

World Humanitarian Summit Pacific Consultation

Position Paper: Gender Equality and Pacific Humanitarian Response

Executive Summary:

Men, women, boys and girls face different risks and have different priorities and needs in humanitarian settings. Pacific women are also subject to pre-existing and systemic inequalities, which impede their ability to survive and recover from disasters. These include high levels of gender-based violence, barriers to women's meaningful representation in decision-making forums, formal and informal obstacles to women's access to productive resources and information, and deficiencies in essential service provision for vulnerable groups.

All humanitarian actors are required to integrate consideration for the rights of vulnerable groups (including inter alia women, children, elderly people, people with disabilities and the landless) into every stage of humanitarian operations. However the majority of Pacific humanitarian actors display limited capacity on gender and protection issues, and do not afford these issues sufficient priority in preparedness and response. Additionally, protection cluster leads and member agencies do not have adequate resourcing to meet needs for gender and protection mainstreaming support.

Consequently the needs and capacities of women, girls and other vulnerable groups are not systematically assessed, nor are they consistently incorporated into response and recovery programming. A significant proportion of Pacific humanitarian action does not meet the specific needs of women and children, and is likely to be creating or exacerbating risks to their safety, security and dignity. In addition women's particular skills and knowledge are not recognized, nor are they generally able to exercise these skills in the context of recovery and resilience building in their communities.

Recommendations to address the above issues include:

- National protection clusters need to be acknowledged as leads on programming on gender and protection issues in emergencies, and should be resourced to develop dedicated capacity to respond to the reasonably foreseeable needs of humanitarian actors for technical advice and support.
- Women's machineries and gender equality actors need to develop capacity to support humanitarian actors within agreed national response frameworks.
- Humanitarian actors need to make formal and accountable commitments to improving practice on core responsibilities, such as gender and protection mainstreaming, sex and age disaggregated data collection, information/communication/participation, training of staff, and protection monitoring.
- Donors need to require, from the earliest stages of responses, active consideration of the differentiated needs of vulnerable groups (including inter alia women, children, people with disabilities, elderly people and the landless) as a condition of accessing funding.
- Attention must be paid towards supporting community level actors to enact healthy and protection sensitive preparedness, response and recovery strategies, and towards strengthening essential services outside of capital cities (including and in particular for GBV and child protection).

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Introduction: Humanitarian Action and Gender Equality

Men, women, boys and girls experience the effects of disaster, climate change and conflict in different, sometimes vastly different, ways. Men, women, girls and boys face different risks, have different skills, priorities and perspectives to bring to relief and recovery interventions. Additionally, women and girls are, by virtue of the position and roles they occupy within societies, subject to additional vulnerabilities associated with their lack of access to resources, information and decision-making forums necessary to survive and recover from disasters.

These vulnerabilities are not inherent to individuals nor innate to women and girls as a group; vulnerability is created by circumstances that prevent the meaningful exercise of human rights. Women and girls' vulnerability during disasters is created by the social conditions which dictate that they occupy lower positions within family, community and broader societal structures. These social structures also prevent women and girls from exercising their particular skills, knowledge and talents to support the reconstruction and resilience of their communities.

The Pacific as a region is both particularly exposed to the impacts of disaster and climate risks, and subject to widespread social and gender inequalities which create specific and severe pre-existing risk factors for women and girls, including epidemic rates of gender-based violence, disenfranchisement of women and girls from power structures, and barriers to women's access to and control over productive resources.

This paper will set out some of the specific risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Pacific women and girls, and make recommendations for stakeholders to consider in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit Pacific consultations, to be held in Auckland in June 2015.

Gender Equality and Protection

Protection is "all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law¹". All humanitarian actors are bound by protection principles and required to place protection at the centre of their humanitarian activities, as most recently affirmed by the 2013 IASC Statement on Centrality of Protection, which states that:

"Protection of all persons affected and at risk must inform humanitarian decision-making and response, including engagement with States [...]. It must be central to our preparedness efforts, as part of immediate and life-saving activities, and throughout the duration of humanitarian response and beyond

In practical terms, this means identifying who is at risk, how and why at the very outset of a crisis and thereafter, taking into account the specific vulnerabilities that underlie these risks, including those experienced by men, women, girls and boys, and groups such as internally displaced persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, and persons belonging to sexual and other minorities²"

Gender within the protection framework

In humanitarian contexts, gender (relating to the socially constructed and generally subordinate roles of women and girls as compared to men and boys) forms part of the broader protection framework because women and girls, as a group, face persistent barriers to the exercise of their rights, and because humanitarian responses that do not take into account these pre-existing threats and challenges will create or exacerbate risks to women and girls. Gender inequalities place

¹ See for example IASC Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disaster, IASC/Brookings Institute, 2011

² IASC Statement on the Centrality of Protection, IASC, 2013

women and girls at a disadvantage when it comes to claiming their rights on an equal footing; this places all humanitarian actors under a positive obligation to take corrective action to mitigate these impacts.

