

Gender and Protection Monitoring Report | East Ambae

Data gathering period: 13-17 November 2017

SECTION 1: Gender & Protection Monitoring Report Findings 13 – 17 November 2017

This Gender and Protection Monitoring report by the Gender & Protection Cluster aims to provide timely information on emerging gender and protection issues in Ambae Island following repatriation. It aims to inform the government, organisations and actors across different clusters of specific issues affecting women and men after the eruption and provides some recommendations on how early recovery programs can be more responsive to their different needs. The process of data gathering is also aimed to give women and men a forum to express their concerns, through focus groups or storians.

Women's focus groups, East Ambae

"I can hear, see and smell the volcano at times." "[Our] safety depends on the direction of the wind."

"All the ways of living have changed. We had a sense of belonging."

– women focus group, Norosungi

"Before, life is normal and safe, we are free. Now everybody is afraid. Mothers worry for their children."

"When we saw the loud noise and saw fire [from the volcano], we felt like we just want to die."

– women focus group, Weibulu

Men's focus groups

"East Ambae [is] not safe anymore." – men focus group, Alao

"After we come back, we feel like strangers in new Ambae, only evil spirit are there."

"[We] Don't feel like doing anything. Don't know what to do." "We are shocked."

– men focus group, Norosungi

"How long will we be able to stay here?" – men focus group, Weibulu

Emotional Well-being

The sense of safety and well-being are poor; people are stressed, worried and uncertain of their immediate needs and their longer term situation. Women, girls and vulnerable groups feel and are perceived to be more at risk in this new Ambae. A total of 66% said they felt unsafe (43% very unsafe, and 23% unsafe). Urgent concerns are on the physical safety from the volcano, acid rain and ash fall, water quality, health, food shortage, low food diversity and cash. People do not know what will be the long-term effects of the 'new normal', the implications to their lives, and the ways to cope with it. Women and girls are more likely now to move in groups, unlike before; they are accompanied by husbands and bigger children to gardens because of fear of the volcano. People are concerned about persons with disability (50%), elderly (60%) and children (50%) and their high vulnerability. People also expressed concern about women (50%), particularly pregnant and lactating women, due to their mobility and the ability to source their own resources to survive and recover. As a way of coping, people have been sourcing information from radio and government officials on ways to survive in such situations. Women have been emotionally encouraging vulnerable groups such as elderly and children, women, men and youth are having storians in the community and through church, and in the longer-term, some people are securing or thinking of securing a "second home" in other areas like Santo and Port Vila.

Agriculture

Women and men are uncertain of their lives and livelihoods; they want to recover and cope but do not have information to enable them to produce and women are not allowed to sell in markets like before. A few crops are existing in the communities (e.g. certain communities have one crop available-Papaya, cucumber, nuts, etc), however the volcanic activity is severely disrupting agricultural production. Across the areas visited, no one understands acid rain and ash fall, such as how it affects their gardens and soil and what they can plant in response. They have been guessing and observing nature, replanting since repatriation. Yet repeated destruction to crops and livestock leave women and men demotivated. Many have tried without success, and fewer are currently trying. They are eager to recover (by producing and resuming market selling to rebuild purchasing power), but they cannot do it without life-saving and timely information on agriculture.

Food Security

We've been eating bananas and that's all we got. We used to eat three types of food groups but now [mostly rice, coconut milk and local nuts]. – women, Alao Ward

Diet has changed, people are reliant on the government for food supply. Food supply is lower, there is less food diversity, and lower quality food available. Women and girls are burdened with the task to cope with it at the household level. Changes in diet are pronounced in all communities – many rely on a few crops and plants for 'soup' and are eating rice left over from the evacuation, but this is not a staple food in Ambae. To cope, women mix rice with coconut milk and add local nuts, using sea water for salt. A community in Alao eats papaya everyday with rice. Due to their roles to feed the family (99% of female respondents said one of their main role is household work), women are worried about the health of children and their family. One woman, for instance, recently fell sick and the doctor told her to eat less rice and coconut milk – but this is all they currently have access to. Anecdotal data show that women are more likely than men to take direct action to fill the gap and find ways to improve the quantity, quality and diversity of food as food preparation is a traditional gender role in East Ambae. Across areas, women were more fluent and more frequently described the ways they coped with food to feed the family. For instance, they said they have to be creative with cooking, find ways to exchange goods by sharing food with neighbours. Family outside Ambae have also sent food and money. As a new way of exchanging goods in lieu of the market, women "ask" for fruits and produce from each other, and give small amounts as exchange (20/50/100 vatu). They also continue to tend to their small/home gardens to secure food for the family.

