

# THE VOICES OF PACIFIC WOMANITARIANS

Strengthening diverse women's voices, agency and decision making in disaster preparedness, response and recovery in the Pacific



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# Introduction



Michelle Higelin  
Executive Director  
ActionAid Australia

In 2016, governments and humanitarian actors adopted the *Agenda for Humanity* with a commitment to *work differently* to end need in humanitarian crises. This included recognition of the importance of reinforcing local systems and the need to invest in local capacities. Women's organisations are a core part of local systems in crises and women play a vital role as first responders in times of disaster and conflict; a role which frequently goes unrecognised, undervalued and under resourced.

The Shifting the Power Coalition seeks to amplify the voices and leadership of Pacific women in humanitarian action. Bringing

together 13 women-led civil society organisations, representing diverse Pacific women, the Coalition advocates for greater attention to women's needs in times of crisis as well as the systematic inclusion of women's voices in disaster planning and response. Over the next three years, with support from DFAT's Pacific Women, we are working to build evidence and capabilities, influence policies and practice, and support the leadership of Pacific women in humanitarian decision making at all levels. Together, we are starting a humanitarian revolution!

# About Shifting the Power Coalition

The Pacific is experiencing a significant increase in climate-induced humanitarian disasters. In this context, ActionAid Australia together with women-led organisations and the Pacific Disability Forum, established the Shifting the Power Coalition in 2016 to support diverse women to lead emergency response and shift the power to those most affected - ensuring disaster responses address diverse women's needs.

The coalition of organisations is working to build upon the existing skills and knowledge of women who are often the first responders in emergencies. On the frontlines of disasters, women play a vital role in evacuating those most vulnerable and ensuring the food security and protection of families and communities immediately after a disaster as well as in the long-term recovery.



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Coalition convening in Suva April 2019. Photo: ActionAid.

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**As a feminist Pacific Islander, what I learn I will make sure that I transfer the learning and skill to my sisters circle that I have around me to be better, stronger and to take lead in everything we touch, do and say to be resilient and be the game changer.**

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**Flora Vano,  
Co-Country Program Manager,  
ActionAid Vanuatu**

## ActionAid (Australia and Vanuatu)

ActionAid is part of a global organisation working in 45 countries with humanitarian programming that focuses on advancing women's leadership in emergencies, shifting power to local actors and promoting accountability to crisis affected communities.

ActionAid brings technical expertise in women-led humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, community-based protection and resilience building. In Vanuatu, ActionAid is supporting the growth of the 4000-strong Women I Tok Tok Tugetha movement which enables rural women's leadership and community voice in disaster planning and response and works in partnership with the Department of Women's Affairs.



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**Women play a very important part in everyday life... Women have that proactive approach. I feel that they have an understanding that there is a need for preparedness. There is a need to respond, and they talk amongst themselves in the communities.**

**Geeta Goundar,  
 Human Resources and  
 Personnel Manager  
 femLINKpacific**”



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**Women’s rights simply mean to me: my right as a woman with a disability in accessing information, communication, accessibility to facilities, services... I think gone are the days that we work in solo. Once we are working together, our issue becomes stronger.**

**Lanieta Tuimabu,  
 Office Manager,  
 Fiji Disabled People’s  
 Federation**”

## femLINKpacific (Fiji)

femLINKpacific is a women-led community media organisation that works to amplify the voices of diverse women. They initiated Women’s Weather Watch which is now globally recognised as an innovative interoperable information and communication system and is being adapted throughout the region.

## Fiji Disabled People’s Federation (Fiji)

The Fiji Disabled People’s Federation (FDPA) is a national cross-disability organisation that includes four affiliated disability specific organisations: Spinal Injuries Association (SIA), Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD), United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP) and Psychiatric Survivors Association (PSA). FDPA fosters collaboration between the women’s groups and networks of the Federation’s affiliates and also provides capacity support in specific areas such as project design and development.



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I look at the Pacific region and I see the many issues that we deal with in terms of human rights, or women’s rights for that matter. And I see that many times we still have a lone voice. But I see that in instances where partners have brought organisations together the echo is greater.”  
**Agnes Titus,**  
**Advocacy Coordinator,**  
**Nazareth Centre**  
**for Rehabilitation**



“  
As women, we come from different contexts and different parts of the world. Yet we can achieve something collectively... As women, we don’t need to be taught to protect everyone. It’s instinctual. We are born with it. It’s our nature.”  
**Vanessa Heleta,**  
**Director,**  
**Talitha Project**

## Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (Bougainville)

Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation works in Bougainville working through the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC Network). It works with women human rights defenders to strengthen their knowledge on disaster preparedness through coordination, communication, and planning.

## Talitha Project (Tonga)

Talitha Project is an NGO for young women in Tonga. The project is committed to giving young women and girls an opportunity to have a voice and make informed choices. The organisation specifically caters to young women and girls between the ages of 12 – 25 years.





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I believe that we each have our different strengths and power and we can only achieve our goal if we put our hands together and be inclusive around the table.

