

UN Women

Expert Group Meeting

‘Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes’

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Women's resilience to disasters and climate change

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.



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Submission paper: A short paper on successful gender-responsive climate change, environment or disaster risk reduction policies or programmes that incorporate a disability lens or other key issues from your disciplinary and institutional perspective that you may want to suggest for consideration.

Introduction

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), established in 1986, is a multi-ethnic and multicultural non-governmental organization committed to removing all forms of discrimination against women through institutional reform and attitudinal change. Being a feminist organization, FWRM uses feminist analysis in the work we do in addressing gender inequality. By means of its core programmes on Gender and Transitional Justice and Intergenerational Women in Leadership, FWRM practices and promotes feminism, democracy, and the rule of law, good governance and human rights. We strive to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders.

Fiji is made up of many small islands, prone to natural disasters and the impact of climate change i.e. sea-level rise, ocean warming, tropical cyclones, floods and droughts. These challenges are felt across many communities and villages because of adverse weather conditions result in damaged food crops, homes being destroyed, small businesses shutting down, food insecurity, and other interlinked vulnerabilities.

When we look at the context of gender, climate change and disasters only deepens existing inequalities for women and girls in Fiji. Our research shows that many women and girls are more likely to live in poverty compared to men, have limited access to resources, land, assets, and as well as the cultural, attitudinal and institutional barriers that affect women's ability to participate in decision making especially around building resilience. Our research also shows that women and girls face more violence such as rape and sexual assault during and after disasters. Furthermore, the prevalence of toxic patriarchal values seeping through institutional structures and frameworks makes it that much harder for women and

girls to actively access, participate, contribute and make decisions on issues that affect them.¹

These underlying issues mean that in the context of climate change and disasters, women will struggle significantly compared to men. As such, it is imperative that laws and policies around climate change and disaster risk reduction and management recognize the inequalities and vulnerabilities for women and girls to ensure that there is a targeted approach to support strengthening women's resilience.

What has the Fiji government done to mainstream gender in the context of climate change and disaster risk reduction?

A number of key policies have been adopted by the Government with the aim of being more gender responsive to climate change and disaster risk reduction. These include: National Gender Policy; National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management 2017; The 5-Year & 20-Year National Development Plan: Transforming Fiji; National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018–2030 (NDRRP); and National Climate Change Policy 2018–2030 (NCCP).²

These policies do articulate, to some degree, the importance of gender equality and gender responsiveness as the guiding overarching principle in the key thematic areas that these policies cover. In particular, the Government is commitment towards gender responsiveness on the allocation of resources, humanitarian assistance and coordination, budgeting and funding, relocation and evacuation, and building resilient communities to name a few.

However, Fiji's progress in the implementation of the policies mentioned has been slow. True progress is measured when institutions, mandated to enforce these policies, are able to implement it effectively. Additionally, more effort needs to be put into building synergies with existing policies to help in bridging the gap and ensuring consistent language, which is in clear alignment with the policies mentioned herein.

¹ 'Balancing the Scales- Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice' research report is supported by the European Union and UN Women
http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/fwrm2017/publications/analysis/Balancing-the-ScalesReport_FINAL-Digital.pdf

² Please see annex 1 for brief description

Violence against women in humanitarian settings

In humanitarian/ disaster settings, one of the key challenges is around addressing violence against women and girls, whom face multiple forms of discrimination, and the lack of specific language that addresses these multilayered forms of discrimination and vulnerabilities. These policy gaps do correlate with women and girls experiencing higher risk of violence during disasters especially for LGB women and women living with disabilities. Additionally, there is also the lack of language around adequate privacy, security and safety measures to prevent violence against women in humanitarian setting.

Fiji does have the National Service Delivery Protocol for Responding to GBV, which has a GBV Referral Pathway Developed for Emergencies/Disasters. It involves all key stakeholders, and outlines key roles and responsibilities.³ Additionally, Fiji has embarked on an ambitious all of government and population initiative to develop a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls.

Lack of sex and age disaggregated data

Another key area is around the lack of sex-age disaggregated data on specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination such as LGB women, women with disabilities, ageing women etc. This only adds onto the lack of specific language and information that is needed to make effective gender responsive interventions to address the violence against specific groups.

The Government has through its National Women's Machinery embarked on producing its first ever Country Gender Assessment, which would provide much needed up-to-date data and status of diverse women in Fiji.

Participation of women in decision making processes

Women make up almost half of the population of Fiji and as such, it is important to ensure that women have equal participation in decision making at all levels, and even more so in National Disaster Management. This ensures women's agency, capabilities and skill in the proactive role they play in post disaster relief work within their families and communities. The Global Gender Gap Report (2017) ranks Fiji on 105th position in terms of Political

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<http://www.mwcpa.gov.fj/images/stories/Files/2018/Fiji%20National%20Service%20Delivery%20Protocol%20for%20Responding%20to%20Cases%20of%20Gender%20Based%20Violence.pdf>

empowerment out of 144 countries part of the report.⁴ At the local level, women make up less than 25% of the local government with only 2% of females employed as field staff.⁵

Women's meaningful participation in all levels of governance in reference to national disasters and climate change, and including the Disaster Management Committee, must be the priority for the Government so that the needs are taken into consideration and issues being heard.

Gender Sensitive and Responsive Resource Mobilization

Disasters have great implications on women's livelihoods as majority of women in Fiji are involved in informal sectors which are particularly susceptible to impact of climate change and disasters. Hence, there is a need to have gender responsive post disaster funding support, relief and resourcing across all sectors as opposed to compartmentalization of gender needs to one particular ministry.

The Fiji Government is currently piloting the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative, which aims to have all government ministries and agencies planning and implementing gender responsive programmes and budgets.

Role and Responsibilities of all business enterprise

Business enterprises are among the biggest violators of human rights, more so in the context of climate change. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights state that all business enterprises have a responsibility to respect human rights, which means they should avoid infringing on the human rights of individuals and communities and address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved.⁶ The current policies around climate change and disaster risk reduction does not clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of businesses to ensure that there is compliance.

⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017>

⁵ 6 Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), n.d. Creating Space on the Mat. [Online] Available at: http://wilgpacific.org/files/5414/0425/7392/Low_Res_Fiji_SWPMG_Position_Paper_2_Service_Delivery_Final.pdf

⁶ http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/FWRM_Climate_Change_Bill_submission_2019.pdf

