



Until we are all equal

Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate

Executive Summary

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This project was a collaboration between Plan International Australia, Kiribati Climate Action Network, Edith Cowan University's Centre for People, Place and Planet, and the Australian National University.

Plan International Australia is a global independent development and humanitarian organisation. As one of the oldest, largest and most experienced organisations in its field, Plan works alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the injustices facing girls and the most marginalised children.

Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) is a coalition dedicated to addressing the severe impacts of climate change on the islands of Kiribati. Founded in 2011 by Pelenise Alofa, KiriCAN brings together multiple organisations to advocate for climate resilience, support community adaptation projects, and raise international awareness of Kiribati's plight. KiriCAN works on several fronts to mitigate challenges. KiriCAN implements community training programmes to develop climate-resilience practices and collaborates with international partners to strengthen local capacity and influence climate policy both nationally and globally.

The Centre for People, Place and Planet at Edith Cowan University conducts transdisciplinary research using participatory methodologies in the context of global environmental change. The Centre aims to reconnect people, ecosystems, and place-based knowledges for universal well-being.

The Australian National University is a public research university located in Canberra, the capital of Australia. It comprises seven colleges, including the College of Health and Medicine which is home to the School of Medicine and Psychology.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and pay our respect to the lands, seas and skies of the Pacific region, and the continuing custodianship of Pacific people. We acknowledge the girls of the Pacific who participated in this project, and their knowledges and commitment to climate justice.

The Australian authors acknowledge and pay our respects to First Nations Elders past and present. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded and that this land always was and always will be First Nations land. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community, and we commit to ongoing learning, deep and active listening, and taking action in solidarity.



Introduction

Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate documents the lived experiences of climate change for girls, adolescents and young women aged 10 to 18 in the Pacific and their recommendations for action to protect and promote their human rights.

This report examines how climate change in the Pacific exacerbates existing inequalities, creates barriers for girls and reshapes girls' lives as they enter adulthood.

It encompasses the complex and intersecting experiences of girls aged 10 to 18, recognising their diversity of gender, disability, Indigeneity, race, religion and sexuality alongside their experiences of poverty, dislocation and geographical remoteness.

Girls in the Pacific are not passive actors in a changing climate. They are at the forefront of activism and influencing governments to take climate action. The report captures how Pacific girl-led change can be supported, resourced and strengthened by all actors.

The Pacific region is exposed to some of the highest risks of climate change, leading to significant loss and damage to the land, sea and waters of Pacific nations. In this context, Pacific girls have clear strategies and recommendations for changes in law, policy and development practice that will dismantle barriers and create pathways into a future in which they can thrive.

Methodology: Feminist Participatory Action Research

Using a feminist participatory action research approach (FPAR), over 350 Pacific girls living in six countries including the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu contributed to different stages of this report between 2021 and 2024. Pacific girls were actively contributing to and leading co-design of the research methodology, art-based storytelling, a regional survey of 319 girls, participatory data analysis and writing, as well as advocacy and campaign planning.

Who is this report for?

Pacific girls want all actors working on climate change in the Pacific to read and act on this report. This includes Pacific governments, donor governments and development banks, international non-governmental organisations, Pacific civil society organisations and actors in the feminist and climate justice movements.

Partners

This project is a collaboration between Plan International Australia, Kiribati Climate Action Network, Edith Cowan University's Centre for People, Place and Planet, and the Australian National University.

Read the full report

The full report of *Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate* is rich in stories, artwork and reflections from girls, capturing their lived experiences told in their voices and through their eyes. We encourage you to read the full report which you can find <https://www.plan.org.au/publications>.

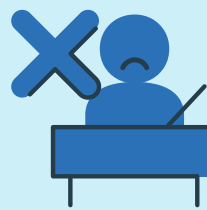
Climate change is challenging Pacific girls' lives

We surveyed 319 girls across the Pacific region including from the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. This is what they told us.

