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WOMEN'S MICROENTERPRISE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTS IN COMMONWEALTH SMALL ISLAND STATES

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BACKGROUND

The purpose of this project was to empower women through microenterprise to address climate change impacts for the short and longer terms in their communities in small island states. Representatives were nominated by Non-government organisations throughout women's and development networks. Applicants completed a concise questionnaire before being nominated for limited opportunities to come to Australia to participate in the Joint Conference for Society of Human Ecology and International Sustainability Scientists, and to complete a training course for Microenterprise for Women for Climate Projects.

This initiative germinated in 2004 when the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in Fiji supported climate interventions and women's empowerment for micro enterprise for Pacific Countries. However that government was soon replaced by the military and projects encountered difficulties. I was forced to stop my efforts then. In 2011, CHOGM was held in Perth Australia. As a result of the Commonwealth Peoples Forum workshop on climate and environmental care, along with the Eminent Persons Group recommendations on climate (existential threats), the Foreign Ministers of 35 Countries chaired by the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, approved 7 actions. (Eminent Persons Group, 2011)

This project combined several of those recommendations and was supported by the Commonwealth Foundation as one of only 4 projects to be partially funded in 2012. The Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC) auspices Envirobusiness to deliver **cross-cultural relationships**, provide women's empowerment and to address community based climate change projects. This dovetails into the Fisheries Projects being undertaken by CHEC. In addition, the project accepted in-kind donations of intellectual input, practical expertise, money from conference attendees, and support from Frontline (sisters of mercy, Pacifica, and church groups). Mentoring for women will continue for 3 years after their adventure in Australia. Corporate sponsorship was pledged for a later period so these women did not receive any benefit in 2013. Visa waivers were not honoured by 3 governments' officials (Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Kiribati), although free visas were approved by Australia.

In 2013, a joint conference was held by the **Society for Human Ecology and the International Sustainability Scientists in Canberra**. Women representing civil society in small island states were nominated by 52 local and international NGOs were invited to participate. The aim was to share their understandings about Climate

change and the impacts on their communities, and what on-the-ground action can be undertaken to provide safer futures. It was important that women share their stories of successes and challenges, with international scientists, civil society and practitioners, to facilitate learning about practice not just research issues and policy proposals. (Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, 2011) (Davis, 2013)

Upon return to Brisbane, women undertook a week for formal training for personal development, business planning, coping with climate through case studies from other countries and field trips, and customising local capacity building kits. The evaluation for this project revealed variable results, but evidence suggests **significant steps forward on some life-changing actions for these women, their communities and their countries.**

METHODOLOGY

In order for this project to be accepted by so many volunteers, a robust methodology was drafted, reviewed and accepted.

The following diagram illustrates how this project achieves four significant objectives underpinned by the Commonwealth Charter. (Eminent Persons Group CHOGM, 2012) These combine the need for empowerment of women, the urgency for addressing climate change, and the obligation to build resilience for vulnerable persons/ states. However, in order to achieve the optimum results, small island states were identified as highest need areas, while the eminent persons group recommended action against existential threats of climate change, and the Ramphal Commission on climate migration identified areas requiring further investigation. (Gamlen, 2010; Ramphal Commission, 2011)

Nexus of 4 policy objectives: Microfinance for women for climate projects in Small Island States



Within this focal point above, is the purpose of this initiative. Women have been proven as effective agents of change for many developing countries. (UN Women: 2012) Women's empowerment relies on economic security for the work they undertake for those causes that are most important for their communities. Microenterprise may take the shape of 16 models far beyond traditional microfinance. Women's microenterprise advances those causes in their communities and countries. In Commonwealth small island states, especially in the Tropical Eco-zone most impacted by climate change, the future is shrouded in the

unknown capability to live with climate impacts, and in some cases escape climate impacts to enable a viable future for younger generations. (Allen et al., 2012; UNU, 2011)

Therefore, in teasing out those spheres, the following is provided to focus on the practical issues and testing possible solutions for the short and longer term.

