



SNAPSHOT 2018

Samoa: Strengthening Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Disaster Law

Samoa, a Polynesian Pacific country consisting of four inhabited and five uninhabited islands, is highly exposed to a number of natural and human-induced hazards. 70 per cent of the population lives along the coastline, exposing them to cyclones, tsunamis and flooding.

Disasters bring with them not only a devastating human impact but have a huge economic cost as well, which can set a country back in their sustainable development. Disasters also accentuate existing gender and power inequalities and the risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) increases during and after disasters. Someone's sex or gender identity and other interrelated factors, including age, disability, sexual orientation, health status, including HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, social status, ethnicity, etc. shape the extent to which people are vulnerable to, affected by, respond to and recover from emergencies.

In 2015, Samoa was chosen as one of the nine case studies across the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America and Caribbean and Europe regions to investigate the potential increase of SGBV in the aftermath of the 2009 tsunami and 2012 Cyclone Evan, in order to inform a global report commissioned by International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) further the development of advocacy and action for enhanced response to and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in disasters. The report, *Unseen, Unheard Gender-Based Violence in Disasters Case study 2: Cutting through the web of violence: Samoa* concludes with a series of recommendations to government and community actors as well as to Samoa Red Cross Society (SRCS) to prevent, mitigate and respond to SGBV as part of disaster risk management.

Specifically, the report recommends: that a SGBV disaster response strategy should be formulated, led by the National Disaster Council and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development; that appropriate shelter design and shelter safety management be prioritized; and to ensure implementation and follow-up of gender and SGBV related content in the Disaster Management Act 2007 and the National Disaster Management Plan.

The Unseen Unheard research was integral in substantiating and progressing the 2015 International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent *Resolution 3: Sexual and gender-based violence: Joint action on prevention and response*. This Resolution reaffirms States' obligations under applicable international human rights law to prohibit acts of sexual and gender-based violence; Calls upon States to review and strengthen, if necessary, their domestic legal frameworks, to fully implement applicable international obligations related to sexual and gender-based violence, and to assess, as relevant, whether domestic procedures, policies and contingency and preparedness plans related to disasters and other emergencies in their territory ensure that adequate attention is paid to sexual and gender-based violence.

After the evidence provided in the *Unseen, Unheard Gender-Based Violence in Disasters Case study 2: Cutting through the web of violence: Samoa*, Samoa Red Cross has engaged with their public authorities to update its Standing Operating Procedures for disaster response to include services for gender-based violence and for local responders to receive relevant training.

Samoa Red Cross Society (SRCS) has a unique position as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, with a clear mandate in disaster risk management, and as a core member of Disaster Advisory Committee (DAC), established under section 6 of the Disaster & Emergency Management Act 2007. The DAC is responsible for developing policies and plans for disaster risk management, including the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP). As such, Samoa Red Cross was able to influence and provide technical assistance to ensure that the recommendations provided in the SGBV research and the standards outlined in the Minimum Standard Commitments to Gender and Diversity in Emergency Programming were translated into practice and imbedded in the NDMP.

Image: Participants at the Pacific Red Cross Joint Action for Planning and Responding to Sex and Gender Base Violence in Emergency Training hosted by SRCS on the 03-07 July 2017. Photo: Samoa Red Cross

Furthermore, Samoa Red Cross provided substantial input and support in the development of Samoa National Policy for Gender Equality, which has key focus on enhancing gender equality approaches to community resilience and enhancing institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality. The NDMP focuses on addressing underlying risk factors to development to minimizing social, environmental and economic costs of disasters, recognizing community members as first responders and ensuring resources for disaster risk management activities and capacity building are allocated at community-level. The NDMP has two sections; the first providing an all hazard framework for disaster risk management planning in Samoa, the second establishing the Disaster Response Operational Procedures to guide stakeholders in response.

