



REPORT IN-BRIEF

**Proactive Resilience and Opportunities for Gender Equity in
Security & Sustainability (PROGRESS) in the Asia-Pacific:
The index for gendered health security amid climate change**

Cover image: Cecep Rahmat

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ABOUT THE GENDER IN HEALTH AND CLIMATE SECURITY PROJECT

This Report In-Brief is a summary of the Major Report *Gender in Civil-Military Climate Security and Disaster Response: Co-Creating Gender-Transformative Approaches Amid the Global Climate Crisis* ((English only). This report, together with the *Proactive Resilience and Opportunities for Gender Equity in Security & Sustainability (PROGRESS) in the Asia-Pacific: The index for gendered health security amid climate change* report, provide a brief overview of the *Gender in Health and Climate Security Project* ('the Project') produced by Pacific Forum International, a Honolulu-based U.S. think tank, in partnership with the US Indo-Pacific Combatant Command (USINDOPACOM) Office of Women, Peace and Security.

The Project centered around holding a series of virtual and in-person / hybrid workshops on the gender-health-climate-security nexus. These workshops brought together civil society organization (CSO) representatives, defense and security force personnel, and civil servants from seven Indo-Pacific countries: Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Vietnam. The workshops aimed to foster collaborative efforts in developing country-specific Action Plan priorities for inclusive, contextualized, and gender-transformative disaster responses. A core focus thereby was to enhance civil-military (civ-mil) mutual learning, support, engagement and transformative response co-creation across the multiple phases of disaster prevention, preparation, and management, as well as in diverse climate crisis contexts.

This Report In-Brief is a summarized version of the Major Report: *Proactive Resilience and Opportunities for Gender Equity in Security & Sustainability (PROGRESS) in the Asia-Pacific: The PROGRESS Index for gendered health security amid climate change*. Please see the Major Report for a complete list of contributors to the Gender in Health and Climate Security Project.

Disclaimer: This report in-brief reflects the views and opinions of the authors, as well as those who are directly quoted, and should not be construed as a consensus document. Neither the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command nor the Pacific Forum take an institutional position on the issues discussed herein.

Threats to Healthcare Security

Threats to healthcare security pose various challenges that compromise the integrity and functionality of health systems. Infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, exemplify the need for robust surveillance and response mechanisms. These outbreaks strain health resources, disrupt services, and highlight gaps in preparedness and resilience. Natural disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, further exacerbate these vulnerabilities by damaging infrastructure, displacing populations, and impeding access to essential health services. The convergence of these threats necessitates a comprehensive approach to health security that prioritizes preparedness, resilience, and rapid response.

Moreover, a lack of clean air, food, and water presents a chronic threat to public health, particularly in low-resource settings. Air pollution contributes to respiratory illnesses, while food and water insecurity lead to malnutrition and waterborne diseases. The loss of utilities and communication services during emergencies can paralyze health systems, underscoring the need for resilient infrastructure. Additionally, restricted access to reproductive and sexual health services, often exacerbated by sociopolitical factors, leaves women and marginalized groups particularly vulnerable. Finally, conflict and violence disrupt health services, increase injury rates, and impede humanitarian aid, requiring targeted interventions to maintain health security in unstable regions.

The Importance of Gender in Health Security

Integrating gender perspectives into health and climate policies is of critical importance. Women and men face different health risks and vulnerabilities due to biological, social, and economic factors. For instance, women's reproductive health needs and the caregiving roles they often assume make them more susceptible to certain health risks. Gender inequalities also affect access to healthcare, with women facing barriers such as limited mobility, financial constraints, and cultural norms. Addressing these disparities through gender-responsive policies is essential for effective health security.