82%

of surveyed girls say that climate change has affected their life at home, in school or in their community.

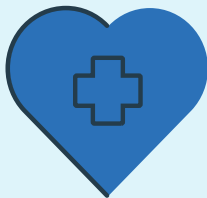
Education disruptions



50%

of surveyed girls say that climate events have stopped them from going to school.

Health and wellbeing



Only

0.6%

of surveyed girls say that climate change has not affected their health and wellbeing.

Food shortages



27%

of surveyed girls say there is less food and 19% say they feel hungry due to climate change.

Water scarcity



Close to

50%

of surveyed girls say the most common impact of climate change on their basic needs is lack of clean fresh water.

Housing insecurity



Almost

1/3

of surveyed girls say that climate change has damaged or destroyed their homes.

Girls are not passive actors, they are leaders and activists

Pacific girls are climate justice activists



34%

of surveyed girls participate in climate justice activism.

Pacific girls want to build a stronger girl-led movement



72%

of surveyed girls want to be connected to climate justice groups.

Pacific girls want to shape a just future



57%

of surveyed girls want their voices to shape climate policy and action.

Pacific girls want tools to build a better future



66%

of surveyed girls want education on how to adapt to climate change.

A group of children, mostly girls in blue dresses with white collars and white shirts, are walking away from the camera on a dirt path. They are in a rural, outdoor setting with lush green vegetation in the background. The children are walking in a line, and their shadows are cast on the ground. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Findings: Impacts of climate change on Pacific girls

Children on their way to school in West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Photo: Plan International Australia.

Impact 1: Environmental

Pacific girls experience a range of environmental impacts from climate change including increased heat, water scarcity, sea level rises and extreme weather events. Overall, 73% of surveyed girls identify increasing temperatures (“getting hotter”) as the most common impact.

Sea level rises and coastal erosion are also experienced at higher levels by girls in the atoll nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati as well as the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Storms, cyclones and floods are most felt by girls in Tonga and water scarcity is a greater challenge for girls in Tuvalu, Kiribati, FSM and Tonga.

Impact 2: Access to water, food and housing

Climate change impacts Pacific girls’ basic needs by limiting their access to clean and safe water as well as high quality food. Climate change also impacts their right to safe and permanent housing.

Water scarcity

Many Pacific communities rely heavily on groundwater as the only reliable source of fresh water, however changes in rainfall patterns and sea-level rises as well as pollution in urban regions is placing water resources at risk.

“I would like to have water tanks to reduce work for our mothers in fetching clean water and our community water source to be treated to reduce skin diseases and sickness. Request if the Ministry of Health and Infrastructure could pay a visit to my community to see the issues faced and provide awareness. If my community are supplied with good water tanks and water sources are treated, we will have clean and safe water to use and good health.”

Filo, a 14-year-old girl with a disability living in a rural village in Fiji.

Surveyed girls say that the lack of fresh water affects their hygiene. They experience difficulties washing their bodies and managing menstruation.



47%

of surveyed Pacific girls say that access to clean and safe water is the biggest impact of climate change on meeting their basic needs.

Collecting water is often the responsibility of girls and climate change impacts their ability to perform their household responsibilities. Many girls must boil water before drinking it.

Food insecurity

Cyclones, storms, coastal erosion and flooding affects freshwater availability, contributes to salination of lands and reduces fertile land for farming and access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, Pacific communities are heavily dependent on oceans for food and income, but acidification, ocean warming, overfishing, and pollution is poisoning marine food sources.

“My drawing describes how poor fishing is happening in my villages which affects my livelihood. Before when I go out fishing, I usually collect a lot of seaweeds, sea grapes, fish etc. but now it has [become] extinct due to land reclamation and dumping of rubbish in the sea. We can reduce by placing taboos [restrictions on fishing] in reserved areas for a period of time to let the marine resources grow again.”

