

Putting People First

Area Based Approaches to Disaster
Response in The Pacific

Fiji discussion paper



Table of Contents

Executive summary.....3

Key Takeaways.....3

Acronyms5

Acknowledgements6

Fiji – International, Regional and National Actor7

Area based approaches to disaster response.....8

Research approach10

Disaster Response in Fiji11

 The Fiji Cluster System13

Multi-agency, multi-sector collaboration and assessment15

Localised responses19

Adaptive, flexible and realistic processes.....21

Reflective practice and evaluation23

Next steps24

References and further reading25

Executive summary

This discussion paper explores how area-based approaches (ABAs) can contribute to national adaptation and responsiveness to disasters in Fiji. People centred, geographically targeted, and multi-sectorial, ABAs provide a developmental approach to disaster response and recovery. Framed around the 10 principles of ABAs, the project draws on international experience through the review of desktop literature relevant to Fiji and exploratory stakeholder interviews to consider the suitability of ABAs to disaster in Fiji.

Recognising the need for increased collaboration and coordination across sectors, agencies and levels of government, this discussion paper has been drafted to initiate a conversation with Pacific Island people, including government representatives at all levels, local Community Service Organisations (CSOs), Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the wider community involved with, and impacted by, disaster management and response. It is also an invitation to International NGOs working in the Pacific to consider and contribute to a people centred approach to humanitarian disaster response.

Key Takeaways

Significant investment has contributed to significant improvement

Increased investment following Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston, including financial, human resources and policy development has contributed to significant developments in Fiji's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster. Emerging networks are proving effective such as the Australian Humanitarian Partnership and Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council which facilitate greater collaboration across sectors and the opportunity for country-specific approaches to response and recovery, including the use of existing social protection mechanisms and superannuation structures to mobilise responses. Similarly, more marginalised groups needs are being better addressed, including those with disabilities and LGBTQI communities.

While national response structures have improved there are still issues with local response mechanisms, particularly in urban areas.

The national systems and structures enacted following a disaster are reasonably robust and effective; however, collaboration between national and local authorities could be strengthened. Standard national approaches offer limited flexibility at a district and local level, often resulting in insufficient or inappropriate urban and peri urban responses. Stakeholders noted the need for greater coordination and collaboration at local levels including well defined structures for informal settlements to be engaged in disaster response and long-term resilience building. Similarly, effective scaling up will require stronger links between local and national levels of governance.

Greater consideration for collaborative assessments and coordination of data

Despite gains, the current post-disaster assessment process still has weaknesses, in particular duplication or gaps in effort when assessing impacts on communities, and a lack of centralised and standardised data which can contribute to gaps in response and the needs of affected people not being met. The tendency of NGOs to work in communities with pre-existing relationships provides depth and familiarity, but can also result in several NGOs working in some communities, with none in others.

Evaluations are often lacking in time and investment

There is a need for greater investment in monitoring and evaluation to underpin continuous improvement over time, sharing of lessons across sectors and agencies, and stronger capacity to scale up. Additionally, the traditional approach of end-of-program evaluation to enhance learning will arguably become less effective as disasters increase in frequency, with one disaster occurring before the completion of earlier disaster response efforts. Instead, systemic, reflective and shared learning practices could support more rapid and adaptive response and recovery initiatives.

Acronyms

ABA	Area- based approach
ADRA	Adventist Development & Relief Agency International
AHP	Australian humanitarian partnership
DDA	Detailed Damage Assessments
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FBDRRC	Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council
FCOSS	Fiji Council of Social Services
FNPF	Fiji National Provident Fund
IDA	Initial damage assessment
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
NDMA	Natural Disaster Management Act
NDMC	National Disaster Management Committee
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
PASSA	Participatory Approach to Safe Shelter Awareness
RPF	Rainbow Pride Foundation
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

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These contributions are gratefully appreciated, particularly as this report was being produced during a period of significant disaster upheaval across the Pacific Island Region, including the COVID-19 pandemic, TC Harold, TC Yasa and TC Ana.

