**A submission by Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific**

**an NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC**

**on the**

**Questionnaire**

**“Climate change and the enjoyment of child rights.”**

**The focus of our response is on the Pacific island nations which contain clubs that form part of our Federation.**

**Question 1.**

Climate change and its impact on cultural and traditional practices, security in its many forms, health and education are profound and increasing. The consequences of climate change; rising sea levels, rising air and sea temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and severe weather events all have an impact on children and their rights.

The full exercise of their rights, particularly Articles 6, 12, 19, 24, 27 and 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is not possible in a number of countries as a result of climate change.

Governments are facing complex problems and despite mitigation and adaptation being underway children’s rights in key human rights areas such as security (personal and food), access to clean water, adequate sanitation, health, freedom from violence and education are threatened.

Severe weather events linked to climate change exacerbate these issues and as governments struggle to deal with vast destruction and meets the complex needs of a diverse range of people it is easy for short term needs to be met and the longer term impact of the experiences to be given a lower priority.

**Question 2.**

The well-documented impact of Tropical Cyclone Winston on Fiji provides an example of the range of impacts.

The storm affected more than 540,000 people including 185,000 children. 53,000 lost their homes and all their possessions. 100% of crops were destroyed.27% of primary and secondary schools were damaged and 6% destroyed.17% of early childhood care and education centres were destroyed and over one third of other structures were damaged.11% of schools were being used as evacuation centres. 39% of all health care structures were damaged.

Documented impacts on children include:

* Cases of malnutrition in isolated areas due to shortages of fresh, fruit, vegetables and fish
* School attendance down by 75%. Classes stopped or badly disrupted. Relocation to other areas disrupts attendance and interaction with peers. Families unable to provide uniforms, equipment or fees.
* Access to fresh clean water disrupted by destruction of piped water supplies and contamination of water by damaged sanitation systems.
* Protection was compromised as abuse, violence and exploitation were common. Home and property invasion and robbery increased. This contributed to insecurity, instability and fear.

Current statistics are not yet finalised in many areas due to the complexity of issues and the need to prioritise administrative activity.

Other impacts include:

* Loss of security from home destruction and loss of possessions including school supplies
* Trauma from experiences
* Predicted increase in family violence as income loss and trauma impact family relationships
* Move from familiar surroundings and social support if relocated
* Disruption to education

While some impacts may be short term there is a long way to recovery as shortages of materials and skilled trades will delay recovery and a return to normalcy for many children and their families.

In other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) similar climate related problems exist.

*Solomon Islands:* rising sea temperatures and levels is increasing salinity of the soil in the Ontong Java atoll. Taro, the main food crop, is dying and local ferns, another food source, are threatened. Food security is decreasing and affecting children’s health and schooling as children are not attending as they do not have food for lunch.

The declining food source also affects village market sales and hence the economic security of families. Fresh water supplies are also under threat in this region and this affects the security of girls who are responsible for gathering water.

*Kiribati and Vanuatu:* A similar situation exists in these nations as shown by the UNICEF commissioned report “Climate change and its impacts on children in the Pacific”

by Burton, Mustelin and Urich.

*Papua New Guinea:* Sea levels have risen at a faster rate than the world average, sea and air temperatures have risen and as with other nations mentioned acidification and changing rain fall patterns are predicted to impact upon a range of issues that will affect children’s health and well-being. For example disruption the fresh water supplies and an increase in vector borne diseases and the spread of mosquitos into highland regions is likely to have deleterious effects on children’s health. Existing crops and economic income will be adversely affected by climate change with a flow on effect on children.

*Samoa:* Similar patterns of change in sea levels and coastal erosion are recorded in Samoa with similar impact on children. The loss of some low lying atolls has seen climate relocation for some families and the impact on economies has resulted in economic migration or cyclical migration to ensure economic survival. Both will impact on children’s sense of security.

Question 3.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified convention, with only the USA and Tonga refraining, so all nations are committed to this but its implementation varies enormously. Most Pacific nations have also committed to Climate Conventions, CEDAW, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Nations have implemented National Plans of Action on Climate Change where the focus has been on awareness and information raising, mapping exercises, policies for mitigation and adaptation, education and use of technology. While the impact on basic human rights is acknowledged it appears that only in response to

Disasters, that a human rights approach is evident in meeting basic needs.

