



## **The Hidden Effects of Climate Change**

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The Pacific region consists of more than 20,000 islands spread across the vast Pacific Ocean; its people are living the very real effects of climate change and its unexpected consequences. For example, in the northwest Pacific it is expected that a temperature rise of as little as 2% will result in a 12 to 15% increase in the intensity of tropical cyclones. This will be coupled with a 12 to 28% decrease in rainfall. Effectively, more storms, more droughts, less food, less stability.

The effects of climate change do not discriminate. Both men and women can be severely affected by disasters that result from climate change, however, gender still plays a major role in how people are affected by and manage disasters.

Global research has shown that women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be injured in a disaster than men. It is speculated that this has to do with the gender roles that women play. Many women work in the home, and the home is often not the safest space during disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis. Many women are also not given as much leeway as men to socialise and network. For example, 87% of women in one Pacific Island country have to report their whereabouts to their partner - limiting their freedom of association and meaning that many women are not privy to early warning systems.

Disasters and the other effects of climate change exploit and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, especially the global epidemic of violence against women and girls. Globally, 1 in 3 women experience sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime; but in the Pacific, the average is 2 in 3. After two cyclones hit Vanuatu, the Women's Counseling Centre based in the Tanne region reported a 300% increase in new cases of domestic violence.

In the aftermath of recent floods in the Solomon Islands and in preparation for cyclone season, the United Nations (including UN Women and UNFPA), together with civil society organisations, are taking action to build capacity among key stakeholders to ensure that governments and communities are prepared to manage the increasing levels of violence women and girls experience after disasters. More information on the steps being taken by UN Women in particular can be found [here](#).

While this work is very important, more needs to be done. The root of the problem lies in the high levels of violence against women generally. These 'normal' levels are unacceptable. Until the structural power imbalances, such as lack of accountability, access to justice and services, that result in gender-based violence at the local,

national and international levels are addressed, natural or human-made disasters will continue to lead to ballooning levels of violence against women and girls.

The governments of the Pacific have been making positive strides to address the high levels of violence against women and girls in their countries and territories with UN and bilateral support. New legislation has been drafted and passed and services are being honed. Since the numbers of disasters are increasing and constitute a constant threat to Pacific societies, it is essential also to consider how these new laws will hold up in times of disasters

There is no doubt that in many ways the Pacific is an idyllic paradise. In order to keep it that way for both visitors and those reliant on the land, the effects of climate change must be addressed and violence against women and girls must be reduced and eventually eliminated.

The work starts with each individual. We need to do our part in whatever way possible to put an end to violence against women and girls, and highlight how the effects of climate change exacerbate this form of violence. Write to your government, support the development of legislation and policies that end impunity and promote transformative justice and include women in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Support programmes that end violence against women in times of peace and in times of disasters. Whatever you can do, do. Act. The climate has proven that it - like time - waits for no one.

### ***About the author***

*Tonni Brodber is the Technical Adviser with the UN Women Fiji-Multi Country Office. The UN Women Fiji-Multi-Country Office (MCO) covers 14 Pacific Island countries and territories. UN Women's Fiji MCO works with governments and civil society organisations across 14 Pacific Island countries and territories to address this imbalance empower women and build more inclusive societies.*

*To do this, the MCO works through four key programmes:*

- [\*Women's Economic Empowerment \(WEE\)\*](#)
- [\*Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\)\*](#)
- [\*Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific \(AGJP\)\*](#)
- [\*Increasing Community Resilience through Empowerment of Women to Address Climate Change and Natural Hazards \(IREACH\)\*](#)

- *Read more here:*

*<http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji#sthash.ooFj4mBD.dpuf>*