

PACIFIC FORUM
WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY



KEY FINDINGS

**GENDER IN HEALTH AND CLIMATE SECURITY
VIRTUAL WORKSHOP**

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GENDER IN HEALTH AND CLIMATE SECURITY WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP SERIES PURPOSE

Since 2020, the Pacific Forum has been working with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and countries in the Indo-Pacific region on issues related to Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Pacific Forum’s work in this area has included topics like climate security, cybersecurity, maritime security, and counterterrorism. As part of these collaborative efforts, the Pacific Forum and USINDOPACOM are conducting workshops on gender in climate and health security in 2024. For this project, Pacific Forum partnered with seven countries: Fiji, Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.

WORKSHOP SERIES OBJECTIVES

1. Emphasize women’s meaningful participation within participating country defense and security sectors.
2. Increase women’s access/participation in assistance programs, resources, training, and education.
3. Increase participating country defense and security institutional understanding of how to advance women’s meaningful participation in defense/security.
4. Strengthen participating country defense and security sectors’ understanding and commitment to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.



Participating Countries

Fiji, Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea
Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu, Vietnam

Participating Defense Force Branches

Fiji

Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration

Indonesia

Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child
Protection

National Disasters Management Authority
of the BNPB

Planning Bureau of the BNPB

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea Defence Force

Philippines

Philippine Commission on Women

Thailand

Disaster Information Section, Royal Thai
Army

Disaster Relief Division, Royal Thai Army
Thai Ministry of Defense

Vietnam

Department of Food Hygiene and Nutrition,
Military Institute of Preventative Medicine

International Cooperation Division, Vietnam
Peacekeeping Department

Military Medical Department

Ministry of National Defense, Committee
for Population, Family and Children

Participating Civil Society Organizations

Fiji

The Pacific Center for Peacebuilding (PCP)
Transcend Oceania

Indonesia

Coral Triangle Center (CTC)

Women Working Group

Papua New Guinea

Advancing PNG Women Leaders Network
(APNGWLN)

Philippines

Philippine Council for Health Research and
Development (PCHRD)

Sulong Peace

Thailand

Civic Women

Women's Network of Disaster in the Deep
South of Thailand

Vanuatu

ActionAid Vanuatu

Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition

Vanuatu Young Women for Change

Vietnam

Center for Create Initiatives in Health and
Population (CCIHP)

Center for Environment and Community
Research

KEY FINDINGS

From January 30-31, 2024, the Pacific Forum, with support from the WPS Office of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), held the first event for the two-part workshop series Gender in Health and Climate Security. This virtual event brought together 45 defense and security personnel and women’s civil society organizations (CSOs) from Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Vietnam. The event was produced in partnership with the Coral Triangle in Bali, Indonesia, and offered U.S. partner defense forces and CSOs an exploratory and interactive platform to discuss gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive policies during health and climate crises and natural disasters.

Climate change has increased the frequency and severity of weather events and humanitarian crises around the globe, further drawing defense and security sectors into disaster relief and recovery responses. During climate-related extreme weather events and health crises, instances of sexual harassment, assault, exploitation, and trafficking in persons are frequently reported, with women disproportionately affected. Given the unique threats to women and the growing requirement for defense and security agencies to plan for, mitigate against, and adequately respond to such events, climate and health crises require a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) perspective (see sidebar). Yet no security/defense sector climate action or adaptation plan in the Indo-Pacific currently integrates a robust gender perspective. This event centered on the real experiences of women and expertise of women from civil

society organizations in the seven partner nations. By emphasizing local women’s leadership and knowledge in climate, environment and disaster contexts, and helping to foster relationships between them and their country’s defense and security personnel, this workshop aimed to improve the long-term effectiveness of humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR) responses for health and natural disasters in the region.

Key topics covered in the virtual workshop included the fundamentals of WPS and climate security; the gendered impacts of climate change, including those with human security and national/international security implications; women’s health during disasters; and an exploration of international law and regional frameworks related to WPS and HA/DR. Country-specific group breakout sessions enabled participants to interact and share their own contextual expertise, perspectives, and suggestions for policymaking and disaster response.

Participants learned how climate change intersects with gender to impact both human security¹ and national security, and heard how climate change has already caused significant insecurity and disruption in the daily patterns of many communities. Speakers noted that repeated shocks and stressors caused by climate change will reduce adaptive capacity and destabilize communities, and may result in fractures that erupt in conflict and violence at the national and international levels.

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¹ According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the term "human security" describes safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression, as well as protection from sudden disruptions in the patterns of daily life -- whether in homes, jobs or

communities -- that impact a person’s ability to exercise their choices safely and freely.

Partner Countries' Climate Adaptation / Action Plans

The following is a summary of climate adaptation/action plans for the United States and seven partner countries, none of which were developed specifically for defense or security application, though some contain a gender perspective.

