



# GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS AND DISABILITY-INCLUSION IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN THE PACIFIC

Photo: UN Women/Nicky Kuautonga

## KEY MESSAGES

- Inclusive and transformative disaster risk reduction (DRR) requires a sound understanding of how socioeconomic characteristics intersect with and shape people's unique vulnerability to disasters. Current approaches to inclusive DRR tend to overlook the complexity of power dynamics among different groups in society and categorize social groups as if they were homogenous.
- Of the 12 countries in the Pacific that were assessed for this study (Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), only six (Kiribati, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) are collecting and using sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) to monitor the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Operational agencies need SADDD to plan targeted assistance and programming, and it should also be complemented by qualitative data (e.g., gender analysis) to reveal the root causes of vulnerability in order to ensure actions towards inclusive DRR are meaningful.
- Continuous and sustainable efforts and investments are required to ensure inclusive DRR. This can be achieved through gender-responsive budgeting and by mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in all phases of policy development and programme implementation. Cooperation and collaboration between all actors involved in DRR are crucial to achieve inclusive results. To avoid duplication of efforts and enable more holistic and transformative approaches, national authorities can facilitate a multi-stakeholder approach, while at the same time bolstering resources for national machineries for gender equality, statistical agencies and disaster finance and risk management institutions. In addition, support should be given to non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and grassroots organizations with a focus on gender and disability issues, who play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and social inclusion.



## INTRODUCTION

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The Pacific region relies on an ocean-based economy ranging from transportation, fishing, oil and gas, and tourism. Most of the coastal and rural populations depend on fishing for livelihoods and as the mainstay of their diet and nutrition needs. The impacts of climate change have accelerated the frequency and intensity of disasters, which pose a big threat to the lives and livelihoods of people in the Pacific. These threats have disproportionate impacts and consequences on women, children and youth, and people with disabilities. Countries in the Pacific have taken proactive approaches to better understand and manage climate change-related disasters in order to bolster their disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures, especially at the subnational and local levels. In recent years, the region's countries have adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (2017–2030).

In disaster events, the most vulnerable populations are those facing social and political marginalization based on their gender, (dis)ability, age or other characteristics, which are often overlooked in DRR and affect their capacity to recover from disasters. Therefore, the need to prioritize considerations for gender equality and social inclusion have been expressed through DRR frameworks and have been particularly highlighted in the Hanoi Recommendation for Action on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction (2016).

## UNDERSTANDING GAPS IN POLICY COMMITMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

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As 2020 marks the five-year anniversary of the adoption of the Sendai Framework, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) commissioned the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia Centre, to conduct a

### Pacific countries included in the study

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review on the status of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive commitments and progress in the Asia-Pacific region. The study team assessed national DRR strategies and action plans of 12 countries in the Pacific (see map) to see how international commitments and recommendations for gender equality and social inclusion were integrated into their approaches to DRR. Following this, the team collected case studies from key stakeholders in Fiji and Vanuatu to gain insights and better understand the gaps between policy commitments and their implementation on the ground. The findings of these case studies highlight some of the main enablers and barriers to the inclusion of gender and disability issues in DRR strategies, and they contributed to the recommendations of the study that can help achieve more inclusive DRR in the region.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Insufficient capacities to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion in DRR, due to a lack of understanding of the root causes of vulnerability

Cultural beliefs and social practices are often the cause of discrimination and marginalization of certain social groups, including women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ+ LGBTQ+) people; people with disabilities; and indigenous people among others, which also exclude them from DRR planning and activities. International and regional frameworks on DRR tend to promote inclusive policies and programmes through the collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD), however, only half of the Pacific countries reviewed in this study adopted this approach.<sup>1</sup> While SADDD are crucial to inform targeted policymaking and planning, they are insufficient in and of themselves to generate transformative action. For instance, the study found that people

