

INCREASING FIJIAN WOMEN'S RESILIENCY

THROUGH PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE



Photo: Tomoko Kashiwazaki /UNDP

KEY POINTS

- 01** Women are differently impacted by climate change because of social and economic barriers
- 02** Women are not only victims of climate change but are active agents of change and have knowledge and skills that can help them and their community adapt to the changing climate
- 03** Women's participation in climate governance is crucial to ensure that their specific needs and vulnerabilities are addressed in climate change adaptation
- 04** We should aim for women to have meaningful participation in climate governance, the highest form of participation where women are present in decision-making fora, have agency and voice, and are able to affect change in all areas of decision making.
- 05** Drawing on the existing local knowledge of women is a key strategy in ensuring women's participation in climate governance

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is not gender neutral. According to UNDP (2009), women are disproportionately impacted by climate change. For example, women farmers account for 45-80% of food production in developing countries and are usually tasked with collecting water for their family. This means that climate change impacts such as floods and droughts affect their livelihoods and put them at greater risk than men. In addition, natural disasters heighten women's vulnerabilities to gender based violence (UN Women, n.d.). Women in evacuation and temporary shelters experience rape and violence, and have low levels of access to sexual and reproductive health.

Since climate change impacts are not gender neutral, the solutions cannot be gender neutral. In order to address this, there must be meaningful participation of women in climate change adaptation, both at the community level and at the national level. Research have shown that women legislators and politicians are more likely to deal with and support issues that deal with women's issues, including the environment (Volden, Wiseman, and Wiltmer, 2010).

In addition, women must not only be seen as victims. Women have strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction, and adaptation strategies. Women's responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of natural and household resources positions them well to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities (UN Women Watch, 2009)

WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN FIJI

Fiji, an island country comprised of more than 300 islands and atolls, is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. According to COP 23 Fiji (2017), some of the climate change impacts the small island state are facing and will continue to face include sea level rise, stronger El Niño patterns, food and water borne diseases, extreme weather events, and ocean acidification.

Some of these impacts will have a greater effect on women than on men. For example, salinisation and drought may mean women have to spend longer collecting water and increases in infectious or water-borne diseases post-climate change events will result in a greater burden of care for women. (UN Women Fiji, n.d.)

UN Women Fiji (ibid) also identified an increase in gender based violence post-disaster. Women in evacuation and temporary shelters are subjected to rape and violence. There is also low access to sexual and reproductive health post-disaster.

These vulnerabilities that women face need to be addressed through gender specific responses for climate change adaptation.

According to Emmeline Skinner (2009, p.4),

CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES WILL NEITHER BE EFFECTIVE NOR FAIR UNLESS THEY BECOME GENDER AWARE, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO BE INCLUDED IN CLIMATE CHANGE RELATED DECISION MAKING AND TO BENEFIT FROM THEM EQUALLY.



"The impacts of climate change are not gender neutral, so strategies to address them cannot be gender neutral."

United Nations Development Programme

Particularly, in Fiji, a small island state considered to be one of the most vulnerable to climate change, women only hold 16% of parliamentary seats after the 2014 elections (8 out of 50). A study on gender and disaster management found that while women participate actively in disaster preparedness, this does not hold true when it comes to planning and policy making. Women are simply not consulted and included in any of these processes (Asia Development Bank, 2015).

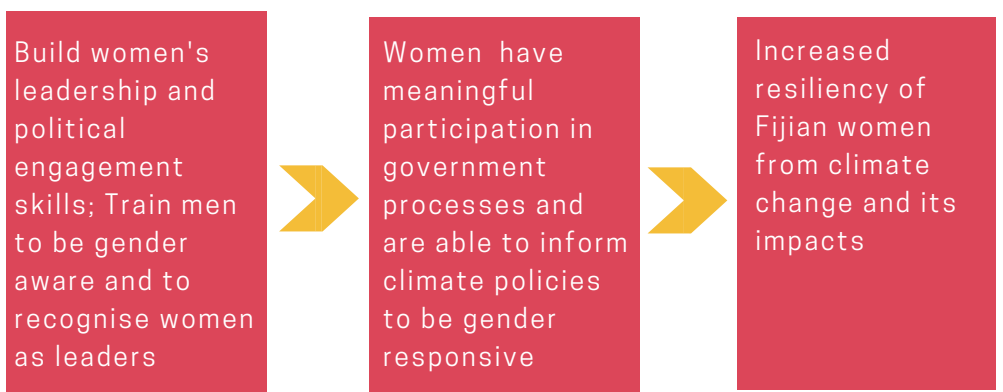
In a research done by Lane and McNaught (2009), women raised concerns that the bulk of decision on disasters was made by men. The women felt that most of these decisions were not always fair, making them not fully prepared for disasters.

Women in island states like Fiji also already have particular knowledge and skills that can be drawn upon in finding solutions for climate change adaptation. These are in the form of traditional practices which have been maintained through informal education (Lane and McNaught, 2009). For example, in Fiji, Samoa, and Kiribati, women are more likely to be responsible for storing food and water (ibid). Women in agriculture also act as custodians of knowledge that help preserve agricultural genetic diversity (UNDP, 2009).

These particular vulnerabilities and already existing knowledge of women need to be addressed and utilised to increase their resiliency in facing climate change.

WHAT DO WE WANT?

We want to increase the resilience on women in Fiji. To be able to do this, women in Fiji must be able to participate in all climate change adaptation and disaster planning, decision-making, and implementation of projects. We also need to train men to recognise women's leadership skills. In the longer term, we want more women to be part of the government in order to have climate change policies that address women's specific needs and vulnerabilities.



