gender is a core factor in disaster risk and in the implementation of disaster risk reduction. Gender relations permeate every aspect of our lives<sup>5</sup>, and given that gender is a central organizing principle of human beings, it shapes the capacities and vulnerabilities of women and men, girls and boys, also with regard to disaster risks. For this reason, it is not surprising that integrating gender into disaster risk reduction (DRR) has been identified as one of the potential driving forces of progress in the field of DRR.<sup>6</sup>

In consequence, knowledge and understanding of gender roles and the different responsibilities of women and men are vital for mainstreaming gender into the planning and implementation of DRR projects.

As gender roles and responsibilities are socially defined, women and men will not experience gender relations in the same way and their interests and needs will vary - depending on the situations in which they live, depending on the local behaviour patterns, belief and value systems. Therefore, a profound understanding of the given sociocultural context is key to gender-aware projects.

Local specifics may also have implications for the effectiveness of DRR measures: projects that succeed in implementing risk reduction activities in one place may fail in other locations.<sup>7</sup> It is thus information about the local context that is required to customise disaster risk reduction to particular settings and make it more effective and sustainable - as well as gender-sensitive.

Since local specifics are best known by communities themselves, community participation in the design and implementation is fundamental for the integration of a gender perspective.

## Community participation – the basis of effective DRR

The involvement of different social groups of a community in programme design and implementation makes it more likely that local preferences, beliefs, practices, assets and resources are integrated into project strategies. Such involvement is likely to

2. See IFRC (2010).

3. See the World Bank's list of disaster hotspots.

4. See UNISDR (2007).

5. See Azerbaijani-Moghaddam (2003:3).

6. See UNISDR (2012:7).

7. See UNISDR (2007:5). The report points out that disaster risk reduction needs to be adapted to particular local settings.

render specific measures more appropriate and acceptable because they accommodate various local needs and interests of women and men.

However, community participation does not automatically challenge existing power relations, particularly those based on gender, because traditions and customs may consistently undermine specific groups - women in particular. Unfortunately, increased participation of women does not automatically make measures more gender-sensitive or supportive of women's empowerment. It is the degree of participation in decision-making processes, in use and control of resources that truly determines the level of participation.

But participation is a process. As such, it facilitates the involvement of women and men in development processes and offers opportunities for people to actively get involved. Being confronted with different points of view may challenge customary attitudes and opinions. Participating in community affairs and listening to other people may open up alternative ways of action and other options for women. It may encourage them to new ways of thinking. Being free to choose alters women's room to manoeuvre. Having choices permits inner flexibility, a vital internal resource. As such, choices are an integral part of social resilience.

## 2. THIS STUDY



## Context

When disaster strikes, women and girls as well as men and boys are affected likewise. However, both sexes have different abilities and ways of responding, and consequently disaster impacts them in different ways. Gender inequalities regarding access and control to resources, information and technical equipment, their limited decision-making power etc. very often make women more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters than men.

While women's vulnerability to disasters is often highlighted, their role in fostering a culture of resilience and their active contribution to building disaster resilience has often been overlooked and has not been adequately recognised.<sup>8</sup>

Based on these observations, and with the purpose for the Vanuatu Red Cross (VRC) and the Solomon Islands Red Cross (SIRC) to successfully implement the consecutive phase of community-based DRR project Together Becoming Resilient (TBR), both Societies initiated a research study aiming at a more gender-sensitive approach to disaster risk reduction in both countries.<sup>9</sup>

## Research objectives

The main objectives of the projected research were to gather relevant information to answer the following questions:

1. What are the roles and capacities of women and men in disaster risk reduction in the selected communities?
2. What are the roles and capacities of women and men in food production and income generation?
3. What are the main vectors of information that men and women use to access information? How can awareness and early warning messages be adapted to better reach both men and women?
4. To which extent have VRC and SIRC adopted a gender-sensitive approach in the design and implementation of the TBR project?<sup>10</sup>

Relevant information and recommendations were to be given to inform the planning and implementation of the TBR project in order to ensure that the project methodology is gender-sensitive. In the context of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands this means to see that women's capacities in contributing to community resilience are not overlooked.<sup>11</sup>

## Methodology

Considering (a) the proposed methodology, (b) the projected objectives of the research, and (c) the given time frame for the project, the following methodology was devised to carry out the task in an efficient, realistic, timely and sound manner.