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The views expressed in this report, and any errors and omissions, remain those of the authors.

Cover photo: urban flooding, Fiji. Accessed from: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/community-responses-floods-fiji-lessons-learned>

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Fiji – International, Regional and National Actor

Fiji has played a leading role globally in highlighting the significant impacts of climate change on the world and, in particular, on the Pacific island region. In a recent workshop on Climate Induced Security in November 2020, Fiji's Roving Ambassador noted that: "The fight against climate change cannot be won by government's alone — we need to work with business and industries, cities and states, civil society representatives, academic institutions, and other actors". This multi-stakeholder, 'whole of nation' approach to combatting climate change becomes of existential importance following the most recent findings of the International Panel of Climate Change report that carbon dioxide emissions are still climbing and in the Pacific region extreme climatic events are likely to get more severe unless drastic action is taken globally.

Across the region, Pacific Island leaders have made strong calls to action including the Pacific Island Forum *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*¹ (2018) and the *Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now*² (2019). In Fiji, the *National Adaptation Plan Framework* provides a strong foundation for action. It acknowledges the importance of implementing "location and context-specific" responses to climate pressures, and that success relies on community participation and ownership, and on leadership at the sub-national level.

Recognising the value of location and context, this project explores how area-based approaches (ABAs) can contribute to national adaptation and responsiveness which is tailored to place and specifically addresses 10 key principles³). The project draws on international experience to frame inquiry, reviews desktop academic literature and reports, and finally conducts exploratory interviews with stakeholders representing government, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local and community NGOs operating in Fiji. For this initial study we focused on the greater urban environment of Suva.

Key findings from the research indicate a relatively strong national response to disaster management with coordination and collaboration occurring via the National Disaster Management Committee. It is anticipated that these mechanisms will strengthen further with the introduction of the new Disaster Management Act and supporting policies. Positive examples of multi-agency and multi-sectorial collaboration were acknowledged with new networks emerging, specifically the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP), the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council (FBDRC) and recent coordination efforts among Pacific island countries through the Pacific Island Forum initiated Pacific Resilience Partnership.

Additionally, feedback indicated the adoption of social protection interventions that extend existing social protection mechanisms and seek to alleviate some of the barriers to recovery. These are a promising addition to more traditional responses. This is just one step which demonstrates how the needs of marginalised groups including persons with a disability and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) communities are being considered and integrated into disaster response — something that has not always occurred in the past.

Despite notable gains, challenges and gaps are still evident. Post-disaster assessments continue to present challenges due to weak coordination leading to variable performance, including duplication of effort in some communities, gaps in coverage, and a lack of centralised and standardised data.

¹ <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

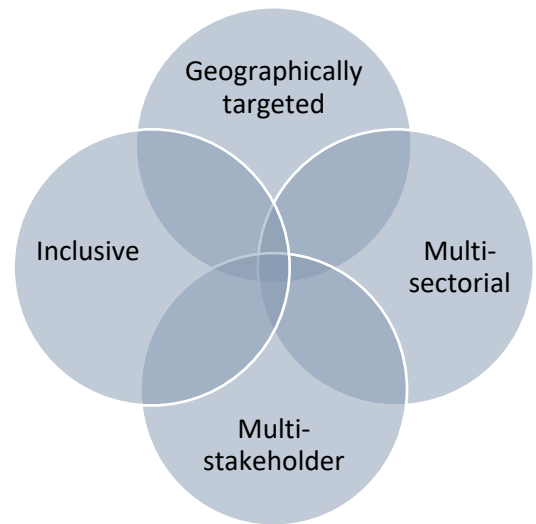
² <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/50th-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Communique.pdf>

Increased attention is required to develop governance and decision-making in urban areas, particularly in relation to disaster response and long-term resilience building. Similarly, there is a need for greater investment, both financial and capacity development in monitoring and evaluation to underpin continuous improvement over time, and sharing of lessons across sectors and agencies. Finally, there remain issues of expectation management, and ensuring that government-community partnerships encourage self-organisation, while being supportive. These issues are not uncommon globally^{3 4}.

