



# WHY ACTION IS URGENT



I watched an Al Jazeera documentary recently called *The Cut* about female genital mutilation (FGM) in northern Africa. At first, I felt I was watching something horrific but which was far from home and disconnected from my work on climate action in New Zealand. But then the narrator pointed out that when crops fail, as they do more and more with climate warming, there is an incentive for fathers to marry their daughters away. Suddenly, our failed vegetable plot in our flooded

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back garden in South Dunedin connected me to my sisters overseas. I am lucky that a failed garden has no bearing on my future. But in Somalia, daughters are often seen as commodities and at the age of 14-15 are married to older men in exchange for livestock. When crops fail this can happen to even younger girls. And those who have gone through FGM are “worth” substantially more livestock.

It's true that climate change affects us all, however, women and girls are impacted on two different axes. First, they experience the harm of climate change as human beings. Second, they're impacted by male violence, commodification and exploitation. With climate change this *manifests* (excuse the pun) in many different ways, from early marriage to increased domestic violence during heat waves.

Jacques Cousteau's 1956 film *The Silent World* captivated many at the time and since. In the following years, Cousteau revealed the beauty of the marine environment on big and small screens, showcasing pristine ecosystems and new discoveries. In 2017, only 61 years later, David Attenborough presented *Blue Planet II* a similarly wonderful celebration of the marine world. However, Attenborough's most important message was not one of joy, but one of deep concern.

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Both *The Silent World* and *Blue Planet II* reveal what is “under the surface” literally and figuratively. Although Cousteau was one of many advocates for environmental protection and despite numerous attempts to raise awareness since, a whole range of issues and problems have been blissfully (or actively) ignored by individuals and governing bodies. It is now apparent that we can no longer turn a blind eye to our impact on the world. It inspires most of us to ask: What can we do?

I have seen our human impact on the marine world first-hand. I have felt disheartened, cynical and thoroughly gloomy, but I am still hopeful that we can make a difference. I think that if each of us is curious, caring and makes mindful choices we can begin to restore our damage.

Kia ora and Talofa lava, my name is Suzanne but to my family and friends, I am Susana. I am the Marketing and Communications Manager for Pacific Cooperation Foundation, a non-governmental organisation which focuses on building cooperative relationships in the Pacific region around hard issues.

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partnership is effective in addressing issues such as climate change because governments cannot do it alone.

The number of natural disasters caused by climate change has increased in the Pacific region over the last few years. The governments of the Pacific nations affected received disaster response funds to assist their recovery measures. The most recent was the Government of Tonga which received US\$7 million for relief efforts following Cyclone Gita. They received also an additional US\$3.5 million from the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRAFI) based on insurance cover against tropical cyclones.

Disaster risk finance products available to governments, including contingency funds from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are currently limited to mitigation and post-disaster recovery efforts.

The Forum Economic and Finance Ministers Meeting (FEMM), held in Palau this year, supported a call by the

We recently hosted the Pacific Wave Forum with two other Pacific-based regional organisations and invited private sector representatives from all over the region to come together to discuss solutions for non-communicable diseases and climate change finance. I think having a public/private



Early marriage reduces the girls' time in school. Family pressures around food and health resources can result in women and girls being sex trafficked. Regional militarism and war result in specific abuse of females – rape, forced pregnancy and living situations without maternity care.

We know that learning to read improves girls' lives most significantly. When women and girls have that tiny bit of power, they choose to have fewer children. And as pregnancy complications are the leading cause of death globally for girls aged 15-19, according to the World Health Organisation 2017, this choice is life-saving.

I believe prioritising the well-being of women and girls worldwide is crucial in stopping catastrophic climate change. If we treat women and girls with kindness and compassion,

we will treat Earth in the same way. I believe Lierre Keith, writer, feminist and environmentalist, that the basic rights of girls are crucial to the survival of the planet. It's fair to say: *something other than the climate needs to change.*

What can we do? Get involved now! In small things like fundraising for charities such as Caritas which support girls' education, or for Richie Hardcore's programme helping men reform themselves from violence. Speak to others about the connections between our lives in New Zealand and climate impacts worldwide so people learn that climate change is a human problem, not merely the climatologists' challenge. And in harder but essential things such as making substantial changes in our attitudes and lifestyle for the good of Earth. ❄️

We need to be curious about where our purchases come from, about how they are grown or made. And curious about where our waste is going. We need to actively seek information about what to do to protect life and how to do it well.

We must care about how our actions affect the environment, both directly and indirectly.

We need to make informed decisions. Our day-to-day decisions help to shape our world and we need to be intentional – from our simple choices about what product to buy, to our harder choices such as who to vote for. We need to give our support to the people who make wise decisions on behalf of us and for the whole world.

Meeting the UN Global Goals for climate action will not be easy to achieve across the world, but the alternative

will be far more difficult, even disastrous, for all of us. I'm constantly striving to improve the environmental impact of my own life, and I'm encouraging those around me to come on board too. I know that if we keep being curious, caring and making informed choices, we will reduce the damage we do to Earth.

I am inspired by Wendell Berry's words: "I am speaking of the life of a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children; who has undertaken to cherish it and do it no damage, not because he is duty-bound, but because he loves the world and loves his children." ❄️

private sector for an economic risk assessment and recovery model for the business sector to better inform, plan and prepare business communities on loss and damage.

In the Pacific Wave Forum's session on climate change finance, there were discussions on a range of topics including: the scale of disaster risk financing available in the region; financing flows in-country post disaster; connectivity to the private sector; key barriers that limit private sector engagement; and innovative methodologies to improve private sector accessibility to disaster risk finance.

The Forum drafted recommendations to present at the Private Sector Dialogue with Forum leaders this month in Nauru. One of the recommendations is to strengthen collaboration between development partners and public/private sector stakeholders in the disaster and climate

change sectors.

As a young professional, I know that Pacific private/public sector representatives are not the only ones taking action on climate change. A youth-led movement *350 Pacific*, works across 15 Pacific Island nations, organising and facilitating workshops to educate and empower youth. They participate in UN climate negotiations.

I strongly feel that although the Pacific region knows that it is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, they are resilient. It shows in their proactive approaches – banning single-use plastic bags, challenging fossil fuel industries and drafting recommendations to be presented at high-level meetings with global leaders.

I'm passionate about climate action and encourage all people to take to heart the catchphrase that has become a mantra throughout the Pacific region: "We are not drowning. We are fighting." ❄️