Nations have responded also to the need to provide protection for children and have enacted laws against violence against women and family but these do not appear to be integrated in a response to Children’s rights. For example, while Samoa has legislation to protect children, 80% of the population believe that it is appropriate to beat a child as a means of discipline. The law may be one thing but effective implementation is another.

Fiji provides the most thorough plans for Disaster Risk Reduction and dealing with its aftermath with an effective government structure and a plan which details the need to meet basic human rights. Fiji, in its response to TCW had a system to meet basic human rights and needs with the following strategies:

* Support restoration of livelihood and self-reliance through cash grants, reconstruction assistance and provision of seeds and agricultural needs
* Lifesaving assistance to re-establish basic services such as water, food and health care as well as rapid establishment of temporary classrooms and rapid distribution of relief goods
* Provision of safety and protection to vulnerable society members and the provision of temporary shelters

These measures reflect a plan based upon human rights but the provision of services to specifically meet other needs of children appears to have been led by other agencies and civil society, perhaps because of the sheer size of the task.

There have been examples of where Pacific nations have involved populations in awareness and decision making.

For example, Samoa focussed on raising public awareness through seminars, workshops, community consultations and the establishment of a National Climate Change Awareness Day, as well as village- based discussion for the NAPA. The Solomon Islands celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Fiji’s Disaster management Plan involved consultation at all levels of government both formal and informal and sought views from a range of the population.

It has been difficult to find examples of effective monitoring apart from response and rebuilding from disaster.

**Question 4.**

(a)There needs to be an acceptance, both by law makers and the general population of the need for this to occur otherwise it would just be a nod to requirements and could be ignored in much the same way as real gender equality. This may very well provoke opposition from some quarters in some countries. An awareness and education programme to show the advantages of child rights and the impact of climate change and violent weather events upon children in a manner and language appropriate to each country may be needed.

National education curricula need to address this issue so that generational knowledge and change as well as a change in attitudes over a period of time can be achieved.

Education through village or community level meetings is also needed and this could be done through health centres, church groups or other civil organisations.

Effective and supported partnerships, including with the media, are essential.

(b)Most violence against children occurs as a result of stress within the family. In many countries in the Pacific although laws exist and increasingly are being implemented, this is still regarded as a private matter and is often supported by religious interpretations. Continuing awareness and education programmes are needed for the community and religious leaders, law makers and law enforcers. Information about the impact on children, their children and its personal and economic cost is important. The media should be utilised to influence public opinion.

(c) Intergenerational equity needs gender equity to be the backbone of such a process and this in turn must be a real component in any planning with a gender lens being applied to policies and budgeting with a real accountability being obvious. A number of countries have widespread community consultation with the opportunity for a variety to be heard. It is not possible to know how effective this was as traditional societal values would impact on this. For example, in some societies although children are loved, they are expected to be seen but not heard while in others it is not usual for females to speak at formal gatherings. While increasingly the voice of youth is being sought it is difficult to know if the whole range of older voices, other than those of traditional leaders, is being sought or heard. The use of existing networks such as religious groups and civil society organisations may be one way to ensure this.

**Question 5.**

There has been an expansion of efforts to involve the voice and energy of youth and this is possibly the most effective way to ensure continued, energetic and creative responses to adaptation and mitigation activities.

Governments such as Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands have included climate change in the official curriculum for schools and universities such as the University of the South Pacific include relevant courses in their offerings. In Fiji there is a manual, “Live and Learn Environmental Education” resource document for children aged 15-24 years.

Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands have used community consultations and existing youth organisations to canvas their views and commitment. For example in Fiji:

* All government departments consult with youth
* Existing youth groups on climate change include Youth Visioning for island living, 350 Fiji ( part of a regional organistion),Project Survival Pacific, HOPE Fiji (use music to promote climate action), Climate Change Development Community ( youth in forestry and agriculture)
* In 2015 a third Summit on Fiji National Climate Change was held with a youth focus and the theme “Building Climate Resilience through Genuine Community and Stakeholder partnership”

Regional and international involvement has been possible also. For example: youth representatives were at Rio and at Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) which provided opportunities for young journalism students to practise their craft at discussions through a focus on Climate Change Communication.

The Climate Change Adaption (CCA) programme run in the South Pacific countries of Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu is an example of an effective programme to create safe and resilient communities where children and young people contribute to management and reduction of risks associated with climate change. The Child Centred Climate Change Adaption (4CA) initiative also in the Pacific is another programme which focuses on the ability of children to challenge adult attitudes.