Climate Change in small island states

Climate change is impacting in a series of ways for small islands states. Variations in weather patterns means changes to droughts and fires for part of the year changing everyday lives, while extreme events like cyclones, floods, top soils loss, housing destruction, infrastructure losses (water pipes, bridges and roads) causes death, homelessness, disease and despair. (Flannery, 2012)

The “slow burn” of climate change means that incremental changes to temperatures result in crops failing and subsequently traditional food and fish supplies dwindling. Rainfall may disappear for months on end, so fresh water is at a premium with some places importing from another country in ships. In small island states, in particular coral atolls, feel the impact of rising sea levels once a month at the highest astronomical tide. This results in sea water inundation of houses and schools in towns and cities, inundation of cropping land making the chemical balance inappropriate for growing food, infiltration into water supply and sanitation infrastructure, and rendering land useless for a period or forever. Even fishing villages are impacted by diminishing stock because of changes in water temperatures, acidification, loss of fish hatcheries, changing currents, and local overfishing. Living with the slow burn of climate means changing lifestyles to adapt to the everyday challenges. (Finucane, 2009)

The extreme events multiply those slow burn impacts with some devastating effects. Some islands become inhabitable resulting in internally displaced peoples having to be cared for neighbours, relatives, churches and the government. For some countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati, migration may be the only option, while in the longer term almost all tropical communities may need to consider safer futures for their younger generations. There are many stages to the realisation from the climate refugee mind-set, to the planning for future, to actualising medium term plans for business migration or other approved safe migration systems. However, leaving one’s home and culture forever is a daunting task. A long-term plan must engender a sense of place and belonging to one’s original culture. (Yamamoto & Esteban, 2011)

In the World Risk Report, **four components for vulnerability are explored** including exposure to natural hazards, and three social vulnerabilities: susceptibility, coping, and adaptation. This project aims to address these four components in the suite of actions for these women and their communities. (UNDP, UNEP, World Bank, & World Resources Institute, 2011) (World Resources Institute, 2009) (UNU, 2011).

Women’s empowerment

Women are recognised as agents of change. Women strongly relate to community and intergenerational issues. Wellbeing and sustainability performance measures include the participation rates of women in decision-making across a spectrum. Therefore, the empowerment of women is seen as a multiplier effect for efforts made towards sustainable development. (Women for Climate Justice: 2010)

In the case of Commonwealth small island states, women’s representation was limited to the South and Central Pacific countries; because airfares were not covered in the partial funding provided by the Commonwealth Foundation, exacerbated by corporate sponsorship that was not approved in the time required.

However, the opportunity for Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia to be properly represented is an achievement in itself. Sr. Senolita Vakata from Tonga, Lolia Kamauti from Kiribati, and Olivia Bunari from Papua New Guinea provided a broad spectrum of experiences and cultural differences, in which to consider climate change actions appropriate for their own communities. During the conference, the training course and field trips they learned more from others' experiences that allowed a different reflection time on their own circumstances.

Women's Case Studies included long term models including 8 examples from Philippines for internal displacement and relocations, Marshall islands resettlement programs, Belize plan, Torres Straits systems, and a myriad of immediate actions for fresh water collection, public sanitation, infrastructure options, mosquito controls for disease management, converting kilos of waste into kilos of food (Curitiba program), soil building in pots for food production on sandy islands, and making poverty history campaigns (better education for all especially children and youth futures). (Herpen, 2012)

The training program firstly aimed to strengthen women themselves and their networks, and then to understand issues with corresponding plausible solutions, to evaluate possibilities, and then to advance a business s planning approach for enterprises with alliances, partners and funders. Although the focus was originally "micro", some projects developed way beyond that to indeed make a difference for the longer term. The **urgency of achieving immediate wellbeing projects** was understood while the **important longer term initiatives** needed nurturing and ongoing energy of mentors and partners.

The following table illustrates the scope for the formal training package.

Contents	
1.	Introduction – Why are we here? Who cares?
2.	Roundtable
3.	Women's Development: extracts from Springboard and UN Women
4.	Small Business Management – Micro enterprise
5.	What is inside and outside the scope for "Micro-finance"?
6.	Climate projects for stronger, safer communities
7.	What are women doing about this? World-wide case studies
8.	Story-telling and field trips (other women's journeys)
9.	Business Planning
	a. Personalised plans for you
	b. Micro-enterprise partners
	c. How do we know we are making a positive difference?
	d. On-going support – mentoring for 3 years – cross pollination
10.	Capacity Building Toolkits.

