

The **Pacific Insight Briefs** capture climate and disaster integration knowledge, lessons, and insights from the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership (Climate Partnership). The five thematic briefs draw on the experience of the Climate Partnership's community of aid program managers, implementing partners, technical experts, and staff.



Pacific Insight Brief 3 | Gender Equality, Disability & Social Inclusion – pathways to resilience

It is increasingly recognised that addressing marginalisation and exclusion is an essential component of effective climate and disaster resilience. DFAT's regional leadership in gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) supports positive social and policy change towards resilient development. DFAT also has a growing focus on First Nations engagement and LGBTQIA+ rights. This brief captures the connections between GEDSI and climate and disaster resilience for transformative change and identifies insights, lessons and opportunities to strengthen GEDSI in resilient development.

Insights



Investments promoting income generation for women and people with disabilities increase community resilience:

Supporting the earning capacity of women, including those with disabilities, can enhance the livelihoods of women, and provide economic stability to families. Climate Partnership research found examples of women and men drawing on family savings to undertake disaster preparedness actions, which help them to withstand climate and disaster impacts more readily.

Financial literacy and economic independence increase the confidence and agency of women (with and without disabilities) to contribute to, and lead community level disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster response actions:

This enables transformative shifts in traditional gender roles for women and contributes to changing gender narratives in the Pacific. This approach has benefited people with disabilities (see case example from Vanuatu Skills Partnership) and has the potential to be applied with other groups such as LGBTQIA+ community.

'The Market for Change Program upgraded the Luganville Market House in Vanuatu, where majority of the vendors were local women. Women could resume their livelihood activities 7 days after Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020. Re-designing the marketplace increased women's preparedness and recovery capacity, which supported local economy and strengthened community resilience.' (UTS-ISF GESI Sendai Midterm Review in the Pacific, 2022).

Investing in Pacific women's leadership supports effective climate and disaster resilience: Multiple initiatives are promoting women's agency, enabling women's leadership and contributing to significant resilient development outcomes. Women leaders from the Pacific region are engaging with decision makers, voicing community priorities and advocating for gender inclusive practices at local, national and regional levels. Women are influencing subnational, national and regional policy reforms for more inclusive climate and disaster resilient practices. However, social and structural barriers often limit women's participation and

leadership in climate action and DRR approaches. See Barriers and opportunities for more details.

'Women's Weather Watch Vanuatu members participated in dialogue with local parliament members to discuss community's resilience priorities, where women set their own agenda and presented the community's demands.' (UTS-ISF GESI Sendai Midterm Review in the Pacific, 2022).

Women-led partnerships and coalitions show great potential to build inclusive resilient development:

Coalitions of GEDSI-focused organisations are demonstrating effective and innovative models to support diverse Pacific women to gain climate knowledge and access climate and disaster risk information in meaningful ways. The learning and knowledge dissemination approaches of partnerships and coalitions are creating sustainable pathways for women at community level to understand and respond to climate and disaster risks and build resilience. Partnerships and coalitions are actively engaging with communities, INGOs, scientific organisations and government agencies and integrating traditional and local knowledge, which is effectively bridging the gap between community, national and regional decision-making levels. Women-led partnership and coalitions have demonstrated positive outcomes for inclusive and resilient development, highlighting an opportunity for further investment and scale up (see opportunities section).

'Shifting the Power Coalition Program facilitated network meetings and enabled learning through storytelling approaches. Women with disabilities developed knowledge and gained confidence through the network and played a critical role to inform post-cyclone needs of people with disabilities to the Fiji and Vanuatu governments.' (Pacific Insight Briefs interview 2023, Climate Partnership Adviser).

Strong and inclusive climate and disaster risk governance structures support resilient development:

Government and non-government actors including regional networks and civil society organisations (CSOs) are working in partnership to progress gender-responsive and disability inclusive climate and disaster resilience practices. Inclusive partnerships and

governance structures are enabled through creating space for dialogue, with stakeholders demonstrating a willingness for collaboration and policy reform to progress resilient development. An example of dialogue that aimed to progress inclusive and resilient development between government and civil society comes from Tuvalu. Research undertaken by the regional network of organisations of people with disabilities (Pacific Disability Forum) played a strong advocacy role to integrate disability data in Tuvalu’s national climate

and disaster resilience strategy. See case example from Pacific Disability Forum below for details.

‘Ministry of Women’s Affairs in Vanuatu introduced the Gender and Social Protection Cluster with the support of INGOs (CARE and Save the Children) in Vanuatu. This enabled women to engage in community recovery strategy for Tropical Cyclone Harold and Covid-19.’ (Leading for Resilience: Women’s leadership in Disaster and Climate resilience in Vanuatu, 2022).