According to the Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice (2015), there are three levels of women's participation:

Presence: women are present in decision-making fora but do not have the agency or voice to affect change.

Partial Participation: women are present in decision-making fora, have some agency or voice, but may be limited to specific areas and issues where women are traditionally associated to. (i.e child care, women's health)

Meaningful participation: women are present in decision-making fora, have agency and voice, and are able to affect change in all areas of decision making.

What we aspire for is women's **meaningful participation** in climate governance. With women's meaningful participation and inclusion in local and national leadership, there will be better design, planning, and implementation of adaptation strategies that will enable women to be more resilient in the face of climate change.



CASE STUDIES

ASIA PACIFIC

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development implemented a project called Climate Justice-Feminist Participatory Action Research that "aimed to improve climate actions by providing women with knowledge and experience so they can participate in policy dialogues and advocate for their own needs and solutions to be included in climate policies at the local, national, and international levels." (Women and Gender Constituency, 2017)

Through this project, women have improved on their political and leadership skills and have been given voice to shape policy decisions in their countries.

CHILE

La Aguada, Chile, has experienced climate change impacts such as drought that has led to water scarcity and desertification. As a result, the community can no longer produce crops and relies on water deliveries for each household. A local organisation, Junta de Vecinos La Aguada, has helped women and men participate as equals in community development. Women's participation has helped their community in protecting their right to food and water. They were able to implement projects such as the Rainwater Harvest Project which utilised both traditional techniques and technical skills. With the construction of greenhouses and the installation of the pipes, women are able to grow fruits and vegetables and are able to secure food and water for their families (Mary Robinson Foundation, 2009).



These case studies have all been carried out by non-profit organisations. A case study of a government led project specifically on women's participation in climate governance in Pacific Islands still has to be seen. There are, however, successful projects on community-based adaptation, in ensuring the participation of communities in climate change adaptation. One case is from Samoa where the local community was actively engaged in decision-making processes related to its watershed (McNamara, Hemstock, and Holland, 2012). McNamara, Hemstock, and Holland (ibid), who evaluated different climate change adaptation programmes in the Pacific, considered the Samoan project a success due to factors such as community consultations, allowing the community to voice their opinions in their comfort zones, and developing a community-based management plan. These things, coupled with a gender framework can help lay the foundations of participatory governance specifically aimed for women.



WE ARE NOT DROWNING
WE ARE FIGHTING!!

Increasing the resiliency of women in Fiji will involve a number of actors in order to make the programme sustainable:

1. Women and men in communities

Women in communities are the main target of the intended programme. They are the ones that will undergo capacity building through leadership and political training, enabling them to participate in climate change adaptation planning and implementation. Men in communities are the secondary target. Men will undergo gender sensitivity and awareness trainings to support women's leadership.

The women who will gain leadership skills will be able to train other women and pass on the skills to their family and community. This will enable a cultural change where women can be seen as leaders and be given opportunities to lead.

2. Community leaders or Turaga-ni-Koro

Community leaders, also called, Turaga-ni-Koro, are the head of the villages elected or appointed by the villagers. As head of the village, they need to ensure that women are included, participate, and are engaged with all activities in the community. They also serve as a bridge between the local government and their women constituents. Community leaders will be able to train the next generation of leaders to ensure women's participation in community activities.

3. Local government

The local government is the proposed implementer of the programme. This is important because local governments have direct input into national affairs. Local governments also face different impacts of climate change, and strategies for adaptation will be different for each province. The local government should ensure that climate change adaptation for each of Fiji's provinces address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women. It should also ensure that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes. Involvement of the local government can help transform Fijian governance to be participatory and gender sensitive.

4. Non-profit organisations

While this programme aims for local government to take charge, there is recognition that it may prove challenging, as it involves not only a change in governance, but a change in culture. To help local governments, partnerships with non-profit organisations may prove beneficial. Non-profits, can, for example, give gender trainings to the local government and introduce them to relevant gender frameworks and methodologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Highlight women's agency and capacity in adapting to climate change. This can be done by ensuring that their existing knowledge and skills about the community and the environment are taken into consideration as part of planning and implementation of adaptation programmes.

Practicing community-based adaptation also promote gender-aware solutions and policies that acknowledge and makes use of the different roles men and women play within their communities. If women's roles include food preservation, water storage, and farming, how might these knowledge be incorporated in planning and implementing climate change adaptation programmes in the community?

2. Build the capacity of women and enable them to participate in climate change governance and adaptation processes at the local and national level and ensure their meaningful participation in these discussions. Having leadership and political trainings for women at the community level can be a start to achieve this. Women should also always be included in all community level meetings, planning, discussion, and implementation of climate change programmes and projects. They should be should be given voice to speak and be allowed to make decisions for the community. Men should also be trained to respect women when they speak and to allow women to lead projects. Both men and women in the community need to be gender aware and acknowledge women's capacity to lead.

3. Implement gender-focused participatory approaches that are gender aware and inclusive for women. There are many participatory approaches for women that are already happening at the local level in different parts of the world. These existing projects have lessons learned that can be reflected on, improved, and implemented in other areas and even on a larger scale.

4. Integrate local knowledge with Western science. Salick and Ross (2009) have noted that many Pacific communities have long oral histories on adapting to the environment. By integrating local knowledge, adaptation strategies will be locally and culturally appropriate and communities will be able to take ownership of the programme. Where traditional local knowledge on adaptation no longer works for new climate change impacts, Western science will provide the needed information and new methodologies.



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