PRACTICE AND LESSON LEARNED

In late January 2013, representatives arrived in Brisbane. They were accommodated with a family in suburban Brisbane, where they learned about our diverse range of foods, cooking methods, Australian family culture (and humour), and the use of public transport go-cards for ferry, bus, and train trips. Training began but in a very informal way. On Saturday, 15 volunteer mentors met for lunch and many hours of discussion. On Sunday, our

climate women travelled by plane to Canberra, after sharing some warm clothes for a 7 degrees Celsius arrival. This was very different from the summertime Equator weather. A trip to the War Memorial in Canberra struck chords with the Kokoda Trail story close to the heart of Olivia, and the images of American Army annihilated on Tarawa where Lolia lives. A charity walk for raising funds for Olivia's school was borne, involving an annual trek of the Kokoda Trail to Oro Bay strengthened by discussions with War Memorial staff and consultants.

On Tuesday, student presentations were assessed by conference organisers. Our women attended to get an appreciation of the scope of latest research from Masters and Doctorate students. On Wednesday, the formal conference commenced with keynote speakers followed by themed workshops sessions. (The conference program can be accessed <http://societyforhumanecology.org/she-xix-2013-canberra-australia>. An Art Exhibition was opened depicting themes of the conference.

On Thursday, several sessions concentrated on climate impacts, climate research, international migration law, internally displaced people, local empowerment and failures in resettlement programs in the Philippines. One session dedicated to resettlement was led by lawyers and researchers. It was a shocking reality check when stories of displaced Intuits (Canada), indigenous (Asia) and islander peoples put those theories into perspective. One comment about forced migration from the floor resonates: "These are People not Fish".

On Friday, we conducted the Pacific Climate Women's Roundtable. After introductions, the country representatives gave an overview of their home, their issues and what women could do to make a difference. Their images were so powerful; as homes were gently inundated by succeeding waves of high tide encroached. Other diagrams like drinking water reserves being infiltrated by waste and diesel were exacerbated by sea rise. Sandy soils became salty and unfit for growing traditional food. Kids were cut off from district schools as bridges were torn apart in floods, so a make-shift elementary school was established and maintained on goodwill, food and flower sales. Feedback from the audience was encouraged throughout the session, where some practical ideas and systems were discussed. It was proposed that on the closing day, we seek support from the conference attendees to kick start projects for Olivia, Lolia and Senolita. 64 offers resulted.

On Saturday, people from the conference hosted each of the women as they developed lasting friendships and mentoring for the future. On Sunday, we returned to Brisbane with a warm welcome from local networks of women.

Case studies from women worldwide: (various sources and media)

- Climate health (mosquitos, heat stroke, disease, water, healthy food, contraception)
- Food, water and sanitation, energy (making changes to food crops, fisheries, hatcheries, rain water collection, waste, composting toilets, make soil in pots for food production, etc.)
- Energy, cooking, lighting, fossil fuel use (internal and external pollution)
- Mitigation of impacts (engineering infrastructure with unintended consequences)
- Adaptation (to live with nature – coping with inundation)
- Educating elders and children
- Keeping the culture during relocation/ resettlement. (Photo stories, sense of place, songs, dance, traditions, initiation, rite of passage, marriage ceremonies, birthing rituals, mid-wife roles, community role in rearing children, caring for elders, funerals services).
- Stopping the causes of climate change (class action by Maldives).

Formal training began on Monday at Griffith University's Ecocentre. The Ecocentre was a demonstration project for self-sufficiency with an operating school and conference centre for community/university. 15 test solar systems compared performance, efficiency rate and cost. Rain-water is collected and reused several times before flushing through the compost toilets. Natural ventilation and lighting is optimised. The wet-composting

toilets with worm farms were self-contained and adequate for the endless stream of children throughout school days. This model was adopted by Lolia for consideration for public toilets in Kiribati.

During this week, formal training combined with field trips with guest speakers and mentors. Field trips included visiting mansions and houses falling into the sea at Redcliff and Scarborough, north of Brisbane. The day that we inspected was foul with stormy seas gouging out red mud from the pylons and foundations of the properties. Every wave scooped more of the under carry as houses perched precariously over an open sea, propped up by feeble rusting metal struts. This provided significant impact because the houses were expensive residences on a foreshore. The land was obviously being torn away with every wave and it was not even highest astronomical tide, just stormy weather.

