Oceania Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Family, 2024

The Intertwined Impact of Technological Transformation and Climate Change on Families and Communities in Oceania: Navigating the Policy Response

Brisbane, Australia, 30-31 May 2024

SUMMARY REPORT

Empowering families and communities in a changing world

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Queensland (UQ), The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which the Expert Group Meeting took place in Meanjin/Brisbane.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their Descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognize their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

Scene Setting

Experts from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region, including Indigenous representatives, took part in discussions focused on issues relating to digital technology and climate change and their impacts on families and communities in Oceania.

Over the course of two days of discussion, it was acknowledged that technology holds the potential to bridge divides, empower families, and foster work and family

balance, but some aspects of technology can have negative impacts. It was emphasized that climate change constitutes a significant threat to families and communities, particularly the most vulnerable ones.

Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity can displace families and disrupt their wellbeing. Yet climate crisis responses can help build resilience and reveal the strength of families and communities in times of uncertainty and challenges. From a family perspective, it is imperative to focus on intergenerational aspects of climate change, and express our debt to the next generations in the overall socio-economic policy making. We also need to make sure that families are empowered as educators, consumers and advocates for climate change.

As mentioned in the 2030 Development Agenda, it is vital to ensure that by 2030, people everywhere have the relevant information, education, and awareness required to support sustainable development and positive lifestyles, in harmony with nature. This underlines the importance of family focus in addressing climate change and advancing the 2030 Agenda, where family-centered climate change solutions are needed. The digital, natural and social domains need to be addressed together. Family, migration, information, and climate policies tend to be developed in different government departments that mostly do not interact with one other. Thus, the challenge for policymakers is how to integrate those policies. What's needed is a more systematic analysis of these interactions and their implications for policy and a new way of developing policy also considering people's inputs, resulting in bottom-up approach.

The Oceania experts noted that ageing is an issue of concern in the region. Due to migration, older people are left behind in their countries of origin ending up being dislocated from their family, often lonely and isolated. Policy has not kept up with these changes with significant implications for older people as well as for families that migrate in Oceania. Policymaking must consider rapid technological and environmental changes to make a difference in peoples' lives. It is important to understand the interactions between digital, technological, environmental and social worlds as they relate to healthy ageing and overall family functioning.

Some municipalities in Oceania have recently updated their programmes for age-friendly cities and communities and for the first time they have included digitalization and natural environment as part of their frameworks, which also include transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation, communication and information, community support and health services, and outdoor spaces. Research has demonstrated the interactions across these domains so that the whole concept of separate domains of action like transport, housing, etc. is not effective in improving the lives of individuals living in cities.

The impact of climate change could force people, especially older persons to spend more time indoors and in the digital world, impacting the way they interact socially. On the other hand, online forums can provide information and support to access the natural environment for older people. Similarly, social media can help people engage and find out about climate issues and is crucial in promoting volunteering and social participation, as well as participation in climate action. In fact, digital solutions can offer some empowerment, for example, easier translation and information access for migrants, etc.

Community-led approaches and building of resilience towards climate change and natural disasters is of special relevance. Building transdisciplinary teams and working across all tiers of government, and grappling with the complex interrelated social environmental issues faced, using dynamic systems understandings, is required to tackle these challenges. It is crucial to navigate policy response in this intertwined space with integrated, evidence-informed, and community-led approaches.

The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional well-being can be seen at individual, family and community level. There are many individual level factors that then cascade into lifestyle factors within which the individual is situated to living and working conditions and then all the way out to the cultural source, as well as economic, political and environmental conditions. These dynamic and layered systems interplay and overlap constantly, and change throughout the life course.

Policies supporting resilient and sustainable communities through whole of government action, which recognises the relationships between health and climate outcomes and looks at health across different policy sectors is required (and being

developed in some localities). Considering the complex intertwined systems, work is required with stakeholders to navigate, collaborate, and co-design solutions that are community-led.

Finally, particular attention is required for communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Working with First Nation communities requires respect of Indigenous knowledges, data sovereignty and governance, and for efforts to be Indigenous-led from the outset.

Digital identities and divides: bridging gaps

Participating experts, drawing from their work continued to elaborate on their perspectives emphasising that technology should improve human development; thus, it is the responsibility of Governments, companies and citizens. Standards for accountability and public observability of advertising and other information of public interest on digital platforms should be created and implemented.

