

**Thematic Session  
Women**

## **The 'Green Heart' of Pacific**

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The Disney animation 'Moana' took inspiration from Samoa, an island located in the South Pacific Ocean. This animation describes the small island of Motunui where the coconuts start to rot, and fish become scarce due to abnormal weather events and the residents begin to feel gloomy and become less friendly to each other.

Their life in the island becomes enriched again after Moana gets back the "luminescent green stone", which is the heart of a goddess. The wise and virtuous women in the Pacific are putting together their wisdom for their islands, just like what Moana did for her island. Then, what would be the "green heart" to help us overcome the current crisis?

The island countries of the South Pacific that sit at the Ring of Fire, receive visits from unwelcomed visitors from January to February almost every year. The unwelcome visitors refer to the ultra-powerful category 5 cyclone with the maximum wind velocity of 320 km/h and the frequent earthquake of magnitude 8. In August 2021, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a report that most of the island countries in the South Pacific might disappear within this century due to climate change.

When COVID-19 began, the Pacific Island countries were some of the first countries to close their borders, because they were vulnerable to infectious diseases as their communities were centered around each tribe. Samoa knows from its experience how dreadful an infectious disease could be, since 22% of its population lost their lives when the Spanish Flu broke out. Meanwhile, tourism industry accounts for as much as 70% of the GDP of the Pacific Island countries. Even if these countries reopen their borders, it would be difficult for them to be optimistic about the recovery of their tourism industry.

When a series of unfavorable events occur and lead to the worst situation, it is called a "perfect storm". This is exactly what the Pacific Island countries are going through now. And all the burdens of this "perfect storm" are carried by women in those countries.

In the vast Pacific Ocean, there are 14 island countries including the Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Palau. Each of these island countries has a rich cultural diversity with different culture, languages, and ethnic groups.

Such a diversity also exists in the status and rights of the women of those countries. Women in Tonga, a matriarchal society, have the decision-making authority over all matters. However, Fiji that experienced frequent wars among the tribes have low

awareness on women's human rights to such an extent that they have a tool to beat women.

The whole population of the Pacific Islands are fishers and farmers because hunting remains an important means to secure resources. Women living in the islands, where a large percentage of the population engages in fishery activities, often appear to be strong and tough. The same is true for the women in the Pacific Islands. They take the responsibility for the livelihood and future of their families.

Climate crisis has made life in the Pacific Ocean more difficult. They are in a severe shortage of healthy food, clean drinking water, and manufactured goods. Above all, they can hardly see what the future might be like. As a mother of two children, I can't even imagine how the women in the Pacific Island countries would feel about having to raise their children in such an environment.

I will share photos and images that describe the reality of the Pacific Islands where the residents are losing their land due to climate change. This will hopefully help you understand how those residents would feel in the current situation. I would also like to discuss what we can do about the situation together with them. The "green heart" to make the Pacific Islands enriched again is in the future of the children. Women in the Pacific Islands are sincerely hoping to get back their future for themselves.