A protection centric approach to humanitarian response does not focus solely on threats to safety and security, or on violations of the law. Rather it requires all actors to work to create an environment in which all people are able to meaningfully exercise their individual human rights. For example, this includes positive attention to women's capacity to equally exercise their economic, social and cultural rights (e.g. to shelter, food, housing, clothing, education and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health), and with the civil and political rights less usually associated with disaster response (e.g. to civil documentation, and freedom of movement). Failure to consider gender in humanitarian responses will at best mean that they fail to meet the needs of large swathes of the population; at worst it will create or exacerbate risks, and miss opportunities to build sustainable community resilience.

In order to achieve these goals, all humanitarian actors are required to abide by the following protection principles:

1. **Prioritise safety and dignity, and do no harm:** that activities prevent or minimize the creation of negative consequences for affected populations, and avoid exposing affected populations to increased risk.
2. **Equality and non-discrimination:** that meaningful access to humanitarian assistance is available to all affected persons on the basis of need alone, and without discrimination. This requires targeted attention to the needs of marginalized or otherwise vulnerable individuals or groups.
3. **Participation and empowerment:** that all affected persons, including vulnerable groups, are supported to claim their rights, and that self-protection and coping capacities are supported.
4. **Accountability to beneficiaries:** that all affected persons, including vulnerable groups, are able to submit concerns, complaints and feedback, and that the extent to which humanitarian assistance meets identified needs is measured and evaluated.

Emerging humanitarian issues in the Pacific region:

Gender and vulnerability

Pacific women are subject to a number of pre-existing factors which heighten their vulnerability to the impacts of natural hazards. Pacific women experience barriers to accessing productive resources, low levels of opportunity for mobility, limited access to the forums (at community and national levels) where decisions are made, limited (and often disaster-vulnerable) livelihood opportunities, as well as vulnerabilities associated with their inability to access information necessary to survive and recover from disasters. The tasks that Pacific women are responsible for within families tend to be highly climate and disaster sensitive, placing additional burdens and barriers on women, as well as exposing them to additional risks if protective interventions are not made; for example, following disasters food and potable water becomes more scarce, placing increased burdens and increased risk on women in their roles in providing for their families. Women rely disproportionately on livelihood channels which are vulnerable to being affected or completely destroyed by disasters, meaning that they may find it more difficult to cope during and immediately after disasters, as well as making them less likely to be able to bear the costs associated with reconstruction. Pacific women also experience extremely high rates of gender-based violence, which escalates after emergencies and places them at increased risks of physical and psychological harm. Pacific women also have extremely low levels of representation within key agencies responsible for core disaster response functions (NDMOs, cluster lead agencies, and line ministries with responsibility for allocating resources and prioritising disaster response activities), and their absence is not addressed, nor are male humanitarian staff provided with procedures, training or capacity building to help them address gender issues in programming.

Pacific humanitarian actors at national and regional levels do not consistently assess women’s particular needs, risks and skills and often fail to meaningfully integrate these into humanitarian programming. For example, prior to disasters, women’s communication preferences and needs are not given priority in early warning and disaster risk reduction messaging; women therefore rely on male interlocutors for early warning and preparedness information. This negatively impacts women’s survival and recovery rates. Additionally, women are not given a meaningful voice in preparedness or resilience measures, as these are presumed to be the primary domain of men. Following disasters, data is not systemically collected nor analysed on the numbers and needs of women and girls across the age cycle; programming is developed which is essentially ‘one size fits all’. As humanitarian response transitions into recovery, development and preparedness programming, there is also a tendency to miss out on opportunities to support women’s resilience to disasters. These inequities limit women’s ability to survive and recover from disasters.

Examples and case studies³:

Recent large-scale disasters in the Pacific have demonstrated to following gaps and trends:

- Gaps in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV)
- Gaps in addressing specific problems facing women and girls experiencing displacement

- Gaps in gender and protection mainstreaming
- Women’s unequal access to information
- Barriers to equitable access to housing, land and property

Broadly, the systemic problems emerging across Pacific humanitarian practice are:

- Failure to prevent or mitigate foreseeable harm to women and girls
- Failure to remove or address obstacles preventing women and girls from accessing vital humanitarian assistance
- Inconsistent prioritization of humanitarian assistance on the basis of needs, resulting in discriminatory outcomes for women and girls
- Gaps in the meaningful participation of women and girls in humanitarian responses.

Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence has been consistently found to increase following an emergency, and is well understood to be underreported, even in settings where accessible services exist. Knowing this, all humanitarian actors must assume – even in the absence of confirmed data following a disaster - that GBV has increased and represents a life-threatening issue⁴. Pacific women and children experience high to epidemic rates of GBV as measured by global standards⁵. Data on Pacific prevalence rates during emergencies is generally ad hoc or non-existent, although there are several standalone observations which would indicate a trend towards sharp increases (e.g. a 300% increase in rates of new domestic violence cases reported to the Tanna Women’s Crisis Centre following an earthquake and tsunami in the 9 months following TC Vania in 2011).