It was also noted that there was a delay between how fast digital technologies develop and the need for regulations as well as the pressure on government, especially when the topic covered by the media needs a fast response. Hence, there's a push for fast policy response in contrast to the need of slow policy design based on cooperation and deliberation to get it right from the beginning. Another point is the influence of politics on policy and top-down responses vs bottom-up processes. It is then difficult to address the tension between fast and slow policy response. It is also essential to embed monitoring and evaluation from the start. What is clear is that a collaborative approach leads to better community outcomes.

The concept of sustainability varies across different groups and for some it relates to sustaining people in times of varying contexts, whether it was a gathering of small family groups or whether it was the largest inland tribal gathering place. Regenerative process is mostly not considered. To illustrate the importance of Aboriginal knowledges to care for environment, an examples of fish traps was given, a technique allowing for fish management with benefits for people downstream. It is important to allow Indigenous Peoples, to retain ownership to look after cultures and knowledge to ensure that we can create benefits for everybody.

A variety of views on codesign methods was expressed pointing out, for example, the need to make sure that all the intellectual property belongs to the community. The importance of community design was also emphasized where Culture hubs can make a difference for communities, especially in remote areas.

A point was raised that policies require understanding and appreciation of Indigenous languages. A variety of Indigenous languages has been seen as a barrier to conventional policymaking but it should be seen as a strength enriching the policymaking. Understanding of geography, proportionality, visibility and access to funding are all essential as well. It is also important to have an extended family focus. In addition, historical grounding of Indigenous experiences must be considered. How to effectively leverage codesign being pragmatic and innovative is another issue worth exploring.

An example of Queensland Digital Media Research Centre was given. The Centre operates several programmes including one on transforming media Industries, another one on digital public that form online spaces, computational communication and culture.

Low-income families in Australia are highly digitally excluded with intersecting forms of disadvantage in the families. First Nations families are also digitally excluded. Some families may have members with disabilities, some may live in social housing. These kinds of intersecting factors mean that families living on low incomes don't have the access to technologies and devices, and sometimes the skills to be able to use them in the ways that they want and need.

Having a mobile phone only to access the internet is also an indicator of digital exclusion. Around one fifth of Australian children are impacted by some level of digital exclusion. Because of that, they're significantly behind on their benchmarks for digital skills impacting on the outcomes for them across various life domains later in life.

The ethnographic work over two years and six communities around Australia, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania was noted. It included interviewing of families, organisations supporting the families, libraries, neighborhood

houses as well as national charities. The findings indicated that families experience digital inclusion in complex ways. There are differences in access across families that impact children's learning at home, how people parent and care for their children, and their own literacy around technologies. This impacts on families and their ability to engage with, and benefit from. technology.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index provides a good baseline and it is used across the social services sectors as an indices of people's access to technology and their ability to forge that technology as well as their digital ability to be able to use it. As there has been a gap in data collection around First Nations communities, there is now a project working with Indigenous communities to collect more data to provide a baseline index.

These indices and index scores are widely used but the research project looks at the gaps the index has highlighted and how we can learn more about them to address the digital inclusion of low-income families now that we know that there's a gap in that index number also across the three dimensions that we commonly refer to digital inclusion which are affordability, access and ability. It is worth mentioning that creative social activities drive digital participation, hence the importance of libraries or community centres, vital places that people use to connect. However, there are very few digital inclusion programmes or digital literacy programmes that are aimed at families and young people.

Recommendations coming from the research note that families should have access to affordable prepaid product offering digital services and broader range of consumer information like information about the energy market, which may include green energy options. Digital service delivery platforms must be appropriate and accessible by data; funding needs to be sustainable and fit for purpose; rural and regional towns need specific support, and community information needs to be communicated across a variety of digital platforms to make sure families have access to vital health information and other types of information they need.

At their core, digital initiatives hinged on the idea that the inclusive use of digital technology will help move developing populations and global society towards a better future, through technologies encouraging or supporting practises of use of digital

devices, as well as increasing the specific types of digital literacies or skills that individuals in developing countries had or could easily learn. However, there is an inequity and falsity of the singular vision of both digital technology used and social progress once we consider the different cultural communities with some types of digital activities and agendas largely reiterating the ongoing colonial framework that is based on the idea of a common linear progress and of a broad ideal of applying universal truth to particular places.