Area based approaches to disaster response

Area based approaches (ABAs) support people after a disaster in a specific location to transition effectively from relief to recovery'.⁵ ABAs apply lessons from development approaches by planning for longer timeframes, considering long-term outcomes, and exploring opportunities for wider application and scale. ABAs are also known as neighbourhood or places-based approaches. They have begun to gain traction as effective at integrating development and disaster recovery goals, particularly within complex urban contexts. Most recently, Sphere published *Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings*⁶ which includes a chapter dedicated to ABAs. This publication complements the Sphere Handbook, an internationally recognised set of common principles and universal minimum standards associated with humanitarian response. Additionally, ABAs have been adopted by the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) through the District Councils of Social Services⁷ (DCOSS) Coordination and Support in all of its programing work

Figure 1 Key Characteristics of ABAs



ABAs key characteristics⁸ (Figure 1) include:

- People-centred and inclusive of the whole population within an area – this includes specific consideration for more vulnerable populations including women, children, people with a disability, elderly, LGBTIQ people, and people with no legal status
- Geographic response – levels of need are assessed by physical, social and administrative boundaries. The intention is to address the holistic needs of a target area rather than a target group

³ Keen, Barbara, Carpenter, Evans & Foukona (2017) *Urban Development in Honiara: Harnessing Opportunities, Embracing Change*

⁴ Kiddle, McEvoy, Mitchell, Jones & Mecartney (2017) *Unpacking the Pacific Urban Agenda: Resilience, Challenges and Opportunities*

⁵ Sanderson & Sitko (2018) *Ten principles for area-based approaches in urban post-disaster recovery*, Humanitarian Exchange, Overseas Development Institute

⁶ <https://spherestandards.org/resources/unpacked-guide-urban-settings-2020/>

⁷ DCOSS are sub national platforms of FCOSS CBO affiliates that are clustered by area and represented via a DCOSS through a committee. There were 12 DCOSS's operating across Viti Levu and Vanua Levu during TC Harold and the COVID19 response

⁸ Adapted from Parker & Maynard (2015) *Humanitarian response to urban crises: a review of area-based approaches*. IIED Working Paper. IIED

For discussion

- Multi-sectorial – sector-based interventions can be coordinated across sectors such as health, education, and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), in response and relative to the identified needs of the community
- Multi-stakeholder – to ensure appropriate representation throughout the project cycle, diverse stakeholder groups are actively engaged. This includes government representatives from national to local, national and local NGOs, civil society, the private sector and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) from both the humanitarian and development sector.

Ten core principles (Figure 2) for implementing ABAs have been developed⁹ to provide practical guidance to humanitarian practitioners following rapid onset, naturally triggered disasters in urban areas.

The ten principles are:

1. Multi-agency, multi-sector participatory assessments for better collaborative efforts and less duplication and wastage
2. Focus on location that people recognise, e.g. a particular neighbourhood or district
3. Realistic timeframes for effective recovery, which may be outside the timeframes of humanitarian relief and recovery funding
4. People-centred actions focused on human needs, rather than agency objectives
5. Work with existing governmental and community structures
6. Collaboration between sectors and programmes to ensure all actions are coordinated
7. Flexible and adaptive programming that respond to changes in circumstances
8. Nimble internal systems, including finance and human resources, which can ‘gear up’ or ‘slow down’ in response to realities on the ground
9. Plan for scaling-up – there is little merit in one-off small projects, experience need to be shared and adapted for greater impact and efficiency
10. Measure contribution not attribution, i.e. the collective improvements within a location by all actors, rather than the impact of just one agency.

⁹ David Sanderson and Pamela Sitko, *Urban area-based approaches in post-disaster contexts. Guidance note for Humanitarian Practitioners.*, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), June 2017 2017), <http://pubs.iied.org/10825IIED>.