Case example | Income generation of women and people with disabilities through *Vanuatu Skills Program* has strengthened overall community resilience, which has cascading benefits for climate and disaster resilience

The [Vanuatu Skills Program](#) (VSP) is a locally-led development program, funded by the Governments of Australia and Vanuatu. Skills for Handicraft is one of the four streams of VSP and focuses on supporting rural women’s economic empowerment through production and sale of local handicrafts. The program also has a focus on the inclusion of women with disabilities to ensure the program brings positive outcomes for diverse women within communities.



Women of Wala Island in Malampa Province, Vanuatu, participated in VSP, with many becoming financially independent and more resilient to the shocks and stresses of climate and disaster risks. The income from the sales of handicraft products gave families within Wala community an opportunity to invest in disaster preparedness and saving for future severe weather events, which was a spontaneous and community-led outcome from the investment.

Women’s earning capacity, and consequent increased capacity in disaster preparedness and resilience building, were positively accepted by male members of the community. Men and women in families started working together in businesses, with women involved in decision-making. Men’s support for women to make business decisions initiated a positive shift in social norms and mindsets and brought about a transformative change within Wala community.

Women were encouraged to lead decision-making beyond their families and take on leadership roles within the community – including in times of disaster response and recovery. The local governance structure (Council of Chiefs) also included a role for women, which can in part be attributed to women’s demonstration of leadership capacity in the VSP activities.

Lessons



Building new knowledge through Pacific-led exploratory GEDSI research: Climate Partnership research on risk, vulnerability and lived experience of marginalised groups including people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people and gender diverse communities provide an evidence base and practical recommendations to progress towards inclusive climate and disaster resilience strategies. Pacific-led research supports the localisation agenda by utilising and building Pacific research skills and capacities, and promotes ownership of the findings to Pacific partners.

Research outputs can act as an advocacy tool and source of evidence to influence policy makers, as was the case in Tuvalu as noted below, and described in more detail in the case example.

‘In Tuvalu, the Pacific Disability Forum-led research was the catalyst for discussions with government about disability, climate and disaster resilience including indicators within the 10-year Development Plan currently being developed.’ (UTS-ISF Outcome Harvesting Evaluation, 2022).

More Pacific-led and participatory research exploring complex resilience issues can be an effective way of building an evidence base, raising awareness and advocating for policy reform to strengthen community resilience within Pacific communities.

Australian development actors play an important convening role in catalysing new partnerships: Australian GEDSI-focused investments have resulted in positive outcomes when support was intentional and created new opportunities of partnership and collaboration for Pacific partners. The Australian aid program has a strong reputation for gender equality, disability and social inclusion in the Pacific region. GEDSI-focused Pacific partners are successfully leveraging this reputation, as well as Australian networks, connections and Australian aid investments to build new relationships with national and regional stakeholders and extending their climate action and disaster resilience activities. The new connections facilitated and influenced by the Climate Partnership strengthen the climate and disaster resilience ‘ecosystem’ of the region and supporting two-way learning for an inclusive climate disaster resilient approach. An example of this in practice was seen in the way the Climate Partnership’s GEDSI Advisor facilitated a connection between YWCA Samoa and Samoa’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as described in the quote below.

‘The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) in Samoa recognised women’s capacity and potential in climate and disaster resilience approaches through their continued engagement with women-led organisation, YWCA Samoa. The MNRE and YWCA Samoa are now collaborating to design gender-inclusive climate change and DRR strategies.’ (UTS-ISF GESI Sendai Midterm Review in the Pacific, 2022).

Continued engagement builds mutual trust and strong partnerships between development partners including CSOs and national and regional decision-making agencies enabling inclusive climate and disaster resilient practices.

Skill development and capacity building initiatives contribute to inclusive practices: Australian investments are supporting Pacific women and people with disabilities to upskill themselves through multiple skill development and capacity building initiatives. Women are participating in training in disaster preparedness, response and recovery and sharpening their leadership skills through different skills and capacity building programs (e.g. Shifting the Power Coalition, Women’s Weather Watch and ANCP leadership training). As a result, women and people with disabilities are championing climate action and DRR approaches at local level and creating pathways to inclusive development within their communities.

‘The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) provided leadership training to 2,000 women with disabilities, who are currently leading local organisations of persons with disabilities.’ (Mid-term review of the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030 Disability inclusion in DRR in the Pacific, 2022).

Continued focus on training and capacity building, both in terms of leadership training and on climate and disaster resilience, will create pathways for women and people with disabilities to play more meaningful leadership roles beyond community level for climate change and disaster resilience into the future.

‘The Tuvalu Organisation of People with Disabilities (OPD) staff participated in dialogue with Nui Island council members (following the workshop), and influenced disability inclusive national climate change strategic plan in Tuvalu.’ (Regional Coordinator, Pacific Disability Forum).

