Resourcing Pacific climate justice

with the urgency and abundance it deserves

BY ROCHELLE JONES

The Pacific region is one of the most vulnerable to climate change, experiencing significant economic losses, erosion of identity and Indigenous knowledge and, in many cases, loss of entire islands.

With COP31[1] just around the corner (hosted by Türkiye from 9–20 November), Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC) have launched 'Witness Stand 2.0'. Building on their original Witness Stand project, this small, youth-led organisation has been collecting testimonies from communities across the Pacific and beyond to provide undeniable evidence of climate harm. Thirty-one years since the first COP took place in Berlin, the evidence pile has been growing.

Pacific Islands have generally small-scale economies, with dependence on fishing, tourism, and remittances. Every sector and industry in the region is now at critical risk from climate change – but it is also a region that has and continues to fight the hardest for the survival of its people.

These voices are necessarily loud.

For instance, it was the Pacific region, through the leadership of the Republic of Marshall Islands, that led the call for '1.5 to stay alive', which was given wider recognition within the Paris Agreement to keep global temperatures well below 2 degrees.

Tuvalu has declared itself the first digital nation as it is threatened with displacement due to climate change. By recreating its land, archiving its culture and digitising its government, Tuvalu's strategy is to "exist as a nation even after its land is no more". You could be forgiven for thinking this is a science fiction story, but incredibly, this is reality.

Climate Justice is a Feminist Issue

The interlinkages between feminist and environmental movements are long-standing but complex. The term ecofeminism, for example, highlights the relationship between women and nature, and how both have been (and continue to be) subordinated to and controlled by patriarchal and capitalist systems. But while the Western label 'ecofeminism' dates back to the 1970s,[2] the practice itself has existed as land and ocean stewardship and sovereignty by Indigenous communities around the world for millennia and contemporary ecofeminism has evolved to become more intersectional. In the Pacific, the term 'ocean feminisms' is an emerging framing. Now, with climate change providing more and more evidence, it is widely accepted by feminist and women's rights movements,[3] alongside Pacific governments and the United Nations, that climate change disproportionately impacts women, and that women are key to climate justice efforts.

The climate crisis demands the same systemic changes that feminists have been calling for. They are not separate issues, but directly linked to the same systems - patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism.

Across the Pacific, women and gender diverse people are on the frontlines doing the work to confront and address both the drivers and the consequences of climate change. They work at multiple levels: With their families and communities dealing with salinisation of water sources, destruction of farming land and severe weather such as cyclones; as part of feminist and women's rights movements collaborating and strategising together; and leading advocacy efforts on the international stage. For instance, PISFCC, the Government of Vanuatu, and World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ) led the push for the now well-known International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion, which was delivered as a landmark victory for climate justice in July 2025: "States have legal obligations under international climate and environmental treaties, as well as under human rights and customary international law, to prevent and mitigate climate-related harm."[4] Seven of the thirteen delegations were led or represented by women, and three countries had all-female teams.[5]

The Pacific Feminist Fund (PFF) understands that climate change is not gender-neutral. In the Pacific, women are most often the custodians of culture, food and water security. As a regional Pacific-led feminist fund supporting women's and feminist groups across the Pacific that are often overlooked by conventional funders, PFF has seen both sides: While the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect women, gender minorities, Indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups, these groups remain frustratingly overlooked when it comes to funding.

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[1] Sitting under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Conference of the Parties (COP) is a critical global climate summit where the future of our living planet has been discussed, debated and decided upon annually since 1995.
[2] First introduced by French author Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death). https://www.francoise-d-eaubonne.org/en/2022-feminism-or-death/
[3] See for example, https://divafiji.org/join-us-and-support-the-pacific-feminist-defending-the-living-planet-campaign/ ; https://iwda.org.au/gender-and-climate-justice-why-the-climate-crisis-demands-systemic-change/ ; and https://theecologist.org/2021/dec/10/racial-capitalist-climate-patriarchy
[4] https://www.minterellison.com/articles/what-the-icj-advisory-opinion-on-climate-change-means-for-australian-directors
[5] Naidu, Kavita. 2026. Report commissioned by Pacific Feminist Fund: Engagement Strategy on Climate and Gender in occupied territories of Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesia), Kanaky (New Caledonia), West Papua, Guåhan (Guam) and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Unlocking more resources for Pacific feminist and women-led climate work

Feminist/women's rights movements and climate justice movements in the Pacific often operate in silos: engaging separately in 'feminist' or 'climate/environment' spaces. Pacific feminist and women-led climate work is critically underfunded, and where funding is available, it is directed to only a few women's rights organisations in the region. Less than one percent of philanthropic climate funding reaches women-led environment and resource rights work, and less than one percent of all philanthropic funding is available globally for gender and the environment.

