

# Reshaping reality: climate change's impact on Pasifika girls' lives

by Pelenise Alofa and Conor Costello

20 February 2025



Young girl celebrates International Women's Day in Suva, Fiji

Photo Credit: [Unsplash / Vijesh Datt](#)

Nervous anticipation about new teachers, subjects and challenges to come. Checking how much growing has happened over the summer, and whether shoes and uniforms are still OK.

Right around Australia and the Pacific region, students and their families have been occupied by the return to school rituals over the past few weeks. The new year of learning brings new horizons of challenge and opportunity, cushioned by the mundane everyday rituals of schooling.

But for more and more students, particularly girls and young women, the school year across the Pacific will be disrupted or incomplete due to the growing effects of climate change in the region.

50% of girls and young women from six Pacific countries surveyed as part of recent research reported missing out on school due to climate events, with 74% of surveyed girls in Tuvalu having this experience.

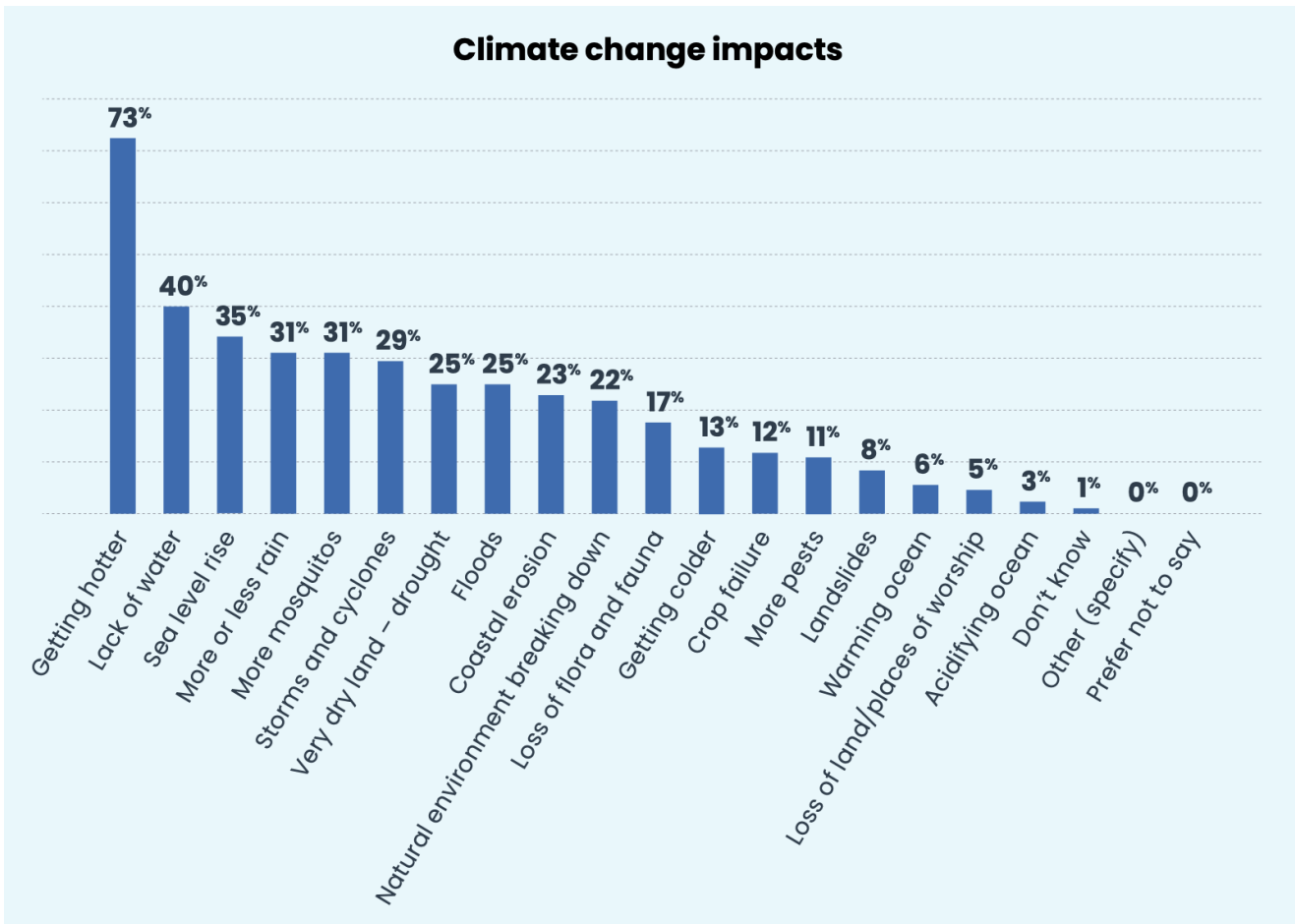
The [Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate research](#), from Plan International Australia in partnership with Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN), reveals the extent to which Pasifika girls and young women are experiencing climate change. Carried out by Edith Cowan University and the Australian National University, the research took place over a period of four years, from 2020-2024, utilising [the Feminist Participatory Action Research \(FPAR\) methodology](#). It was co-designed with girls in Kiribati and Fiji and included a survey of 319 girls aged 10-18 years in six Pacific countries — Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu.