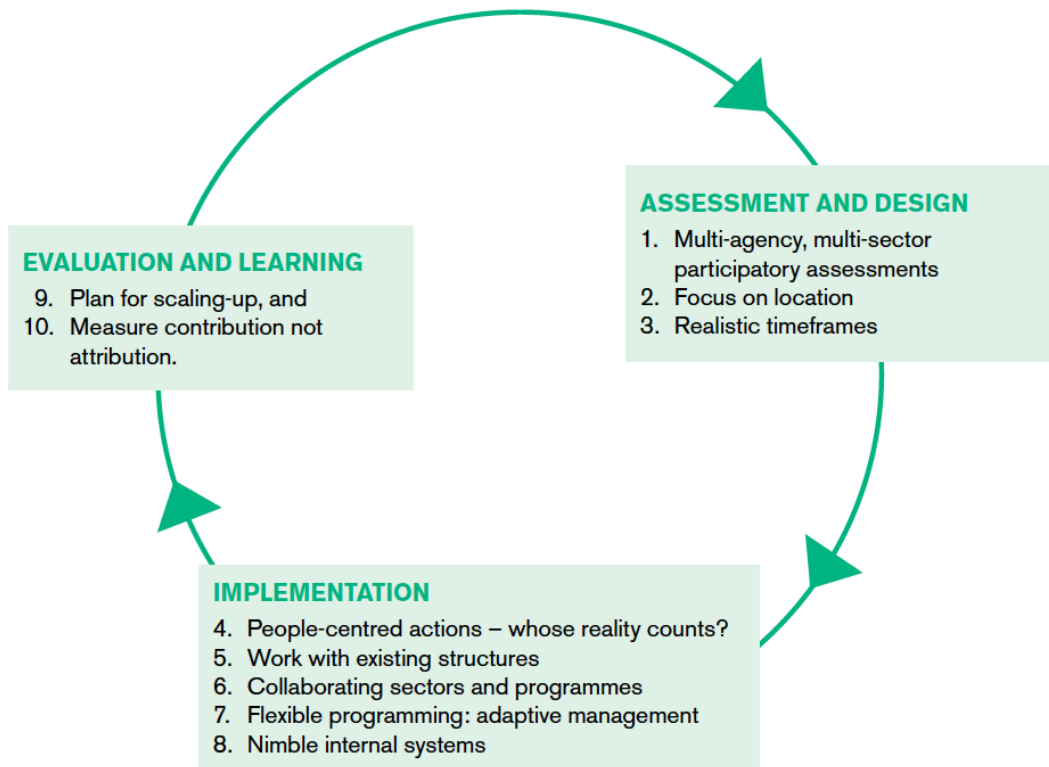


Figure 2 10 Principles of ABAs aligned to the project management cycle¹⁰

Research approach

The research approach was participatory and reflective. We engaged with diverse stakeholders to listen to their experiences and to explore with them system strengths, weaknesses and preferred adaptations. A series of semi-formal interviews were carried out to explore the use of area-based approaches in urban areas. Interview questions were formed using the 10 Principles of ABAs¹¹ and categorised into four key themes:

- Multi-agency and multi-sector collaboration and assessment
- Localised responses
- Adaptive, flexible and realistic process
- Reflective practice and evaluation.

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Sanderson & Sitko (2017) *Urban area-based approaches in post-disaster contexts*. Guidance note for Humanitarian Practitioners. IIED

A total of 18 interviews took place from 27 July to 8 September 2020 (Figure 3). The number of interviews were kept low but representative of a broad cross section of stakeholders because of the extreme pressures on the disaster response community due to the Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 work as well as competing priorities associated with end of financial year activities and the announcement of the 2020/21 national budget.