- Fiji's National Adaptation Plan (2018) was developed in consultation with vulnerable groups including women. It references a gender- and human rights-based approach and uses related criteria for prioritizing adaptation actions.
- Indonesia's National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaption (2019) includes a section on "Gender Responsiveness, Traditional and Local Knowledge," though it only lightly addresses the unique impacts of climate change on women.
- Papua New Guinea's National Adaptation Plan 2023 (2022-2030) references gender 52 times and speaks to a "gender responsive approach." Gender responsiveness is clearly articulated in the framework and gender is included in the outputs.
- The Philippines' National Climate Change Action Plan 2011-2028 mentions "gender equality and the full and equal participation of women," though leaves full development of this to the Gender and Development framework.
- Thailand's climate National Action Plan (2017) and the Thailand Strategy 2018 – 2037 National Action Plan address climate, but the documents are not specific to defense/security agencies. While there was a participatory consultation process, the documents do not specifically mention gender.
- Vanuatu's National Climate Change Adaption Strategy (2011) does not apply to military activities and does not include a gender perspective.
- Vietnam's National Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050, does not robustly address gender. The country's "Mainstreaming Gender into the National Adaptation Plan Process" (2023) does, though it does not specifically pertain to defense and security sectors.
- The U.S. Department of the Navy Climate Action 2030 calls for the enhancement of mitigation and adaptation through collaboration, noting the need to "work with allies and international partners," though it does not mention gender or the need to consult with women. The U.S. 2023 WPS Strategy and National Action Plan, which applies to all U.S. Department of Defense activities, does offer direction for including women. Taken together, these policies offer federal guidance that reinforces the need to consult with women and women's organizations in planning for climate-related hazards, but they have not been operationalized together.

Participants explored different forms of oppression and privilege, and the need for policies and programs to address the complexities of intersectional² discrimination and unequal social power relations. These concepts are central to ensuring health and climate disaster responses do not entrench or even intensify existing gender inequities in invulnerable communities. Speakers also stressed that human insecurities underpin many national and international threats, and that understanding such human insecurities – with a gender perspective – is crucial for shoring up community stability and for any peacebuilding projects. In doing so, they examined the ways in which climate breakdown may pressurize existing socio-political cleavages, potentially increasing the likelihood of various human security, as well as national and international security threats.

Special attention was paid to the ways in which climate change is directly affecting human health and therefore national and international security. In particular, climate change is expected to increase risks of injury and death from extreme weather events, as well as increase the spread of infectious diseases, air pollution, food and water insecurity, and displacement of populations, leading to a range of adverse health outcomes including heat-related illnesses, respiratory problems, malnutrition, and mental health issues. Health deterioration among defense and security personnel can weaken military readiness. Health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic also distract governing bodies and law enforcement, and may give rise to criminal activity such as counterfeit medications and healthcare gifting and corruption, all of which can threaten national security.

² "Intersectional identity" refers to the complex and multifaceted nature of an individual's social identity, which is shaped by various factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, and other dimensions of identity. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989,

Moreover, climate breakdown has already impacted human health by deteriorating air and water quality, food security, shelter, and public services, all of which undermine women's health and human security. Crucially, by increasing women's unpaid care and domestic work burdens, climate-caused health crises can put women at greater risk of physical injury and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and may deteriorate their mental health. Men may also experience increased gendered health risks due to climate change, such as injury and death in disaster response efforts related to forest fires and flooding. Therefore, particular attention must be paid in health and climate crises responses to ensure women's and men's different health needs are considered and addressed.

Participants also discussed international laws and frameworks that address climate insecurities, gender inequities, or both, including the Humanitarian Action Compact the Sphere standards (1997) which spell out minimum standards in humanitarian response, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015). These international agreements reflect ongoing efforts to address gender equality, humanitarian crises, disaster risk reduction, and the rights of marginalized populations.

Finally, speakers noted that, given the greater role defense and security agencies are likely to play in responding to climate-related disasters, it is incumbent upon the defense and security sector to equally include women, elevate women's leadership, and mainstream gender perspectives in planning for disaster responses, including redefining which groups

intersectionality highlights how different forms of discrimination and oppression can intersect and overlap, resulting in unique experiences of privilege or marginalization for individuals who embody multiple identities.

are secure and which entities – individuals, institutions, and systems – might pose a threat. Drilling down on these specific questions is the first critical step in tailoring relief efforts and policy to fit the needs of the people affected. By involving women, their unique and valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences can strengthen climate solutions.

However, women face challenges and gaps that hinder their inclusion and influence in various levels of climate governance, from international diplomacy to local action. It is therefore critical to proactively strengthen support for women’s empowerment and leadership in climate adaptation and response initiatives.

Gender transformative solutions were raised as key in "building back better." A gender transformative approach requires seeing women as positive change makers with agency, knowledge, and determination, rather than as passive victims or beneficiaries, and seeking to change discriminatory structures and systems that underpin gender inequality. One caution offered by speakers was the need to be aware of women’s unpaid care and domestic work burdens, and to make efforts to minimize any additional burdens – financial, familial, health or otherwise – imposed on women in seeking their inclusion.

Throughout the two half-days of the virtual workshop, participants learned from a diverse range of cross-sectoral experts and practitioners, and were provided a unique space to deepen their connections and working relationships with gender, disaster, humanitarian, peacebuilding, civil service, and security sector professionals from their own country. The country-based group discussions, as well as the rich variety of case studies shared from across the Pacific and Southeast Asia, underpinned an inclusive,

impactful, and at times impassioned first event in this workshop series.

The participants will reconvene in April 2024 in Indonesia for the in-person continuation of this workshop. Building on the discussions and insights forged during the virtual workshops, one of the outputs from this engagement will be a CSO and defense co-constructed gender-responsive climate Plan of Action tool. The tool will allow defense and security institutions to develop climate and health disaster response plans that comprehensively mainstream gender, and encourage consultations with women in their communities to ensure context-specific, localized responses to harmful gender norms and roles.

This key findings document was prepared for the Pacific Forum International by Maryruth Belsey Priebe (maryruth@pacforum.org) and Tevvi Bullock (tevvi@pacforum.org) with contributions from Elena Braghieri, Astha Chadha, Caroline Wood, and Allison Lee. This report reflects the views of the organizers; it is not a consensus document.