Ruci, a 15-year-old Indigenous girl, living in a rural area in Fiji.



Over one third of surveyed Pacific girls say the quality of food has reduced due to climate change and 27% say there is less food available. This is experienced at higher levels by girls in the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu and for girls in outer islands and rural areas.

Housing insecurity

Climate change has significant impacts on girls' housing security.

Disasters such as cyclones have damaged critical infrastructure; 22% of surveyed girls explain that climate events have caused power lines to go down, disrupting phone and internet access which leads to disruption to their remote education. Delays in repairing bridges, power lines and wharves severely limits community access to critical infrastructure.



27%

of surveyed girls say that climate change has damaged or destroyed their homes and displaced their families.

Impact 3: Disaster response: accessibility and inclusion

Girls, especially those with disabilities, face unique challenges around access and inclusion in disaster response, including poor access to disaster information and lack of disability-inclusive evacuation facilities.

Fourteen percent of surveyed girls say that they have difficulties accessing information about climate change and disasters. This is much higher in the Solomon Islands (34%) and for girls in urban areas (20%). Access to disaster information is particularly an issue for girls with a disability:

“Some of my friends are visually impaired and have hearing impairments and miss out accessing information about cyclone. When we have television news, there are no interpreters so it's hard to know what's going on... There is still not enough support from government for our group especially for my other friends and colleagues who have visual and hearing impairment. Lack of disability friendly facilities at evacuation centres and even in our everyday life.”

Co-design workshop participants

Russell Islands lie two meters above sea level, Solomon Islands. Photo: Plan International Australia.

Impact 4: Girls' health and wellbeing

Climate change has significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of Pacific girls. These include impacts on their physical health, safety and security, and mental health.

Physical health

Close to half of surveyed girls (48%) report the most common impact of climate change on their health is feeling very hot, thirsty or tired. Girls also report skin and stomach problems due to a lack of access to clean water for cooking and bathing, poor sanitation, overcrowding, dietary deficiencies, dusty air, and pollution.

Girls experience diarrhea and disease due to contaminated water, and struggle to manage their hygiene and menstruation due to climate change impacts on freshwater supply.

Mental health and well-being

Pacific girls detail the extensive impacts that a changing climate has on their mental health and wellbeing. In the survey, girls share that as a result of the very real impacts of climate change on their lives, they experience feelings of worry, fear, being unsafe and insecure, stressed, sad and confused.

Climate change also affects family wellbeing, and some girls have experienced family separation after losing homes or moving villages.

A small cohort of surveyed girls report physical violence, early or forced marriage, and sexual and gender-based violence during and after disasters, along with limited access to support services. Girls in the co-design workshops highlighted the issues of safety in evacuation centres.

“ Hot temperatures in weather causes raises and boils on the head. Frequent changes in weather patterns causes sicknesses like short of breath, headaches. During hot sunny days it causes headaches.”

An Indigenous girl, aged 10, living in an urban area in Fiji

“ There's a lot of information about the effect of climate change but the most worrying of this is about the future. We (next generation) don't know what's going to happen to our home island.”

Indigenous girl, aged 18, living in a rural area in Kiribati.