The research began with a review of available relevant project documents. This comprised documents relating to the ongoing TBR project as well as those submitted on the subject of its continuation. The review concentrated on how gender issues were being addressed throughout the project cycle and focused on the operational aspects of the TBR.

Further preparation included the drafting of questionnaires and supplementary reading and viewing of relevant literature and material. The questionnaires were

8. See ToR for this consultancy (Appendix E).

9. See ToR for this consultancy (Appendix E).

10. See ToR for this consultancy (Appendix E).

11. See ToR for this consultancy (Appendix E).

designed for the different groups of stakeholders aiming at bringing together information about the (a) gender policy of the RC Societies, (b) gender awareness of the stakeholders, (c) attitudes and opinions on gender, and (d) the integration of a gender approach into the TBR project so far. Key informant interviews were conducted on the HQ level as well as in the communities (see Appendix C).

Communities were selected for visits by the VRC and SIRC respectively. The choice was made considering accessibility within the given time frame and included communities of TBR 1 as well as TBR 2. Overall four communities were sampled, two in each country. The stays were planned to be three to four days long.

Further preparations included informing the communities about the planned research and notifying involved staff, including sub branch officers (SBOs) and volunteers. Also, travel bookings needed to be made to secure the time slots for the visits.

The research was planned as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) because (a) it is collaborative – involving direct participation of the communities as well as the facilitators, (b) it advocates for direct community input, and (c) it emphasises social change to solve practical problems. The PAR was mainly conducted by local staff and thus provided a “learning by doing” opportunity for all involved. This included the volunteers who proved to be very helpful and flexible facilitators.

In view of the fact that none of the local staff members had received training on gender awareness, the consultant introduced some of the key concepts such as gender roles, gender needs, gender mainstreaming, and gender equality. In Vanuatu, this was included in the workshop held *after* the field visit whereas in Solomon Islands, the key concepts were explained *before* visiting the communities.

The implemented tools have been included in a drafted handbook to be used by the facilitators. The PAR handbook provided local staff members and the communities with the chance to test its consistency for future use and to give feedback on its use and functionality of the suggested tools.

A complementary Monitoring & Evaluation tool specifically designed for VRC and SIRC staff members as well as the CDCs (in Vanuatu) and VDRCs (in Solomon Islands) to monitor and evaluate the participation of women and men in the implementation of the TBR was drafted and prepared for testing by the facilitators.

Since PAR is a fully consultative process, team meetings were considered a vital part of the conduct of the field research. The meetings provided space for giving feedback, discussing the course of action as well as experiences made and lessons learnt.

Further practical considerations regarding the implementation of the PAR included the presence of at least one female local staff member to advance the involvement and active participation of female members in particular as well as special translation needs as often the facilitators and communities don't speak the same language.

In order to achieve a comprehensive outcome of the research, information was gathered on (a) at RC and project management level, (b) with local facilitators and (c) with the communities.

### **Limitations**

The PAR study experienced several constraints that need to be made explicit to clarify and explain the actual outcomes of the mission.

The chief limiting factors concern planning and timing of the PAR in the field. In Vanuatu, there was no time to meet with the team before going to the community. As a consequence, the team members felt unprepared and not confident regarding the purpose and outcome of the PAR. They missed a clear schedule and expressed that they had not been prepared beforehand about the projected PAR. Poor preparation certainly affected their commitment and attitude towards the research and the consultant. In particular, when the consultant suggested making use of the time originally planned for visiting a second community for analysis and discussion, most of the team members cooperated poorly. This may have been different had the supporting FRC staff members joined the PAR as initially planned. Since the consultancy started more than three months later than it had actually been projected, there were already other work-related commitments to accommodate. Nevertheless, a cogent argument for them not to join was the consideration that their presence during the PAR might impact the participation of the local staff members as well as members of the VDRCs/CDCs.

Furthermore, the field visits encompassed two weekends, time which is usually occupied for going to the market, church and rest - schedules that should have been known to the planning team. The agendas of the communities limited the time for the actual implementation of the PAR substantially. Instead of anticipated three to four days per community, time allocated for the research was reduced to one and a half days. In practice, that permitted about six to seven hours (approx. two per session) in each community to actually work with the people.