In Samoa, and for the wider transnational Samoan community, navigating the effects of colonialism and colonisation is a multi-layered and ongoing process. Colonial narratives of disenfranchisement and disadvantage continue to largely inform Samoans' perceived standing in global dialogues and decision-making environments and colonial institutions such as dominant or Western forms of education and government continue to influence their formalised ways of learning and their official processes of governance and regulation. It is important to offer information on the ways Samoans organise society, establish identity and determine individual agency. Throughout the Oceanic region, decolonization speaks to the efforts to prioritise Indigenous Peoples and their autonomy and to reestablish and build bonds of collective cultural strength. In this context, decolonization looks to reiterate, reincite and resignify Moana existence, beginning with actions, values, stories, and relations grounded in kinship landscapes, seascapes, and skyscapes. These efforts of resistance, reclamation, and rebuttal also align with and reinforce the objectives and ideals of digital sovereignty understood as a sovereignty encompassing inherent rights to self-governance and self-determination within and through digital infrastructures, technologies and environments.

Some researchers have highlighted how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals use social media, expressing and reclaiming their Indigeneity as a form of embodied sovereignty and using social media to express their relational affiliations with people and country, or by making the most of other technical features to simply be Indigenous online. First Nations Australians are positioning social media as a space and place of resistance, and as a space and place to restore, regenerate and re-centre community actions that help them to reconnect with land, culture and community.

Culturally grounded uses of digital technologies can help challenge the false divide set up by colonial imaginings and imperial practises. Digital technologies can help communities flourish through recognition of past as present and future. The work with and alongside Indigenous peoples to counteract and debase the colonial mentalities that continue to define so much of our world must continue.

Digital platforms, advertising & media literacy

Commercial determinants of health and well-being in the digital era where we're all connected to digital platforms, have been growing in importance in recent years. There is a big debate about the use of smartphones by children in Australia. The question arises is the phone as inherently addictive and problematic like an addictive substance would be?

Most social media platforms are organised around a particular design challenge, which is how to optimise our attention, how to keep us scrolling and moving in the feed for as long as possible, and then how to fill that feed with as much advertising as possible. It is important for advertisers to get to the right person at the right moment meaning that there are lots of automated models in the background trying to work that out. Over the last couple of decades, these platforms have been engaged in a very historically significant project of building a new kind of targeted advertising model that is built on translating all sorts of aspects of our social and intimate lives into data, which is then ingested into the models of these platforms.

The Australian Ad Observatory collects advertisments Australians donate from their Facebook feeds. So far, 2000 Australians donated nearly 1,000,000 ads over the course of a year, supplying a portrait of the personal data attached to those ads that that the advertising model uses to locate people in relation to each other. The model is constantly trying to learn who we are and the more we interact with it, the more information we give over.

An example of a project with Victoria Health, a health promotion foundation in Australia was given where 200 young people were recruited to take screenshots of alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food marketing they were seeing in their digital feeds. Those young people had had 194 advertisers upload personal information

about them into a system which created 787 interests about them, so effectively every individual in the study on average had 787 words that the model had attached to their profile, which is much more than a human would do. As the young people had been using these platforms, the media platforms have been accumulating large sets of interests and attaching them to their profiles. Those interests follow them throughout their lives and shape the patterns of advertising they see. Digital platforms have been collecting an enormous database, and then their algorithmic models find different pathways for us to follow through them. There are patterns related to class, so for instance, people of different classes see advertisements of different types kinds of alcohol. There is an also a gendered universe of advertising where the model has figured out how to respond to their gender and their background in innovative ways.

Our goals should be for digital media platforms to be safe as creative spaces for young people. The challenge is that all forms of accountability and regulation we have for advertising and for media are based on the idea that media is public and therefore publicly accountable. However, media platforms have moved advertising out of the public domain into the private, customised feeds of all of us. Therefore, it's very hard to have a full account of what is happening. At the same time, media platforms provide the data to advertisers. The challenge is to enable the public to have better forms of observability leading to monitoring and accountability.

It is difficult to make online spaces safer for kids, especially when they're owned by corporations based overseas, not in Australia. There have been attempts by nation states, as well as regional entities like the European Union, to regulate platforms, including legislation that the platforms to a large degree had to comply with despite their opposition.