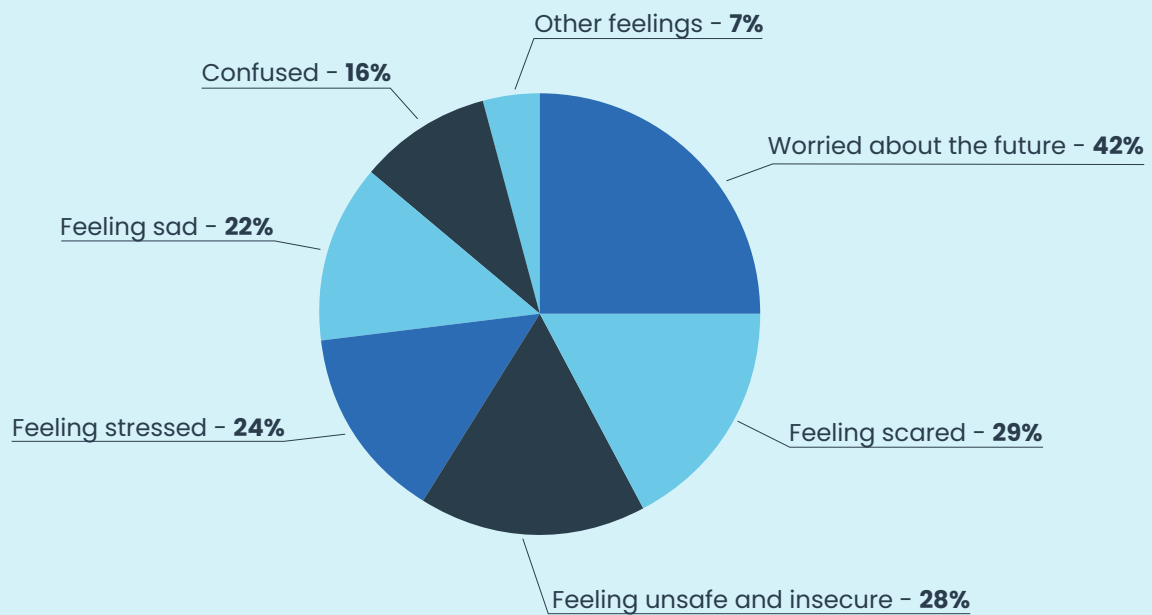


Figure 1. Climate-related emotional impacts

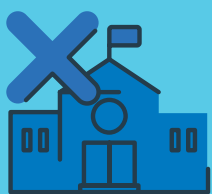
Impact 5: Girls' education, play and livelihoods

There are clear impacts of climate change on girls' access to education, their ability to play sport and their families' ability to maintain their livelihoods.

Access to schools and learning

Thirty three percent of surveyed girls say their schools have been damaged or destroyed due to disasters and 13% of girls say they attend schools in alternative places such as village halls, religious buildings or tents.

Girls also share that they cannot access their school due to rain, floods, heat and droughts. A lack of roads, bridges, transport, streetlights, footpaths and other services such as internet and phone connectivity are barriers, particularly for



50%

of surveyed girls have experienced being unable to get to school, including missing classes and changes to school terms, due to disasters.

girls in regional and remote areas. Families from low incomes often cannot afford a mobile phone, tablet or internet access for remote learning.

“ My issue is, we don't have any bridge to go to school, town, etc. I had to cross the river every day of my life to reach school or access services. When water level rises my mom had to carry me across to go to school....”

Recommendations: We at my village need a bridge, streetlights, walkways in school, a library, networks for research and information, our school toilets to be attached to school, treated, safe and clean drinking water and many more. Urging the government of the day, NGO, CSO and other stakeholder to help us. My environment of living and studying will be safe and secured if only changes are made. Biggest barriers is, we don't know [which] door to knock to seek help and access information.*

Lusiana, a 10-year-old Indigenous girl, living in a rural area in Fiji.

**this is a shortened version of Lusiana's story*

Sport, play and household labour

Climate change affects Pacific girls' ability to engage in play and sport. Girls explain that disasters destroy or flood sporting areas and schools, while heat distress, lack of access to fresh water and poor health affects girls' ability to participate in recreation activities.

Additionally, girls share that they are undertaking more household labour due to climate change with 19% of surveyed girls saying they work longer on household tasks and 11% travel further to collect food, firewood and water, or to go to school.