Based on her experience in working with remote tribal communities, in order to have sufficient time, the consultant had proposed to narrow the research down to one community per country. The FRC team however upheld its original idea of visiting two communities each in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, because (a) visiting two communities might reflect better the reality of TBR communities than the visit of only one, and, (b) visiting communities of TBR 1 and TBR2 in each country might indicate changed patterns of women's participation resulting from a different approach. However, the initial plan did not leave any contingencies.

Other constraints included several engine problems, rough sea, ash fall, and an unexpected visit of a Bishop in Vanuatu - the visit of a second community in Vanuatu was cancelled due to the above-mentioned factors. The amended schedule is attached to this report.

As a consequence, the results of the PAR remain incomplete. Hence, the report presents what has been achieved as well as next necessary steps that need to be taken to complement the findings that were requested in the ToR. Now better informed and sensitised by the experience, the local teams should be able to carry out the required assessments with the help of the handbook provided.

Please note that these limitations are certainly not elaborated upon to complain; instead, the constraints are listed to reinforce a realistic understanding of the conditions under which the local staff members have to work on a daily basis and what the implications are for their work as well as the progress of activities. Additionally, it aims at explaining what the consultant and the team of facilitators were able to achieve and what had been possible in spite of the given circumstances.

## Outcomes

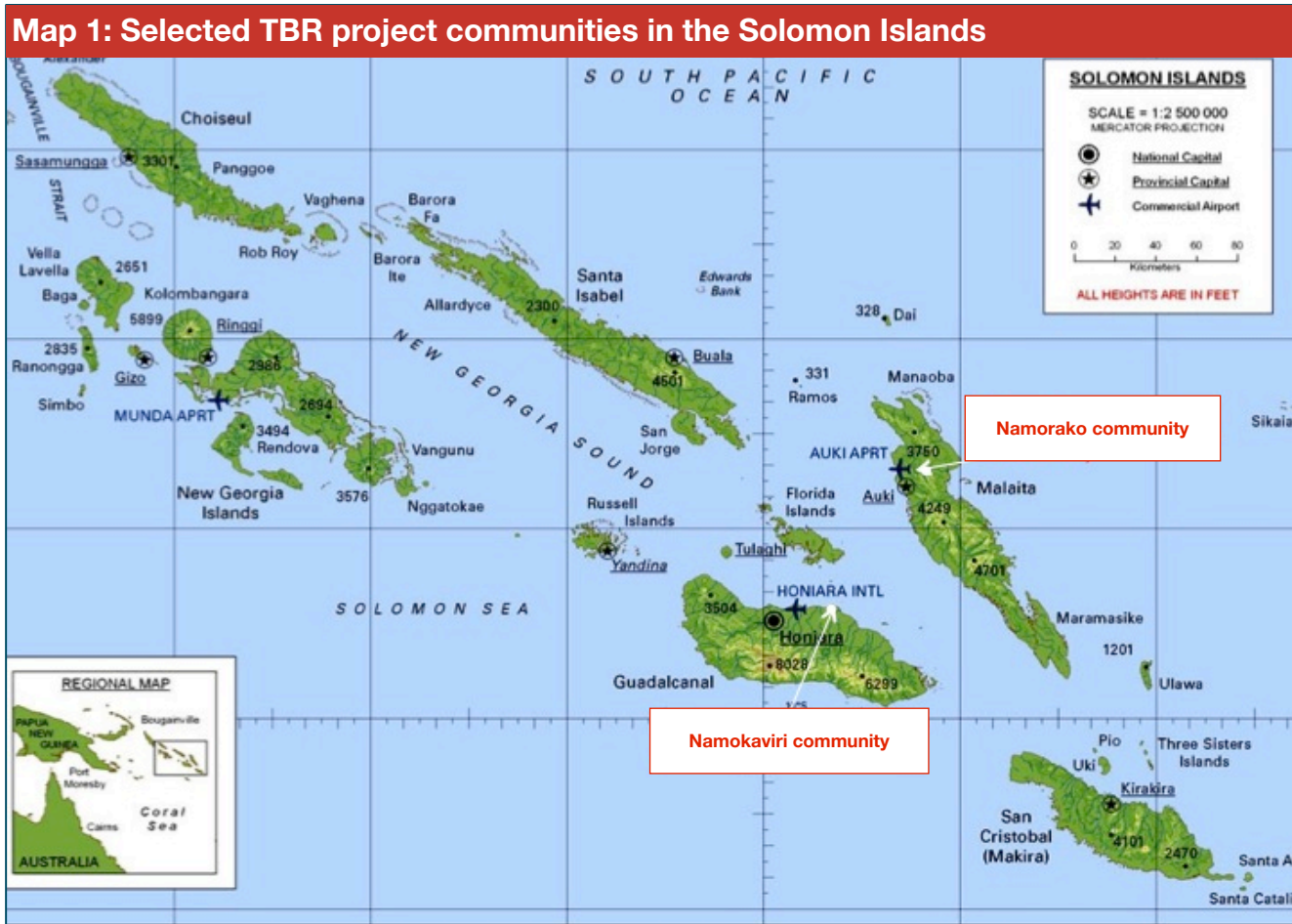
The outcomes of this research include:

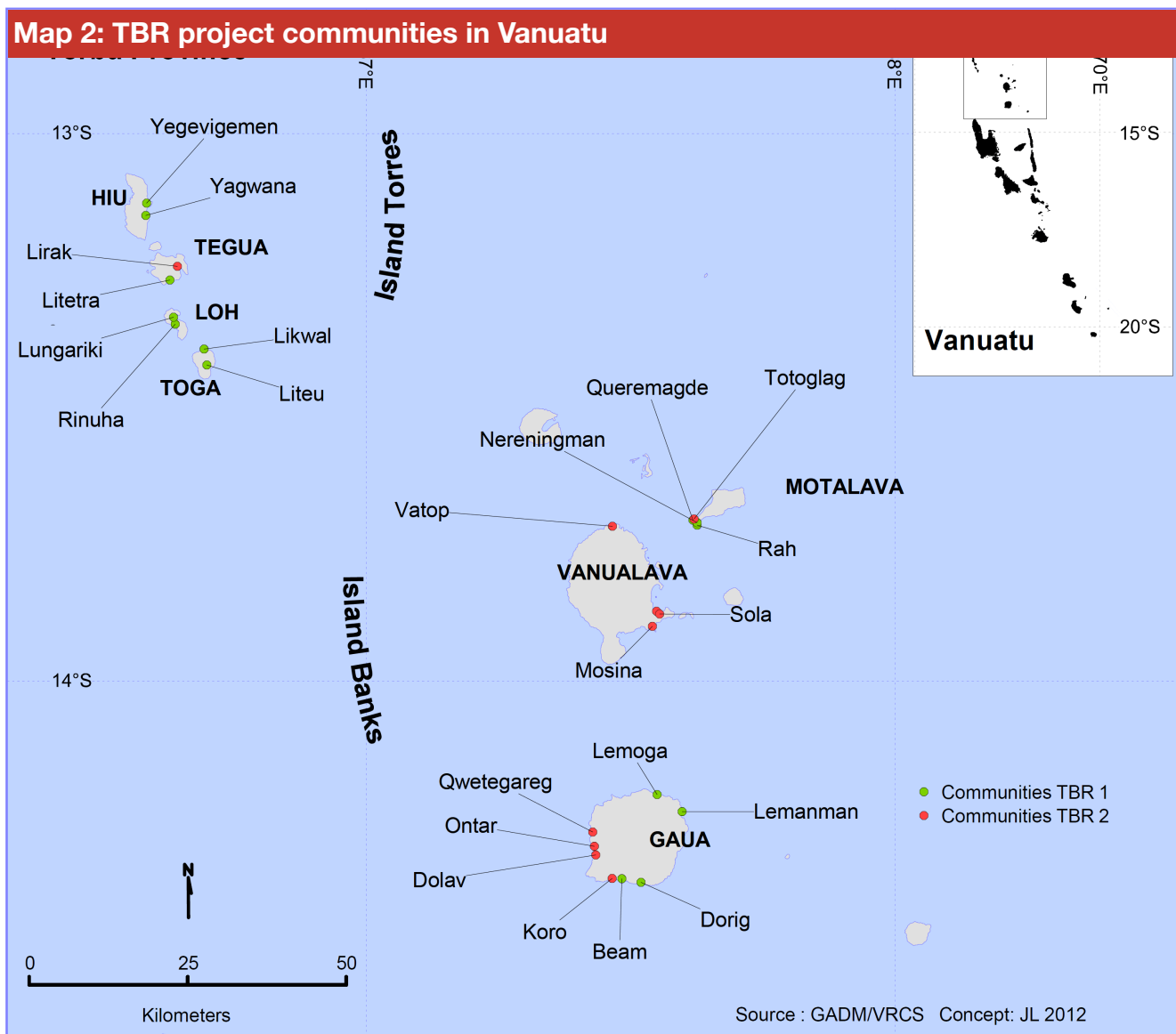
1. This report containing the results of the research
2. A handbook describing the methodology used during the PAR.  
To make the outcome as comprehensible as possible for the use at community level, the handbook includes experiences and lessons learned regarding the use of particular participatory tools.
3. A M&E tool to monitor and evaluate community participation  
The M&E tool contains relevant checklists as well as already existing monitoring tools that were gendered by the consultant
4. One workshop to introduce key concepts of gender to the SIRC team before going to the communities
5. Two workshops (one in Vanuatu, one in Solomon Islands) to share the research results