³ The observations in this section have been drawn from UN Women’s technical and operational support to national protection cluster lead agencies in Tonga, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands in the period 2013-15.

⁴ Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Emergency Settings, IASC, 2005

⁵ See for example Kiribati Family Health and Safety Study, UNFPA/PRSO, 2010; Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, SPC/Ministry of Finance and Treasury, National Reform and Planning, 2009; National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women in Tonga, Ma’a Fafine mo e Famili, 2009; Vanuatu National Survey on Women’s Lives and Family Relationships, Vanuatu Women’s Centre, 2011

Pacific women also face structural and systemic risks associated with GBV in emergencies. These include the following:

- Evacuation centres which lack basic physical security measures (such as private spaces for women and children to bathe and change clothes; gender-separated, lit and lockable WASH facilities; sleeping areas separated by immediate not extended family, etc).
- Heavy reliance on informal evacuation centres (especially within extended family, wantoks etc), which pose particular issues for women and children following Pacific disasters. There is often an assumption that family obligations and community ties automatically ensure that these environments are safe. However, as the majority of physical and/or sexual abuse is perpetrated by persons known to and trusted by their victims and their families, this assumption is not valid. Reliance on family networks to serve as default evacuation centres places women and children at elevated risk of abuse, particularly where (as in the majority of Pacific emergencies) there are no formal mechanisms for monitoring protection issues in these sites.
- Across the Pacific, and particularly outside capital cities, there is a lack of safe places to report GBV or child protection issues. For example, following TC Pam in Vanuatu, the majority of assessed sites reported that the only avenue for reporting GBV or child abuse was the (male) village chief. In all assessed sites chiefs were perceived to prioritise maintaining community cohesiveness at the expense of the needs of victims. Similarly, in Tonga following TC Ian, the majority of communities reported that the only person who could assist victims of GBV or child abuse was the Town Officer. Although Town Officers clearly viewed the prevention of violence as part of their mandate, they were all male, had no specific training in recognizing or responding to GBV or child abuse, and viewed themselves as having a responsibility to keep families together and prevent community conflicts. Additionally, GBV is associated with a strong sense of stigma and shame across the Pacific, with victims discouraged from reporting or seeking assistance by the need to protect their family or even community reputation.
- There are also inadequate services to meet the basic needs of GBV victims for care across sectors (e.g. for healthcare, legal services, police, mental health/psychosocial support, transitional shelter), particularly in outer islands and remote communities. In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, for example, formal GBV referral networks exist only in the capital cities, and only at the most basic levels. Women and children who experience violence in outer islands in Vanuatu face walks of up to 8 hours simply to access basic medical care or police, without any likelihood that they will reach someone trained in specialist responses to GBV.
- GBV services that are available in the Pacific rarely have the resources and technical expertise necessary to scale up to meet the additional needs occasioned in humanitarian settings (e.g. providing services to displaced populations), nor are they meaningfully integrated into disaster response plans and structures. Rather, following disasters they either respond in isolation without coordination with the rest of the disaster response, or they are expected to rapidly pick up large numbers of unfamiliar tasks within the humanitarian (as opposed to development) environment, resulting in exhaustion of resources and (frequently) disengagement from the humanitarian response.

These deficiencies in service provision and reporting frameworks are not caused by emergencies. They are the result of deep-seated resource and capacity issues, and cannot be mitigated by humanitarian actors alone. However, these gaps exacerbate the already substantial risks facing disaster-affected women and girls, and so there is increased responsibility for humanitarian actors to work to mitigate the threat of GBV across all programming. Such mainstreamed prevention and response mechanisms are, however, frequently missing or incomplete in humanitarian programming in the region, creating and exacerbating risks for women and girls.

Displacement

There is variable awareness in the Pacific of the obligations spelled out in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including on the requirement to take targeted actions to meet the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups in situations of displacement. Mechanisms to achieve durable solutions are inconsistent, with governments frequently viewing those experiencing persistent displacement as either beneficiaries of charity (rather than rights-holders) or worse, in some circumstances as threats to security or public order.

Standards in formal evacuation centres in the Pacific vary widely; in Ha'apai following TC Ian protection actors noted that communities had organically mobilized to organize evacuation centres that complied with all generally accepted EC management principles. They had locks, lights and gender separation in WASH facilities, gender-separated sleeping areas, private areas for women and girls to dress and breastfeed, and women were involved in EC management structures. By contrast, evacuation centres in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu have all been recorded as lacking basic safety, security and privacy features, leading to cases of GBV and other life-threatening issues directly attributable to these deficiencies. Vanuatu has begun to take steps to rectify these issues, by putting in place formal evacuation centre guidelines which require adherence to privacy, safety and security standards; however many other countries fail to address these issues until the onset of emergency, by which time it is usually too late to rectify these structural defects.