Household Roles

"Most of the time, men don't help women – but now they work together and make decisions." – Norosungi ward

Gender roles seem to have shifted since the crisis: men and boys now provide household work and women appreciate the additional labour. 83% of people said their roles have changed in the household and in livelihoods. Discussions with women and men consistently revealed that men and boys are taking more household work now that they spend lesser time in the garden. Women welcome this shift in behaviour, and some noted that families and couples are now working and supporting each other. However, a smaller portion shared that there is more work now after repatriation in the household as an effect of the crisis; and some children have not returned to school.

Community

Community “The sound of community is gone.”

Women have their own collective community work that benefits the household and larger community: 20 vatu groups (selling of cooked food in-community, also a savings group), market stalls, church and savings groups. Men and women have traditional groups too, which provides a mechanism for communal and mutual labour for gardens, but these groups have not functioned since repatriation. However, other forms of mutual labour are still present such as for fencing animals and replanting, but these are not applied to market production. Some said that there is now a focus on household survival rather than community cooperation, but others said there is a higher turnout than before for community volunteer activities (e.g. road work) where benefit is mutual. Decision making in each community varies but is centered on the church and Nakamal Council for community issues. Where there are functioning women councils, there is more space for women to decide over matters that affect their lives. However as traditional and church leaders, men have more power over the community and its sectors, and so make decisions for the whole community, whereas women tend to make decisions on a particular matter. In one community in Weibulu, for instance, women convene as a council yet the pastor, male is still present “to guide/support” women in the discussions.

Support received during crisis

Support for needs (food, non-food items and WASH) received were mostly received in evacuation areas (73%) and less likely after repatriation. Much of the current food supply are from evacuation areas and what is left from their home gardens. Home-based evacuees though were not able to receive such support and so have lesser access to food after repatriation.

Violence

There are varied perceptions on the occurrence of violence after repatriation. Some say it decreased as couples are helping each other more. Women on the other hand are more likely to say that it still exists, just like before; and they anticipate more as food supply dwindle and cause more tension among couples. A grave story of violence against women was shared in one of the communities where a woman was unconscious after being hit by the husband before evacuation. In the same data gathering week, Vanuatu Women’s Centre (VWC) received the first case of VAW. The survey reported only 13% noticed an increase in domestic violence (in all forms). Chief (70%) and police (53%) are the most mentioned in reporting domestic violence cases, with 20% saying family and relatives and 10% pastors. Similarly, only 10% said an increase in child abuse has been observed after repatriation (in physical and emotional forms). 60% said they would go to the chief, and 43% said they would go to police, the VWC office in Saratamata SC or the CAVAW to respond to safety and security concerns. There are no safe shelters for people experiencing violence apart from VWC.

Income and Livelihoods

“Tired and confused” - men focus group, Alao

“They [government] then went on to say that we just need a kick-start and then we can take it from there but currently they just do not know where to start.” – men focus group, Weibulu

Comments from the survey

“We are working but slowly.”

“Cannot earn money back as money was spent during evacuation.”

“Spirit to work has gone down.”

“No money flows no more businesses garden destroyed.”

Gender trends in livelihood are apparent in the communities affected. Gardens for production are the work of both women and men (vegetables, kopra, kava, root crops), while selling of most produce in markets is most likely to be a woman’s role while some do it with men, except for kava – only men and boys process and sell kava. Daily labour for livestock is said to be both women and men’s work while selling is most likely to be a man’s role (cattle, pigs). In the survey however, results showed equal numbers: both women and men make decisions. Probing questions in qualitative methods showed that men are more likely have more power in deciding over these assets, as they are known to be household heads; yet there are couples who are able to equally decide on such matters. Women though have articulated more varied ways of earning income apart from these before evacuation, which provided for the needs of the household (small stores, 20 vatu group, baking and selling bread, weaving mats and bags, among others). After repatriation, most of these were lost (livestock and crops) and only kava can be sold now on a daily basis, which bring in money to the household. Although kava in community have been destroyed, men buy green kava from South Ambae, process and sell these. Kopra is available but the buyer was said to refuse to buy from Ambae because of effects of ash fall. Women and men see market participation and resumption as the only way to meet daily basic needs and increase purchasing power. There were consistent questions about why the government advised them to stop and when the it can resume.

The survey results show that gardening is the main livelihood activity (43%) followed by livestock (17%) and small business (13%). 57% said they have some effort to revive or recover these such as to replant, or women re-focusing on weaving, however they note that recovery is slow and gradual. One respondent said it will require sufficient information how to cope with the changes. Women are focusing on weaving mats and bags as it is the only product they can produce and are allowed to sell in the community and Saratamata market. Some are able to sell taro in the market. One woman shared that she sent her chickens to Santo before evacuation. Another respondent noted that borrowing money is an option for those with income, but with a 10% interest rate (50 vt per week for a 500 vt loan).

