

Project Information

- **Country:** Fiji and Solomon Islands
- **Project Name:** The Strengthening Community Disaster Risk Management Project in the Pacific Region (Technical Cooperation)
- **Cooperation Period:** 2010 - 2013
- **Implementing Organization:** National Disaster Management Office, etc.

1. Background and Project Summary

The Pacific Islands are vulnerable to various types of natural disasters and would be easily affected by the sea-level rise and the abnormal weather caused by climate change. In addition, the geography of the scattered islands makes it more difficult to transmit precise disaster information and deliver emergency aid in a timely manner. Thus, there has been a growing interest in and need for community-based disaster countermeasures.

This project supported strengthening national- and community-level disaster risk management to establish an effective evacuation system in case of floods in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Lessons learned from the experiences of the pilot projects, such as the effectiveness of collaboration with community-based organizations and the importance of the consideration for women's roles played during disasters, were shared with the authorities concerned for improvement in community-level disaster risk management.

2. Disaster Risk Management from the Gender Perspective

In general, women are more vulnerable to and disproportionately affected by disasters. Statistics from past disasters have shown that women are overrepresented in mortality rates. 65% of the dead and missing in Sri Lanka during the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, for example, were women. Women are more vulnerable to disasters due to factors such as their own physical capacities, limited access to information on the evacuation routes and facilities, the need to protect children and elderly in the family.

However, women are more than just victims: women can play vital roles in disseminating information on disasters through their human networks, mobilizing community members during and after disasters, etc. They also have unique knowledge and skills that are crucial when addressing or managing risks. To integrate women's knowledge and skills into disaster risk management, their participation in all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making

processes need to be ensured. It is also important to build women's capacity on disaster risk management through training and education to promote women's participation in decision making.

3. Gender-responsive Activities

The project promoted women's participation in evacuation drills and workshops to develop risk and hazard maps in pilot communities. Additionally, the following activities were implemented in cooperation with the Department of Women in Ba, Fiji.

(1) Training for women trainers

Basic knowledge on disaster risk management were imparted to women representatives from community-based women's groups so that they could conduct awareness-raising activities on disaster risk management in their communities. The training programs were targeted for women because training opportunities had rarely been given to women although they play various roles during disasters.

(2) Awareness-raising workshops in disaster risk management

Women who had participated in the training of trainers conducted awareness-raising workshops in disaster risk management in their communities. The workshops were mainly targeted for women and held in the communities where the risk of flood during a disaster was anticipated. During the workshops, participants actively took part in the discussions on the importance of raising awareness on disaster risk management and effective evacuation drills, etc.



(3) Disaster preparedness for the vulnerable

A system in which youth groups support the elderly and people with disabilities in their community during evacuations was established and incorporated into evacuation drills.

It is important to understand the relations between women and men as well as their different roles and responsibilities in a community when we design an early warning system, develop preparedness plans, etc. Disaster-resilient communities can be built through recognizing women as agents of change and incorporating women's voices into disaster risk management at all levels.