Case example | Pacific organisations are leading exploratory climate and disaster resilience and GEDSI research to build new knowledge is demonstrated in the *Pacific Disability Forum* case study

Pacific-led disability inclusion research created a pathway for the *Pacific Disability Forum* to play a key role in progressing disability inclusion in climate change and disaster resilience policies in three countries – Kiribati, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands. Pacific Disability Forum leveraged its partnership with the Climate Partnership and sought research funding support to ensure research rigour and quality. The Pacific research officer received mentoring support to design and undertake the research and produce meaningful research findings. The research officer recruited research participants from three Pacific countries – Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, from local organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) in each country.

The research involved a five-day workshop for OPD staff from the three countries, to increase their understanding of disability inclusive climate change practices and the role of OPDs in building advocacy for inclusive resilience approaches. The workshop, and resulting research report, helped the OPDs to gain confidence to influence national dialogue and provide national governments with evidence on risk and vulnerability of people with disabilities. OPD staff in Tuvalu used the research report as an advocacy tool when initiating conversations with government on disability inclusive national policy. The research report, and the OPD’s knowledge and confidence, contributed to dialogue disability inclusion within the climate change national strategic plan.



Supporting GEDSI-led resilient development: Pacific organisations and coalitions focused on GEDSI (e.g. Pacific Disability Forum, Shifting the Power Coalition) are critical actors driving the resilient development agenda as they amplify diverse experiences and champion policy reform for development policies and programs to be more inclusive. Opportunities exist to support GEDSI-led organisations to more strongly integrate climate and disaster resilience. Examples of such work is emerging; however these opportunities are not yet fully realised and present an opportunity for the aid program to more comprehensively engage.

Mobilise flexible climate and disaster risk finance for local GEDSI organisations: Given the potential of GEDSI organisations to drive climate and disaster resilient action at local levels, it follows that efforts to make available resources are needed. Locally led civil society, such as women's organisations, have less visibility and influence at the donor level, which is a barrier to locally led gender-responsive and inclusive resilience building. Access to flexible financial mechanisms and funding (e.g. small-to-large grants, budget support, ongoing core funding) with locally contextualised compliance requirements can enable local Pacific organisations to continue and accelerate their contribution to climate action and disaster resilience activities. By understanding the agents of change within a development context, opportunities to channel appropriate development funds can leverage the influence and impact GEDSI organisations can have on resilient development outcomes.

Robust GEDSI and climate-disaster policy frameworks and capacity to drive action: The intersection of climate and disaster resilience and GEDSI policies and practices are not adequately prioritised or developed across different sectors in the Pacific. An integrated policy environment highlighting a strong linkage between GEDSI and climate and disaster resilience can encourage decision making stakeholders to concurrently address climate-disaster and GEDSI issues and

support mainstreaming of inclusive climate and disaster resilience practices. There are opportunities to incorporate GEDSI, climate change, and disaster considerations into sectoral policies. National gender policies and plans, including gender actions that are in line with UNFCCC commitments to advance knowledge, understanding, and gender-responsive climate action, also require support and present an opportunity for the aid program to engage in. Strengthening resourcing and capacity at the national level across government agencies can support implementation of inclusive climate and disaster resilience and Ministries of Women to be able to meaningfully contribute to national forums and governance systems to manage and address disasters and the impacts of climate change (e.g. national disaster management committees).

Policy environments that recognise the benefits of inclusive and community orientated strategies: Continuing efforts to address systemic inequality and creating space for meaningful participation of diverse women in dialogue about climate and disaster resilience can support women to voice their perspectives within decision-making environments. Men within communities and at all decision-making levels can also play a key role to support inclusive policy development through championing gender equality. See Insight Brief #4 on Governance for further details.

Consideration of gender beyond a binary perspective: GEDSI-focused investments that consider gender as 'men' and 'women' can limit the participation of gender diverse populations in resilience building activities. Integrating non-binary gender perspectives can be supported through partnerships with Pacific organisations leading research and advocacy in this space. Resilient development investments can encourage projects to consider diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and ensure participation and inclusion of gender diverse communities in resilience building activities.

Case example | Consideration of 'gender' beyond a binary perspective

The *Pacific Humanitarian Capacity Building Project* is a DFAT-funded research project led by Oxfam Australia in partnership with Edge Effect, Oxfam Fiji and Fiji Rainbow Pride Foundation. The study was conducted in three locations in Fiji including Lautoka, Levuka and Suva. The research explored the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ and gender minority community following Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016. The research demonstrated evidence of transgender people losing their jobs over cis-gender displaced population following the cyclone and pointed to a lack of inclusiveness in employment practices as the key issue. The findings of the research highlight an area for future attention when considering gender responsive climate and disaster resilient development, to be more inclusive and sensitive of SOGIESC issues.