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media and media technologies in all aspects of life, using critical thinking as a media consumer and producer. There are several key components of media literacy: fact checking, awareness and knowledge of the media environment generally, civic participation and what it means to be a citizen in a progressive functioning democracy, raising awareness about polarisation and its impacts.

A cohesive national approach to media literacy should include having a body with a capacity to carry out research as well around the world where media literacy is successful. It should be guided by longitudinal research and evidence. Media literacy should be part of the national curriculum and we need to have high quality teacher training that's readily available. Besides teachers, training for librarians, health workers, community leaders, social media influencers, etc. is also indispensable.

There have been media literacy efforts in Australia going back to the 1950s and 1960s while media curriculum developed for most states around Australia, especially in the 1980s. All these efforts have led to the formation of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, a coalition of media organisations, such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's education team, represented by the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, the Australian Library and Information Association, the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, national and state libraries of Australasia, Queensland University of Technology and the Special Broadcasting Service in Western Sydney University, the founding members of this alliance. All these organisations, in one form or another are responsible for advancing the cause of media literacy. The concept was based on a model that has been successful in the Netherlands, formed about a decade earlier which had been quite successful at ensuring that media literacy obtained a profile in that country.

There has been an explosion of interest in media literacy since around the mid 2010's with the rise of misinformation, perhaps with the rise of the influence of digital platforms on the outcomes of elections. Some approaches to media literacy define it as the ability to analyse, evaluate and act with a knowledge of several key concepts, such as media technologies, media representations, audiences, institutions, languages and relationships. And each of these focuses on particular knowledge domains.

In 2019, the Australian Media Literacy Report was produced based on a representative survey of 3,500 adult Australians to be repeated every 3 to 4 years. A separate qualitative study is being developed to complement the quantitative data. Reports are also being developed on news literacy, including studies on inclusion and representation while the Australian Research Council linkage project on a national approach to cultural institutions to address misinformation is focusing on

misinformation as a concept and on how to use media literacy to address it. Three thousand five hundred adult Australians have been surveyed about media literacy when they were asked to complete tasks that are focused on examples of misinformation to see if people can identify which pieces of information that are put in front of them are misinformation and how they go through the process of deciding if it is misinformation. The survey concluded that Australians have low levels of media literacy with two thirds of the respondents to an activity-based survey not able to identify if something is misinformation which further shows the need for the Australian Media Literacy Alliance.

Managing eco-anxiety

Climate change is a top concern globally. For Australians, it is their main topic of concern for the future in 2024; in the United States, 60 per cent of survey respondents have cited climate change in their fertility decisions while international prevalence is estimated at between 25 and 68 per cent.

Framing of climate anxiety is crucial as it determines our response to it and it is important to consider how this intersects with other emotional states. Framing of climate anxiety as an individual pathology could risk exacerbating existing feelings of isolation and ineffectiveness while framing it as a relational experience, could help to alleviate isolation and promote collective social action.

In this context, an analysis of media articles in Australia points to several discourses on eco-anxiety. Focusing on emotional reaction to climate change, the analysis identified several overarching narratives related to emotion that can be seen as a threat to rationality; as an individual pathology; as a skill that can be managed or as a reflexive pattern. When we see emotions as an understandable response to climate change it is clear that it is a natural response to an uncertain future. If we see it as a threat to rationality, it can be seen as a global warming 'hysterics' or threat to collective activism. When we see climate anxiety as a pathology the response is that we need to protect children and find coping strategies for positioning emotions as truly necessary fuel for climate activism. When emotion is identified as a reflexive practice and is regarded as relational and part of persuasion, with individuals drawing on their own and others' emotions to determine how to proceed, the emotions are

then positioned as central to decision making and political activism. Moreover, seeing emotion as a reflective practise would be validating climate anxiety, spurring political action with the potential to localise a collective experience. So, tuning into which kind of emotions are emphasised in these shared experiences is important. The analysis of media articles indicated that many aimed at discrediting concerns, subverting activism, and inflicting shame on individuals.

More research is necessary to understand this topic to find effective solutions to shaping of the narrative. Some of the questions that need to be answered would be: how are parents experiencing and managing climate anxiety, how prevalent is the phenomenon; how does it impact mental health and well-being; how does it intersect with gender divisions of labour; how might management of climate anxiety shape collective resilience, action and hope?