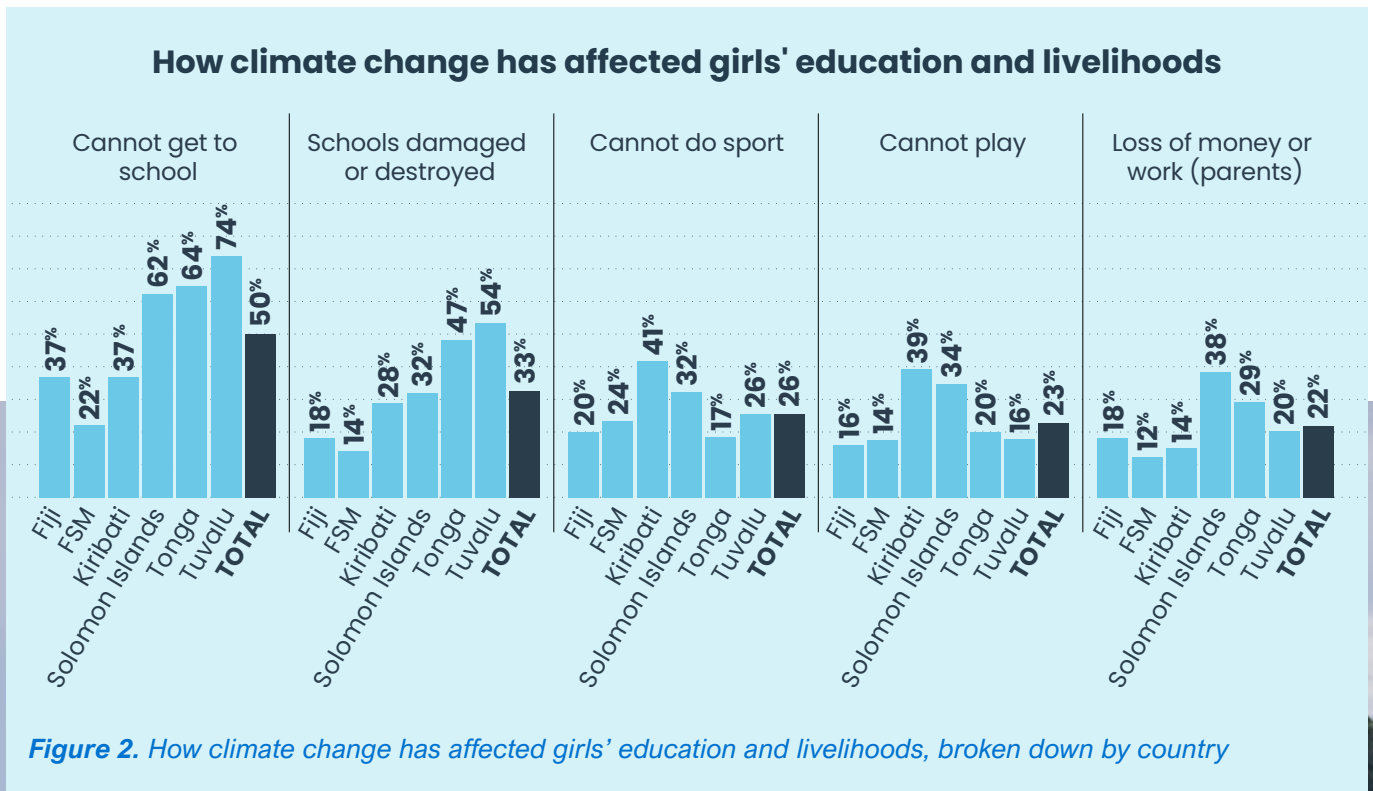
Family livelihoods

Girls experience multiple impacts from the loss of family livelihoods in agriculture, farming and fishing due to climate change. 22% percent

of surveyed girls say that climate change has caused loss of money or work for their parents. This can have flow on consequences for girls' access to education.

Impact 6: Community and culture

Girls in the Pacific identify a range of community and cultural impacts of climate change. This includes the impacts of relocating communities from coastal to non-coastal regions, as well as damage to religious and community buildings. Over one quarter of surveyed girls share that they cannot attend events such as weddings and funerals due to climate impacts and one third of girls say they cannot engage in community and cultural activities such as dancing, music and singing.