The results paint a clear picture of how climate change poses a direct threat to the health and wellbeing of Pacific girls, creating urgent gaps in basic needs and fundamentally changing the course of their lives and their families' lives.

The most common impact of climate change that girls reported experiencing was

“getting hotter”, with lack of water, sea level rise and changes to rain fall being among the other top impacts (Figure 1). The reported impacts of climate change varied by place, with girls in atoll nations, like Tuvalu, most likely to report the broadest range of impacts.

**Figure 1: Survey responses on the impacts of climate change experienced by girls**



Source: *Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate*.

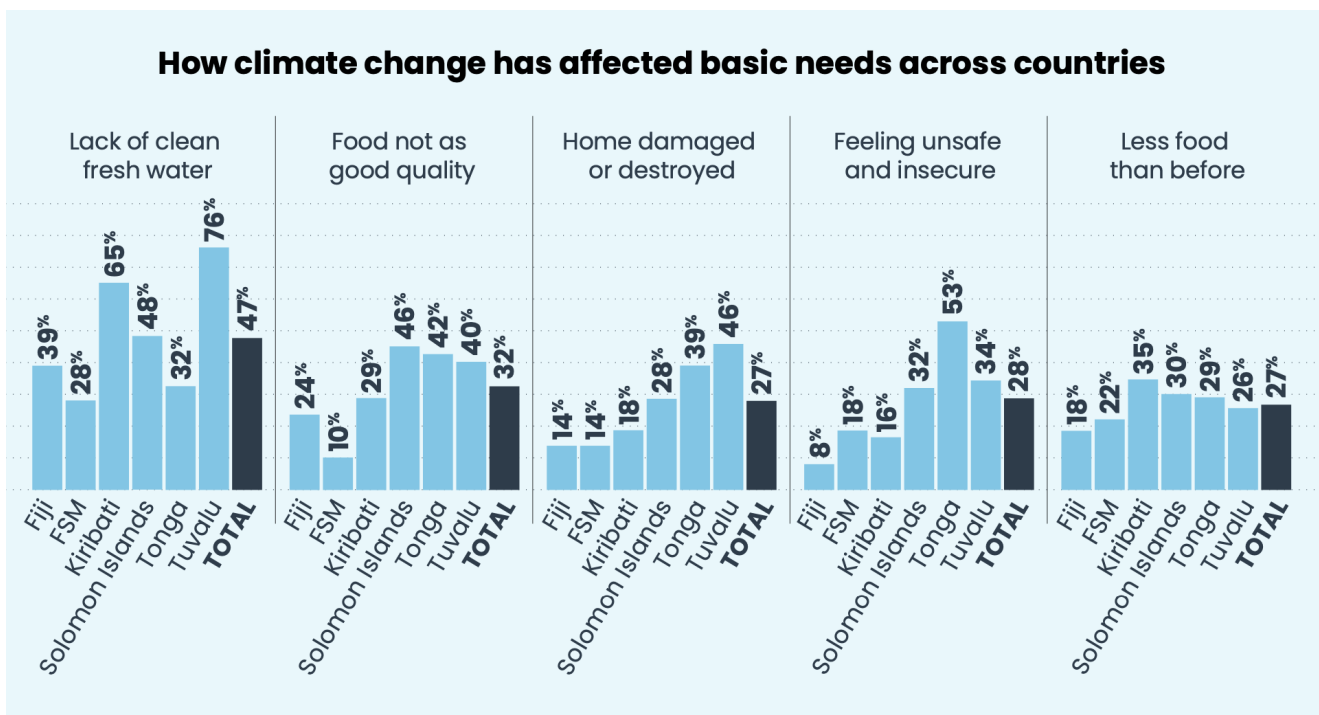
Just two of the 319 girls surveyed said that climate change has not affected their health and wellbeing. Almost half of the girls surveyed reported experiencing a lack of clean and safe water. Already a scarce resource in atoll nations, sea level rise and changes in rainfall patterns are putting water resources further at risk. The lack of clean fresh water was the most common climate impact on girls’ needs reported in the study, with girls in Tuvalu and Kiribati, and those in outer islands, experiencing this most acutely.