This contrasts with gentle high tide waves in fine weather that gently inundate schools and houses on coral atolls. However, in extreme weather with monsoon storms and cyclones, like in Tonga in February 2013, whole towns are evacuated not to return until Easter (April 2013). Such displacement is dysfunctional. Over time, with sea level rise, the towns will not be fit for human habitation, rendering families homeless with the need to decide on relocation internal to that country or resettlement in another country. New Zealand's open door policy for Pacific Islanders is under review. Australia has stricter provisions but improved systems for long term horizons for business migration through formal training and permanent residency.

On Thursday night, Frontline, Sisters of Mercy and FOSEQ arranged radio and TV programs to capture heartfelt stories of Senolita, Lolia and Olivia. This was powerful for many attendees because most had worked in the Pacific and therefore related to the loss of cultural landscapes and iconic places. That evening a range of people volunteered to continue relationships across the seas. The PowerPoint presentations keep their stories alive as U-tube and radio interviews act as social connectors.

The next few days, spelled disaster for several Pacific Countries as Cyclone Evan raged, after tropical storms had battered the area for a month. Olivia and Senolita headed home. Lolia's flights were delayed until March 2013 and she remained in Brisbane until it was safe to return home.

FUTURE ACTIONS – BUSINESS PLAN

Draft Business Plans were developed. Some evolved in crude formats while others were more detailed. But we worked in culturally appropriate ways as much as possible. They covered micro, immediate enterprises with others more long term. There was insufficient time to demonstrate advanced business planning skills or prove that training was in fact useful. However, the tools were provided, and lots of verbal examples and encouragements were shared. Techniques from one culture had not been considered in another. Some methods were quite foreign, but as we explored options we were all enlightened. More possibilities arose.

In Kiribati, Lolia's immediate projects included rain water collection and storage, and mobile public toilets (Johnny on the spot, dunnies with dignity) with residual composting and soil making in pots. Partnerships with locals means a shipping container of toilets could change the quality of many lives and return pristine beaches. Overcrowding and no work for younger people exacerbate social problems. In the longer term, youth training and relocation was essential, with a 5 year plan to replicate the nurses program for business migration to Australia, or elsewhere.

For Senolita in Tonga, immediate projects were enforced as townships were evacuated from Cyclone Evan and the aftermath. In the longer term, building community housing from waste was important. A safe, culturally appropriate centre for the aged / disabled was roughly designed. The youth skills training for self-build housing

is important for empowerment and sense of purpose. Senolita has mentors and proposed partnerships to develop those initiatives.

Olivia from Papua New Guinea wished to keep her elementary school operational. A suite of support systems include volunteer teachers, onsite teacher training, gifted children placement, enterprises to fund the operational costs for the school (vegetables and flower sales) and a charity walk on the Kokoda Trail in May 2014. In the longer term, the school must be supported by the government, which is a whole new challenge. Olivia is a tribal elder and has special influence but this might be too little too late.

Learning and meeting supportive people is only the beginning. The energy and impetus must come from these amazing women leaders back on their own land. The lessons Australians and other conference attendees learned from these Pacific Climate Women cannot be ignored, as we have a duty of care to our regional neighbours, our Commonwealth Sisters.

CONCLUSIONS

The project fulfilled the purposes and milestones required of the funding bodies. Women from Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia came to Australia and actively participated in the SHE conference. In addition, they actively developed business plans as a result of targeted training for microenterprise for climate projects, analysing case studies, and accepting mentors and partners for the future endeavours. Furthermore, all who encountered these country representatives, Olivia, Senolita and Lolita, gained a greater appreciation of their circumstances and learned from them.

The resulting outcomes of this project will take some time to realise with immediate microenterprise ventures within one year, and longer-term ventures with a minimum of 5 years. All ventures demonstrate improved quality of life and provide ethical pathways for the future. (Preston, 2001; The Australia Institute, 2008)

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Acknowledging 52 NGOs across the Pacific & Commonwealth

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