



# International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## **Talking Points: Gender and Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific Region**

This paper has been prepared by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Pacific Delegation with valuable input from the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre and UNDP's Pacific Centre. The purpose of the paper is to provide some background information and talking points on gender and climate change adaptation for participants at the 2008 Pacific Climate Change Roundtable. The paper highlights why gender analysis is an important consideration in the development of community adaptation initiatives. The paper also provides a brief overview of initiatives in the region that are working towards the integration of gender into initiatives in climate change and Disaster Risk Reduction.<sup>1</sup>

### **What do we mean by gender and gender analysis?**

The South Pacific Disaster Recovery Programme (SRDRP, 2002), formerly at the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission, summarises gender and gender analysis in the following manner:

' ... gender is the socially (rather than biologically) determined characteristics of men's and women's positions in society.....gender analysis examines both women and men and the social, economic and cultural forces which shape their relative positions and the relations between them.'

### **Why is gender an important consideration in the context of adapting to climate change in the Pacific?**

- It is well acknowledged that because the economies and small communities of Pacific Island Countries are highly dependent on natural resources, they are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and associated increases in the occurrence of natural hazards (ADB 2004, 13-14; UNDP 2008, 2).
- Despite the vulnerability of Pacific Islands to the impacts of climate change and disaster, research shows that men and women of Pacific Island communities have been successfully utilizing specialized knowledge of their environments to mitigate disasters through the management of their natural resource base for generations (Campbell 2006). They have done this through a variety of traditional practices that have been maintained through informal education and oral tradition across generations. These include food preservation, housing construction, traditional systems of exchange, and most importantly the management of their natural resource base (Campbell 2006).
- Different studies indicate that men and women have different skills and knowledge that can assist in adapting to climate change, preparing for disasters and reducing disaster risk, stemming from gendered divisions of labor present in non disaster periods (Anderson 2002; SPDRP 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> NB This paper is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all the issues and initiatives relevant to gender and climate change in the Pacific but rather to provide talking points for the Roundtable.

Anderson (2002, 25), for example, notes that the everyday responsibilities of women and men in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) translate into gender-differentiated response to warnings of oncoming climatic hazards, such as typhoons and droughts.

- Gendered divisions of labor and men and women's specialized traditional or local knowledge, far from being static, shift over time in response to a range of external factors including: development processes; urbanization; environmental degradation; and climate change (Anderson 2008, 3). As a result of these pressures the relevance and use of some Traditional Environmental Knowledge among the men and women of Pacific Island Communities has significantly eroded.
- There is increasing evidence that successful adaptation and coping capacity relies upon measures that address the livelihood activities of poor and vulnerable communities. This not only requires an understanding of how livelihoods are conducted and sustained by men and women it requires a strong appreciation of how climate change will impact upon available natural resources and the different roles that men and women play in managing these natural resources.<sup>2</sup>
- Understanding gendered divisions of labour within Pacific Island communities can therefore assist in providing more in-depth understanding of community perspectives on changes to climate and environment. It can also provide a useful entry point for harnessing the specialised knowledge held by men and women in developing strategies for adapting to climate change.

### **What is the Pacific Region doing at the global, regional and national levels to ensure that gender issues are integrated into climate change agendas?**

- In February 2008 at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, during the Interactive Expert Panel on the theme 'Gender and climate change' the Pacific delegation made an intervention. The intervention acknowledged that despite the fact that women in the Pacific make a significant contribution to the informal economy particularly in agriculture, fisheries and micro-enterprises the nexus between gender and climate change in the Pacific has not gained much traction. The intervention went on to recognize the importance of the inclusion of gender in both strategies for mitigation and adaptation and called for efforts to address the gender specific impacts of climate change in areas such as energy, water, food security, agriculture, fisheries, health and disaster management.
- In the same month the UNDP Pacific Centre and AusAID jointly sponsored a regional forum on the *Gendered Dimensions of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Pacific*. The forum, which was held in Suva, brought together practitioners from the fields of natural resource management, disaster risk management and climate change to explore and share issues relevant to gender, to identify gaps in practice and research, best practices, and lessons learned, and to initiate an ongoing dialogue among stakeholders. The forum explored Pacific understandings of gender and found traditional knowledge and social structures to be strategic points of entry for gender

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<sup>2</sup> Taskforce on Climate Change, Vulnerable Communities and Adaptation, 2003, **Livelihoods and Climate Change Combining Disaster Risk reduction, Natural resource Management and Climate Change Adaptation in a New Approach to the Reduction of Vulnerability and Poverty**, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Manitoba, Canada.