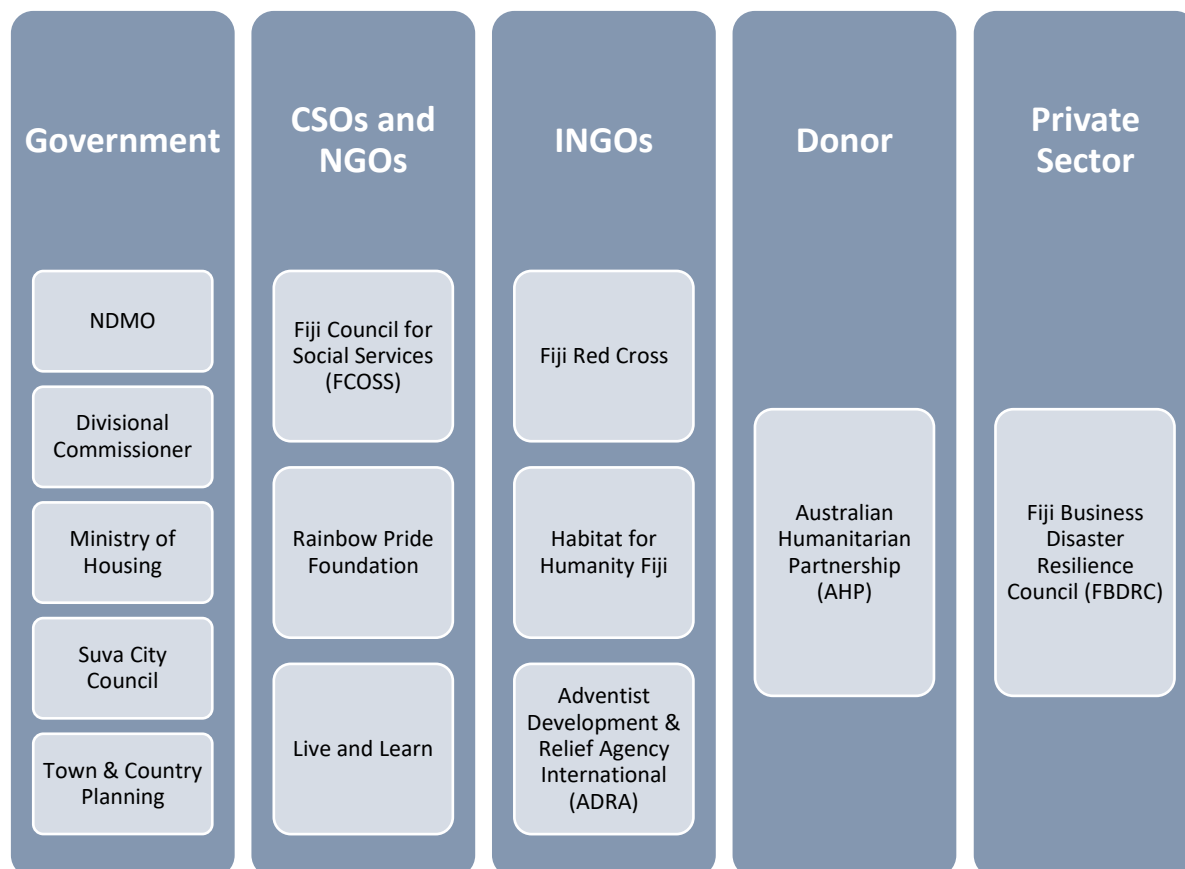


Figure 3 Organisations interviewed for current scoping research

Disaster Response in Fiji

As part of the Pacific island region, Fiji is highly vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change. Climate pressures, including sea level variation, coastal erosion, ocean acidification and increasing water and surface air temperatures, are contributing to an increase in frequency and severity of naturally triggered disasters. The impacts of climate-related disasters for the Pacific are significant. In addition to the immediate risks including loss of shelter, access to food and drinking water, and injury and loss of life; there are longer term challenges associated with livelihoods, food security, physical and mental health and wellbeing, gender inequality, and protection of those most vulnerable. As a result of the increasing economic and social challenges facing the region, Pacific leaders and their communities are advocating for a transformational response to climate change action that aligns with and builds on the Sustainable Development Goals and considers the needs and impacts to those most vulnerable.