## The “Together Becoming Resilient” Project

### TBR 1

Initially, the TBR project started in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands in March 2010. Based on vulnerability assessments, VRC and SIRC selected 14 communities in Vanuatu and 12 in the Solomon Islands to implement DRR measures (later on during the TBR2 stage, 9 communities in Vanuatu and 12 in the Solomon Islands were





added). From the beginning, the “step-by-step” approach was participatory - one of the big strengths of the project, as participation allows for developing awareness and thus, for change. Participation also strengthens existing and enhances further development of resilience.

In collaboration with the communities, ToRs for future activities were developed; Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) were signed by the chiefs of the communities. The communities elected Community Disaster Committees (CDC in Vanuatu) and Village Disaster Risk Committees (VDRC in the Solomon Islands) – a process facilitated by the Sub Branch Officers (SBOs) of the two National Societies. Tools for conducting a Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (VCA) were developed jointly and the members of the CDCs/VDRCs trained in performing the VCA.

The results of the VCAs were used to develop risk maps and Community Action Plans (CAPs), containing community-based disaster preparedness measures to be taken until the end of the project in June 2011. These included DRR measures such as bush clearing, trimming of trees, digging drainage facilities and rubbish disposal pits (Lemoga), building toilets (Namorako, Lemoga), raising the height of stilts houses are



built on (Namorako), cleaning of an evacuation site (Namorako), and building of an evacuation centre (Lemoga). In the Solomon Islands, the CAPs were followed up by Village Response Plans (VRP; these plans were included in communities in both countries during the TBR2). Also, there were activities planned concerning health education messages, including First Aid. VRC and SIRC provided toolkits to help the community to implement the CAP and monitored the progress of the activities. For the latter, simple monitoring tools were developed together with the CDC and VDRC members.

In the report, this phase of the project is referred to as TBR 1. The communities Lemoga (Gaua, Vanuatu) and Namorako (Malaita, Solomon Islands) concerned in this research belong to TBR 1 communities.

## **TBR 2**

Started off in July 2011, the TBR project is now in its second phase. Supported by the FRC, VRC and SIRC local staff worked hard on lessons learned from TBR 1. A vital change was the decision to make the DRR approach more holistic, i.e. to include cross-cutting issues such as gender, climate change, and (more) health.

This had implications for project-related procedures, such as the establishment of the CDC/VDRC and for the conduct of VCAs: TBR 2 envisions gender-balanced committees to support that women's vulnerabilities and capacities are taken into account more earnestly. This is reflected in the MoUs and relating ToRs for the forming of CDCs/VDRCs. A gender-sensitive approach was included in the tools used during the VCA and for monitoring purposes, i.e. some data are now assessed in a gender-segregated way, e.g. done so in Namokaviri, a TBR 2 community in Malaita, Solomon Islands.

Efforts were made to modify tools and procedures to facilitate a more active participation of female community members, particularly in decision-making processes. In order to enhance this on the community level and to further develop a holistic approach for future TBR projects, FRC supported VRC and SIRC in executing this research.