responsive programming in the region. There were a number of priority areas identified for collaboration and future research at the workshop that can guide future research and programming in these areas within the Pacific to ensure that programming is gender responsive.<sup>3</sup>

- The World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Climate Witness Program has successfully demonstrated how women's and men's traditional roles and environmental knowledge have proven to be crucial in observing shifts in natural resource availability due to long-term changes in climate.<sup>4</sup>
- The Red Cross National Societies in Fiji (in partnership with UNDP Pacific Centre), Solomon Islands, Cook Islands and Samoa have been using participatory methodologies through Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments to identify gendered impacts and perceptions of disaster risk.
- The Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific (DSAP) program employs gender analysis and gender focal points in participatory approaches to work with local farmers throughout the Pacific to improve their food security and livelihoods. Over the long-term this improves resilience to disaster risks and impacts of climate change. Benefits of this programme have included improvement in the quality of soil, drought or saltwater resistant crops, improvement in irrigation systems, management of pests and disease. Staff and team members receive gender sensitivity training to incorporate gender analysis approaches and the programme builds capacity of both men and women.
- USP's Institute of Applied Sciences and PACE-SD unit collaborate on a Community Based Adaptation to Climate Change Project being run in seven different project sites within Fiji. The project focuses on management of coastal areas and watersheds. To ensure participation of women and men in gender-sensitive projects PACE relies on the participatory learning and action method to engage communities in using their knowledge to develop strategies. USP ensures that participatory processes are gender sensitive so that both men and women are able to participate. In addition, by having women facilitators, the project benefits from increased interaction with a broader base of community members.
- Dr Veikila Vuki, editor of Women in Fisheries, University of Guam, has been spearheading research into the gendered impacts of climate change upon fishing in the Pacific. This research notes that there are differences in the methods men and women use and the stocks they catch. It also looks at the way gender roles in fishing across the Pacific have also evolved with recent changes in lifestyles, nutrition and economic systems and how women and men face different environmental impacts depending on where they fish. This research supports the call for both women and men to be included in policy development for resource management.
- UNDP Pacific Centre with financial support from AusAID and technical support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Pacific office is facilitating the formation of a Pacific Delegation to attend the 3rd global Congress on Women in Politics and Governance focusing on Gender

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of this report including the priority areas, gaps and opportunities identified may be accessed online at:  
<http://regionalcentrepacific.undp.org.fj/HTML%20docs/Workshops%20and%20Seminars/Forum%20on%20Gendered%20dimension%20on%20DRM.html>

<sup>4</sup> More information on the climate witness programme can be located at [http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/what\\_we\\_do/climate\\_change/index.cfm](http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/what_we_do/climate_change/index.cfm)

in DRR and ACC. The Congress which is taking place from 19-22 October 2008 in Manila will look at best practice, lessons learned and ways forward for integrating gender into legislation on climate change and disaster. The Pacific delegation which is comprised of representatives from government, non-government and regional organizations, working in the fields of gender, climate change and disaster risk reduction, will share experiences from and take forward priorities for the Pacific region.

- The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme are currently seeking funding for an initiative on gender and climate change that will include engagement of a Climate Change Gender Advisor, development and training of regional and country officials in the use of guidelines on gender analysis for use in V&A assessments and development of adaptation strategies and application of gender analysis in V&A work.

### **What are some potential future directions on gender and climate change in the region?**

- Initiatives designed to address issues on gender and climate change that give consideration to the gendered vulnerabilities of both men and women and ideally involve both men and women in partnership in both design and implementation.
- Deeper understandings of existing social systems and the cultural contexts of gender are crucial for donors and programmers to factor into the design and implementation of adaptation strategies. This will assist in ensuring that strategies support local capacities, meet the specific needs of men and women and do not impose top down mainstreaming agendas that, albeit unintentionally, can reinforce existing or create new inequalities by imposing external or 'western' understandings of gender roles and relationships in communities.
- More awareness needs to be raised among wider development practitioners on the intersections between gender, development, natural resource management, climate change and disaster risk. Development partners need to be sensitized to methodologies that can assist them in reviewing projects for their potential impacts on increasing or decreasing gendered vulnerability to the impacts of disaster and climate change.
- The impacts of climate change and existing climate variability may be multiple at anyone time and will interact with a range of other socio-political and economic factors such as environmental degradation, development and urbanization to impact upon communities. Gender responsive strategies for adaptation need to be flexible and involve a number of responses from a number of partners through collaboration and partnership.
- Undertake more research in order to learn more about how risks and impacts of climate change are gendered by collecting gender disaggregated data
- Assist communities by translating information on climate change into easy to understand and local languages so that men and women can understand how climate change will impact on their everyday roles and livelihoods and be better informed to choose appropriate strategies for adaptation.