Informal evacuation centres (displacement in private homes within family/community/wantok networks) feature heavily in Pacific disasters, and are usually under-monitored and overlooked. Displacement under these conditions often extends for months or even years after disasters, however there is often an incorrect assumption by many humanitarian actors that displacement problems end when the formal evacuation centres close. Those displaced among informal networks are frequently excluded from registration for humanitarian assistance, and the specific protection issues affecting them are not monitored or addressed in humanitarian programming. Although data on issues affecting this cohort is minimal, indicative trends of impacts on women and girls in this situation are:

- Heightened risks of GBV and child abuse, due to increased proximity to perpetrators and lack of access to formal and informal reporting structures
- Resource stress on women who are excluded from access to humanitarian assistance, including increased risk women may need to resort to transactional sex and other harmful coping mechanisms.

Case Study: Response to internal displacement in Solomon Islands

Following flash flooding in the Solomon Islands in April 2014, residents of informal settlements adjoining the Mataniko River in Honiara made up a large part of the displaced population. Ordinances prohibiting building/rebuilding in flood-prone areas prevented them from returning to the settlements after the floods, but while they could not return, they also lacked viable alternatives. Pressure mounted for the evacuation centres to close as soon as possible. Proposals that people should 'return' to the provinces from which they or their families had originally migrated (as much as 40 years ago, in some cases) were accompanied by threats of eviction and public vilification of residents, raising concerns about the voluntariness of any resulting relocations.

For those families that made the move the process was burdensome, and disproportionately so for women. Wrongly advised that the relocation was imminent, mothers repeatedly withdrew their children from school. In some evacuation centres, this pattern was repeated for weeks, creating great stress for the women and children affected. When they came, the boats were overloaded and uncomfortable, and passengers – including pregnant and lactating women, children and infants – were not provided food or water for the eight-plus hour journeys.

Finally, as there were no viable livelihood options in the areas of relocation, many men left their families and returned to Honiara to seek work. This had been flagged at the outset of this process as a likely outcome, and created a new cohort of extremely vulnerable female-headed households, living in unfamiliar areas with no men to support reconstruction.

Further, this took place in an area where there was already pre-existing resource scarcity and the potential for hostility towards those viewed as outsiders and burdens upon wantok networks.

Housing, land and property

Pacific women face a number of challenges relating to housing, land and property during emergencies, chiefly stemming from barriers to owning or using land, as well as overwhelming reliance on traditional (and therefore male dominated) structures to allocate land or mediate land disputes

Although there exists consensus at international levels on the right to non-discriminatory access to property, Pacific women are often either formally barred from owning land, or face significant socially constructed barriers to accessing or benefiting from land tenure⁶. This has significant implications for women's safety, security, dignity and ability to recover from disasters, as those without adequate housing and secure tenure are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse, are less likely to be able to access humanitarian assistance and essential services, and are more likely to live in unsafe conditions (such as those discussed above).

Even where women have previously enjoyed informal but consistent (even generational) rights to the use of residential or agricultural land, these rights can come under threat after disasters. Resource scarcity can encourage encroachment by others onto neighbouring plots of land; absentee owners affected by the disaster may return and insist on exercising their land rights; and/or documents relating to land tenure may be lost in the disaster.

Case Study: Housing, land and property (HLP) issues in Tonga following Tropical Cyclone Ian

Tonga experienced significant HLP issues in Ha'apai Province following TC Ian. In Ha'apai many women, being legally barred from owning land themselves, had resided on land held by male relatives who were residing overseas. Following the devastation caused by the cyclone, the World Bank and the Tongan Ministry of Infrastructure implemented a reconstruction program to deliver cyclone-resistant housing to those who had lost their homes.

However, as many women were residing on land to which they had no formal rights, they were not able to give consent to the reconstruction of homes on the property. Rather, they had to remain displaced for lengthy periods of time while permission was obtained from overseas male relatives, some of whom were reluctant to grant it, or could not be contacted for many months. Consequently, they were displaced in unsafe, undignified and over-crowded conditions in tents or with extended families for (in some cases) over a year following the disaster.

These problems arose despite the fact that there existed significant goodwill at local and national levels towards prioritizing the most vulnerable groups, including single female heads of household, elderly women and disabled women. Although all humanitarian and government actors involved in reconstruction recognized the need to address the specific needs of these vulnerable groups, the barriers posed by Tonga's land registration and demarcation system proved insurmountable for up to a year after the disaster.

Had the specific problems with women's housing, land and property rights been recognized and acknowledged at the beginning of this process, it is likely that either solutions could have been identified earlier. At the least, more accurate information on timelines could have been disseminated; thus supporting the affected women to plan for their own recovery options and develop their own coping strategies.

⁶ E.g. formally barred from owning land in Tonga; minority of leaseholders in Vanuatu;

Women are also commonly excluded from having constructive input into processes for allocating land or settling land disputes, as formal systems for demarcation are minimal (outside of capital cities, excluding informal settlements) and disputes are settled by male-dominated traditional or customary mechanisms. These structures are neither designed nor expected to deliver fair outcomes for women and other vulnerable groups, and accountability or appeal mechanisms are generally completely absent. This was the case for example in Samoa following the 2009 earthquakes, where it was observed that access to safe and suitable land for resettlement was hampered for families where their *matais* were unable or unwilling to advocate for their needs; as is commonly the case for customary land arrangements, no complementary or appeal mechanism was available to redress this inequality⁷.

