

# GENDER RESPONSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

A COUNTRY REPORT  
ON VANUATU

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>CC</b>	Climate change
<b>CDCCCs</b>	Community disaster and climate change committees
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>DDR</b>	Disaster risk reduction
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GRACC</b>	Gender-Responsive Alternatives on Climate Change
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organisation
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
<b>IO</b>	International organisation
<b>NDMO</b>	National Disaster Management Office
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government organisation
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>TC Pam</b>	Tropical Cyclone Pam
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>WITTT</b>	Women I Tok Tok Tugeta
<b>WPS</b>	United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Kastom</b>	Collectively refers to customary beliefs, values, governance and practices
<b>Nakamal</b>	A space where all village decision-making is done
<b>Ni-Vanuatu</b>	Refers to indigenous inhabitants of Vanuatu
<b>Tok tok</b>	<i>Bislama</i> word for talk
<b>Yasur</b>	Mount Yasur, active volcano in Tanna

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The complex consequences of climate change demand an approach that encompasses the interaction of different risks and hazards across multiple scales and aspects of human life; and how environmental degradation is entangled with other crises such as armed conflicts, health pandemics, and economic recessions. However, natural and social sciences research approaches still predominantly examine one or a few impacts which yield partial, if not, increasingly incorrect assessments of the global processes surrounding climate change. Without explicit focus on integrating changes resulting from the intersection of multiple risks and hazards, we are yet to gain insights on whether and how various adaptation and mitigation strategies produce positive outcomes, by reinforcing or amplifying one another, or negative outcomes, through counteracting or cancelling gains in other areas.

The same siloing is also evident in the implementation and monitoring of global agendas particularly on disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change, sustainable development goals (especially SDGs 5, 13 and 16), and women, peace and security (WPS). Responses to hazards and risks are separated under

different policy goals and priorities which in turn has implications for coordinating political leadership and institutions, and mobilising resources for programs. An integrated framework therefore has broad implications for systematically addressing climate change and interlinked crises in ways that effectively respond to the comprehensive security needs of the most marginalised and climate-affected populations, particularly women and girls.

This report presents country-level findings for Vanuatu where it examines women's cumulative, customary knowledge, participation and collective action in climate change-affected communities. Based on multi-country collaborative research conducted by Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre in partnership with ActionAid, the research aims to develop a global framework that shall serve as a starting point for integrated, gender-responsive policy solutions and agendas across climate governance, sustainable development and crisis or emergency response. Drawing on evidence collected through field research and secondary analysis, the research findings illustrate how a gender-responsive alternative approach to climate change strengthens integration among existing policies on climate change, gender equality, and peace and sustainable development.



## KEY FINDINGS IN VANUATU

Addressing gender inequality reflected in societal norms and institutions is fundamental to any gender-responsive approach to climate change and especially apparent in Vanuatu. With limited access to decision-making, women are often invisible in policy-making. Without adequate representation of women 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 and food insecurity, increased prevalence of gender-based violence, and institutionalised marginalisation of women's voices and leadership. Women's knowledge, participation and collective action strengthens the resilience of communities. It is a potentially transformative basis for climate policy-making that promotes gender equality and addresses related crises. Crucially it avoids adaptation to climate change that violates women and girls' human rights, undermining their ability to participate in – and benefit from – crisis responses.

### 1 Women's Everyday and Traditional Knowledge

Ni-Vanuatu women are vital to the continuation of their indigenous knowledge yet their distinct expertise and roles in the stewardship of the environment is often devalued in their communities as well as not recognised in existing policy frameworks. There is widespread societal awareness of climate change as a *visible* phenomenon in Vanuatu although people may not know about the technical information, policies and programs. National policy frameworks state the importance of traditional knowledge and governance known as '*Kastom*' in addressing climate security risks. The neglecting of women's traditional knowledge and capacity, however, compounds the negative impact of disasters. For example, in 2015 in the midst of Tropical Cyclone Pam disaster warning systems contained technical information that did not connect or bridge with what women knew or observed within their immediate surroundings.

### 2 Women's Participation

Ni-Vanuatu women's everyday lives remain deeply shaped by unequal gender norms that systematically deny and typically foreclose women's capacity for decision-making. They are traditionally excluded because of unequal division of labour beginning at the household and by norms that specifically prohibit women from speaking in the same spaces where men are gathered. Women in Tanna are customarily excluded from a direct role in village decision-making through the *nakamal* and this exclusion compounds at higher levels where provincial and national governance structures remain male-dominated.

One avenue for the inclusion of women within community disaster and climate change committees (CDCCCs) began in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Pam. However, our research stressed the importance of deepening participation by ensuring that the women included are knowledgeable and trained in articulating the gender dimensions of climate change issues, as well as recognised for other technical and traditional expertise they bring.

### 3 Women's Collective Action

Incorporating women's everyday and traditional knowledge as well as substantive participation are crucial to respond to climate change and its effects. Our research identified the importance of women-only initiatives such as the network *Women I Tok Tok Tugeta* (Women Talk Together; WITTT), formed in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Pam. WITTT represents a space or gathering for women to share information around disaster risks, response and mitigation and has since evolved for community mobilisation where they discuss all issues affecting them as *women* and collaborate on income-generating activities.

Ensuring male champions or advocates for women's rights is necessary because respect for *kastom* systems are embedded at provincial and national

levels. Endorsements by male community leaders signal to the community in general, and especially to the other men that WITTT is in alignment with *kastom*. Some of the women in our research expressed how the men started ‘seeing’ the contributions of women precisely because of WITTT’s collective action.

The initiative of WITTT demonstrates grassroots training for women to be more politically active and to gain visible recognition as a group. WITTT members recommend the network as an avenue for women to directly support and mentor one another in community leadership not only in times of disasters but also during elections and with respect to ongoing awareness-raising on violence against women. WITTT is demonstrating how fundamentally important the base work of supporting women’s movements is for both disaster preparedness and long-term development in the country.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ni-Vanuatu women on the frontline of multiple crises should inform how, when and where gender-responsive policy can integrate action on interlinked climate-induced crises. The following recommendations are for government and non-government actors from diverse agencies and sectors.

- Develop **integrated early warning mechanisms for disasters and community-level conflicts** at household and village levels, incorporating women’s knowledge.
- **Strengthening women at the community level’s capacity** to contribute their knowledge into reporting formats for forecasting and risk analysis, and to access relevant technologies.
- Support **women-friendly safe spaces for community participation and enable women’s community networks and organisations to develop meaningful opportunities for consultation and collaboration with customary mechanisms and government policy.**
- **Build on existing women’s networks such as WITTT to connect women from other islands and nationally** for the purposes of emergency or crisis response as well as preparedness and planning.
- Provide **training and support to local *kastom* and church leaders** to respond to gender-specific needs in times of disaster.
- Encourage **village level male champions of women’s networks and organisations** and updating harmful *kastom* beliefs and practices that exclude women from village governance.
- Create **opportunities for women’s networks and gender-balanced representation** in provincial level institutions as part of decentralisation in Vanuatu.

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the approach and findings from a research project conducted by Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre in partnership with ActionAid Australia and its country office in Vanuatu.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on feminist approaches to global peace, development and security, it examines the potential of everyday and traditional knowledge, participation and collective action by women in climate change-affected communities as key pillars to developing an integrated risk assessment and global response to human insecurities.

Climate change is an urgent, interlocking and cross-cutting issue.<sup>2</sup> By 2100, climate change will constitute a major threat to all main domains of “human health, water, food, economy, infrastructure and security”.<sup>3</sup> However, how multiple risks and hazards intersect or compound one another is yet to be addressed in an integrated manner in both policy and research. Examining one or a few impacts risks partial, if not, increasingly incorrect assessments of the global processes surrounding climate change. Without explicit focus on integrating changes occurring as a result of multiple risks and hazards intersecting, we are yet to gain insights on whether and how various adaptation and mitigation strategies produce positive outcomes by reinforcing or amplifying one another; or negative outcomes through counteracting or cancelling gains in other areas. Therefore, developing an evidence base that can inform policy solutions is needed to begin mapping climate change impacts as they occur in a continuum with other drivers of social, political and economic insecurities; and consequently, to comprehensively address them.

Indigenous peoples have always believed that peace is central to human security and all life forms that exist in a community, a nation, Mother Earth and the universe – Hilda Lini<sup>4</sup>

As the quote above from ni-Vanuatu woman Hilda Lini suggests,<sup>5</sup> responses to climate change must form part of broader efforts by indigenous peoples to promote peace and human security across all levels from community to the state and globally. It also involves recognition and regeneration of the interconnectedness among all life forms and nature. Ni-Vanuatu as

indigenous peoples take pride in how they have adapted to their environment using their knowledge of how to live in synchronicity with nature over thousands of years. They possess a strong connection to land and commitment to carry on as custodians of the Pacific Ocean. This research builds on the connections with peace, security and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agendas through an analysis of gender, climate change and interlinked crises in Vanuatu.

