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Women's Weather Watch – Vanuatu: Invest in Women as First Responders (/index.php/en/actions/archive/549-women-s-weather-watch-vanuatu-invest-in-women-as-first-responders)

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Published: **08 May 2017** Hits: 788



by *Sian Rolls*

There is a need to ensure that humanitarian response during disasters support women-led organisations and amplify diverse women's voices, agency and decision making in disaster preparedness and women-led innovation in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and humanitarian response.

That is the message from organisations like femLINKpacific and Vanuatu Young Women for Change who have been tracking Tropical Cyclone (TC) Donna together in the past week.

“Organisations that are led by women, they have to be able to at least get access to some funding to find some kind of communication strategy to be able to communicate with everyone and to let everyone know what's happening during disaster,” recommended Anne Pakoa of Vanuatu Young Women for Change this morning.

According to Pakoa, immediate needs for communities that continue to be battered by TC Donna include sanitary kits, which include sanitary pads, clothes, including for children and underwear, and seedlings.

“We continue, as well, to call for the gender gap in participation and protection in preparedness and humanitarian response to be closed,” said Bhagwan Rolls. “There is a need to ensure that responses to disasters like TC Donna are done through a women's rights based approach.”

“As partners of the Shifting the Power Coalition, we also amplify the ongoing need for policies and humanitarian responses to be institutionalised in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and human rights commitments. Systems and processes must enable women to take up and be included in formal decision making spaces and processes at national and local levels. One of the ways in which policies can better reflect the voices of women and girls, is to engage women at the community level to support early warning systems and humanitarian preparedness and response as well as resilience and recovery, with a gendered lens and approach.”

In an interview earlier Pakoa noted with concern the damage to communications infrastructure.

“Unfortunately, we’re not able to (reach) the families out in Torba province,” she said. “That’s where the cyclone has been circulating for the last six days.”

But, from what information they had been able to gather over the weekend, the islanders are mostly without homes.

“Most of the houses are actually on the beach so people have moved out and a lot of them are actually living in the caves,” she explained.

These gaps in communications is why Pakoa is calling for more investment in community based organisations and their communications.

“It’s okay having messages from Digicel, that’s quite effective, but it’s useless when you have all the lines cut off from Torba province especially when the cyclone has been sitting circulating there for over a week now,” she explained. “In terms of disaster, the lives of the people suffer.”

“It’s... very important that the government takes into consideration and support any proposals of women’s organisations made to donors to fund community based organisations, women’s organisations that can be there, can mobilise themselves and can also engage all women across all sectors from grassroots up to professional working women.”

This is one of the reasons, according to Bhagwan Rolls, that femLINKpacific is hoping to develop a Public Emergency Broadcast strategy that builds on its Women’s Weather Watch model.

For the podcast from this morning and more, go to femLINKpacific’s Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/femlinkpacific> (<https://soundcloud.com/femlinkpacific>)

For more information, visit femLINKpacific’s website for our ongoing Women’s Weather Watch documentation and policy recommendations: <http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/> ([/index.php/en/](http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/))