Case study: Relocations procedures at community level in Vanuatu

Following TC Pam it was noted that there were a number of communities that would have to permanently or temporarily relocate due to the likelihood of landslides, land salination and other adverse impacts of the cyclone. When asked how land would be allocated, community members consistently stated that this would be done arbitrarily by the Village Chief, as he owned the land on a customary basis, and decides who will be permitted to reside and build upon it. Land disputes are settled solely by the chief, with no process for appeal or mediation in the event of an unfair decision or impacts upon vulnerable groups. If allocated land that was unsafe, inadequate for their family's needs, or otherwise inequitably distributed, there is no reasonably accessible way for women or other vulnerable groups to have these decisions fairly reviewed.

Information, communication and participation

Ensuring effective two-way communication with and participation of affected populations is vital to ensure that disaster affected populations are able to plan their own recovery, make informed choices and support self-resilience following a disaster. Humanitarian standards require that disaster affected populations should be provided with easily accessible information in languages and formats they are able to understand, including on available and planned humanitarian assistance (content, beneficiary criteria and means of access), and on recovery plans. Affected communities, including marginalised or otherwise vulnerable groups, should also be given the opportunity to participate in planning and implementation processes for humanitarian assistance. Additionally, all humanitarian actors should have measures in place to receive feedback and complaints from affected populations.

Pacific women face significant barriers to accessing vital information in humanitarian contexts. Information provision, consultation and participation are consistently inadequate across Pacific disasters, hampered by the remoteness of affected communities, poor ICT networks, lack of dedicated CwC expertise, and occasionally, by deliberate decisions of governments to withhold information from affected populations. In this environment where communication in general is a challenge, women's access to information almost always suffers. Where efforts are made to communicate with affected populations, it is almost always one-way (information flow from central authorities to affected communities, rather than the other way around), and almost always via traditional power structures (i.e. information flows from NDMOs via village chiefs, provincial disaster officers or similar, and from there sporadically to community levels). Women rarely have direct access to the information they need, rather they rely on others to pass information to them – this is true for both early warning information and for information on the availability and beneficiary criteria for humanitarian assistance.

⁷ 'Protecting the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Natural Disasters: Challenges in the Pacific', UNHCR, 2011

These systems sometimes work reasonably effectively, for example in Ha’apai following TC Ian, where the formal requirements of the Fono system meant that the limited information that was made available to Town Officers was generally likely to make its way eventually to women, despite their lack of direct representation in the system⁸. However, more frequently it works to marginalize women from response and recovery processes, impacting their ability to access humanitarian assistance, communicate their specific needs to humanitarian actors, and plan for their own recovery, and creates additional resource burdens on women at times when they are already overwhelmed with responsibility. Following TC Pam in Vanuatu, for example, many women with no alternative way of accessing information resorted to travelling to the NDMO offices in Port Vila, seeking basic information on eligibility for humanitarian assistance. The failure to plan for inclusive information dissemination and feedback mechanisms meant that women needed to use already limited time and resources to obtain information on how to access their rights.

Women’s participation in programme design is not a mere nicety; multiple deaths across the region during emergencies have been the result of poor nutrition in infants, which could have been avoided with better consultation with lactating women about their specific nutritional needs. It should also be noted that women with cumulative vulnerabilities – female heads of household, women with disabilities, elderly women – are significantly more likely to be missed by the ad hoc communication efforts that do occur.

Mainstreaming

Related to the above considerations on communication is the need to substantively integrate the information provided by women into programming. Gender mainstreaming is: “The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated.”⁹

In emergencies, it is incumbent upon all humanitarian actors to collect differentiated data on men, women, girls and boys, and to ensure that this data is integrated into programme planning, implementation and monitoring, so that the needs of all persons are met, and humanitarian assistance does not perpetuate systemic inequalities.

Pacific humanitarian actors have variable track records on gender mainstreaming in emergencies. While significant advances have been made across the last couple of years in terms of acknowledging the differentiated needs of women and girls, and particularly around integrating the responsibility to mainstream gender into disaster response planning and response structures and policy documents at national and regional levels, there remain sizeable gaps in gender mainstreaming in practice. For example:

- Shelter assistance that only those with specific expertise and customary responsibility for shelter construction (usually, if not always, men) can utilise.
- Food assistance that is unsafe or unsuitable for vulnerable groups (e.g. infants or older people) to consume, or which fails to meet the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of five.
- Distribution mechanisms which exclude female-headed households, or which don’t take family size into account when apportioning assistance.

Although humanitarian actors are in general aware of the responsibility to take the needs of vulnerable groups into account, their knowledge of how to do this is generally deficient, and many of the key humanitarian entities have not

⁸ TC Ian Safety and Protection Assessment, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Tonga, 2015

⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Council Agreed Conclusions on Gender Mainstreaming, ECOSOC, 1997

meaningfully integrated procedures for mainstreaming gender and protection issues into their standard operating procedures.