By starting with women's experiences and knowledge, this research project highlights complex and diverse relationships between women and *kastom*. The emphasis in *kastom* on valuing community order above individual freedom may not always be empowering for women because it structures and maintains gender differences in the household, community and the state. While there is widespread acceptance of *kastom* as an indispensable and positive pillar in the face of extreme weather and a rapidly changing climate, its continuing significance must also be weighed against aspects that are detrimental for women in the country such as disaster-induced local and land conflicts, political disenfranchisement, and unequal distribution of natural resources for women.

This report has three main sections. The first section provides a brief background on climate change impacts in Vanuatu and existing national policy frameworks. Gender mainstreaming and broadening of active participation among women are recognised as important. However, existing frameworks require specificity and understanding of how responses to climate change and multiple disasters are to be coordinated in integrated ways that progressively open spaces for women's direct and broad participation. The second section presents our key research findings to argue that there is a need to examine climate change and related crises from women's standpoints in order to better understand their gendered and multi-scalar impacts. Our findings illustrate how a gender-responsive alternative approach to climate change might further strengthen integration among existing policies on climate change, gender equality, and peace and sustainable development. Finally, in the third section of the report discusses the conclusions and offers recommendations toward enhancing women's collective action.



## RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of this research project is to develop an evidence-based, gender-responsive framework that can strengthen women's voices and leadership in responding to climate change and related natural disasters through the recognition and support of their localised knowledge of how multiple risks and hazards are interlinked.

The approach of the study builds on feminist scholarship which considers the ways in which climate justice may

serve as one entry point for promoting gender equality, as much as gender equality is a prerequisite for climate justice.<sup>6</sup> To examine how responses to climate change can promote both climate justice and gender equality we use the concept of "gender-responsiveness" which means "[I]nformed by gender-sensitive analysis and/or agreement, gender-responsiveness as a concept and a practice seeks to enable operational and practical capacity to address gender inequalities, exclusions and differences through action or implementation efforts that are feasible, monitored and evaluated".<sup>7</sup>

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following key research questions informed the research:

1. What distinct 'early warning' signs do women observe for environmental change and its impacts?
2. What is the extent of women's and men's awareness of climate change programmes, information and related policies? Do they participate in their implementation?
3. How are women represented in different governance levels, processes and institutions where climate decisions are made?
4. What contributions does women's knowledge, participation and leadership offer for climate governance, and why do they matter?

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Research data was collected through a mixed-methods, participatory research design in collaboration with ActionAid Vanuatu and ActionAid Australia (see Annex 1).<sup>8</sup>

### Primary data

Primary collection of qualitative data was through key informant-interviews and focus group discussions. Field research took place between 24 September to 7 October 2018. Three research sites were visited in Vanuatu: the capital Port Vila, Eton and Tanna. Eton and Tanna were selected purposively to ensure that the research supports ActionAid Vanuatu's programming on local women's capacity and leadership for developing gender-responsive alternatives on climate change.<sup>9</sup>

### Secondary data

The research used qualitative and quantitative data from a baseline study conducted by Kylie Mullins and her team at Development Services in April 2018. This baseline consisted of survey data from 79 women respondents. Data collection also included 18 key-informant interviews with local authorities from Disaster Management Committees, and four (4) mixed-gender focus group discussions in Port Vila, Eton, and Tanna.

The analysis focused on capturing processes and interactions across women's bodies, households, and communities and situating these at the national level with existing policies and frameworks. First, desktop research was undertaken to analyse existing national reports and policies in Vanuatu. Country-specific key issues, themes and actors were then identified on gender, climate change and security issues. Second, the baseline study yielded



data specific to WITTT communities. We used the findings to refine our own field research questions and also to guide our analysis of the existing literature and national policies. Finally, our field research was crucial in collecting narratives and stories from women and men relating to their everyday climate change adaptation and how these intersect with post-colonial political transition and economic development. We placed our field interviews and focus group discussions

in dialogue with evidence from secondary sources including national-level analysis. Multiple sources of data therefore served to corroborate, add depth to and/or critique how existing national frameworks and dominant understanding of climate change as a security issue are responsive to women’s context-specific knowledge and experiences within their households and communities.


TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research Participants	Total	Location	Composition
Key-Informant Interviews	12	Port Vila	<i>Gender</i> 7 females, 5 males
			<i>Affiliation</i> 2 government 10 non-government (both local and international)
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	6	Port Vila, Eton and Tanna	<i>Gender</i> 3 (women only), 1 (men only), 2 mixed group
			<i>Affiliation</i> 4 groups of community / village residents and members of WITTT 2 groups of chiefs, leaders, elders and government representatives at community and provincial levels

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, such as Vanuatu, bear the brunt of the negative impacts of global climate change “because their mostly low-lying, coastal populations tend to be exposed to a range of hazards, particularly cyclones, floods, landslides, earthquakes and tsunamis”.<sup>10</sup> The country is also located in the Asia Pacific region which is considered crisis-prone because no other region in the world has more vulnerable people exposed to multiple hazards and recurrent displacements.<sup>11</sup> The projected impacts of climate change are therefore profound and expected to intensify affecting all systems of governance, finance, knowledge and information.<sup>12</sup>

Through this country case, we see that climate change is driving more frequent occurrence of extreme weather events that can cause severe devastation such as in the aftermath of 2015 Tropical Cyclone Pam (TC Pam). TC Pam, a Category 5 typhoon, affected the whole country with an estimated total of 15,000 homes damaged or destroyed and 65,000 people internally displaced. Three years later while Vanuatu is still recovering from the effects of TC Pam, the country has also faced and will likely have to contend with further natural disasters and their impacts, including mass relocation from Ambae island due to volcanic activity and prolonged droughts caused by El Niño. As well, the Vanuatu state has experienced ongoing development challenges to ensure basic access to



health, education and livelihoods for its citizens since political independence in 1980.

Ni-Vanuatu people face multiple disaster risks and hazards. They have significant experiences to contribute globally to develop integrated solutions and responses needed to address climate change. However, the distinct experiences in Vanuatu and together with other SIDS are invisible within global measures and indexes of climate risk and fragility due to lack of available data and persistent barriers to data collection (see Annex 2). Gathering information at the national level is onerous due to geography comprising of many remote and difficult to access areas which also means dissemination and access to information may be uneven. The global picture on climate risk, gender and sustainable development therefore severely lacks perspectives from the Pacific. This means first, that there is a long way to go to situate the experiences of Pacific peoples at the centre of global agendas because they are not counted or measured. Second, it means that bridging knowledge gaps for countries such as Vanuatu requires understanding of gender and climate change based on contextualised analysis, corroborated through different types of national and subnational data.

For example, the Global Climate Risk Index which measures the impacts of extreme weather-related events based on fatalities and economic losses for a given year, and longitudinally for 20 years. Vanuatu ranked the 5<sup>th</sup> most climate risk affected country in 2015 as a result of TC Pam with losses amounting to approximately 41 per cent of GDP.<sup>13</sup> The following year, the country was not ranked highly – 120<sup>th</sup> out of 183 – because it did not experience *exceptional* catastrophes in 2016.<sup>14</sup> However, based on the index which also measures *continuous risks* from extreme weather events over a 20-year time span, Vanuatu is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> based on percentage of GDP loss. This indicates that the country suffers economic losses far greater than other countries relative to its already low level of economic development and therefore there is a need to further examine how economic progress is set back by multiple disasters in the country. Moreover, this underscores the extent and manner through which significant resources will be required

to ‘disaster-proof’ Vanuatu’s economy and to ensure peace and security for their people. Importantly, the index as a representation of current limitations in risk monitoring and reporting, highlights the gap in terms of ‘measuring’ impacts for slow-onset or gradually accruing disasters such as the complex existential threat posed by rising sea levels, much less how multiple risks are interlinked.

In addition, there is also a paucity of gender-related data in Vanuatu which makes tracking trends and progress on gender equality and the environment difficult. However, available data relating to ni-Vanuatu women’s societal status indicates a need for urgent measures to promote gender equality across development and crisis response as part of long-term climate change adaptation and mitigation. An intersecting range of geographic, social, cultural and economic barriers to gender equality in Vanuatu suggest that further research is required to analyse where, when and how women distinctly made vulnerable and insecure before, during and after disasters within the broader context of climate change.

For instance, since the country’s independence in 1980, women’s direct participation in government has been limited. Only five women have ever been elected in Parliament and this includes Hilda Lini. In the most recent elections in 2016, ten or 3.8 percent of candidates were women and none won.<sup>15</sup> Lack of direct participation in political decision-making is reflected and reinforced by other barriers. Women have low literacy such that 7 out of 10 women in Vanuatu have either only completed primary education or have not had any schooling at all.<sup>16</sup> Access to health is still limited as are most social welfare services.<sup>17</sup> Weak or absent health infrastructures distinctly impact women due to their sexual and reproductive health needs. For example, maternal mortality is believed to contribute to the invisibility or lack of women aged 15-49 years old in certain communities and provinces (e.g. Penama and Malampa).<sup>18</sup>

High rates of sexual and gender-based violence have also been documented by the Vanuatu National Survey on Women’s Lives and Family Relationships, the first and still only nationwide study on violence against

women. The study found that approximately 60 percent of women who have ever been married, lived with a man, or had an intimate sexual relationship with a partner, experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Violence is pervasive and occurs across all socio-economic backgrounds. However, the study noted that rates of physical and sexual violence were higher in rural areas (63%) than in urban areas (50%). The scale of this insecurity is in that approximately 75 percent of the population reside in rural areas.<sup>19</sup> Though levels of economic development are low nationwide, rural and coastal communities are more vulnerable to economic shocks when disasters lead to income loss due to damages in property, food crops and/or weakened tourism. The remoteness of the islands means that there is little access to state and non-state agencies that can provide information relating to climate change and DRR, and to assistance from relief of long-term alternative livelihood opportunities in some locations compared with the capital, Port Vila.

Research by UN Women found that gender-based inequality in Vanuatu can be more serious in urban rather than rural areas. Vulnerability to poverty – or inability to meet basic needs – is high at 44 percent of the population residing in the capital. The higher risk of poverty for women in urban areas is found to be in part due to wage inequality because the benefits of economic growth in Port Vila are unequally distributed in favour of male-dominated jobs like construction.<sup>20</sup> In this context, attention to gender inequality is necessary because urban migration does not automatically guarantee women's security. Vanuatu is undergoing rapid change and push for economic growth which is an opportunity to ensure that development spreads to other islands and not just urban centres particularly Port Vila. This country case study demonstrates how immediate and long-term solutions to climate change will increasingly need to comprehensively address all areas of people's everyday life and how multiple risks create intersecting insecurities. Given the lack of data on Vanuatu, its ranking (or lack thereof) in the Global Climate Risk Index and other major indexes should be taken as a starting point for a deeper and comprehensive understanding of climate risks.

## NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR GENDER, CLIMATE CHANGE AND RELATED CRISES

While contributing the least to global carbon emissions and environmental degradation globally, Vanuatu has had a strong policy commitment to the environment and its environmentalism is enshrined in its Constitution. The government's overarching vision for the future is to be "a resilient community, environment and economy". National policy frameworks, examined below, state the importance of enduring traditional knowledge and forms of governance collectively known as *kastom* in how ni-Vanuatu assess, interpret and navigate present and future climate security risks.

Among the key frameworks are:

- [National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030](#)
- Vanuatu Climate Change Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030
- National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement 2018
- [National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019](#) (see Annex 1 for a list of identified entry-points).

These policy frameworks recognise that climate change is driving extreme weather and represents an existential threat to Vanuatu including its culture and identity. They also mention improving gender inclusion is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be part of development, climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) programming (see Annex 1). They demonstrate potentials for gender-responsive, integrated implementation through the supporting empirical evidence and identification of policy entry-points that signal the active interlinking of risk mapping and coordinated response linking gender equality, climate change, DRR and development policies.

Two recent disasters have highlighted priority concerns for these national frameworks in addressing women's needs and barriers to gender equality: a) TC Pam in 2015; and b) Ambae mass relocation in 2018.



## 1 Interactions between formal or state and customary governance structures and processes

Decentralisation, enshrined within the constitution, has been a key political goal since independence and it is cited as a driver for achieving sustainable development and climate resilience in the country. Across the major policy frameworks, it is viewed as improving governance for a country with 83 different islands, and given historically dispersed political authority held by *Kastom* chiefs. However, decentralisation remains to be fully implemented. In practice, there is still negotiation over the responsibilities of the national and provincial governments, and between formal and customary governance. Negotiations over the responsibilities of the national and provincial governments, and between state and *kastom* officials are ongoing and with distinct implications for gender-responsiveness. This is because a key challenge is ensuring that women equally benefit from and contribute in shaping decentralisation in Vanuatu.

In the case of post-TC Pam<sup>21</sup> and the Ambae response, decentralisation itself is not a guarantee for gender-responsiveness in relief and recovery processes. Pre-existing indigenous systems have long been male-dominated in the majority of islands. At the village level, the basic unit of customary governance called the *nakamal* is headed by a chief – a role traditionally held by a male elder in the community.<sup>22</sup> Decentralisation may not automatically guarantee women's direct participation which is necessary for raising their own voices and concerns when local systems such as the *nakamal* remain male-dominated. Rather, decentralisation may further reinforce the system of male-dominance by legitimating the exclusion of women *through* the *nakamal*.

Decentralisation should be implemented alongside national-level reforms to improve women's status in the country particularly in the areas of protection from gender-based violence and access to land – which are all gender and climate change issues. For instance, because women are unable to own land and have limited economic resources that can help protect them from gender-based violence they are even more vulnerable during disaster-induced displacement where threats of violence tend to also intensify. Displacement for them means being deprived further from accessing income or

livelihood. Gaps manifest in the implementation of key legislations such as the Family Protection Act (2008) and Customary Land Management Act (2013). The loss of their homes and/or livelihoods places women at a greater disadvantage than men during recovery not least of all because women are at risk of intimate partner abuse and typically cannot make economic decisions on their own.<sup>23</sup> Customary dispute resolutions including island courts, moreover, tend to privilege community peace and order which often translates into inadequate protection for women's rights.<sup>24</sup>

## 2 Coordinated monitoring and response to gender-inequalities especially violence before, during and after crises

Despite equal emphasis in policy documents, priority in the implementation of national frameworks is largely on immediate or emergency relief which often comes at the expense of long-term planning and preparation. In practice, there is little clarity on the roles and responsibilities “for addressing the long-term recovery needs of communities affected by displacement. Responsibility for different components relevant to long-term recovery are dealt with separately by different Government Ministries, but coordination in relation to recovery is limited”.<sup>25</sup> As pointed out in the National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement 2018, while inter-agency or cluster-type coordination among public and private sectors has been in recent practice applied and to some extent in disaster response, this level of coordination is not sustained post-disaster therefore undermining long-term rehabilitation.

Moreover, resource allocation currently reflects a gap between immediate or emergency relief and funding for sustainable development and inclusive growth goals. This is relevant both for the Vanuatu government and for external aid donors. For example, the language of ‘urgent and immediate’ used in these policy frameworks particularly in the 2007 Vanuatu National Adaptation Plan to describe the DRR and CC goals may undermine the other ‘gender inclusion’ goal also identified under these frameworks and plans. This is because ‘gender’ is often considered a secondary issue and not a priority in emergency response. For example, in the aftermath of TC Pam “the gender and protection cluster did not really get funding until 2 to

3 years after...the government said money should go to infrastructure.”<sup>26</sup> Women’s needs may be relegated to the recovery phase – which as pointed out above is more likely to be under-resourced and lacking coordinated action. Yet, this siloing between crisis response and development programming obscures women’s equal capacity to lead and participate in disaster preparedness and fuel a neglect of the continuity in women’s care burdens which intensify during and immediately after disasters.

The next section presents our field research findings drawing on the knowledge and experiences of ni-Vanuatu women from Eton and Tanna. It demonstrates how starting from women’s lives, we are able to identify how risks are interlinked and consequently, how responses to these multiple, intersecting risks can be integrated under women’s leadership.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### WOMEN’S EVERYDAY, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND GENDER DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

People’s everyday and traditional knowledge are increasingly recognised for their value in global climate change and DRR agendas. New and emerging research studies have started documenting how this form of knowledge can:

- 1) Strengthen scientific information and technologies especially around monitoring and risk assessment;
- 2) Deepen or enhance the quality of resilience through shared lessons for adaptation; and as especially for indigenous traditional knowledge;
- 3) Serve as a repository of accumulated knowledge relating to human interaction with the environment that can provide long historical perspectives that will sustain humanity in the future.<sup>27</sup>

Our research in Vanuatu highlighted how gender divisions of labour shape gender-differentiated knowledge of the environment. Consequently, everyday, traditional knowledge requires gender analysis to connect the significance of this body of knowledge for climate change

and DRR agendas with gender equality goals.

In Vanuatu, there is widespread societal awareness of climate change as a *visible* phenomenon even while people may not know about the technical information, policies and programs especially because in Vanuatu the majority of the population – at 75 percent – are rural and practice agriculture.<sup>28</sup> This widespread everyday awareness of climate change impacts was further corroborated by a female informant who affirmed that given rising sea levels and extreme weather affecting Vanuatu:

“Everyone here knows climate change. They know it is real. Some villages have already moved to higher areas”.<sup>29</sup>


Baseline research conducted among 76 women in Tanna found that:

- 85 percent reported that they had some knowledge or a lot of knowledge about the effects of climate change on their daily lives;
- 95 percent observed changes in their livelihood activities due to climate change;
- 99 percent – confirmed that their household had experienced reduced income from CC and disaster impacts.<sup>30</sup>

In key informant interviews and FGDs in both Tanna and Eton, women expressed a strong connection to land, water and other bodies of nature. Many were able to recount previous disasters in their community, which forms part of their oral history, to compare or express the impacts of TC Pam (26 September 2018, Eton; and 1 October 2018 in Tanna). Particularly in Tanna, the research participants stated that they have a rich oral history about disasters including memories of how their elders and they themselves survived. Local people’s strong connections to the environment are continuously fostered through traditional or *kastom* knowledge which is shaped by their immediate environment, especially the presence of Mount Yasur, an active volcano in the island.

For example, Tanna women described that in their language the word for ‘god’ is Yasur, which is also the name of the volcano.<sup>31</sup> According to them, all the





communities on the island have a profound relationship with the active volcano. They regard it as supernatural – and it gives structure and meaning in their daily lives. Through customs and practices, including ritual dance, the people in Tanna have learned to live in mutual harmony with an active volcano while they rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. They understand the behaviour of the volcano as it interacts with seasons and are able to predict the success or loss of their harvest as a result.

Some aspects of traditional knowledge are gender-specific and this is evident in the division of labour at household and community levels. For instance, while both men and women in Eton and Tanna practice daily farming as a way of life as well as an income source, women are in charge of selling produce. They are regarded as the “mamas of the market.” Being tasked with selling produce in village and urban markets such as in Port Vila has enabled the women to establish social networks that facilitate the intergenerational sharing of information on how and when to farm specific crops. Even among fishing communities, women sell the produce and therefore develop similar social networks with their own shared knowledge in relation to this livelihood. In the case of men, they are in charge of *kava*.<sup>32</sup> They gain gender-specific knowledge of how to plant, harvest and prepare for ritual ceremonies that are traditionally exclusive to men in the *nakamal*, and for men’s everyday drinking.<sup>33</sup>

Another example of gender-differentiated knowledge of the environment is through traditional building practices – believed to be undertaken mostly by men<sup>34</sup> – using native plants and specific architecture which are valued for their cultural significance in Vanuatu. This knowledge is being revisited for its (scientific) relevance to disaster resilience – developed by ni-Vanuatu over time as they adapt to what has already been a disaster-prone environment.<sup>35</sup> For example, one female research participant from Tanna shared the knowledge she gained from her elders:

“[TC Pam] is like an animal, they trap it so it wants to take everything [very destructive]. When it comes you must just welcome it. We have to respect the wind...they come in, you let them out”.<sup>36</sup>

This belief informs the design of thatched houses in Tanna where the windows and roofing can be collapsed to let air in and out as opposed to non-indigenous shelters that introduced iron roofs.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, focus groups in Eton and Tanna especially with community elders shared examples of how traditional knowledge involving respect and understanding for different types of disasters has been key to their people’s survival. Tanna people have long survived and adapted to a harsh environment with minimal to no loss of life. They recalled how Ni-Vanuatu people come from generations of seafarers who have navigated vast distances by canoe using only knowledge of reading the winds and nature. They all highlighted that their elders used to have systems of predicting or preparing for volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, landslides, drought, flooding and tropical cyclones. In their history, they know of people believed to have capacity as ‘rainmakers’ or the ability to control nature.

Women are vital to the preservation and effective use of *kastom* knowledge because of their role in biological and cultural reproduction. However, women’s contributions are often taken for granted – or rendered invisible and unrecognised by men – due to women’s exclusion from *kastom* governance systems and particularly when *kastom* designates women have the sole responsibility for care and domestic work. For example, in a mixed-gender focus group in Tanna, our participants explained that in the past, their people have used various plants for food and shelter that allowed them to survive during disasters and recover in the aftermath. Participants highlighted certain methods of food processing and storage, and building shelters using indigenous techniques and materials. They explained how their survival depended upon these traditional skills. However, when asked specifically who undertakes the labour needed for these crucial safety nets, the male participants affirmed that it is the women who are predominantly responsible for all the preparations necessary for survival – food provisioning, turning shelters into homes, and care and domestic work for all members of the family and community.<sup>38</sup> The male chiefs and community leaders may possess these types of knowledge but ultimately, the labour and execution fall under the women’s responsibility, who by virtue of practice acquire their own expertise. Yet, women have not traditionally been part of community leadership structures and are excluded from village decision-making.

Neglecting women's traditional knowledge and capacity may compound the negative impacts of disasters and undermine people's overall capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change. For instance, this was the case in the aftermath of TC Pam. As one female research participant in Port Vila said: "[W]atching the weather was expected to be technical in approach. There was no understanding initially of the value of women reporting the weather until Pam hit." Despite this, she argued that "Tanna women were so mobilised, they were connecting together [to respond to TC Pam but] they were stunted because they did not understand the NDMO message and the weather was even calm".<sup>39</sup> Focus group discussions corroborated this insight in Tanna and with women from Eton too.<sup>40</sup> The women reflected on the difficulties they encountered with the disaster warning system at the time, which did not connect with their real-time observations on the ground. They expressed a need to better improve community-level communication but also to have their capacity to lead and mobilise their communities supported and recognised.

Finally, both male and female participants in Tanna stated that traditional knowledge will require special focus in light of a changing climate and society. Participants expressed concern that the younger generations are losing this knowledge and are unable to appreciate its value for long-term disaster preparedness and climate change response. For instance, some elders pointed out how the introduction of Western food and shelter construction processes, most recently through foreign-led post-disaster response in the aftermath of TC Pam, has undermined the relevance of traditional food and shelter, which have proven to be more adapted to their harsh environment. Our respondents explained why they believe disasters in Vanuatu have so far led to minimal loss of life, a fact noted by the Global Climate Risk Index as well, is because of their strong community networks and repertoires of coping mechanisms they have developed through generations. Indeed, the Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement Policy 2018 report stresses a growing concern with how 'top-down' climate change programming and disaster response might undermine them in the long-term precisely because of a lack of knowledge from external actors as to what is already in place and working. A government representative was quoted saying, "[P]lease, do not take away people's resilience. If you are going to provide services to people, explain everything involved to them and let them choose".

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Research in Port Vila, Tanna and Eton revealed both progress and entry points for women's participation in climate governance and political decision-making as well as key barriers to this participation.


### EXCLUSIONARY FACTORS

"Bring down the ni-Vanuatu man's level... for equality, we have to challenge his pride, heroism. Ask the man to let go, step back a bit. Then, a woman can step forward. If not, the next Pam [tropical cyclone] will come and the men will still dominate."<sup>41</sup>

#### 1 Multiple care burdens and unequal gender norms beginning at the household

The majority of women in our survey (62 per cent) felt that climate change and disasters affect men and women in the same way. However, the women believed that a gender difference in the impact is such that women needed to work harder than men after disasters, particularly in collecting and preparing food, caring for young and elderly and finding water. Beginning at the household, women face greater responsibilities in disaster recovery in their roles as wives, mothers and daughters. Even male participants stated that in the aftermath of TC Pam, their communities required so much care and this is what the women predominantly do before, during and after disasters. They noted, however, that many of these contributions are taken for granted – or assumed unimportant even by the women and especially in the context of disaster preparedness and response – because women had always been doing these for their communities.<sup>42</sup>

Women's care obligations hinder them from participating within formal governance structures. This is exacerbated by women's customary exclusion from a direct role in



village decision-making through the *nakamal* or the basic unit of *kastom* governance. The *nakamal* also refers to the space or place “where chiefly business, ritual, and ceremony are conducted and where *kastom* mediations take place”.<sup>43</sup> In Tanna and Eton, our women respondents explained that their *kastom* prohibits them from occupying specific spaces or decision-making authority. Most of the time, men in the community make decisions on behalf of their village. Women in certain cases will be invited to attend but decisions had already been formulated or made by the men. One woman participant argued that, “women may be invisible in the *nakamal*, but we have always been there”.<sup>44</sup> For example, they cited how women are not included in the *nakamal* but women ensure that the meals are there, that the men and children are taken care of, and even carry out the decisions and advice of the chiefs such as when to relocate and how to prepare for disasters. Therefore, women’s contributions benefit the *nakamal* and are integral to the continuation of *kastom* itself. Indeed, while women’s contributions to their families and villages were discussed in both Tanna and Eton, their roles were almost exclusively considered with reference to their identity as home-makers. Both men and women did not identify direct community and provincial *kastom* leadership roles for women in times of disasters thereby underscoring a wider absence of political participation among ni-Vanuatu women.

## 2 Continuum of violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls negatively affects women’s capacity to participate and lead. In Vanuatu, women experience direct physical violence before, during and after disasters which is symptomatic of male-dominance in society. A 2014 UN Women report cited a “300 percent increase in new domestic violence cases reported by the Tanna Women’s Counselling Centre after two tropical cyclones in 2011.”<sup>45</sup> While that increase could be attributed to the surge of post-disaster response in Tanna which may have enhanced access to reporting, especially in remote parts of the island, women continue to experience social stigma and economic costs as a result of reporting violence. These negative

effects of reporting intensify when perpetrators are from within the same family or village.<sup>46</sup> UN Women reported that in the country, 98 percent of victims of violence do not access the formal justice system primarily due to the high and accumulated costs involved in undergoing the legal process.<sup>47</sup> In some cases, women seek help via formal justice mechanisms but then eventually abandon the system because *most women do not want their marriages to end; they simply want the violence to stop* (emphasis added).<sup>48</sup>

Displacement situations in Vanuatu expose women to various protection risks which may intensify due to failures or gaps in crisis response. Most recently in the 2018 Ambae response, there were anecdotal reports of young women being forced into marriage in the islands where their families are relocated to Maewo.<sup>49</sup> This means lack of access to food, livelihood and identity unless *kastom* arrangements are secured between Ambae and Maewo chiefs. Access to land is so integral for economic and cultural reasons such that families are resorting to intermarriages as a way to become part of a new kinship network that has custom ownership to the land where they are relocated. In cases where forced marriages are not successfully arranged by parents, boys are vulnerable to forced labour instead.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, a male informant from the government indicated that the ongoing protection issues in Ambae were triggered in part by the failure of the government to anticipate the vulnerability of young women in the relocation process with respect to land.<sup>51</sup> National leaders were unable to encompass the range of insecurities that may potentially arise due to the scale of this disaster. A female informant stated that “some of our politicians are struggling. They get overwhelmed themselves by the multiple demands. They need help in capacity-building too”.<sup>52</sup> The remoteness of many communities means that access to timely and reliable services is already poor and often impaired after disaster. Hence, many islands more intensely rely on *kastom*, including elements that are harmful to women.

The Ambae relocation has revealed protection gaps as a result of gender inequalities in land rights in Vanuatu. First, women cannot own land based on *kastom*. This means that they are never able to make direct decisions to secure themselves and are at risk during forced relocations. Second, women are not directly participating in crucial decision-making processes relating to disaster preparedness and response. The marginalisation of



women and lack of a gender responsive framework prevented policy-makers from addressing violence against women and girls during and in the aftermath of the disaster. The recent national policy on disaster-induced displacement recognises this neglect:

“[t]o date, there has been an emphasis on improving protection in temporary displacement scenarios, such as evacuations, rather than on longer-term recovery or working towards building durable solutions for communities, especially contexts where communities may not be able to return to places of origin following displacement”.<sup>53</sup>

## INCLUSIONARY FACTORS

### 1 Importance of women's networks and women-only groups

Within a male-dominated political context, where access to information is shaped by patronage, information is more likely to spread through informal connections rather than official channels or structures. Women have responded to this reality by mobilising on their own social networks particularly through their village or community markets where they thrive. For instance, in the baseline survey, 94 per cent of the women believed that the women in their community had a range of resources to respond to climate change and disaster.<sup>54</sup> They reported that the most valuable resource for women is their social capital network and willingness to help each other. Women working together is a major factor in supporting women's participation and leadership.

Women-only initiatives such as the network *Women i Tok Tok Tugeta* (Women Talk Together; WITTT) in Vanuatu began in the aftermath of TC Pam as a space or gathering for women to share information around disaster risks, response and mitigation. WITTT mirrored customary forms of gathering where the women bring their mats and sit in a circle to form community – only that in this space, they can speak freely and are encouraged to do so. After the disaster, key women leaders within the WITTT network are working to transform their gatherings into safe spaces

to discuss all issues affecting them as *women*. Indeed, as one female FGD participant explained, “[T]his space allows as to talk about issues arising in our household. In churches, we have women's groups there too, but that is for spiritual things. WITTT is our safe space for our social issues”.<sup>55</sup> The women members also expressed their goals to expand their network and begin exploring ways to access alternative livelihoods and income-generating activities to the benefit of their communities.

For the members of WITTT, the network serves as a training ground for women to be more politically active and to gain visible recognition as a group that women are key members of the community and that their voices deserve to be heard. WITTT opens avenues for women to directly support and mentor one another's experience in community leadership during elections and with respect to awareness-raising on violence against women. Through such women's gatherings, women are able to learn from their own shared experiences about how climate change is related to the insecurities they experience such as domestic violence and lack of political representation.

### 2 Men's support for women's participation

In a society that is customarily headed by men, a pathway for women to gain influence is by engaging the men in their families to advocate for them. A key benefit for the women coming together to form WITTT is that they can also influence the men in their community collectively and across different levels not just within their own families. For the women in this research project, ensuring male champions or advocates for their rights is necessary and important. The baseline survey found that 75 per cent of women respondents believed that there was a person in the village from whom they could seek help from violence. This was usually the chief, who is a man.<sup>56</sup> In Tanna, whether men or women, they all highly regard the male chiefs, pastors and elders in their community. So, it was natural for WITTT members to enlist the support of their chiefs in order to gain community awareness and endorsement for their women-only gatherings. A chief who has been an ally of WITTT is an example of the transformative impacts of women-only groups. In his words:

**TABLE 2. WOMEN TRANSFORMING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY**

Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT)	
Location	Eton, Erromango and Tanna, Vanuatu
Year of Origin	2015
Membership	3,700 (total estimated number in 2015) <sup>65</sup>
'Catalyst Issue'	<p>In the aftermath of TC Pam, ActionAid Australia established 'blue information tents', which provided 'rights-based training' and were created as 'safe spaces' for women to talk to each other regarding their experiences and collective or shared needs. These have transformed into permanent women's forums that meet regularly and are engaged in collective action through WITTT.</p> <p>WITTT members have actively pushed to transform post-disaster response to promoting women's participation across the development-humanitarian nexus, and their vital role in driving the protection of their rights and resilience building in communities.</p>

"To me as a chief, I support this network [WITTT]. The *nakamal* has been for men to just talk. Everything that is the *nakamal* is through the women. Even when decisions are made by men, the women put it into action. The men are able to do things firstly because of the women".<sup>57</sup>

Endorsements by male community leaders signal to the community and to the other men that WITTT is in alignment with *kastom*. In fact, some women participants expressed how the men started 'seeing' the contributions of women precisely because WITTT of acting collectively. In one community event organised by WITTT involving setting up a flea market in the village, a woman recounted: "[T]he men came to me and said, 'wow you women can do many things!' Yes, I said to them, and we need your support!"<sup>58</sup>

Men research participants recognised the need for the women involved in WITTT to have a specific center or building where all trainings and engagements with and among the women can occur. They considered it a priority for their community that women have a shared and safe space for '*tok tok*'. Male leaders recognised that WITTT and their activities will benefit other members of the community. They stressed that what they require now is for continuity of other trainings that they have

received in the past in the aftermath of TC Pam so that they can upgrade or improve skills with men and women working together.<sup>59</sup> Positive community dynamics of women working together with male leaders serves as a foundation for women's networks such as WITTT to be able to influence *kastom* and state systems at provincial and national levels. According to one female participant, there is optimism behind male champions: "[O]ur history has proven this. [Hilda] Lini was endorsed by the chiefs. Let's bring the chiefs on board. You know our chiefs can ensure women walk into parliament even without so much machinery".<sup>60</sup>

## WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIVE COLLECTIVE ACTION AND MAKING WOMEN'S INCLUSION COUNT

Bringing together insights from ni-Vanuatu women's knowledge and participation yields a model for transformative leadership wherein women can directly enable gender-responsive mechanisms that actively integrate security issues and agendas; with the intention to extend crisis response to long-term development; and to promote the progressive inclusion of other marginalised groups or sectors in ways that strengthen and diversify



expertise from villages to the global level. Our research among women in Tanna and Eton underscored the importance of making women's inclusion count in order to go beyond 'token' participation to engage in collective action.

### Gender-Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change: Critical Actions




For example, approximately 54 per cent of the women in the baseline survey were members of their local Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC). Three out of the 22 women members held a Chair or Co-Chair leadership role. The majority of the women expressed that they actively rather than passively engage in the committee. Many felt comfortable speaking at meetings albeit only when they have something to say or when specifically asked to speak up. This is a positive indicator that crisis can open opportunities for women to participate and become directly part of governance. There has been important progress in promoting women's inclusion in CDCCCs established after TC Pam. These committees are important institutional mechanisms for gender-responsiveness. However, their functions are yet to be integrated within an overall plan for sustainable development and promotion of women's rights. One female participant from Eton stated that: "the women were included as part of 'tick-box'."<sup>61</sup> As a result, some key informants observed a growing tendency to relegate women's networks and organisations to 'DRR and CC only issues' rather than to national security and development concerns. In Eton and Tanna, for example, research participants were not clear what the mandate of women's representatives on CDCCCs was or how women could become involved in the committees.

As such, DRR and CC programming is still unclear on what role different groups of women can play and how. Strengthening the quality of women's inclusion and participation is vital to ensure that women's representation is not confined to 'token' or checklist measures. It is important that the women included in the committee are knowledgeable and trained in the gender dimension of climate change issues, as well as recognised for other technical and traditional expertise they bring.

In a mixed-gender FGD in Tanna, participants cited the specific push to include women in CDCCCs as part of the broader environment they faced in the aftermath of TC Pam. They discussed a growing discontent in communities about previous disaster responses by foreign NGOs. According to their experience, NGOs have indirectly sowed divisions within their communities by unequally distributing resources that result from a lack of recognition for existing local structures especially customary mechanisms. As a consequence, post-disaster resource allocation served to undermine community harmony. One female FGD participant shared:

"NGOs when they come, they just go to specific people, they don't follow the [local] structure which means they don't reach all the women. But [now] WITTT is everywhere. Could NGOs recognise WITTT so they understand what we are doing here? We want to work in partnership to further expand our network".<sup>62</sup>

Learning from previous experiences in the aftermath of TC Pam, participants stressed the need to maintain and implement a structure of information dissemination and coordination that aims to assist all geographic areas equally – and this is believed to be a better structure from where women's meaningful collective action can arise. This means all state and non-state responders should commit to recognising the expertise and positive impact local women's groups can have in disaster preparedness and response. Women's action in CDCCCs, especially in the aftermath of disasters, cannot itself serve as a proxy for transformations in gender relations until these CDCCCs are further strengthened as part of long-term efforts to be



systematically integrated within village and provincial structures and other local women's groups, including WITTT and the National Council of Women.

In the case of women in Tanna and Eton, the women-only networks they have formed serve as opportunities for actively developing women's collective action that can harness crises as opportunities for building long-term sustainable development. Because climate change is an urgent, interlocking and cross-cutting issue, addressing its impacts require coordination from multiple actors with diverse expertise across different spheres of governance. The initiative of the WITTT network is an example of how fundamentally important the base work of supporting women's movements is for both disaster preparedness and long-term development in the country. It represents the trajectory ni-Vanuatu women want to see as part of their country's ongoing transition post-independence.

Even the male leaders in our Tanna focus group stressed that with climate change comes the need for everyone – men and women – to join together in building their communities in partnership with (rather than being dictated by) foreign NGOs. This strong sense of indigenous and women-led adaptation is rooted in their sense of identity and connection to nature. Participants understood that the crisis of TC Pam serves as an opportunity to transform their communities and society including deeply-held *kastom* practices that disadvantage ni-Vanuatu women.

With climate change and the already observable successive and cumulative impacts of disasters in the country, it is increasingly difficult to demarcate what are women's specific concerns in the aftermath of displacements and in 'everyday life'. The distinctions to how their needs differ across rapid onset and slow forms of risks will become less relevant as the boundaries are also increasingly less clear between one disaster after another. There has to be a progressive shift from addressing gender issues under protection mechanisms of disaster response to strengthening nationwide justice systems and enhancing spaces for women's political mobilisation. What this shift represents is to move away from predominantly representing ni-Vanuatu women as victims toward a stronger emphasis on women as stakeholders and leaders.

## CONCLUSION

“As custodians of a unique chain of islands and expansive ocean we have an inherent responsibility to protect and preserve our natural resources”.<sup>63</sup>

The major findings of this research project have significant implications for gender-responsive alternatives to climate change in Vanuatu.

This research project provides evidence that first, identifying women's distinct knowledges and experiences is a necessary strategy to comprehensively understand the consequences of climate change and to reveal its intersecting impacts. As a country transitioning from successive and ongoing crises, ni-Vanuatu people are at the frontline and already taking the lead in broadening the global climate change agenda. They do so through concerted efforts to protect intangible heritage and by 'going back to their roots'. Our research in Vanuatu underscored how global discussions on climate change are yet to encompass non-material loss and damages that are not adequately or simply cannot be measured in economic terms. Here the country is leading by example globally to protect intangible cultural heritage and in raising awareness to safeguard traditional knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Our findings identify an important opportunity to raise the significance of gender analysis to traditional knowledge and shared stewardship of men and women for climate change.

Second, promoting the status of ni-Vanuatu women by reducing and ultimately eliminating gender-based inequalities and violence is a long-term measure needed to address development, DRR and climate change goals. In a society still characterised by gendered division of labour and unequal gender norms that expect women to be 'quiet' or speak through male intermediaries, women's groups are vital training grounds for sustained political participation whereby women can then be recognised for the authority they bring before, during and after crisis. The role for state and non-state actors is to recognise that broader groups of women can take the lead in changing the practices and structures that shape their sense of security – on their own terms. These women can experiment and innovate with their own community agendas – within customary structures that also provide meaning and purpose to their lives. Recognising

and further supporting spaces for women to come together as *women* have the potential to mobilise transformative collective action. By this we mean that women can effectively bring in their everyday knowledge and demonstrate how this can help integrate climate change and gender equality across all national and global agendas. Moreover, that they can navigate *kastom* by engendering collective dialogues involving men from their households and villages to nationally, and across their custom networks.

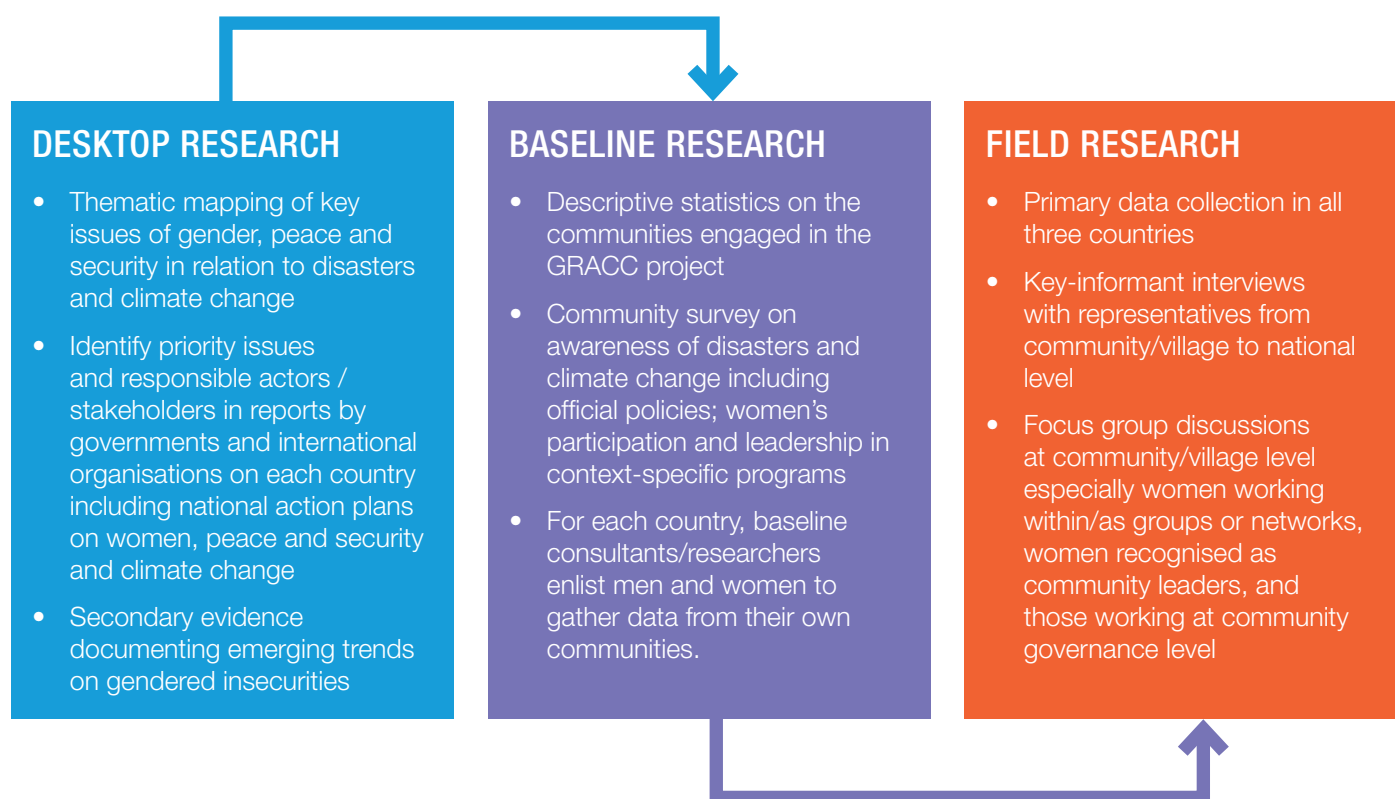
## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ni-Vanuatu women on the frontline of multiple crises should inform how, when and where gender-responsive policy can integrate action on interlinked climate-induced crises. The following recommendations are for government and non-government actors from diverse agencies and sectors.

- Develop **integrated early warning mechanisms for disasters and community-level conflicts** at household and village levels, incorporating women's knowledge.
- **Strengthening women at the community level's capacity** to contribute their knowledge into reporting formats for forecasting and risk analysis, and to access relevant technologies.
- Support **women-friendly safe spaces for community participation and enable women's community networks and organisations to develop meaningful opportunities for consultation and collaboration with customary mechanisms and government policy.**
- **Build on existing women's networks such as WITT to connect women from other islands and nationally** for the purposes of emergency or crisis response as well as preparedness and planning.
- Provide **training and support to local *kastom* and church leaders** to respond to gender-specific needs in times of disaster.
- Encourage **village level male champions of women's networks and organisations** and updating harmful *kastom* beliefs and practices that exclude women from in village governance.
- Create **opportunities for women's networks and gender-balanced representation** in provincial level institutions as part of decentralisation in Vanuatu.



## ANNEX 1. THE RESEARCH PROCESS



## ANNEX 2. POLICY FOUNDATIONS FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

	Main Policy frame-works	Provisions, contents and entry-points
1	Constitution of Vanuatu (1979/1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stipulates that all land in the country belongs to the indigenous owners and designates <i>Kastom</i> as the basis for ownership and governance</li> <li>✓ Recognises fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals</li> <li>✓ "To safeguard the national wealth, resources and environment in the interests of the present generation and of future generations" is a fundamental duty of all citizens to themselves and their descendants (Article 7d).</li> </ul>
2	<a href="#">National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Also known as "The People's Plan" committing to build a 'stable, sustainable and prosperous' nation</li> <li>✓ It explicitly states that the country has made great progress since independence in 1980 but that there had been setbacks and difficulties, notably through natural disasters (p. 1).</li> <li>✓ Implementing the country's shared vision and aspirations, three pillars for implementation are identified: society, environment and economy. Under the 'social inclusion' branch of the society pillar, listed goals include 'gender-responsive planning and budgeting processes', and preservation of traditional knowledge, governance systems and sites of cultural and historical significance.</li> </ul>

3	<a href="#">National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Strong focus on eliminating gender-based violence and improving women's political and economic participation.</li> <li>✓ Policy cites only 5 women MPs since independence in 1980.</li> <li>✓ Identifies equal 'access to information' on health, employment, disasters and election as among key enabling factors to achieve national gender equality goals.</li> <li>✓ Includes as strategic indicators A) the inclusion of GBV prevention and response within disaster risk management and planning; B) Evidence-based research, and gender-responsive climate change and DRR projects and governance mechanisms.</li> </ul>
4	Family Protection Act 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provides the legislative framework on domestic violence and where protection order is a key component to access to justice.</li> <li>✓ This law is increasingly relevant in context of disaster-induced displacement and will need review of implementation relating to challenges and difficulties surrounding internally displaced populations in addition to general concerns of geographic remoteness for many island communities.</li> </ul>
5	<a href="#">Justice &amp; Policing Sector Infrastructure Priorities Plan 2017 - 2022</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improving infrastructure is vital to delivery of policing and justice services.</li> <li>✓ Documented impact of TC Pam to the justice and policing sector.</li> <li>✓ Represents an example of how disaster reconstruction and governance are integrated within formal justice systems.</li> <li>✓ Mentions specifically the need to also support infrastructure for <i>Kastom</i> governance through Malvatu mauri Council of Chiefs in 22 island council offices including merging traditional approaches to building construction and disaster-proofing facilities.</li> </ul>
6	<a href="#">Meteorology, Geo-hazards and Climate Change Act 2016</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Embodies 'whole of government' approach to climate change and disaster risk reduction</li> <li>✓ Among key objectives of the law is to ensure capacities across multiple scales from communities to national government; and implementation of international conventions namely UNFCCC and other regional instruments.</li> <li>✓ Stresses importance of access to, facilitation of the use of information in order to effectively respond to disasters and protect the environment.</li> </ul>
7	Vanuatu Climate Change Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Affirms gender and social inclusion as cross-cutting issues with climate change and disaster risk reduction.</li> <li>✓ Places strong emphasis on governance of knowledge and information relation to climate change and disaster risks.</li> <li>✓ Notes high importance placed at provincial and community levels on "respecting, recording and sharing traditional knowledge, including traditional early warning and coping mechanisms".</li> <li>✓ Success of policies and programs dependent on extent in which they build on both indigenous and externally-derived knowledge.</li> <li>✓ Sets forth key action points for addressing complex vulnerabilities of internally displaced populations and managing disasters including further strengthening of cluster approach and tapping with local community networks.</li> </ul>



8	National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Vital new national policy framework that seeks to adopt the <a href="#">IASC's criteria for 'durable solutions' to internal displacement</a>, and other global frameworks, and connects these with the broader national sustainable development goals under the People's Plan 2030</li> <li>✓ Provides important provision on preservation of traditional knowledge and culture through designating key role of <a href="#">Vanuatu Cultural Center, field workers network</a></li> <li>✓ The core cross-cutting priorities of the policy are: Women's leadership, gender responsiveness and social inclusion; community participation; disaster-risk reduction and climate change adaptation (including hazards-mapping); safe, well managed migration; and partnerships (p. 19).</li> </ul>
9	Customary Land Management Act 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ongoing land rights issues in the country – particularly the balancing between <i>Kastom</i> and state justice systems – will increasingly require review of implementation in the context of gender and climate change related displacements.</li> <li>✓ Current national-level efforts to map multiple hazards and vulnerability assessments will invariably intersect with land tenure and protection of women's rights in land disputes.</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 3.

### TABLE: COUNTRY PROFILE ON GENDER, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY

Climate risk and fragility	
2018 Global Climate Risk Index	120 out of 183 countries (2016) 2016 losses per unit GDP in % = 0 2016 losses in million US\$ (adjusted by purchasing power parity) = 0
2018 State Fragility Index	Not included
2018 Global Peace Index	Not included
Gender, Peace and Security	
2017 WPS Index	Not included
2017 Global Gender Gap	Not included
2013 Environment and Gender Index	Not included
SDG and Human Development	
2018 SDG Index	Not included
2017 Human Development Index	138 out of 189 countries (score 0.603, 1 is highest)

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The project is part of a multi-country case study research examining gender-responsive alternatives to climate change in two other countries, Kenya and Cambodia.
- 2 IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.) (Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2014), p.2.
- 3 Camilo Mora et al., "Broad threat to humanity from cumulative climate hazards intensified by greenhouse gas emissions," *Nature Climate Change* vol. 8, (2018): p.1062, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0315-6>. See also Wolfgang Cramer et al., "Climate change and interconnected risks to sustainable development in the Mediterranean," *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 8 (2018): pp.972–980, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0299-2>
- 4 Quoted in "Motarilavao Hilda Lini" The Nuclear-Free Future Award Foundation, 2018, <http://www.nffa.de/laureates/motarilavao-hilda-lini-2/>
- 5 Hon. Hilda Lini was the first ni-Vanuatu (indigenous) woman elected to Parliament in 1987 (Pacific Women in Politics, n.d.). In 2005, she was recognised for her role in peace and environmentalism by championing nuclear-free Pacific through the Nuclear-free Future Award ("Motarilavao Hilda Lini" The Nuclear-Free Future Award Foundation, 2018, <http://www.nffa.de/laureates/motarilavao-hilda-lini-2/>).
- 6 Geraldine Terry (ed), *Climate Change and Gender Justice* (Oxfam, 2009); Seema Arora-Jonsson, "Forty years of gender research and environmental policy: Where do we stand?" *Women's Studies International Forum* vol.47 (2014): pp.295–308; Rebecca Pearce, "Gender and climate change." *WIREs Climate Change* vol. 8 (2017): pp.1–16, doi: 10.1002/wcc.451; Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 2nd Edition (London: Zed Books, 2014).
- 7 Developed by Cate Buchanan and Jacqui True, August 2018 cited in UN Women, *Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting* (New York: UN Women, 2018), p.4, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/egm-womens-meaningful-participation-in-negotiating-peace-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3047>
- 8 The research received Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee approval, project number 11825. Three main features of our collaboration involved community participation and specifically, women from the *Women I tok tok Tugeta* (WITTT) network: first, through direct participation as part of ActionAid program delivery which includes the production of a Women's Charter of Demands as part of ongoing efforts to lobby for greater national and provincial political participation from women in the islands. Second, the research built on data collected by the WITTT members themselves for the baseline research. This allowed for greater community awareness within their network and served as a platform for community dialogue and learning regarding gender and climate change. We also relied on WITTT in mobilising participants for our interviews and focus groups especially with community and provincial leaders from *kastom*, church and government thus recognising and further supporting the work of WITTT in advocating for women's leadership. Third, indirect and regular consultations with the community by Dr. Maria Tanyag, Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre through ActionAid regarding how the women from the network understand the aims and questions of the project. Our collaboration facilitated this participation through a steering committee structure and during the actual field research data collection of interviews and focus group discussions.
- 9 The project supports the establishment of a Vanuatu-based 'women's weather watch system' and to strengthen WITTT as a nationwide women's network.
- 10 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). *Global Report on Internal Displacement*. (Geneva: IDMC, 2016) p.19; see also *Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030*, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2015, p.6. Vanuatu's country profile in terms of gender, security and climate change is shown in annex 2.
- 11 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). *Disaster-related Displacement Risk: Measuring the Risk and Addressing its Drivers*. (Geneva: IDMC and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015) p.21.
- 12 *Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030*, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2015, p.1.
- 13 Eckstein, David, Vera Künzel and Laura Schäfer. 2017. *Global Climate Risk Index 2018*. Bonn; Berlin: GermanWatch p.7. Other estimates indicate as high as 64.1 percent of GDP loss; see ILO, "Cyclone PAM causes devastating impact on employment and livelihoods" ILO Disaster Preparedness and Response, 23 April 2015, [https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS\\_368560/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_368560/lang--en/index.htm)
- 14 Eckstein, David, Vera Künzel and Laura Schäfer. *Global Climate Risk Index 2018*. (Bonn; Berlin: GermanWatch 2017).
- 15 Pacific Women in Politics, Country Profiles: Vanuatu, n.d., <https://www.pacwip.org/country-profiles/vanuatu/>
- 16 UN Women, "Markets for Change Vanuatu" Brief, (Suva: UN Women, 2016), p.30.
- 17 UN Women, "Markets for Change".
- 18 Vanuatu Women's Centre. *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships 2017*, p.47. Available at: [https://mjcs.gov.vu/images/research\\_database/Vanuatu\\_National\\_Survey\\_on\\_Womens\\_Lives\\_and\\_Family\\_Relationships.pdf](https://mjcs.gov.vu/images/research_database/Vanuatu_National_Survey_on_Womens_Lives_and_Family_Relationships.pdf).
- 19 UN Women, "Markets for Change," p.15.
- 20 UN Women "Markets for Change," p.50.
- 21 See Julie Webb, *Does gender-responsive disaster risk reduction make a difference? A comparative study of Category Five Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu* (Port Vila: CARE International in Vanuatu, 2017).

- 22 Respondents noted that they believe there have been exceptions in some islands of female chiefs or women from chiefly families taking on head role in the *nakamal*.
- 23 See also UN Women Fiji, "Climate change disasters and gender based violence in the Pacific" (Suva: UN Women Fiji, 2014), <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/1/climate-change-disasters-and-gender-based-violence-in-the-pacific>.
- 24 UN Women, "Markets for Change".
- 25 *Vanuatu National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement*, Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, 2018, p.14.
- 26 Personal interview, Port Vila, 4 October 2018. This point was also affirmed by participants in FGD, Eton and Tanna.
- 27 D. Nakashima, I. Krupnik & J.T. Rubis. *Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation*. Local & Indigenous Knowledge 2. (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and UNESCO, 2018).
- 28 UN Women, "Markets for Change".
- 29 Female informant, international NGO, Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 30 Development Services. 2018. *ActionAid GRACC Baseline Study ActionAid GRACC Baseline Study in Vanuatu April 2018 – Summary Document in Vanuatu*. Port Vila: ActionAid Vanuatu, pp.6-7.
- 31 Field notes, 1-2 October 2018, Tanna, Vanuatu.
- 32 Refers to the alcoholic brew produced from roots of the kava plant.
- 33 Women, however, are not prohibited from consuming and also can be involved in the planting and harvest.
- 34 Note that respondents also pointed out how many practices and beliefs vary from island to island and this diversity applies to gendered allocation of household and community-level tasks depending on local *kastom* arrangements. Further research in mapping gender differences among other islands on gender-differentiation of indigenous knowledge is needed.
- 35 See for example, *Vanuatu National Adaptation Programme For Action (NAPA)*, Republic of Vanuatu, 2007; and *Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030*, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2015.
- 36 Female informant, international NGO, Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 37 Also discussed in a separate FGD with Tanna elders and leaders across the province, 2 October 2018.
- 38 FGD with Tanna elders and leaders across the province, 2 October 2018.
- 39 Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 40 FGDs, Eton, 26 September 2018 and Tanna, 1 October 2018.
- 41 Female informant, international NGO, Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 42 FGDs, Eton, 26 September 2018 and Tanna, 1 October 2018.
- 43 Polly Walker. "Storians: Building on Indigenous Knowledge to Enhance Ni-Vanuatu Mediative Capacity." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (2013) 30,3: p.312. See also Forsyth, M. *A Bird that Flies with Two Wings: The Kastom and State Justice Systems in Vanuatu*. (Canberra: AnUPress, 2009)
- 44 Female FGD participant, Tanna, 1 October 2018
- 45 UN Women 2014.
- 46 Vanuatu Women's Centre 2011
- 47 UN Women, "Markets for Change."
- 48 Vanuatu Women's Centre. 2015. *Phase 6 Progress Report 4*. Available at: <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/vanuatu-womens-centre-progress-report-4.pdf> p.46.
- 49 Interview, male and female informants, Port Vila, 25 and 28 September 2018.
- 50 Interviews, Port Vila, 25 and 28 September 2018.
- 51 Personal interview, Port Vila, 28 September 2018.
- 52 Personal interview, Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 53 *Vanuatu National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-induced Displacement*, Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, 2018, p.14.
- 54 Development Services 2018, p.7.
- 55 Female FGD participant, Eton, 26 September 2018.
- 56 Some Islands are believed to have greater gender equality under *kastom* such as the above anecdote on Hilda Lini's election.
- 57 Focus group discussion, Tanna, 1 October 2018
- 58 Focus group discussion, Eton, 26 September 2018.
- 59 Focus group discussion, Tanna, 2 October 2018.
- 60 Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 61 Female informant, NGO representative, Port Vila, 25 September 2018.
- 62 Tanna, 1 October 2018.
- 63 *National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030*, Republic of Vanuatu, 2016, p.5.
- 64 See for example UNESCO-funded initiative to document, and therefore help preserve, intangible cultural heritage as part of long-term response and adaptation. UNESCO, Disaster Needs Assessment of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ambae Community in Vanuatu, n.d, [https://en.unesco.org/events/disaster-needs-assessment-intangible-cultural-heritage-ambae-community-vanuatu?fbclid=IwAR3j9HheBD-7bnlLzXsdytutmRxMSU071x9WdznsnOa\\_gslK1Mi-elElfI](https://en.unesco.org/events/disaster-needs-assessment-intangible-cultural-heritage-ambae-community-vanuatu?fbclid=IwAR3j9HheBD-7bnlLzXsdytutmRxMSU071x9WdznsnOa_gslK1Mi-elElfI).
- 65 This number was based on an initial program evaluation done by ActionAid Australia (8 months post-disaster; see Grace Nicholas, *Evaluation Report: Women-led Protection Project Vanuatu* (ActionAid Australia, 2015), <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Evaluation-report-Vanuatu-November-2015.pdf>



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Monash Gender, Peace & Security is a group of policy and community engaged scholars whose research is focused  
in the field of gender, peace and security. We seek to use our research to inform scholarly debate, policy development  
and implementation, public understanding about the gendered politics of armed conflict and the search for peace.

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women living in poverty and exclusion in over 45 countries to understand their rights, collectively organise and  
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