

**LINKING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY  
WITH  
DISASTER RESPONSE AND MANAGEMENT**

ISSUE PAPER

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## ***The Australian Civil Society Coalition for WPS***

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Australia, Asia and the Pacific region and globally.

Our vision is a world in which gender equality, and the contributions and rights of diverse women and girls, are at the forefront of transforming conflict to build peace.

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### ***Issue Papers***

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security commissioned the writing of thematically focused Issue Papers to inform the development of Australia's second National Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2nd NAP) and to advance the discussion on women, peace and security in Australia. These Issue Papers build on key themes outlined in "[Listening to Women's Voice and Making the Connections to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security.](#)"

### ***Issue Paper Contributors***

The Australian WPS Coalition thanks Fanny Berg for her contribution.

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# Linking Women, Peace and Security with Disaster Response and Management

The global context of peace and security is changing - and the Indo-Pacific region is increasingly exposed to emerging security issues and challenges linked to climate change. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper<sup>1</sup> provides a detailed account of the potential impacts of climate change on regional food and water security, mass displacement, irregular migration and violent conflict. Increasingly frequent and severe climate-related disasters are considered a fundamental threat to national and regional stability. Climate change is already forcing millions of people from their homes, and future storms, droughts, rising seas and other impacts of climate change will further exacerbate people's vulnerabilities.

Due to socially constructed roles and responsibilities, climate-related disasters have different impacts on men, women, girls and boys.<sup>2</sup> Women and children are more likely to die during disasters,<sup>3</sup> and the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights abuses tend to increase in the aftermath of disasters.<sup>4</sup> Further complicating disaster recovery, women tend to experience an economic instability often exacerbated by a lack of access to information and resources, along with discrimination in employment and land rights.<sup>5</sup> As women in rural settings often are the primary providers of water, food, and energy in the household and community, they are highly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods – thus making them particularly susceptible to natural disasters.<sup>6</sup> While the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda focuses overwhelmingly on women in armed conflict, there is a growing recognition of its applicability to natural disasters, as both are inherently gendered crises.

Sustainable peace and prosperity requires the full and equal participation of women. So far, the crucial role of women in disaster management and in building resilient communities has received less recognition than it deserves. The dominant perception of women as passive victims of disasters continues to constrain their ability to participate in disaster prevention, response and recovery as agents of change.<sup>7</sup> In light of the above considerations, this paper aims to provide recommendations on how Australia's next National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS can be responsive to natural disasters, both within Australia and overseas.

## WPS and Natural Disasters

The linkages between WPS and natural disasters are receiving increasing attention. In 2012, the UN Commission on the Status of Women adopted resolution 56/2 highlighting the need to mainstream a gender perspective into all aspects of disaster programming.<sup>8</sup> The 2015 UN global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325<sup>9</sup> addressed the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters. It urged the international community to recognise women as a force in resilience building and hence respond through inclusive strategies. As stated in the study, principles of gender equality are not limited to humanitarian assistance in conflicts, but equally important in contexts of natural disasters. An independent interim review of Australia's current NAP conducted in 2015

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper: <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

<sup>2</sup> UNISDR, 'Gender' (Accessed April 2018) <<https://www.unisdr.org/we/advocate/gender>>

<sup>3</sup> Neumayer, E. & Plumper, T. (2007). 'The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981-2002.' London School of Economics and Political Science

<sup>4</sup> Le Masson, V., Lim, S., Budimir, M., Selih Podboj, J. (2017) 'Disasters and violence against women and girls - Can disasters shake social norms and power relations?', Overseas Development Institute, Nov 2016

<sup>5</sup> UNEP, UN Women, PBSO and UNDP, 'Women and Natural Resources, Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential', 2013

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> UN Commission on the Status of Women, 'Report on the fifty-sixth session', 2012

<sup>9</sup> UN Women, 'A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325', 2015

identified climate-related disasters as an emerging issue related to WPS.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the 2017 Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on WPS<sup>11</sup> raised the possibility of including disaster response in the second NAP. Most recently, a report published by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee on climate insecurity recognised the need to build resilience in the region and empower those disproportionately affected by climate change and natural disasters.<sup>12</sup>

Gender equality and women's empowerment was an overarching theme at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016. The WHS produced agreements such as the Grand Bargain and the Agenda for Humanity – both emphasising investing in local women and women's organisations, enabling their active participation and leadership in humanitarian action, including disaster preparedness and response.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recognises that women's participation is "critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes".<sup>14</sup> Similar, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW) recently published a general recommendation on the adoption of a gender-based approach to climate change and disaster prevention and response.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, governments and donors, international organisations and non-governmental organisations came together under the 'Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies'<sup>16</sup> – a global initiative to drive change and develop accountability from the humanitarian system to address GBV from the earliest stages of a crisis.

Earlier this year, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2408 addressing the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters on the stability of Somalia.<sup>17</sup> The resolution marks the first time an explicit link is being made between instability and climate change in a UN Security Council Resolution – broadening the potential scope of the WPS agenda.