Cultivating eco-conscious families and communities

The Parenting and Family Support Centre at The University of Queensland is home to the Triple P parenting support, disseminated around the world now in more than 30 countries in 23 languages. A new programme aiming at understanding the intersection between parenting support and climate actions, or green parenting, as it can be called has been recently underway.

The concept of thriving is vital to understanding of eco-consciousness. When discussing thriving, we consider a set of positive “vital signs” in adolescence, such as academic success, caring for others and their communities, the affirmation of cultural and ethnic diversity, commitment to healthy lifestyles; dynamism and birationality; stability and balance toward a goal. Thriving should also be characterized by future orientation, growth trajectory and cultural specificity.

Thriving is not just a concept which is individual-specific that can be developed by individuals on their own. Although there may be individuals better at thriving, thriving is determined by the ecosystem around the child, consisting of their parents, their family, their extended family, their community, their school.

The concept of green parenting or eco parenting is not well defined. It encompasses modelling of pro-environmental behaviour, explicit training of children as well as practises parents engage in, in relation to their children. We could assume that in some ways, parents might be more motivated to engage with environmental behaviours or practices because they're concerned about the future of their children and they want to ensure that their children grow up in a world that is more sustainable.

Green parenting practices are influenced by parental characteristics that come from before the onset of parenthood which in turn are influenced by a whole range of environmental practises that parents engage or do not engage in. Moreover, there are specific green parenting behaviours that parents might adopt, which in turn may lead to pro-environmental behaviour.

There is some evidence of intergenerational transmission of environmental behaviours from parents to children, and although there is research on transmitting environmental behaviours from children to parents, the research is not very clear on the direction of transmission as children do not necessarily have the agency leading to changes within their home environment, unless parents are already aligned with that notion.

Parental modelling of environmentally sustainable practises is important, and so is encouraging communication with children. Exposure to nature is also seen as an important element to help children understand the value of the natural environment. There is also some evidence suggesting that doing things together is especially important.

A green parenting practises scale has been developed to measure some specific behaviours, practices and attitudes. Some of the elements include critical thinking and decision making; planning and problem solving; being flexible and adaptive to change; having a positive outlook; being caring and communicating well with others; being confident in one’s personal capacity; speaking up and sharing ideas and contributing to the wellbeing of the community.

Children's capacities toward sustainable living depend on several factors, including parental values towards sustainable development, parental wellbeing and emotional health, parental cognition, expectations towards sustainable living, to name some. They also depend on parenting practices, such as modelling, encouragement and reinforcement of sustainable living behaviours as well as parental investment of time and money towards sustainable living accompanied by social identity chracterised by a sense of belonging and sense of social connectedness. To be effective, parental actions then need to be accompanied by school programmes as well as community interventions promoting sustainable behaviours.

Research on green parenting is scarce with no clarity of definitions, lack of longitudinal studies or clear links between parenting and child outcomes. It also lacks evidence-based strategies. Moreover, the focus has tended to be on older children and adolescents and we know very, very little about younger and middle childhood. What's more there is no evidence-based parenting support strategies for green parenting and although there is lots of information about what parents might do, none of that is evidence-based, hence more research is needed to define these concepts and come up with evidence -based strategies to support families. It is also important to keep in mind the issue of individual versus collective action and be cautious not to lose sight of a bigger picture of collective actions that need to be done and avoiding blaming individuals who may feel shame, blame and hopelessness. Finally, the concept of raising climate warriors relates to the concept of anxiety and raising awareness among the children, and the role of parents is not visible in the region. There are different actors playing educational roles in this area, such as media and schools.

Toward intergenerational empathy and solidarity on climate change

Participating experts noted fracturing relations, polarisation and the potential for conflict in the region. This threat is encapsulated in the existential issue of climate change, and there is an overall agreement that we need to find ways to move forward and face it together in solidarity. This issue has been framed as an intergenerational conflict but it could be the prevalence of generational stereotypes that reinforce generalised differences between people causing polarization on the issue.