Pacific Regional Frameworks for Gender in Emergencies

Pacific policy and practices on humanitarian action and gender equality

The Strategy for Disaster and Climate Resilient Development in the Pacific (SRDP) is a newly introduced regional framework which jointly addresses climate change and disaster risk reduction programming – it explicitly recognises the need for women’s substantive involvement in CC/DRR programming, for sex and age disaggregated data collection, and for engagement with women’s groups and leaders.

Disappointingly though, nearly all national disaster management policies and legal frameworks ignore gender and other human vulnerability issues, or make only cosmetic reference to them. Solomon Islands’ Disaster Risk Management plan is the sole national DRM plan within the region to make meaningful reference to the need to support women’s participation in disaster response, and to acknowledge the inherent value in doing so.

Women’s machineries and women’s organisations are increasingly gaining representation within humanitarian protection clusters; in Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Samoa the line ministries with ultimate responsibility for gender equality programming are cluster leads, and increasingly gender equality NGOs and CSOs are seeking to join protection clusters (rather than implement standalone programming in emergencies). Similarly, UN Women national presences are represented in protection clusters in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands; in Vanuatu they have taken on responsibility for ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into livelihoods responses, and in Solomon Islands following the April 2015 flash floods they took on substantial responsibility for the coordination of GBV prevention and response activities.

At the regional level, the Pacific Humanitarian Team has taken steps to introduce an overarching Gender Strategy and set of minimum commitments on mainstreaming gender into regional humanitarian response and recovery initiatives. Currently at the early stages of consultation, it is aimed to have this document formally endorsed and adopted by cluster leads by the end of 2015 at the latest. This is a necessary development, as practice on gender mainstreaming tends to be inconsistent. For example, there are no concrete mechanisms whereby response plans are subject to gender review or application of the IASC Gender Marker before they are endorsed. Some cluster actors actively engage with the protection cluster during responses, however others display reluctance to avail themselves of the assistance offered by gender and protection specialists on the ground. There is a need to concretely integrate gender and protection mainstreaming into PHT processes and practice to ensure that this is not dependent on individual attitudes or personal connections.

Additionally at regional level, the IASC regional network on gender in humanitarian action has committed to support a number of practical measures to improve compliance with the IASC Policy Statement on Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action, including inter alia on gender and vulnerability sensitive assessment and monitoring practices, measures to address GBV and sexual exploitation and abuse, application of the IASC Gender Marker to all funding appeals, and capacity building for staff members.

Progress:

Development and strong national leadership of national protection clusters:

An encouraging trend across the region has been the development of nationally led protection clusters, generally located within the government ministries with responsibility for social welfare concerns (usually Ministries of Women, Justice,

Internal Affairs or Social Welfare). Although these lead agencies are at varying stages of building up their technical capacities on humanitarian response as opposed to their day-to-day gender equality and social protection programming, where they exist they are rapidly becoming acknowledged at national levels as the authorities on protection issues, and are working to build productive relationships with NDMOs, national cluster leads and key community stakeholders.

Nationally led protection clusters also create the opportunity to contextualize global norms for Pacific humanitarian practitioners. While all humanitarian response actors, national and international, are bound by the same global norms, there is a strong perception among some national level non-protection actors that ‘protection’ and ‘gender equality’ are concepts fundamentally at odds with Pacific cultural and social norms. The location of expertise and leadership within national protection clusters allows for humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy on protection issues to be undertaken within a recognizably Pacific framework, rather than being viewed as the sole purview of international stakeholders with vested interests in instrumentalising disaster situations to progress advocacy agendas.

The positioning of national protection clusters within social welfare ministries also strengthens links between non-emergency gender equality programming and humanitarian response, and is beginning to address the often-observed inconsistency between development and humanitarian response activities at the national level.

The strengths of the national cluster approach are to be commended, despite the challenges to be discussed below. This will be discussed further, however the growing strength of national protection clusters must be noted as both a substantive improvement in practice in recent years, and a significant avenue for strengthening gender equality programming in Pacific disaster responses.

Women’s organisations’ willingness to support humanitarian response:

The dedication and commitment of women’s organisations in the region cannot be understated. As with national clusters, national women’s organisations tend to be substantially under-resourced, both in general and to be able to dedicate specific technical and staffing capacity to humanitarian response. Despite this, and despite their already formidable responsibilities to respond to the pre-existing gender issues in the Pacific, time and time again women’s organisations divert their scarce human and financial resources towards the needs of disaster affected women and girls, at the expense of their day-to-day programming. From Safenet in Honiara, which conducted outreach and referral for GBV victims in Honiara evacuation centres, to Vanuatu Women’s Centre which provided counseling services for disaster affected women, the burden of addressing specific protection needs rests not with governments or international organisations, but primarily by small local NGOs.

As with protection clusters (as discussed above), the technical capacity gaps within these organisations and their need for dedicated resources to plan and prepare for humanitarian responses will be discussed below, however the willingness and flexibility of small agencies to take on responsibility for gender equality programming in emergencies is a strength which should be supported and built upon.

