

# PACIFIC CASE STUDY: SHIFTING THE POWER COALITION



**This case study will highlight how Pacific Island women leaders, from 6 Pacific countries, are demonstrating how localisation works through a collaborative approach to learning, capacity development and advocacy to hold government and development partners accountable to investing in enhancing diverse women's leadership and agency**

Despite increased attention and investment across the Pacific on women's leadership in decision making, Pacific women are still notably absent from visible leadership roles within mechanisms focused on responding to climate change and resulting disasters. According to UN Women's A Time to Act (2016), Pacific climate change ministries and National Disaster Management Offices (NDMO) have few and weak mechanisms to integrate gender issues and as a result, key response mechanisms do not effectively support gender responsive policy and planning.

Pacific countries make up 4 out of 5 of the countries most at risk of disaster in the world. It is the region where women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles is extremely low, where prevalence of violence against women is among some of the highest rates in the world and where the impacts of climate change are most severe. The situation facing diverse women including young women and women with disabilities makes it harder to access decision making processes.

With limited access to decision-making, women, including young women, are often invisible in policy-making. Without adequate representation in these discussions, the default approach is techno-centric and ignores the realities of climate change and disasters for women,

which include the changing burden of unpaid work, increased prevalence of gender-based violence and food insecurity, and institutionalised marginalisation of women's voices and leadership.

## **So how do we ensure inclusive leadership in a crisis?**

The Shifting the Power Coalition (StPC) was formed in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam (2015) in Vanuatu and Cyclone Winston (2016) in Fiji. It is the only regional alliance focused on strengthening the collective power, influence and leadership of diverse Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change.

The Coalition is made up of 10 women-led civil society organisations and the Pacific Disability Forum, bringing together the diversity of Pacific women including women with disabilities, young women, rural women and LGBTIQ communities. The coalition is contributing to movement building and engaging in new sectoral spaces in the Pacific.

It is a unique, women led mechanism that draws on the capacity of the coalition members and collectively aims to enhance engagement in the humanitarian sector and climate change movement from a women's rights and feminist approach.

The Coalition focuses on strengthening women's capacity to engage in policy and decision making, driving evidence-based and women-led innovations from the region, as well as engaging in national and regional advocacy. StPC members from Fiji, Papua New Guinea (including Bougainville), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Australia, and their local and Pacific-wide networks including the Pacific Disability Forum and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific network are working together to support women at local, national and regional levels to mobilise our collective leadership. ActionAid as a women's rights focused humanitarian organisation supports Coalition members to engage in the humanitarian system.

The Coalition also engages with state actors such as Ministries of Women's Affairs and Climate Change and National Disaster Management Authorities to enhance accountability across the government sector to women's rights in the context of climate change and disasters.

Through engagement via the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) and other national and regional civil society networks, the Coalition is committed to engage with feminist allies to enhance feminist collaboration to learn together and reshape the humanitarian agenda by embedding women's rights and leadership in humanitarian coordination efforts across the cluster system, in line with the PFF Action Plan (2019).

Recognizing that Pacific Governments have made commitments to progress gender equality including through regional and global gender policies such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the ratification of UN Conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of all-forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), a commitment to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, we are committed to strengthen linkages with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Agenda for Humanity as well as Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Pacific Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP)

## Recommendations:

- Support Localised Women Led Humanitarian response by redesigning the processes and structures so that women are engaged in defining and driving the localisation agenda. This must include investment in research and learning models that examine both the opportunities and challenges for diverse, local women's leadership in humanitarian action can support this;
- Ensure an equitable allocation of resources towards the strengthening of women's networks and coalitions that support women leaders to take up leadership and coordination roles in disaster preparedness, response and recovery alongside other national actors. Diverse women leaders must be driving community-based responses to ensure long term sustainability by strengthening of the humanitarian and development nexus;
- Prevent Age and Disability Exclusion in humanitarian action by investing towards greater inclusion, including integrating the specific needs of intersecting inequalities such as gender, poverty, disability and age;
- The #aidtoo movement has highlighted the gaps in ensuring the protection of the rights of women and girls. This requires appropriate and adequately resourced responses that are driven by the communities most affected;
- The protection of women's rights should be central to any response and integrated into early warning, response, recovery and resilience building. This also requires strengthening the capacity and accountability of the humanitarian sector to ensure the protection of women's rights in times of crisis in a meaningful way – i.e, with women's rights organisations involved as key stakeholders.



## For more information contact:

**Georgia Rae Cobon**  
Secretariat,  
Shifting the Power Coalition  
georgia-rae.cobon@actionaid.org

**Sharon Bhagwan Rolls**  
Technical Adviser,  
Shifting the Power Coalition  
shiftingthepower.hub@gmail.com