In the Asia-Pacific region, gender-specific health and climate security threats are particularly pronounced. Gender inequality limits women's access to resources and decision-making power, increasing their vulnerability during crises. Population movements, whether voluntary or forced, disrupt traditional support systems and expose women to new health risks and gender-based violence. Additionally, vulnerable health systems in the region are often ill-prepared to handle the increasing burden of disease, especially during emergencies. Climate vulnerabilities, such as extreme weather events and resource scarcity, further strain these health systems, disproportionately affecting women who are primary caregivers and household managers. A gender-sensitive approach to policy and intervention is crucial to address these interconnected threats and promote health equity and climate resilience.

The PROGRESS Index for Gendered Health Security Amid Climate Change

The PROGRESS Index for Gendered Health Security Amid Climate Change aims to measure and address the specific health security risks faced by women in the context of climate change. This index incorporates various dimensions, such as women's wellbeing and security, healthcare access, economic equality, systemic gender equality, climate resilience, infrastructure capacity, population stability, and food security. By using comprehensive indicators and data sources, the PROGRESS Index provides a nuanced understanding of how gender and climate intersect to affect health outcomes. It serves as a valuable tool for policymakers to develop targeted interventions that promote gender equality and climate resilience.

The dimensions, indicators, and data sources section of the report outlines the framework of the PROGRESS Index for Gendered Health Security Amid Climate Change. It details how different aspects of women's health and security are measured, including personal security, reproductive autonomy, healthcare access, economic participation, and systemic gender equality. The indicators are derived from reputable sources like the World Bank and various gender equality indices. This systematic approach ensures that the data used to inform policy and program development is robust and comprehensive, enabling effective monitoring and evaluation of gender-responsive health security initiatives.

I. Women's Wellbeing and Security

Women's wellbeing and security are assessed through indicators such as the prevalence of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and social acceptance of LGBTQ people. This dimension highlights the importance of personal security and reproductive autonomy in ensuring women's overall health and safety. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that promote gender equality and protect women from violence and discrimination.

II. Women's Health Care Access

Women's healthcare access is measured by indicators like the percentage of births attended by skilled health staff, contraceptive prevalence, and prenatal care coverage. Ensuring that women have access to essential health services is crucial for their wellbeing and the health of their families. Efforts to improve healthcare access should focus on removing barriers such as financial constraints and cultural norms that limit women's ability to seek care.

III. Economic Equality

Economic equality is evaluated through indicators of labor force participation, vulnerable employment, and unemployment rates. Promoting economic opportunities for women is essential for their independence and overall health. Policies that support women's economic

participation, such as access to credit and land rights, can significantly enhance their ability to contribute to and benefit from health and climate interventions.

IV. Systemic Gender Equality

Systemic gender equality is measured using the Women, Business, and the Law Index, which assesses aspects like mobility, workplace rights, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions. Achieving systemic gender equality requires comprehensive policies that address these various aspects and promote women's rights and opportunities across all sectors of society.

V. Climate Resilience

Climate resilience is assessed through the Climate Risk Index, which considers factors such as the likelihood of natural hazards and their potential impacts. Building climate resilience involves enhancing the capacity of communities and health systems to withstand and recover from climate-related shocks. Gender-responsive strategies are crucial to ensure that women, who often bear the brunt of climate impacts, are adequately supported.

VI. Infrastructure Capacity

Infrastructure capacity is measured by indicators related to communication, transportation, and healthcare infrastructure. Ensuring that infrastructure is robust and resilient is essential for effective health and climate responses. Investments in infrastructure should consider the specific needs of women and other vulnerable groups to ensure equitable access and support during emergencies.

VII. Population Stability

Population stability is assessed through trends in urbanization and fertility. Understanding these dynamics is important for planning health and social services. Policies that support stable population growth and urbanization can help mitigate the health and social challenges associated with rapid demographic changes.

VIII. Food Security

Food security is evaluated through indicators of food insecurity and undernutrition. Ensuring that populations have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is critical for health and wellbeing. Gender-sensitive approaches are needed to address the unique food security challenges faced by women, particularly in the context of climate change.