Savings

For now, families are using what is left of their savings or are stretching what is remaining from their cash on hand. Savings have enabled families to survive since evacuation and for some, until now in repatriation. Women from Alao shared that they were able to share up to 30,000 vatu before evacuating) which provided them with needs during evacuation. Savings groups in communities are most likely to be managed by women. Loans provide an alternative source in crisis but the usual sources (NVB, church and Avick) are not as accessible now.

Access to Health and Reproductive Health

Access to health has significantly decreased from 90% of the respondents saying it was easy to access health services before evacuation, to 53% after repatriation. The decrease is largely due to the lack of money for transportation and doctor’s fees. Health services do exist in communities, but for better services, health centres are in Saratamata and Lolowai. People are unsure of the health impacts of acid rain and ash falls. Women said they cannot afford the transportation to access these hospitals after repatriation. To cope, women said they only take family members to doctors when they are “very sick” and many are resorting to traditional medicine. Some have to walk over an hour to reach the services, and some have sent the elderly, persons with disability and sick to their families in Vila to access better services. Reports of diarrhea are prevalent, especially among children in areas visited. Common health

effects of acid rain and ash fall are skin itches, swollen face and red eyes. Older and sick people with high blood pressure and sugar are also considered to be more susceptible to sickness.

Access to Safe Water

Water collection is largely a woman's role (66%) as it is tied to her gender role to provide household labour of feeding, washing and cleaning. However, a few women (23%) said fathers collect water as well. After evacuation, 43% said that this role has changed because of the increased burden of the task due to the impacts of the eruption (e.g. more household work, changed source, need to check water quality), and because men and boys are helping mothers now, unlike before. For female single headed household and widows, such tasks have not changed as they rely on themselves. Women as water collectors were not perceived to be safe while collecting water before evacuation (43%) and this has worsened after repatriation, with only 23% saying they are safe now.

Water quality is an issue, with people concerned of acid rain and ash fall. To cope, men and boys are now supporting in water collection, women boil and filter water with cloth for cooking and drinking, women wash vegetables more times, and people avoid acid rain. In Alao, they now source water from a hand pump with high salinity for drinking, cooking and cleaning, instead of wells, which are contaminated by ash. People, especially women as water collectors, are nervous of the impacts of decreased water quantity in the dry season.

Children and Youth

Children, both boys and girls, were said to not have easily returned to school after repatriation (56%). Most reasons cited were due to absent teachers as some took time to return to Ambae, while others said that children are afraid to go to school, many can no longer afford school fees after repatriation or have no food for school. There are reports of children staying at home with mothers (Alao observation). A visible effect observed by a teacher is how children count the number of eruptions in class and how children are now afraid of rain and taking a bath. While there have been no reports of unaccompanied children, one noted that there are more parents who left their children with the grandmother and are now working outside Ambae.

There is pressure for younger women and men to find jobs and gain income to help families outside Ambae. Although there are no reports that they are flocking to cities for work, if they do, young girls have access to lower salaried-jobs such as babysitting or house help while boys take on work for kopra and kava processing, and other odd jobs like fencing. There was a story from a local teacher (that needs to be validated) of a young woman being arranged to marry with another young man from another island as a way to "connect families" and establish second homes.

"Maybe after years, when the island becomes used to volcano like Embrem and Tanna, we will plant again." – Woman from Norosungi

SECTION 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

Insights and Recommendations

- Ensure gender and protection lens in programming of organisations responding in Ambae that translate to both targeted and mainstreaming actions; and enhance capacity in gender and protection analysis and capacity to implement of frontline staff (Gender & Protection Cluster)

SECTION 3: NEEDS IDENTIFIED FROM COMMUNITIES

Needs identified from communities:

- Urgent life-saving information on the volcano (ash fall and acid rain health and livelihood impacts, alert levels and preparedness measures), agriculture (how to cope with damaged crops and lost livestock), and water treatment.
- Debriefing and counselling are essential as mental health is an urgent issue and frustration is high.
- Government accountability over lost livestock during evacuation.
- Evacuation areas need to be built in Pentecost.
- Organisations responding need more coordination (assessments repetitive); must provide information rather than just ask questions.
- Identify a mechanism/space for women and men's voice to be raised, foster participation and increased access, and allow for close coordination with communities and local leaders – there has been a lack of space to ask and communicate concerns on community issues from volcano impacts.
- Information on government response and early recovery support.
- Government subsidies for school fees until families are able to recover.
- Access to protective fears and materials against ash fall and acid rain.