* **El Nino Drought (2015-2016)**
* **Earthquake Highlands (February 2018)**

# Gender in Crisis

**Introduction**:

Papua New Guinea is a high-risk disaster country experiencing a variety of disasters, such as earthquakes, volcano eruptions, drought, flooding, disease outbreaks and civil unrest. Most recently, CARE Papua New Guinea responded to the El Nino drought impact and providing support to people affected by the February 2018 Earthquake in the Highlands. In both cases, the crisis affected women, men, boys and girls differently, with an added layer of complexity because of differences between communities in PNG. The most notably gender differences and issues are related to women’s participation in community decision making about humanitarian aid, different mobility between women and men, and safety and security issues, especially for women and girls, related to displacement in host communities.

**Gender roles and relations*:***

Traditionally Papua New Guinea has quite rigid gender roles where women take on caring responsibilities and lighter agriculture work and men do the heavier work. These traditional gender roles mostly stay in place with the affected population however occasional changes are reported. For example, male community leaders of displaced communities might have difficulty finding their place in the host community and finding their voice, resulting in a change of sense of identity and purpose. Rebuilding of houses is done along lines of traditional gender roles with women collecting sago leaves for rebuilding while men do the building work. Women re-sow gardens. Middle aged children are reporting taking care of their younger siblings while women tend the gardens, while in non-disaster time and in their home villages women would feel more comfortable taking the young children with them.

**Participation and decision making:**

Traditionally community leaders make decisions, and they will consult their community in line with existing structures about new information and topics. With CARE’s encouragement there are reports of women involved in decision making. Most provincial and national disaster office staff is male. Communities structures are based on households and it is the ‘head of the household’ who is involved in decision making. Women do participate in a range of activities such as trainings and receiving aid if this targets the wider communittee.

**Education:**

Generally, girls stop school earlier as early marriage is prevalent both before the emergency and after. CARE staff did not report an increase in early marriage but this hasn’t been formally assessed. Displaced children are more likely to stay at home due to safety concerns about staying in new community. Hunger issues affects school attendance of both boys and girls, and schools are sometimes fully closed because communities go hungry. One school reported the intention to close as the teacher was leaving due to lack of food and services.

**Livelihoods:**

Women and men both generally did not have a cash income and displaced families got small plots of land from host community. Displaced families have to forage for food, often leaving their children behind with extended family in the IDP community with less supervision. Men are generally responsible for rebuilding and their increased workload related to this might result in less time to forage for food and them, and their family, going hungry.

**Gender based violence and protection:**

Verbal disagreements were observed by CARE but no reports of increase in community or family violence at CARE sites (not formal assessment done though), though in other affected areas NGOs had to cease activities due to insecurity. Children are particularly vulnerable with the parents’ increased workload they are often asked to assist more in household duties such as water fetching, which tends to impact girls more than boys, and they have to walk further for it.

**Groups at risk:**

Generally, the earthquake affected community is deeply traumatized by events of losing homes, gardens, and family members. Particular vulnerable groups such as widows, children, second wives and people with disabilities are often less involved in community activities and have other people making decisions for them. People taking on different roles impact their sense of identity and self worth. For example, previously older men would assist with agriculture, while now they might be required to care for children so the parents can rebuild and rework the gardens for extended period of time.

**Mobility:**

Right after the earthquake whole communities moved to safer ground and temporarily settled at host communities sites where there was access to aid (closer to or at working airstrips). Men especially, sometimes accompanied by their wives, go back intermittently to rebuild but cannot move back yet permanently (8 after earthquake). At the host sites, people move around freely during the day around common more public spaces. At night movement is more restricted due to security issues and little availability of light. Women go to latrines at night in groups, or wait until morning. Mobility is especially difficult for people with a physical disability who have to get used to a new area and unfamiliar ground.

**Access to aid:**

Aid is organised through head of household system, which recognized both male heads of households and female heads of households (though female headed households are a minority). Sometimes children get send to pick up relief supplies. People with disabilities and the elderly would not pick up aid directly, but would rely on benefitting from the aid distributed to their households a whole. Reports indicate community leaders sometimes keep more aid for themselves instead to distribute everything fairly.

**Capacities:**

Children are kept busy and happy with different sports activities. Host communities share food and clothes, especially initially in first stages. Recent assessments and anecdotal evidence though notes food is running out. Some people would have had cash savings, mostly controlled by men as they are primary responsible for cash crops and cash income. But cash is limited as the affected communities are so remote.