PFF's climate and environmental justice (CEJ) grantmaking strategy was born out of this reality. The strategy is synergistic: Influencing and disrupting the funding ecosystem to increase the flow of flexible resources to women, girls and gender non-conforming people working on climate and environmental justice in the region; and providing direct grantmaking and accompaniment to support and amplify the work of these groups and movements.

PFF wanted to ensure they could support groups already leading critical CEJ work in the region and received a three-year grant in 2025 to fund five CEJ grantee partners. PISFCC was identified as a partner, alongside the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN), DIVA for Equality, the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) and DAWN. These organisations are already deeply engaged in advocacy at regional and global climate and environment spaces, such as COP31, and are grounded in and informed by local communities and their members across the Pacific.

For example, the 17 Urgent Demands of Pacific Feminists Defending the Living Planet outline a clear roadmap for ecological, economic, gender and social justice, led by Pacific feminist movements through DIVA for Equality and partners. Initially developed in 2025 but with origins in 2014 through the feminist movement, these demands are in use from local to global, and
have influenced the drawdown of the UNFCCC Belém Gender Action Plan into the Pacific Pact for Gender and Climate Action at the 55th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting in Palau. The Demands will be used as an advocacy tool at the first Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction Conference in Türkiye in November, and at the first Women and Gender Constituency COP31 Pacific Day on 17 November. They have recently been translated[6] into iTaukei, Hindi, Fiji Baat, Rotuman and French, with further Pacific-language translations planned.

"We need grants, not loans. Pay up, industrialised nations, and stop funding fossil fuels! Also, make gender-responsive funds available to feminist and grassroots-led groups. We work with so little funds and resources. MOVE THE MONEY! (We know it's there.)"[7]

The inaugural State of the Pacific Ocean Convening 2026, organised by PANG in June, brought together regional CSOs, Pacific leaders, indigenous leaders, and technical expertsaround World Ocean Day, for a dialogue to "address the mounting environmental, economic, and geopolitical pressures threatening the sovereignty and resources of the Pacific region." The Outcomes Statement calls for a re-centering of Pacific ways of being and knowing, a rejection of deep-sea mining and for a Pacific future built on peace and demilitarisation, amongst other demands.

DAWN has crafted the Peace Under-Sea Siege Policy Brief Series bringing together their research and analysis on deep seabed mining and the militarisation of the ocean.

Leading up to COP31, several activities were held in Fiji and Tuvalu in September and October that have been critical moments for developing a collective, non-negotiable Pacific stance at Pre-COP31 meetings, and where all five grantee partners played pivotal roles. Alongside PICAN and other regional partners, PANG is a leading member of the Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Organisations (PRNGO) Alliance that released "The Funafuti Call for Climate Justice" based on discussions held at the Civil Society Regional Dialogue for Pacific Voices (hosted in September where collaborations were held in Funafuti, Tuvalu).

Building on this momentum, PICAN also launched the Pacific Climate Justice Demands 2026 through consultation across its network of more than 290 member organisations, which "set out the positions our members carry into the UNFCCC, the Pacific Islands Forum and other spaces where decisions affecting our region are made". Distilled into the 'Five Red Lines for 1.5°C' these demands are revisited and built upon every year by Pacific civil society organisations to present a united front at climate negotiations. The 2026 demands were launched at Pre-COP31 meetings in Fiji, where international ministers and negotiators were gathered.

The official outcome document of Pre-COP31 is the Taku Pakasoa Declaration, which echoes several of these core regional priorities and will be used as the official regional mandate at COP31. The declaration is "a political statement whose title means "strength in unity" in Tuvaluan. The document reiterated the priorities of the Pacific, including the need for finance and the centrality of the ocean in fixing climate problems."[8]

Meanwhile, PISFCC brought their Witness Stand booth to Pre-COP31 meetings in Fiji and debuted clips from All Rise! – a new film documenting the campaign's ICJ success story. PISFCC is an example of how a small Pacific organisation with a loud voice can deliver a transformative result for the planet at the ICJ. Unlocking more funding for Pacific climate and environmental justice work like the examples above will be critical as the Pacific region journeys onward through a climate crisis not caused by them.

And what happens in the Pacific impacts our entire planet's fragile ecosystem. When Pacific peoples' deep respect for, knowledge of and reliance on a healthy ocean and environment is trusted and funded, the future for our planet looks a lot brighter.

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[6] Click on this link to access the translated copies: https://tinyurl.com/3jxvskm4
[7] Number 5 of the '17 Urgent Demands'.
[8] Early, Catherine. 2026, "Pacific 'Pre-COP' draws attention to islands plight'", Dialogue Earth, 30 October, https://dialogue.earth/en/climate/pacific-pre-cop-draws-attention-to-islands-plight/

Photo Source: *PANG- Pacific academics attending the State of the Pacific Ocean Convening*