In this context, some recent research in Australia on climate attitudes and their characterization is worth noting as it is a complex issue with generational effects. The cultural dimensions of climate change should also be appreciated as culture is a complex, dynamic, and constantly evolving phenomenon impacting social relations at the heart of our societies. Intergenerational relations play an important role within families, nurturing and providing care, passing knowledge and aspects of cultural identities which lie at the core of the social and emotional foundations for family life and are a foundation for flourishing societies in general.

The idea of generational groups has been described as a shared consciousness that comes from experiencing similar social conditions and significant life experiences. These formative experiences can be positive or lead to cultural traumas caused, inter alia, by natural disasters or economic crisises, etc. Meanwhile, some see generations in competition for resources across the life stages..

Moreover, the issue of climate change has been increasingly positioned in terms of individual morality, for instance in media and political discourses. This is centred on generational cohorts characterized as being either concerned activists, victims of climate change, or selfish and resistant to change. To large extent, the issue has been framed by some as a clash of generations. It is then useful to look at these discourses and see how generations are characterised.

A recent study on climate change in younger Australians found there were several characterisations ranging from innocence, vulnerability to being alarmist or apathetic. Meanwhile, studies on older generations and discourses in Australia tend to be focused on political views, especially those projected by the conservative media. Several studies suggest conflicting generational views, such as millennials versus baby boomers. For instance, a particular study from the United States in 2023 found that millennials and baby boomers expressed animosity towards each other more so than towards other generations. The same study found that this animosity is alleviated when generational categories are removed, in other words, perceiving others as humans, not as stereotypes. Another eight-year longitudinal study in Australia tracking 18- and 19-year-olds, found high and increasing levels of worry about climate change, but also a significant minority was found to have little or decreasing concern.

Some studies among migrant families in Sydney found cultural, economic and practical aspects that influence sustainability, attitudes and behaviours across generations. Another study showed that even people living with physical consequences of climate change in their community hold very diverse perspectives towards the issue. It is then telling that the higher quality studies and those that spend time with people with deep qualitative work tend to also suggest a reality far removed from the polarised characterizations of generational stereotypes.

It is important to realize that the prevalence of stereotypes can have a negative effect on intergenerational relations, both within families and across societies. In this sense, stereotypes reinforce age-related prejudice both towards older and younger generations. This, combined with individualised moralisation of the issue, might lead to less human perception of others. The stereotype content model of dehumanised perception explains that perceived moral failures or competence disparities can lead to ambivalent prejudice. The notion of dehumanisation is usually applied to situations of extreme intergroup othering, discrimination and conflicts.

Recent research from Australia suggests that it can be interpersonal through everyday lesser humanness. This diminishes our view of others in more subtle ways. These factors are working to bring about blame and shame which is not conducive to flourishing intergenerational relations within families or across societies. Instead, this can bring about a dislocation of sense of shared values and beliefs, psychological distance from the issue and from others, and reduced agency to action. In summary, as generational stereotypes frame conflicting views and values and relations, acting potentially as a wedge between people, it might this be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We can move forward through intergenerational solidarity. The common definition views solidarity as a form of intergroup level identification with values and norms, connection to a community or group membership with a collective consciousness and a sense of collective awareness usually coming through familiar or close family and community ties. However, the organic solidarity can occur with people who are similar or different from us, and it brings people together in mutual interest and requires more work in alignment or acceptance of values, attitudes and beliefs across groups. In this sense, the organic solidarity is an empathic solidarity as it requires people to recognise and accept difference and still have social group

identification and give support to one another which is closely aligned with the concept of relational empathy, forming interpersonal relationship characterised by emotional connection and perspective. Fostering interpersonal connections and understanding between people, can support this recognition and acceptance of people that are unlike us, even across significant culturally perceived differences.

There is a potential through various forms of media and technologies to seek to empower and give voice to people anywhere to share their real, lived experiences. In general, there is a need for more national, regional and global level initiatives specifically aimed at fostering empathy between people and particularly across diversities.

Climate-related disasters and violence

A presentation from a participating expert, noted that climate-related disasters have an impact on men's mental health, sometimes resulting in depression and anxiety and then in intimate partner violence. More exposure to climate-related disasters increases this risk. All of this causes enormous stress on families and shelters. In addition to that, climate disasters might result in very unsafe environments, particularly for women. Better understanding is needed of the incremental impacts of reoccurring and persistent climate change events in the Oceanic region on families. Indigenous frameworks of mental health, climate change and intimate partner violence are also indispensable to understand the situation well.