Local community issues that have been effective are Youth Councils, the use of music and drama to convey issues ( Solomon Islands) and the tutoring of children by older people to take positive steps to mitigation by planting mangroves and coral (PNG and Solomons) to restore damaged areas.

There are a number of key approaches that have been shown to be effective in creating and maintaining the voice of children and youth

* Establishing their voice and finding a role for them: 4CA is an example of this and this format could be adapted more widely from the village disaster committee to a national voice. Groups could be given specific tasks such as mapping areas of concern, undertaking planting initiatives or interviewing older people to understand and value traditional practices.
* Educate and inform youth to build their capacity to contribute by extensive incorporation of issues into the curriculum in conjunction with local hands on projects. Opportunities to develop leadership skills in this context to build their voice would be valuable. China has cooperated with UNICEF on an effective use of “climate camps”. Partnerships with CSOs already active in this area would be cost effective and increase local skills and initiatives.
* Increasing community voice and awareness while “protecting” the voice of children would facilitate the adoption of suggestions. Other programmes such as the White Ribbon campaign have used the idea of ambassadors to create and maintain awareness and action. Climate ambassadors, either adult or older youths who have been appropriately vetted and trained could mentor child and community groups and provide the opportunity for open and transparent sharing of ideas and activities to a common goal. The use of elder citizens could build intergenerational learning and capacity.
* Participation and communication across and between nations is vital. The use of social media could be a useful tool here and the establishment of dedicated chat areas would maintain momentum and appeal to the more media conscious younger members of a community. It could be a tool for sharing information, highlighting issues and gaining adherents. Local journalism and science students could make effective contributions here. Local communication systems such as community radio, which has already proved its value in a number of Asian countries in early warning and reporting of violent weather events, could be utilised with regular short specific sessions to highlight activities or provide adaption and mitigation possibilities. Local television stations could be positive influences.
* Setting an example is useful and the UN has much to learn here. Rarely are children’s rights specifically mentioned and children’s voices less so in official documents. While governments actively seek to change in this area the UN needs to look at its own documents and review these extensively. Article 12 of the Convention states that children have a right to participation and to be heard. This needs to be practice not just rhetoric.

**Question 6.**

It is alarming that the nations which have contributed least to damaging emissions are those that will bear the brunt of their impact and that these nations have challenges that will tax governments and people.

*Challenging and changing attitudes*

Many initiatives in the climate change, adaptation and mitigation process may challenge the status quo. For example in some countries customary ownership of land may make conservation exercises difficult by the need to gain permission. This could be an issue also if climate migration and resettlement is needed.

In some countries effective exercise of authority and power rests with men, even is female leaders are part of a village. A process which requires children and youth to exercise their voice may be challenging or even seen as wrong. This can be compounded by the voice of religious leaders who stress the dominance of men in a family and reiterate their authority to beat children. Long term attitudes such as these can be a real impediment to the prevention and elimination of children from violence.

*Access to education*

While education is free the reality is that for the most vulnerable the need for a basic fee, uniforms and supplies make it unattainable. As education is a key agent for change it may be an extra cost for governments to ensure universal education by ensuring grants to the most vulnerable children. CSOs already contribute to the costs of education and more specific partnerships may need to be established.

*Economic challenges*

The cost of major violent weather events on nations is considerable The cost of reconstruction , often having to be financed by major loans, despite aid from a variety of countries, can impact for years on development not only of infrastructure but also on social development schemes, particularly education and health.

Businesses, an essential part of recovery and development may suffer and not be as effective as partners in achieving gender equity.

Destruction of agriculture and forestry impact upon reconstruction and the ability of workers to make usual purchases so sections of the economy may falter. Crop destruction can cause an increase in prices of key essentials and a subsequent long term impact on health as well.

*Data*

An essential part of the achievement of change is the ability to measure and evaluate it and many nations, despite specific aid from UN and other agencies do not have the ability to establish reliable, appropriate and sex aggregated data (SAD) let alone measure change. This makes it difficult for their departments to effectively monitor or report on their international responsibilities. How will they gauge their progress on the SDGs? How will it be possible to move from just having the political will and the legal framework to ensuring that rhetoric has become established practice?

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