Fiji has emerged as a respected global champion for the progression of climate action, leading international climate negotiations, implementing international and regional climate change partnership agreements, and contributing to an ongoing dialogue and body of evidence relating to

present and future climate risks and to the importance of building and strengthening disaster resilience across the Pacific. Nationally, Fiji is undertaking several large-scale legislation and policy reviews to build and strengthen disaster resilience and response. Fiji’s primary legislation on disaster management, the Natural Disaster Management Act¹² (NDMA) and its accompanying policy, National Disaster Management Plan¹³ (NDMP), are being reviewed in an effort to strengthen the legislative framework and governance structures relating to disaster management and to appropriately define roles and increase responsibility to those tasked with responding.

The current Fiji NDMP outlines the governance structures responsible for disaster management from National to District level (Figure 4). With an emphasis on coordination and flexibility, the NDMP applies to all government activities related to disaster management including mitigation, preparedness, emergency response, relief and rehabilitation. In order to strengthen preparedness and support recovery, the NDMP mandates the National Disaster Management

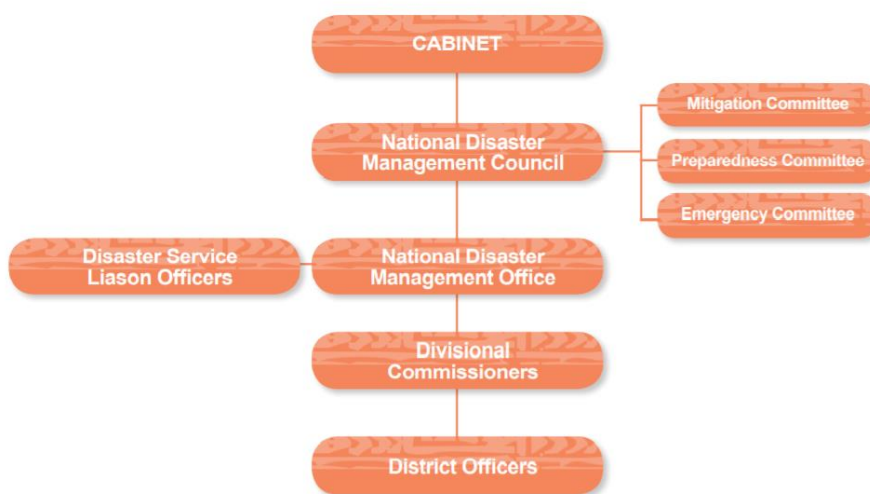


Figure 4 Permanent bodies in Fijian disaster management (Source: Fiji Shelter Handbook)

Council (NDMC) - the overall body responsible for disaster management - to operate continuously irrespective of whether a disaster has occurred or not. This mechanism for continued collaboration has the potential to strengthen disaster preparedness; however, the ongoing function of the NDMC may not be as effective as is intended. A combination of competing priorities and absence of legislated responsibilities for Permanent Secretary members results in disaster preparedness and recovery commitments being reprioritised for other portfolio responsibilities until the next disaster occurs. As part of the legislative review, it has been suggested that the new National Disaster Management Act should assign clearer definitions of roles to the Permanent Secretaries relating to their responsibilities before, during and after a disaster. This proposed increase in responsibility and accountability will arguably contribute to a stronger mechanism for continued collaboration across government sectors.

The more recently drafted National Disaster Risk Reduction (NDRR) policy¹⁴ is aligned to the NDMA and has a primary goal of ensuring “stronger disaster risk governance and disaster risk reduction measures to support poverty alleviation as part of the overall national effort towards sustainable and

¹² Government of Fiji (1998) Natural Disaster Management Act

¹³ Fiji National Disaster Management Council (1995) National Disaster Management Plan

¹⁴ Government of Fiji (2018) National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018-2030

resilient development.” The NDRR is also aligned with the Sendai Framework of Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and acknowledges the importance of mainstreaming DRR into all policies, plans and practice. Under the NDRR policy, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Meteorological Services (MDMMS) are responsible for disaster management and response. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), located within the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is responsible for coordinating recovery and reconstruction following a disaster via the national, divisional and district level Emergency Operation Centers. The policy highlights the need for finance and investment in urban areas with a particular focus on land utilisation plans and critical infrastructure.

