



CASE STUDY

Putting Gender and Protection on the Agenda

By Elissa Webster

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Established in 2014, the Gender and Protection Cluster works to advocate for and safeguard Vanuatu's most vulnerable people during emergencies, as well as to strengthen the humanitarian sector's gender and protection knowledge and practices. CARE International in Vanuatu is the co-lead of the cluster, along with the Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services and Save the Children, and this role has enabled CARE to contribute to gender equality in Vanuatu in a very practical way.

Vanuatu's Gender and Protection Cluster

"We have WASH, food security, and health issues in Vanuatu, but one of the main challenges for us is how do we mainstream gender and protection in these different sectors? That is one of the greatest issues when it comes to emergency response and also building resilience," says Rothina Ilo, the coordinator of Vanuatu's Gender and Protection Cluster.

Gender equality and protection for the community's most vulnerable members during emergencies are particularly big issues in Vanuatu, which has ranked as number one on the World Risk Index for natural disasters five years in a row. Disasters are common, gender inequality is rife, and experience has proved that emergency situations leave women, children and people living with a disability more susceptible to violence and abuse – the Vanuatu Women's Centre found that reports of domestic violence increased by 300 percent in the aftermath of Cyclones Vania and Atu in 2011.

Vanuatu operates seven cluster groups of government departments and humanitarian organisations that work together to coordinate the national response in times of emergency, including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Food Security Cluster and Shelter. The Gender and Protection Cluster works within the cluster system to keep protection of the most vulnerable people in the community a priority in emergencies.



As the co-lead of Vanuatu's Gender and Protection Cluster, CARE works closely with the cluster's coordinator Rothina Ilo. © Elissa Webster/CARE

“The National Disaster Management Office is quite small so when disaster hits, it relies quite heavily on our clusters and all its partners,” explains Rothina. “Because we have all the different clusters responding during a disaster, mainstreaming gender and protection is quite a huge problem because there is a lack of coordination and awareness about this area. Disaster exacerbates this, but the Gender and Protection Cluster runs around everywhere and supports the other clusters in prioritising women, children and people with a disability in the response.”

As one of the co-leads of this cluster, CARE International in Vanuatu has played an important supporting role in the cluster. As well as providing technical advice and training, CARE has been able to act as a conduit of information between rural communities and national level decision makers through our gender and resilience work in Tafea province.

“Our partners at the community level play a huge role in identifying and working on gender and protection issues vulnerable people face,” says Rothina.

“From the national level it would be very difficult to reach out to every community, but our partners on the cluster are able to do that, and one of the greatest examples is CARE. They’ve established Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) and worked closely with the NDMO. They make sure there’s 50 percent representation of women on the CDCCCs and also very gender sensitised men so that women and men can address gender and protection locally. CARE also helps bring the information right up to the national level where it can be addressed and we can respond effectively back in the communities.”

Though the Gender and Protection Cluster still faces challenges in keeping vulnerable people at the forefront of Vanuatu’s emergency response, the dedicated group has made important progress. A comprehensive set of gender and protection key messages, checklists and guidance notes for other clusters as well as a referral system summary for gender based violence have been developed. The National Disaster Management Office now includes a Gender and Protection Cluster representative in all other cluster meetings in times of emergency and consults with the Gender and Protection Cluster on assessment and response plans. As a result, inter-cluster emergency assessment teams now receive gender and protection awareness pre-departure briefings and include female assessors to make it easier to gather information from women in communities.

“Vanuatu’s Gender and Protection Cluster is one of the most active in the Pacific,” says Hannah Tamata, CARE’s Gender and Protection Cluster representative. “We are having a real impact on the lives of women, children and people living with disabilities in times of disaster as a result of our work, and we know we can do even more to make Vanuatu’s emergency response stronger and more equal.”

Resources, including a reference card on the referral pathway for gender based violence survivors and a gender and protection issues summary and checklist for assessment teams, can be found on the NDMO website at www.ndmo.gov.vu/resources

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- Rothina Ilo, Gender and Protection Cluster coordinator

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