Children in canoes play near the shore in West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Photo: Plan International Australia.



Findings: Pacific girls' calls for action on climate change



Children at school in Solomon Islands.
Photo: Plan international Australia.

Overall key message:

Governments and donors must centre Pacific girls and their diverse lived experiences in climate policies and programs.

Action 1: Governments can prevent climate change

Pacific girls identify a range of actions for both Pacific governments and donors to prevent and address climate change:

- Pacific governments must implement strict rules to stop deforestation, plant more trees and mangroves, and reduce water usage. They must stop sedimentation in the ocean, stop removing sand from the beach, and build seawalls.
- All actors globally must reduce pollution from industrialisation and the use of fossil fuels and gas, reduce carbon pollution, improve waste management, and increase renewable energy through technology.

“**Stop sending plastic to Kiribati. Reduce gas emissions. Stop fishing in our ocean. Stop oil spillage both on land and sea. Stop mining phosphate.**”

Recommendation from a Girl, aged 13, living in a rural Kiribati

Action 2: Governments can help girls cope with climate change and build climate resilience

Pacific girls identify a range of measures for Pacific governments and donors to ensure that girls have the necessary support and resilience to take action against climate change:

- Pacific governments and donors can strengthen climate change education for girls, from early years through to university levels, by providing climate change focused programs and workshops alongside integrating climate change into school curriculums.

- Pacific governments and donors can improve girls' standard of living in the face of a changing climate by ensuring clean water, proper shelter, and improved waste management.
- Donors and Pacific governments can provide support for sustainable livelihoods, improve farming, and create jobs and opportunities to study and work overseas.

Action 3: Governments can create girl-responsive emergency responses and disaster risk resilience

Pacific girls want governments and donors to have a stronger focus on girls' unique lived experiences in disasters:

- Pacific governments and donors can teach children how to prepare for disasters including drills in schools, by using social media and engaging with families.
- Pacific governments and donors can improve early warning systems and ensure accessible evacuation facilities.
- Donors can provide aid to Pacific communities during disasters, including food, clean water, clean clothes, medical support and sanitary aids such as care packs and menstruation packs.

“**Prepare ourselves in advance before a disaster strikes. Having to run up the hill before a tsunami when we are alerted before it strikes.**”

Recommendation from an Indigenous girl, aged 10, living in an urban area in Fiji.

Findings: Pacific girls' activism for climate justice

Young girl in Fiji. Photo: Sandra Stephens.

Pacific girls are overwhelmingly interested in being involved in climate justice activism.



72%

of surveyed girls want to be connected to climate justice groups in their region.

1. Pacific girls want to engage in climate justice activism

The report recognises that there are many young women across the region who are strong leaders and advocates for climate justice. Currently one third of surveyed Pacific girls say that they take part in climate justice activism. According to the survey, participation is much higher in Tuvalu (74%), Kiribati (51%) and for girls in the outer islands (75%).

“ We as Pacific girls, we can get into groups and make a petition on papers, signboards and together we march into public areas.”

Indigenous girl from a religious minority group, aged 14, living in an urban area in Fiji.

Girls aged 16-18 are more likely to be involved in activism, and they are mostly engaged through school activities, community education, environmental projects, and campaigning.

When asked, Pacific girls in the survey had a range of ideas for how girls could be part of the movement for climate justice:

Collective and individual actions

Overwhelmingly Pacific girls want to act collectively to encourage governments to take meaningful action for climate justice. Strategies for collective and individual action that girls want to lead and be involved in include:

- Letter writing to governments and talking to community leaders
- Participating in youth parliaments
- Striking and protesting
- Campaigning on social media
- Taking part in conservation projects such as planting days and community clean ups
- Taking part in disaster preparation and climate change education

2. Pacific girls can be supported to be climate justice activists

Pacific girls in the research identify three key enablers to help them take part in climate justice activism:

Education and awareness – Girls say that education and awareness about climate change and activism would help strengthen their engagement in activism; this could be education and awareness delivered through school, workshops, learning resources or the media.