Best practices:

Replicable best practices in gender equality and protection in emergencies exist across the Pacific and at local, national and regional levels.

Community-led preparedness:

At community levels, strengths and organic best practices have been observed in severely disaster affected communities across the Pacific. For example, communities in Ha’apai reported having organized, prior to Tropical Cyclone Ian, to allocate responsibilities among the strong and able-bodied to ensure that vulnerable groups were able to safely access

evacuation centres. This happened consistently across the disaster affected communities, and explicitly in response to a perceived responsibility towards vulnerable groups. As a result, and despite the unprecedented strength of the disaster, women who would normally not have been able to access the designated evacuation centres (including elderly women living alone and women with disabilities) were brought to safety and able to survive. Similarly, a small number of evacuation centres in Honiara demonstrated gender inclusive management practices, whereby women were appointed to oversee distributions, and to serve on centre management committees.

Integrating women’s skills into disaster response, recovery and resilience mechanisms:

Increasingly, development actors are integrating women’s needs and skills into climate and disaster resilience mechanisms. Tools to support this are being developed and taken up at regional and national level – for example the development of a Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit, designed to support field actors to conduct gender analysis of humanitarian and development programming. Similarly, various efforts are ongoing across the Pacific to build community level structures for disaster response, recognizing that the remoteness of island communities and the resource challenges which face humanitarian actors across the region place greater burdens on communities as first responders for protection issues. One example of this is the development of Community Protection Committees in Tonga, funded by UNDP’s Pacific Risk Resilience Programme, and designed to increase the quality, consistency and timeliness of information on protection risks available to humanitarian actors, as well as to support the strengthening of community-based protection responses.

Challenges:

Barriers to gender mainstreaming and the collection of sex and age disaggregated data:

The collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) is a basic and fundamental pre-requisite to the mainstreaming of gender and protection issues in humanitarian response. Without quantitative information on the numbers of men, women, boys and girls, disaggregated to indicate at least groups with specific vulnerabilities (babies, young children, adolescents, women of child-bearing age and elderly people), it is impossible to determine the type and quantity of humanitarian assistance which should be delivered. Without qualitative data on the differentiated vulnerabilities, priorities and skills of women, men, girls and boys it is impossible to deliver humanitarian assistance which adequately addresses needs – it will rather be ‘one size fits all’ (and likely to be geared primarily to the needs of adult men). However, Pacific humanitarian actors face substantial structural and attitudinal barriers to the collection of this data, leading to the under-collection of SADD and consequent challenges in planning and implementing gender-responsive humanitarian programming.

The collection of quantitative data on community demographics, or even on the sex breakdown of casualty numbers, relies heavily on acceptance by local and community level partners that this data is essential. Pacific humanitarian assessments are generally rapid in nature, with small (often one-person per cluster) delegations sent to affected communities, with limited opportunity to spend time on systemic data collection. Challenges in accessing remote communities, and the small size of assessment teams, mean that going house-by-house to determine accurate (or even credible sample size) population demographics will usually be impossible given these limitations. If quantitative data is not held at community level, often it cannot be obtained in time to be of use in planning humanitarian responses. As it stands, and given these limitations, humanitarian actors are often restricted to using (sometimes outdated or inaccurate) census information, at best. Attitudinal barriers also exist. Although most national and regional humanitarian actors view collection of disaggregated data as desirable, this is often viewed as optional, something to be done when there is time but ultimately a luxury (or a responsibility of the protection cluster). There is a need for all humanitarian actors to take steps to integrate this task into their standard operating procedures in emergencies, and where needed, to seek technical assistance from protection actors in a timely fashion to support this.

Variable, but generally deficient donor engagement on protection and gender issues:

Protection-focused activities generally, including those aiming to address gender inequality, are systematically underfunded or ignored by donors in the Pacific region. For example, although the Flash Appeal for TC Pam was ultimately 58% funded overall, protection activities were funded to only 3%. Protection in the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) for TC Pam had received no funding at all at the time of writing. Similarly, the protection by presence component of the Central Emergency Response Fund proposal for Solomon Islands following the April 2015 flash floods was rejected as insufficiently lifesaving, despite clear needs for an ongoing protection presence (due to concerns about the voluntariness of population movements, gender-based violence and general safety and security issues for displaced vulnerable groups). This was despite precedents for successful CERF funding of similar protection proposals in other jurisdictions.

This trend is at least partially attributable to the challenges addressed above on collecting adequate, timely and updated data on protection issues in emergencies, which impacts on the development of a credible evidence base for donors to justify programming. However, and on a more concerning note, there is also consistent failure among donors to require protection and gender mainstreaming as compulsory criteria for accessing funding. Funding is made available rapidly to national authorities for activities with no gender or protection assessments, and without even consideration of available baseline data or indicative trends. The result is gender-blind programming which increases the risk to women and children precisely when they are least able to implement self-protection strategies. Donors have a role to play in driving behavior change and ensuring that protection and gender are considered essential from the earliest days of humanitarian response.