The NDMP recognizes that women, young children, the elderly and people with disabilities are often the most severely affected in times of disaster, and requires that each of the 14 thematic sectors ensure integration of priority cross-cutting issues, including gender, cultural diversity, disability and human rights, in needs assessment, analysis, planning, monitoring and response. Beyond mainstreaming, the NDMP makes specific provisions to ensure dignity, access, participation and safety of all. For example, all information and communication channels should be accessible by all stakeholders as determined by a participatory processes including vulnerable communities. The health sector plan should include estimated cost of interventions above normal as well as costs for the health management of gender based violence. The Disaster Management Office is called to support the development and implementation of plans and policies that address gender and human rights issues across the disaster risk management spectrum. The NDMP requires furthering women's participation and leadership in disaster management, and calls the systematic collection and use of sex and age disaggregated data and gender analysis. In the sector plan specific to Law and Justice, it calls for inclusion in law and policy of all relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in order to ensure their meaningful engagement.

The Community Development sector specific plan, lead by Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development and supported by Samoa Red Cross among others, establishes specific commitments around SGBV. It makes commitments to ensure that 'Violence, exploitation and abuse of children and women, including GBV, are prevented and address' and that 'psychosocial support is provided, especially to vulnerable individuals, groups and their caregivers'. The sector establishes indicators to ensure strategies to support and protect the vulnerable population are developed and implemented, that affected communities are mobilized to prevent and address violence, exploitation and abuse and improve existing systems, and that all protection programmes integrate psychosocial support.

In addition to its gender and diversity mainstreaming and specific actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to SGBV, the NDMP gives specific provisions around facilitation and management of international disaster assistance, and calls for the utilization of the IFRC IDRL Guidelines and the Checklist on Law and Disaster Risk Reduction to review and strengthen the 2007 DRM Act and other disaster-related legislation, policies and procedures. The Checklist on DRR and Law provides specific recommendations on how to address gender considerations and the special needs of particularly vulnerable categories of persons in law, as well as the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, including at community level, in decision-making processes.

Samoa Red Cross has been working closely with the National Disaster Management Office to improve the evacuation centres and WaSH facilities by applying both the Sphere standards and the IFRC Minimum Standard Commitments to Gender and Diversity in Emergency Programming. At community level, Samoa Red Cross collects and updates household level information, both sex- and age-disaggregated data as well as information about the community structure, number of female headed households, people with disabilities, minorities, women's groups, village council etc.

"We need to know who is in the community we are working with, what their vulnerabilities and capacities are so that we tailor our community-based disaster risk management activities and trainings to fit within existing structures. We need to know which household might be vulnerable in a disaster so that we can mitigate risk in the preparedness phase and ensure they have access to services that can assist them, to be part of identifying actions to prevent and mitigate SGBV and to enhance their safety and resilience" says Ms Tautala Mauala, Samoa Red Cross Secretary General.

These assessments are further invaluable in times of disaster to inform response operations and support public authorities to uphold the commitments made under the NDMP.

"We have an important role to play in raising awareness and advocating on gender and diversity considerations, at community level as well as at national level and internationally. We are applying dignity, access, participation and safety considerations across all our activities, including in our training of staff and volunteers as well as our work within the communities, government agencies and other partners. It is important that SGBV is never left behind in times of disaster, it is when our communities are at their most vulnerable."

Ms Mauala recently attended and presented on the work of Samoa Red Cross on SGBV prevention, mitigation and response at the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) Leaders Meeting.

In July 2017, Samoa Red Cross hosted the first Pacific 'Joint Action for Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Emergencies' training with participants from Pacific Red Cross National Societies, IFRC as well as national stakeholders from government agencies and civil society. This course has been developed as one of the actions set out in the 2015 Resolution with the objective to support IFRC and National Societies to integrate SGBV interventions into the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The training aims to ensure that staff and volunteers respect and apply the principles of confidentiality, safety, dignity and non-discrimination as part of the 'survivor-centred' approach. An outcome of the training was the formation of a Samoan National SGBV network, involving relevant government and non-governmental Samoan agencies and chaired by Samoa Red Cross.

"It is really about ensuring that our Fundamental Principles guide all our work, trying to alleviate suffering and being mindful of the dignity of each person" says Rodney Su, Gender and Diversity focal person at Samoa Red Cross and Chair of the IFRC Pacific Gender and Diversity Network.



Image: Mainstreaming Gender and Inclusion in our Community DRM program. Photo: Samoa Red Cross

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[IFRC Gender and Diversity Preventing and responding to SGBV in disasters](#)

[IFRC Disaster Law Programme](#)

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