1 The six countries are Kiribati, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

with disabilities are commonly considered a homogenous group in national DRR plans, even though the multiple forms of disability entail different needs. Consequently, policies and programmes which do not recognize and address underlying causes of vulnerability are less likely to enable inclusive DRR. The limited understanding of individuals and their intersecting vulnerabilities may be caused by a lack of qualitative analysis, such as gender analysis and community and vulnerability profiles. Seven of the 12 assessed countries have commitments to examine social dynamics and the root causes of vulnerabilities that result in unequal distributions of risk.<sup>2</sup> Such approaches are often lacking because they must be carried out by trained staff with gender expertise, and agencies rarely allocate enough resources for training their staff on gender issues, including carrying out gender and social analysis to inform their programmes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Improve understanding on the root causes of disaster risk and the unequal distribution of impacts and vulnerability, through SADDD and improved capacities for qualitative analyses.** Such approaches can help identify the most at-risk groups and design targeted actions to fit their specific needs to enable transformative change. The study found that Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu are the only countries in the Pacific using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to inform and implement inclusive DRR. Stakeholders consulted in Vanuatu highlighted that such approaches require statisticians to have strong capacities to use mixed methods, which can be enhanced through collaboration with local actors to build capacities of national agencies in qualitative research. Using a combination of SADDD and qualitative data, analyses can reveal underlying power dynamics which can then be addressed in the design of inclusive DRR actions.

2 The seven countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.



- **Address knowledge gaps on specific vulnerabilities experienced by different social groups.** This includes knowledge gaps on the various needs of people with different disabilities that should be taken into consideration in DRR planning and implementation. Data must be disaggregated by the type of disability (including physical, mental and learning disabilities among others). For example, in Vanuatu, disability data collection is informed by question sets developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics,<sup>3</sup> which were designed to identify people with disabilities in a census format. Based on that methodology, disability data are disaggregated thoroughly by disability type, including distinctions between physical and psychosocial disabilities.
- **Apply an intersectional lens while implementing the Sendai Framework,** which entails avoiding categorizing social groups by single characteristics and recognizing how socioeconomic identities such as gender, wealth, sexual orientation, age, education, caste, ethnicity, disability

<sup>3</sup> The Washington Group on Disability Statistics was formed under the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2001. The Group works with representatives of various national statistics offices to develop methods to improve statistics on people with disability. A list of question sets on disability is available [here](#).

and other identities and conditions produce inequalities and exclusions in DRR. This can be achieved by addressing the knowledge gaps mentioned above which will help identify entry points to tackle intersecting vulnerabilities through targeted DRR interventions. For example, the national DRR documents of Kiribati and Tonga both demonstrated an awareness of intersectional identities and the differing DRR needs that these entail. Other countries in the region could aim for more explicit inclusion of intersectionality in their DRR strategies by following these examples.

## LACK OF STABLE FUNDING FOR INCLUSIVE DRR

While national governments are responsible for allocating sufficient budgets to national disaster management offices, many disaster risk management agencies across countries are underfunded and therefore have fewer resources and less capacity to push forward issues related to gender equality and social inclusion. Because of this, many programmes become reliant on external funding from sources such as international organizations or international non-government organization (NGOs) to address gender equality and social inclusion in DRR. Yet, these funds can be unstable and/or lacking, causing such efforts to end up in different project cycles instead of being continuous and holistic. The study found that of the 12 assessed countries in the Pacific, seven have committed to mainstream gender in DRR and build relevant capacities within governance bodies.<sup>4</sup> Although the study found many commitments to gender equality and social inclusion, the lack of available monitoring documents points to a critical gap: the lack of a centralised monitoring and evaluation system to track progress and ensure accountability. Without dedicated institutions responsible for inclusive DRR and without appropriate tools to track progress, commitments might not be implemented as there are no mechanism to hold duty-bearers accountable.

<sup>4</sup> The seven countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Secure resources for inclusive DRR through proactive budgeting in order to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion through dedicated institutions.** To avoid relying on external funding sources, initiatives for gender equality and social inclusion in DRR should be budgeted proactively and mainstreamed across all phases of policy development and programme implementation. While stable funding remains a challenge in DRR strategies in the Pacific, cross-region exchanges with countries in Asia could help address this gap. For example, in the Philippines, each government agency allocates at least 5 per cent of their annual budget for gender mainstreaming in their area of work. This includes the Office of Civil Defense which is the coordinating agency for DRR at the national and local levels. Also, the Government of Mongolia has committed a budget for the National Committee on Gender Equality (NCGE) to promote gender equality across government bodies.
- **Set up a national monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the implementation of inclusive DRR.** The critical lack of monitoring and evaluation documents makes it difficult to track the implementation of promising commitments to inclusive DRR and evaluate their progress. While some strategies and action plans were developed with the support of international organizations and NGOs that have their own monitoring and evaluation system as part of their programmes, governments need to mainstream and adequately resource their own monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for strategies they developed solely. For example, Papua New Guinea began developing an online monitoring tool for its national DRR framework in 2019. In 2021, New Zealand intends to produce its first monitoring document on its National Disaster Resilience Strategy and a comprehensive monitoring report in 2023.

## LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

DRR involves a variety of actors, from government agencies to local NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots organizations, often with the help of international organizations. Coordination between these actors has been identified as one of the main challenges to inclusive DRR, as each actor has its own agenda determined by either political aims, donor requirements or local interests. Their agendas are implemented using their own protocols and monitoring mechanisms. This can result in overlapping and duplicated efforts that waste resources and may cause complex realities to be overlooked by actors working in silos instead of considering holistic approaches based on collaboration. This has been identified as one of the main causes when countries have not consistently reported progress to the Sendai Framework Monitor (SFM): disaster data are often available but scattered among different agencies and collected using different methodologies that cannot be easily unified and centralized.

While centralizing coordination can be the key to ensure more efficient DRR, localization is also crucial to ensure policies and programmes are relevant to local contexts and address the needs of all. This requires meaningful participation from at-risk communities, especially the most marginalized people who have the greatest vulnerability to disasters. Of the 12 assessed countries in the Pacific, nine countries recognized the need to involve women in the DRR formulation process through consultation and participation,<sup>5</sup> and nine countries committed to include people with disabilities in these processes.<sup>6</sup> However, the absence of concrete action plans can result in superficial interventions, such as encouraging parity in representation, instead of interventions that build the capacities of women and people with disabilities to enable them to contribute meaningfully to DRR.

5 The nine countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

6 The nine countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Streamline SADD collection through unified and centralized monitoring platforms and enhance capacities for applying an inclusive lens in data analysis.** The review of existing monitoring platforms showed that although most countries do not consistently report SADD onto the SFM, there are often multiple databases scattered between different organizations and government departments. As suggested by stakeholders in Fiji and Vanuatu, a unified and centralized framework for data collection is crucial to support evidence-based policies and programmes, and to evaluate progress towards gender equality and social inclusion in DRR. Suggestions also included establishing focal points, such as the national statistical agency, who would be accountable for ensuring that consistent methodologies are used for data collection and analysis. This system could also help identify gaps in data sets and coordinate efforts to collect the missing data. In parallel, building statisticians' capacities to apply an inclusive lens while analysing the data will also help to make better use of existing databases to plan for gender and social inclusion in DRR activities.
- **Institutionalize multi-stakeholder cooperation at all levels. This collaboration can be facilitated by national DRR authorities.** By encouraging regular collaboration between stakeholders, bridges can be built, for example between NGOs and CSOs – key actors with on-the-ground knowledge – and the public and private sector – which often lag behind when it comes to conducting holistic gender and social analysis. In multi-level stakeholder engagements at the national and local levels, measures must go beyond reserving seats for people and organizations championing inclusive DRR to include actively seeking their inputs to ensure a multidisciplinary approach that fits the needs of marginalized people and leverages diverse leadership capacities.
- **Bolster resources for NGOs, CSOs and grassroots organizations engaged in gender equality work and disability rights.** These organizations play a crucial role in mainstreaming and advocating for gender equality and social inclusion. For instance, in the Pacific region, the Pacific Disability Forum has made major strides towards removing the social stigma around people with disabilities through education, research and related advocacy and capacity-building.
- **Ensure meaningful participation of various groups, including promoting the agency of women and people with disabilities.** Measures for diversifying participation needs to go beyond procedural requirement or counting the number of target participants. An important first step towards promoting the meaningful participation of diverse groups that are usually left out of DRR planning and activities is to have a thorough understanding of their complex needs and experiences. Organizations in Fiji, such as the Pacific Disability Forum, Rainbow Pride Foundation and Fiji Women's Rights Movement, hold a significant role in advocacy work, and they play a key part in building bridges between stakeholders to facilitate such dialogues and identify key data gaps related to different groups. This also helps to identify entry points to create enabling environments for the meaningful participation of women, people with disabilities and other groups that are usually left out of DRR planning and activities. Building the confidence of the most at-risk groups will help them to claim their rights and leverage their leadership capacities for further advocacy for inclusive DRR, while avoiding tokenism.

**WOMEN'S RESILIENCE TO DISASTERS IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:**



**EMPOWER: WOMEN FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT SOCIETIES IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:**



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE PROGRAMMES, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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