## Our Vision

The Australian WPS Coalition envisions a world in which gender equality and the contributions and rights of diverse women and girls are at the forefront of building peaceful societies. Australia's second NAP must recognise women's roles as change agents. It must also underscore the importance of ongoing engagement with civil society, particularly women's organisations, in all aspects of crisis management and capacity building. The NAP must likewise integrate an intersectional approach across all strategies and actions, recognising that women have different identities, needs and living conditions – not all women experience the same barriers.

## What does this mean for Australia's next NAP?

As a regional leader in responding to humanitarian crises, it is in Australia's national interest to continue building momentum towards a holistic and effective capacity-building approach to disaster management and climate change. The NAP is an important institutional mechanism for

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<sup>10</sup> Humanitarian Advisory Group, 'Independent Interim Review of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018', 2015

<sup>11</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security, *Listening to Women's Voices and Making the Connections to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security*, 2018

<sup>12</sup> The Senate, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, 'Implications of climate change for Australia's national security', May 2018

<sup>13</sup> UN Women, 'Global Norms and Standards: Humanitarian Action'. (Accessed June 2018) <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/global-norms-and-standards>>

<sup>14</sup> Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030: [https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 'Draft General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change', October 2017

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>

<sup>17</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2408: [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2408.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2408.pdf)

mainstreaming gender equality and women's rights across all humanitarian crises – and should thus apply to natural disasters.

## Recommendations

Reflecting on the broad suite of disasters – rapid and slow onset, and protracted crises – these recommendations promote effective and sustainable practices. Recognising the linkage between the four pillars of the WPS agenda – participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery – the recommendations aim to respond to all priority areas implicitly. For further direction, Australia could draw on other countries' NAPs that apply to situations of natural disasters.<sup>18</sup>

- The NAP must focus on strengthening women's leadership in disaster management and capacity building for climate change. Supporting women's leadership in disaster management and capacity building is an effective approach to encourage women's leadership, build resilience and reduce the impact of humanitarian crises.<sup>19</sup> Advancing women's rights and empowerment has also proved to accelerate the transition from immediate relief efforts to recovery.<sup>20</sup> Lack of funds and access to resources key barriers to women's participation in disaster mitigation and adaptation efforts.<sup>21</sup>
- Strategies and actions must support mobilisation of diverse women's local civil society organisations (CSOs) and consultation with decision-makers in disaster management and climate change initiatives. Such strategies and actions require greater investment and commitment to resourcing diverse women's local CSOs in leading disaster management and resilience to climate change. As raised in the 2017 Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue,<sup>22</sup> a robust WPS framework for Australia requires resourcing and protecting diverse and vibrant civil society spaces that allow CSOs to frequently interact with policy and decision makers as *partners*. Recognising the potential contributions of diverse women's local CSOs in assessing, understanding and meeting the needs of groups and communities at-risk in disaster-prone settings is essential to ensure inclusive and effective programming and the localisation of humanitarian action.<sup>23</sup>
- The NAP must focus on increasing awareness and understanding of gender-based violence (GBV) in disaster-affected settings, and ensure adequate resourcing of local prevention measures, both within Australia and overseas. Women's safety affects their participation and engagement in mitigation, response and adaption efforts, hence the importance of ensuring meeting their protection needs. Actions should centre around two elements – increasing awareness within organisations and communities through education and training on GBV, and adequate resourcing of local CSOs to prevent and address GBV after disasters. These are also key strategies in developing sustainable community-based protection mechanisms.<sup>24</sup>
- A key element that can enable more effective and inclusive disaster preparedness and response strategies is the collection of data disaggregated by income, sex, age or disability, for disaster-prone regions. The systematic collection and reporting of disaggregated data can help to bridge knowledge gaps about specific needs and challenges that vulnerable

<sup>18</sup> See for example Japan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000101798.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> ON THE FRONTLINE: CATALYSING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION, ActionAid International, May 2016

<sup>20</sup> World Humanitarian Summit, 2016, Women and Girls: Catalysing action to Achieve Gender Equality. High- Level Leaders' Roundtable.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security, *Listening to Women's Voices and Making the Connections to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue On Women, Peace and Security*. 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), 'GFDRR on Civil Society and Community-Driven Resilience'. 2015.

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<sup>24</sup> On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action, ActionAid International, May 2016

groups face in contexts of natural disasters.<sup>25</sup> Currently, Australia is not collecting national or regional data on disaster loss disaggregated by income, sex, age or disability.<sup>26</sup>

- Australia's second NAP must focus on increasing diverse women's participation in domestic emergency management and on strengthening the capacities of women's local service organisations to better respond to natural disasters and climate change. Australia's, domestic disaster and emergency response plans and policies lacks a gendered approach. As a result, there is a limited identification of the differential needs and capacities of men, women and gender minorities.<sup>27</sup> Further engagement is encouraged with the newly established Australian Women in Emergencies Network.<sup>28</sup>

## Want to know more?

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), 'Data Disaggregation in Support of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 & the SDGs Implementation'

<sup>26</sup> Australia: Sendai Framework Data Readiness Review Report, 2017: [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/53161\\_australiaaus.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/53161_australiaaus.pdf)

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