Need for dedicated funding for preparedness and response:

As discussed above, there is substantial opportunity to build upon the growing skills and standing of national protection clusters as leaders on issues affecting women, girls and other vulnerable groups in Pacific disasters. Unless national protection cluster leads are supported to develop dedicated staffing capacity for humanitarian work, protection in emergencies will continue to be an extra burden placed upon already overworked staff in addition to their substantive roles.

This also extends to women's organisations and other protection actors. As it stands, very few have dedicated technical capacity for humanitarian response, which impacts upon the ability of clusters to engage in critical planning and preparedness work; in particular to support protection mainstreaming.

Disconnection between protection/gender equality actors and the wider humanitarian community:

There is also a theme of disconnection between social protection/development/gender equality actors and the wider humanitarian community (although it is noted that this is a broad theme only, and that there are some notable exceptions to this rule). Arising out of the lack of dedicated funding and capacity for protection actors to develop expertise on humanitarian response, what tends to occur is a 'silo' response, whereby social protection actors simply step up their existing development programming priorities. This can result in useful and needed standalone programming. However what tends to be missing is a response to the needs of the broader humanitarian community for technical and operational support on responding to gender and vulnerability issues.

Currently, there usually are very few constructive links between women's organisations and the broader national and regional humanitarian response. Women's organisations, where they do participate in emergency responses, are generally located solely within protection clusters – their expertise, networks and resources are not often made available to the wider humanitarian community. Technical assistance to non-protection actors tends to be provided only by

national or regional protection cluster (or sub-cluster) leads; given that this represents a pool of just two or three people, there is a clearly substantial unmet need for assistance.

There is room for women's organisations and other entities with mandates on social vulnerabilities to organize pre-disaster to anticipate the needs of humanitarian actors for specific technical or resource support. This may include such activities as identifying avenues for communication with women and girls, support on mobilising women for community consultations and distributions, or making available technical expertise on gender mainstreaming, noting that this should as much as possible be done with the specific needs and constraints of the other humanitarian actors in mind.

Recommendations and way forward

Recommendations below deal largely with the resource gaps which exist for programming in preparedness, response and recovery to Pacific emergencies, and the need to build constructive links between those with expertise in gender equality programming and those with responsibilities for humanitarian response. Ultimately, the gender and protection issues which affect the Pacific must be addressed via coordinated mechanisms involving the entire humanitarian and protection community. No single agency or individual can address the complex landscape of women and girls' vulnerabilities in emergencies, nor can any single sector or cohort.

It is acknowledged also that many of the issues affecting women and girls in emergencies relate to deep-seated issues at national and sub-national levels, relating to lack of services and systems which fail to allow for the full expression of women and girls' human rights (e.g. on HLP and GBV). While building these systems and services must continue as a development priority, it is acknowledged that the humanitarian community as such will not be able to fully address these problems in the context of response and recovery.

As there is a need for the building of horizontal links between gender equality actors and humanitarian actors at national and regional levels, so too is there a need to build linkages for communication, resource mobilization and support to community level actors, recognizing their position as first-responders to protection issues as they occur.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: National protection clusters are recognized as the drivers of programming addressing the immediate protection needs of women and girls in Pacific emergency responses, and are supported by donors to access funding for dedicated and ongoing cluster staffing and resources.

Recommendation 2: Women's organisations and other community-based agencies working on the needs of vulnerable groups seek to build up dedicated humanitarian staffing and technical capacity, and are supported by donors to do so.

Recommendation 3: Protection cluster and gender equality actors at national levels, NDMOs and national and regional cluster lead agencies agree to formally coordinate on protection issues in emergencies, and take coordinated steps to agree upon standard operating procedures and minimum commitments for mainstreaming gender and protection into all humanitarian responses.

Recommendation 4: All humanitarian actors immediately implement procedures for the collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data, and on information, communication, participation and mainstreaming; as well as monitoring and accountability mechanisms to promote compliance with these procedures.

Recommendation 5: Humanitarian organisations provide compulsory basic training to all staff on recognizing and responding to the needs of vulnerable groups in humanitarian settings¹⁰.

Recommendation 6: Women’s organisations and protection lead agencies agree on responsibility for assisting humanitarian actors with reasonably foreseeable technical assistance and tasks in support of mainstreaming, including data collection, information/communication, distributions, and post-distribution monitoring; while noting that States are the final duty bearers for ensuring systemic mainstreaming.

Recommendation 7: Donors require from the earliest stages of humanitarian responses the meaningful integration of gender equality and protection principles into all funded humanitarian activities including through provision of minimum standard budget lines that must be spent on these activities.

Recommendation 8: Communities are recognized as those who bear the primary burden of response and resilience building during and following disasters and in response to the impacts of climate change, particularly in remote communities and outer islands. Attention must be directed by all stakeholders towards supporting community level actors to enact healthy and protection sensitive preparedness, response and recovery strategies, and towards strengthening essential services outside of capital cities (including and in particular for GBV and child protection).

¹⁰ E.g. the IASC ‘Different Needs; Equal Opportunities’ e-learning tool