“ I will encourage my Kiribati young girls to be aware about climate change, so we can establish [a] body that only consists of Kiribati young girls, and then we can volunteer ourselves to do anything that deals with climate action or take on climate justice.”

Indigenous girl, aged 17, living in a rural area in Kiribati.

Opportunities to engage in collective action – Girls say they want opportunities to act collectively, identifying that forming a girls’ group (separate from boys) or joining an existing climate justice group or organisation would assist them.

Community support – Girls explain that community support would help them take part in climate justice activism. Some girls say that if their families and friends were involved, they would join

in activism. Some girls also say that approval from Elders and community leaders are important for them to take part in climate justice activism.

3. Barriers to girls engaging in climate justice activism

Being a girl in the Pacific

Girls share that social and cultural norms regarding girls and their role in communities are key barriers to participating in climate justice activism. Girls say they are excluded from decision-making on disasters and feel that they cannot contribute to discussions on climate change because they are afraid or shy.

For girls that experience intersecting discrimination, such as for girls with disabilities, the barriers to having their views heard are even greater.

Lack of support and resources

Girls explain that the lack of support from family and community and lack of resources are key barriers. Girls say that some Elders, parents and community members do not support action on climate change. Their participation is also limited by financial constraints, transport, and family responsibilities.

Lack of knowledge and opportunities

Girls identify a lack of information on climate change and opportunities to participate in climate justice activism as other main barriers.

Project partners explain that the dissemination of climate change information and education is a challenge with climate information held by leaders and government agencies, while grassroots communities have limited access to simple and factual climate information.

“ Some of the barriers in engaging in climate justice activism is geographical location, since I live in a rural area, which is more than 150km away from town. Network is an issue and I live in a very conservative community, my voice as a young person living with disability is not heard and valued.”

Filo, a 14-year-old girl with a disability living in a rural area in Fiji.

Recommendations: Pacific girls' strategies for change



Traditional dancers in Fiji.
Photo: Johnny Silvercloud

The Pacific girls who worked on this report as co-researchers have developed recommendations for all actors to uphold the human rights and active participation of girls in a changing climate.

Who are these recommendations for?

- Pacific governments and donor governments
- International non-government organisations and development banks investing in and delivering programs in the Pacific
- Industries working in the Pacific
- Pacific civil society organisations and all actors in feminist and climate justice movements

How should these recommendations be implemented?

These recommendations for change must reach and benefit girls that are most at risk of climate change and its impacts. This includes girls with intersecting experiences of inequity, injustice and exclusion due to their disability, Indigeneity, race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status and/or living in rural and remote regions.

The recommendations for change must also be implemented with girls – they should be at the centre of co-designing, informing and guiding the development of law, policy and programs that are intended for them.

Protecting Pacific girls' rights in: A changing climate



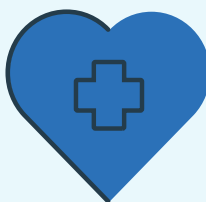
1 Pacific girls have access to well-managed, safe and climate resilient essential infrastructure

- Support community-owned and managed water justice solutions and support girl-led campaigns for water justice at local, national and regional levels.
- Support the shift to renewable, safe and affordably energy and ensure equitable access.
- Invest in communication infrastructure to increase internet connectivity, particularly in rural and remote areas.



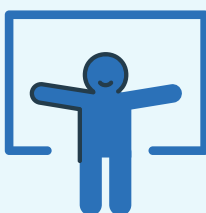
2 Pacific girls have access to quality education, including during and after climate events

- Develop a comprehensive climate-change focused curriculum embedding education on feminist climate justice, climate adaptation and disaster resilience and make it available to girls at all levels from early childhood, primary and secondary schools through to post-secondary.
- Ensure learning institutions promote health and wellbeing and can provide care and counselling to girls who have experienced trauma and anxiety from disasters and the impacts of climate change.
- Maintain girls' access to education during and after climate events by maintaining and rebuilding public infrastructure such as accessible roads, bridges and wharves. Ensure that temporary schools are safe and accessible to all girls.
- Support and enable girls who discontinue their education (due to climate change or other reasons) to re-engage in educational opportunities including formal education and vocational and life-skills training.



3 Pacific girls' rights to health and safety are protected during and after disasters

- Promote equitable access to healthcare for all girls experiencing the health impacts of climate change.
- Promote reproductive and sexual health by work with all stakeholders to address cultural and religious norms and provide rights-based, timely information, services and support to girls.
- Ensure girls have access to professional, rights-based and culturally-secure counselling services to process trauma, depression and anxiety and other mental health issues, including in the aftermath of disasters.
- Provide adequate support and protection for girls who experience gender-based violence, including (but not limited to) during and after disasters.



4 Pacific girls are supported, mentored and resourced as agents of change and first responders in climate change adaptation and disaster resilience

- Support, mentor and resource girls in their existing roles as agents of change and first responders in climate change adaptation and disaster resilience including through leadership and work opportunities in STEM, construction or other male-dominated fields. Training to work in mental health, including in the aftermath of disasters.
- Establish and resource place-based community disaster groups that are trained in gender and inclusion disaster preparedness, and that include girls aged 10-18 as representatives and decision-makers.

Protecting Pacific girls' rights in: Law and policy



1 Pacific Governments review, strengthen and enforce laws to protect forests, oceans, rivers, fresh water sources, air and land

- Governments recognise and protect land and marine environments and their biodiversity as primary sources of food and livelihoods.
- Governments develop laws and transparent enforcement for fishing, logging, mining (land and sea) and manufacturing industries that extract natural and mineral resources for profit.
- Independent institutions such as the judiciary, environment tribunals, human rights commissions, and ombudsman's office use laws and policies to provide remedy and relief from climate and environmental harm.



2 Policy-makers actively engage with Pacific girls to inform their decisions on climate change law and policy

- Create mechanisms and opportunities for girls to participate in law and policy development and decision-making processes at all levels of government.
- Governments work with NGOs, feminist movements, churches and traditional leaders to enable girls in the communities they are work in to contribute to government policy and decision-making.



3 Policy-makers collaborate across-departments to protect Pacific girls' rights in a changing climate

- In recognition that climate change intersects with all aspects of girls' lives including education, health, livelihoods, culture and environment, ministers and government departments must collaborate to implement girl-centred, whole-of-government responses across portfolios.



Protecting Pacific girls' rights in: Movement building



1 Resource and support girls to build girl-led feminist movements for climate justice in the Pacific

- Provide inclusive training, mentoring and funding to girls to become climate justice advocates.
- Resource leadership pathways that connect girls to climate justice advocacy from the community to the global level.
- Convene feminist spaces to enable girls to co-design and co-lead advocacy and solidarity actions.



2 Create inclusive spaces for Pacific girls to collectively co-learn and advocate on climate justice

- Provide inclusive education, training and resources to girls on systemic and human rights impacts of climate change.
- Integrate girls' leadership, participation and voices into all climate and development programs and community-led actions for climate change.



3 Mentor and resource Pacific girls to document their lived experiences of climate change and their climate activism

- Create opportunities for girls to document their lived experiences of climate change and their stories and strategies of climate change activism through multiple forms of expression, creative arts and Indigenous languages.
- Create opportunities for girls to document and share best practices, solutions and success stories for climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

Village near Nadi, Fiji. Photo: Unsplash.





Until we are all equal

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