*We can't grow food around the house due to poor water quality.*  
 — Research co-design workshop participants

32% of girls said that climate change is affecting the quality of their food. Climate events such as cyclones and storms, along with coastal erosion and flooding, reduce the availability of fresh water, contribute to the salination of soil and reduce the amount of fertile land. As a result, it is harder to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, and communities around the Pacific are becoming more dependent on often unhealthy canned food products.

27% of girls said that there was less food available for them overall and an alarming 19% reported feeling hungry due to the impact of climate change on the availability of food, with girls in Tonga and Kiribati, and those in rural areas, more likely to be experiencing hunger.

**Figure 2: Survey responses to whether climate change has affected girls’ basic needs, broken down by country (top five impacts)**



Source *Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate*.

The *Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate* report details these and other realities of how climate change is affecting girls’ lives, their basic needs, safety and security, health and wellbeing, education, leisure and livelihoods.

Importantly, the research also explored what action Pacific girls propose on climate justice and how they want to be involved in driving that action.

In the Pacific, women and girls are often first responders in their families and communities — with responsibility for providing food, water and other necessities. It’s no different when it comes to responding to climate change. Despite being at the frontline of climate change impacts, girls in the Pacific are often excluded from

crucial decision-making and climate response efforts.

The girls who took part in our research were clear on their priorities for action to address climate change. Their key message is that governments must centre girls and their diverse lived experience in climate policy. Their priorities for action are: preventing climate change through reduced carbon pollution, increased renewable energy, and protection of the natural environment; supporting girls to build resilience against climate change, including with adaptation skills, a voice in climate policy and support for basic needs; and a stronger focus on girls in disasters, including improved disaster education, early warning systems and safe and accessible evacuation facilities.

Pacific girls are eager to participate in the fight against climate change, driven by their deep desire to protect their communities and secure their futures.

The research reveals that girls are not just victims of climate change; they are powerful advocates who want their voices heard in shaping climate policies and actions. 34% of the surveyed girls already participate in climate justice activism; 57% want their voices to shape climate policy and action; and 66% of the girls surveyed in the research want education on how to adapt to climate change.

Taking the lead from Pacific girls who took part in the research, Plan International Australia has [called for an increased focus on girls](#) in Australia's climate and development assistance in the Pacific.

The full findings of the *Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate* research are [available here](#).

### **Disclosures:**

KiriCAN has previously received funding from the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Plan International Australia receives grants under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

### **Author/s:**

#### **Pelenise Alofa**

Pelenise Alofa is the co-founder of Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN).

#### **Conor Costello**

Conor Costello is the Associate Director, Policy & Advocacy at Plan International Australia. She previously worked at CBM Australia and Oxfam.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/reshaping-reality-climate-changes-impact-on-pasifika-girls-lives-20250220/>