Women are more likely to experience violence than men in general, family violence, especially during climate disasters due to the role of gender norms that accept violence and position women as inferior to men in society. There has been a lot of literature recently, trying to synthesise pathways between climate change and violence, with a thread about exacerbating underlying drivers of violence around gender norms, including gender inequality and social norms, low power incentives of women in societies and rigid gender norms and financial dependence of women on men. There are also stressors such as mental health, loss of livelihoods and loss of housing and these factors create enabling environments for violence to happen in addition to difficulties in reporting violence in times of disaster in general.

The long-term climate change effects impact much of the Pacific concentrated around sea level rise, ocean acidification and rising infectious diseases. Such impacts have been chracterised by some as slow violence. Studies of communities that were affected by the 2009 bushfires in Victoria show that women were four times as likely to experience violence as men. A key report by the World Health Organisation across 13 Pacific Island countries has noted the role of poor mental health arising from constant disasters in the Pacific region and raises an important point around the links between climate change, mental health and violence, and thinking about, persistent disasters or persistent climate change events which are getting worse in the Pacific region, with worsening mental health and violence. Although qualitative research has been rich, we do not have enough quantitative data.

Based on surveys around communities' perceptions of violence and what the solutions were, a theory of change was developed around what has been seen as the potential solutions and approaches that had been most effective. A collaborative project working with 30 community representatives to look at the evidence base and to develop activities that could be done in their communities around violence prevention was also conducted. The results indicated that in terms of associations between disaster experience and indicators of mental health, poor mental health, and if someone had experienced a disaster, they were 63 per cent more likely to have symptoms of depression if they had experienced a disaster four or more times, and 200 per cent more likely to have symptoms of depression. In terms of women's experiences of intimate partner violence, experiencing a disaster once in their lifetime, women were two times as likely to experience intimate partner violence and if they had experienced the disaster four or more times, they were five times as likely to experience intimate partner violence. The more disasters you experience, the worse your mental health or your partner's mental health, and the worse your experience of intimate partner violence.

It also begs the question around what other structural factors impact on men's mental health, and how do we address men's mental health from an Indigenous or socially cultural perspective? From a quantitative point of view, we don't have the frameworks or understanding of men's mental health in Indigenous communities in the Pacific to be able to measure it and be able to conceptualise it and it is quite outside of the frameworks and the mental health understandings that we currently

have. It is important to continue community led approaches and to engage with Indigenous women and community leaders in participatory assessments to understand their specific vulnerabilities and their specific risks related to climate change and gender-based violence. Incorporating gender-based violence prevention and response measures, international climate action plans and Disaster Risk Reduction strategies are indispensable but they need to be co-designed with Indigenous communities as there is still lack of framework to understand and to acknowledge what the concerns are locally and advocating for the integration of Indigenous custom law and practices to protect women and girls from gender-based violence into legal frameworks.

Reflections on policy development

There is a lot of room for improvement in thinking about policies and practises and forms of governance, particularly in terms of how policy is made. There is a need for greater policy integration and for thinking about importance of policy evaluation at the very beginning, which is a part policy development that's left out in tight fiscal environments. Moreover, sometimes the policy goals change and it may be the case that the decision makers don't want to learn from the evaluation. What cognitive science teaches us is that the language that we use to describe our problems is important and that it is often how we diagnose a problem that leads us towards a particular solution. Hegemonic views about gender, indigeneity, and ethnicity, need to be challenged. We strike the limits of liberal democracy to deal with the challenges like climate change and the digital world, which does present many opportunities, but also has many risks and like all risks, they're not distributed evenly among the population. In terms of climate change, it's the Pacific nations that are being most affected by it change but they are the least responsible for causing it.

It is important to acknowledge that the corporations with commercial interests are the most culpable for climate change. Some of the relationships we have between things such as income and labour need to be rethought and conditions set to reduce harms stemming from labour displacement caused by new technologies. The issue of economic security is of particular importance as societies with greater levels of income inequality tend to be less likely to support action on climate change. It is then important to use media literacy campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of

climate change and actions to counteract it. Moreover, as economic and political rights are being eroded, not to mention 'digital rights' relating to social media, strong legislation is needed to protect those rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS