

Responding equitably in times of disaster

Republic Of The Marshall Islands Enhancing Agency

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Project Name: Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific

Project Partner: The Pacific Community (SPC) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands Community Development Division

Total Funding: \$3,941,712 (this activity is part of a larger program)

Funding timeframe: 2013-2018



El Niño water stations at Jenrok, RMI. Photo Credit: The Pacific Community. The Pacific may have the reputation for having a tropical climate, but RMI has a long history of low rain falls. During 2015–2016 the drought situation was so severe that the Governments of RMI and the United States of America declared it a disaster. Gender experts helped to ensure that the assessment and responses to the disaster took into account the needs and experiences of both men and women.

By May 2016, 21,000 people were affected by the severe drought, nearly 40 per cent of the country's population. The Government of RMI led a post-disaster needs assessment to assist with developing appropriate responses to the estimated US\$4.9 million economic loss.

SPC's Gender Statistics Adviser, Ms Kim Robertson, participated in the assessment. Ms Robertson worked with Ms Marlynn Lakabung, Ms Genna Hansen, Ms Cheryl English and Ms Rose Minor from the Marshall Islands Community Development Division in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Together, they ensured that the data collected in the assessment included qualitative and quantitative gender statistics so that the responses to the disaster considered the needs of women and men.

It was the first time such an assessment had been carried out in the North Pacific and the first assessment of an atoll country worldwide. The whole country was surveyed in just two and a half weeks.

'The amount of work I saw being done by public servants was unprecedented', says Ms Robertson. 'I was very impressed with the Community Development Division talent pool.'

The final assessment was published in February 2017 and included deliberate consideration of gender and social inclusion issues.

'While women and other social groups have been disproportionately affected by the drought of 2016, women's contribution to the household economy is substantial. Women play a critical role in recovery and resilience; post-disaster recovery resources must strive to safeguard, restore and promote the economic engagement and participation of disadvantaged groups. Women's economic recovery must be protected and accorded the same status and importance as that of men ... Recovery efforts must redress gender inequalities or, at the very least, not perpetuate unequal access to power and resources.'

As a result of the data collection and gender analysis by SPC and the Community Development team, the assessment findings were underpinned by strong, sex-disaggregated data. The data also forms a solid baseline of

gender statistics for RMI, which can be used in future programming and planning related to climate change and disaster risk management.

*This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2016 – 2017](#). All values are consistent with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).