Conclusions

Research indicates that health and climate change impacts are not gender-neutral. Women, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, face unique challenges due to their social roles, economic status, and lack of access to resources. Moreover, women's vulnerability to climate change is often exacerbated by their responsibilities in food production and water collection. However, their local knowledge and leadership can contribute significantly to resilience and adaptation strategies. The intersection of gender with other social determinants such as age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status further complicates the impacts of health and climate change, necessitating nuanced policy responses.

The Asia-Pacific region exhibits significant gender disparities in the context of health security and climate change. Yet the close interaction between women and their environments also positions women as invaluable sources of knowledge and leadership in resilience and adaptation efforts. Recognizing and harnessing this potential is crucial for developing effective climate change responses that are both inclusive and sustainable.

Policy Recommendations

To tailor gender-responsive approaches effectively, it is crucial to collect and analyze disaggregated data that reflects the different ways in which health and climate change affect diverse genders. This data should inform the design and implementation of policies and programs, ensuring they are grounded in the realities of those most impacted. It is imperative to create inclusive policy frameworks that acknowledge and address the unique needs and contributions of women in health and climate change initiatives. Such policies should aim to dismantle barriers to women's participation and leadership, ensuring that their voices and experiences inform the development and implementation of health and climate strategies. Engaging women in the planning and implementation of community-based health and climate change projects is critical for leveraging their unique perspectives and experiences. Women's involvement ensures that interventions are relevant, culturally appropriate, and more likely to be successful and sustainable.

Strengthening women's capacity through education and training is also essential to empowering them with the necessary skills to engage in climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and health security. Capacity building initiatives should focus on both technical and leadership skills, enabling women to become active agents of change in their communities. Strengthening legal frameworks is also essential to protect women from the health and socio-economic impacts of climate change. This extends to safeguarding women against increased violence and exploitation during times of crisis. Social protection measures should also be established to support women's recovery and resilience in the aftermath of climate-related events and health emergencies.

Ensuring equitable access to healthcare services, especially reproductive health services, is vital for women's health security. Climate-related emergencies often exacerbate existing inequalities in healthcare access, making it essential to integrate gender considerations into emergency response and recovery plans. Finally, economic empowerment is a key driver of ongoing gender equality. Providing women with access to credit, land rights, and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes related to climate change and health can significantly enhance their economic independence and ability to contribute to and benefit from climate and health interventions.

Implementation Strategies

The establishment of partnerships is a cornerstone for the successful implementation of gender-responsive health and climate security initiatives. By fostering collaborative relationships between governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, a multi-stakeholder approach can be developed that leverages the strengths and resources of each partner. These partnerships are instrumental in sharing knowledge, pooling resources, and exchanging best practices, which can significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of health and climate security efforts. Moreover, such collaborations can help to ensure that initiatives are well-coordinated, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential for measuring the impact and effectiveness of gender-responsive approaches. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data that reflect the multifaceted nature of gender issues in health and climate security. This data collection should be systematic and ongoing, providing valuable insights that can inform policy adjustments and program improvements. Effective monitoring and evaluation practices enable stakeholders to identify successes, learn from challenges, and make evidence-based decisions that enhance the sustainability and scalability of gender-responsive interventions.

Advocacy and awareness-raising activities play a pivotal role in garnering public support and creating a conducive environment for gender-responsive policies and practices. These efforts should aim to educate a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and the general public, about the gendered dimensions of health and climate change. Through targeted campaigns, workshops, and community dialogues, advocacy can shift perceptions, influence policy agendas, and mobilize resources towards gender equality in health and climate security. Raising awareness not only fosters a deeper understanding of the issues at hand but also empowers individuals and communities to advocate for their own health and well-being in the face of climate challenges.

In sum, a comprehensive and integrated approach that incorporates gender considerations into all aspects of policy and program development is essential to address the gendered impacts of health security and climate change effectively. By implementing gender-responsive strategies, the Indo-Pacific region can improve health outcomes, enhance community resilience, and contribute to sustainable development. These efforts are not only crucial for the immediate well-being of populations but also for the long-term prosperity and stability of the region.