*Adi Vasulevu,  
Executive Director,  
Transcend Oceania*

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Climate justice means protection, safety, and security for all. Especially for people with disabilities... We need to build the capacity of women, their confidence. We need to include them in different kinds of international meetings and regional meetings.

*Nelly Caleb,  
National Coordinator,  
Disability Promotion and  
Advocacy Association*

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## Transcend Oceania (Fiji)

Transcend Oceania is grounded in non-violent approaches to relating with others, the environment and creating just, peaceful, inclusive, participatory, sustainable and resilient communities. Through education and training, it advocates for just-peace communities that protect women and support their dignity in leadership by engaging men and boys as partners in the reduction and prevention of violence against women and girls. They also engage with women leaders through peace process facilitation and healing, restorative community ‘peace talanoa’ to reduce violence; promote partnerships for justice and development initiatives and research that build on local knowledge systems, skills and approaches; and recognise other effective ways to building just-peace communities.

## Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association

Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (DPA) is the national disabled persons organisation of Vanuatu. DPA was established with the mandate to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities in Vanuatu and promote their abilities.





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You have to shift the power to others around you to leave no one behind.

*Anne Pakoa, Founder and Technical Adviser, Vanuatu Young Women for Change*

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Women's rights are what women as human beings are entitled to because they are human beings... And coalitions are the best things we can have, because you have more people together, advocating for the same issue.

*Josephine Teakeni, Director, Vois Blong Mere*

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## Vanuatu Young Women for Change (Vanuatu)

Vanuatu Young Women for Change empowers young women leaders in their leadership role and decision making when it comes to disaster coordination, creating spaces where stories can be shared from both the community level in Vanuatu and from women leaders around the Pacific.

## Vois Blong Mere (Solomon Islands)

Vois Blong Mere Solomon is a non-government organisation representing Solomon Islands women working through the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC Network). Their purpose is to link the women of the Solomon Islands through information sharing. They do this through the Mere radio programme on SIBC, newsletters, projects and by coordinating collective integrated systems of information sharing amongst rural, provincial and national women's organisations in the Solomon Islands.



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Young women should be given an equal opportunity to be included in decision making, planning and implementing, as the current climate changes that are happening now will affect our generation and the generation after us in the near future. In order for us to be able to fully address climate change we need to break barriers and be more inclusive. Let's be resilient, take a stand and make a change for the love of mother nature.

*Helena Seneka*  
Project Officer,  
YWCA PNG”



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There is a lot of violence during disasters. Because when it comes to disaster... there is no safe space because everywhere else has been damaged... We have a great responsibility as strong women: as we speak, we are, and so we need to walk and make sure we are out there to help create safe spaces when it comes to disasters.

*Ramona Tugaga,*  
General Secretary,  
YWCA Samoa”

## YWCA (Papua New Guinea)

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is a global network of women leading social and economic change in over 120 countries. The YWCA of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is an organisation dedicated to developing the leadership of women and girls in Papua New Guinea. YWCAs around the world develop the transformative leadership and collective power of young women to achieve justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment.

## YWCA (Samoa)

YWCA Samoa is a member of World YWCA and have expertise in developing transformative leadership and the collective power of women and girls. There is a particular focus on young women's leadership development through peer education on human rights, climate justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality, violence against women, justice and peace for all people. They also bring expertise on village level advocacy and connections with national disaster management committees.



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As the regional peak body for disability rights in the Pacific, we are proud to be a founding member of the Shifting the Power Coalition as together we are more powerful to strategically enhance women and young women’s leadership across disabled persons organisations in our region, and amplify the call for full and effective participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in relation to disaster management and humanitarian action.

*Angeline Chand,  
Team Leader, Programs,  
Pacific Disability Forum*”

## Pacific Disability Forum (Regional)

Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is a regional peak body that works in partnership with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) across the Pacific region. PDF provides links to DPO networks and knows their capacities. It has technical expertise on inclusion, including women and girls in disaster risk reduction, disability rights and the new regional disability framework. PDF is part of the Pacific Humanitarian Team in the protection cluster which provides access to decision making and strategic planning in the region.

## SHIFTING THE POWER COALITION



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I think women need to be in decision making at all times, not just in disaster response...

If we’re talking about shifting the power in decision making, we need to move the power structures to be more accountable throughout the year, so that we can have better representation of women in the community groups, the disaster preparedness committees, in the district or local governance structures where there are meetings with the local government officials, to ensure preparedness stages. To ensure that food security is planned, protection measures are there and inclusive.

*Sharon Bhagwan Rolls  
Coalition convenor,  
Shifting the Power Coalition*”





# Shifting the Power Coalition

Strengthening diverse women's voices agency and decision making  
in disaster preparedness, response and recovery in the Pacific

## Follow us:

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## Watch our film:

 <https://act.ai/33QkUqu>

## Shifting the Power Coalition is a member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network:

 [feministhumanitariannetwork.org](https://www.feministhumanitariannetwork.org)

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