

# Resourcing recovery in Tonga – the Psychosocial Support and Resilience project

Tonga

SHARE

July 2, 2018

Tropical Cyclone Gita made landfall in Tonga on 12 February, causing severe damage to the main island of Tongatapu. The cyclone damaged 4,000 homes and destroyed over 800, causing the evacuation of over 4,500 people and leaving more than 80 per cent of homes in Tonga without power.

While progress has been made through the provision of humanitarian assistance, there remains an ongoing need for support as the country recovers from the category four cyclone. This was made obvious after reports from women and girls who felt unsafe in temporary shelters, particularly around bathrooms and bathing areas.

Tonga's Women and Children's Crisis Centre's (WCCC) Psychosocial Support and Resilience (PSS-R) project is a long-term recovery initiative, funded by the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) program. The PSS-R project supports activities to ensure safe, rapid and confidential access to comprehensive services such as psychosocial support for those who have experienced trauma or violence, with an emphasis on women and children.



Ms. Ofa Guttenbeil, Director of WCCC, signing the grant agreement in the presence of Laisenia Raloka, Program Officer with the Pacific Women Support Unit. Photo Credit: Pacific Women Support Unit.

Work has already commenced with site visits, assessments and the provision of psychological first aid for women and children who had had their homes either sustain massive damage or destroyed.

Since the signing of the PSS-R project grant agreement on 25 May, the WCCC has increased the size of their Mobile Counselling Team from three to five:

‘Increasing our counselling support staff enables us to work directly with the communities most affected,’ explained Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Coordinator of WCCC. ‘Listening to their stories of resilience throughout the entire cyclone and post-cyclone period has given the WCCC a wealth of information about the impact of climate change on women and children, in which we will use as a guide to develop future programs on gender and climate change.’

The WCCC continues to capture the stories of Tongan women in rural areas, and their coping strategies during the cyclone through their ‘Raising Rural Women’s Voices in Tonga post Cyclone Gita’ series, funded in partnership with UN Women, and shared through @WomenOfTonga on Twitter and the ‘[Women Of Tonga](#)’ Facebook page.

‘It is important that we give these women space to tell their stories and embrace their resilience,’ said Ms Guttenbeil-Likiliki, adding the increased engagement further strengthens their psychosocial support work. ‘We are also able to be more effective with our psychosocial support and encourage the women and children to continue the amazing work they are doing to help rebuild their communities – great examples of true leadership.’

The design of the PSS-R project was developed in consultation with key partners, including members of Tonga’s Safety and Protection Cluster. The PSS-R project will support the WCCC’s Mobile Counselling Team until 30 June 2019.