Missing from the NDRR policy is a clearly defined role for the Ministry of Local Government. The absence of appointed responsibility for the Ministry of Local Government in times of disaster complicates local engagement in response and recovery efforts, particularly within peri-urban and urban areas. The involvement and capacity building of the Ministry of Local Government could assist rapid and effective responses in urban areas where they have jurisdiction over the town and city councils. As urban populations and urban geographic boundaries continue to expand there is an urgent need to consider and review roles and responsibilities relating to urban disaster management from a national level all the way to local community responses.

The Fiji Cluster System

The Fiji Cluster System is made up of nine clusters which is managed by the Inter-Cluster Group. The Inter-Cluster Group consists of the eight-government representative Cluster Leads and INGO co-Leads (Figure 5 & 6). Fiji Red Cross is represented across all eight clusters as well as the Inter-Cluster Group. In addition, local civil society organisations are represented in various national cluster groups and coordination committees including the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), Live & Learn, Partners in Community Development Fiji, and six churches.



Figure 5 Fiji Cluster System

Several Fiji National Clusters operate outside of disaster periods, supporting the development agenda including disaster preparedness and planning. This provides valuable continuity and helps to maintain key relationships between stakeholders; however, at present it only occurs across one or two clusters. Experiences from Cyclone Winston indicated the Fiji Cluster system is well positioned for planning and financing at a national level, but at a sub-national level where implementation is key, gaps start to emerge. It is anticipated that the new disaster management legislation will encourage greater sectorial and intersectoral cluster collaboration, with committees to be established from a national to local level. Despite the challenges and shortcomings, the clusters offer an important pathway to strengthening the nexus between humanitarian response and development goals in urban areas.

Health & Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health • World Health Organisation
Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Housing and Community Development • IFRC • Habitat Fiji
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Education • UNICEF • Save the Children
Food Security & Livelihood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Agriculture • FAO • World Food Program
Safety & Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Women • Children and Poverty Alleviation • UN Women
WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health - Environmental Health • UNICEF
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Economy • Fiji Procurement Office • NDMO
Public Works & Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services Lands and Mineral Resources • NDMO
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Communication • UNICEF

Figure 6 Fiji Clusters Leads & Co-leads

Significant improvements and investment in disaster management have led to a more cohesive and coordinated response to disasters in Fiji. The NMDC facilitates strategic coordination across government Ministries, the International Federation for Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and FCOSS, while the cluster system supports the activation and operational coordination across the wider government and non-government stakeholders. These clearly defined governance structures and mechanisms for response offer a relatively robust approach which operates effectively at a national and regional level.

Challenges with response efforts start to appear more prominently at the local level, particularly with the rise of urbanisation and the increase in urban informal settlements. While certainly not the only causative factor, the increase in urban populations has contributed to the disruption of

traditional community structures which in rural settings are central to local coordination, inclusion and engagement. The cluster system, which was developed to improve implementation by coordinating agencies, has been largely successful but some difficulties remain. One of these being that, to date, it has predominately been focused on rural and regional settings. Additionally, the cluster system is arguably not well placed to engage with local structures and to coordinate with local government systems due to the representation of national government and INGOs. The challenges of the cluster system appear to be compounded in urban and peri-urban areas where traditional governance is weak and more formal institutions are still evolving.

The central function of the current humanitarian system is to coordinate and deliver goods and services to communities impacted by disasters; its contribution to long-term resilience building is less well defined. Since 2006, international aid agencies and national governments have worked collaboratively through the cluster system. Established as a mechanism for improved coordination, the cluster system has proved to be largely effective and a notable improvement from previous more ad hoc arrangements.

Notwithstanding its success, those working in the humanitarian sector have expressed a few shortcomings relating to the cluster system, which has had minimal review since its inception. From our interviews concerns were raised about weak coordination of interventions across agencies, sectors and institutions; insufficient localised responses; and a complex and bureaucratic top-down approach which often fails to consider the needs of those most vulnerable. With more than 50% of the population now living in urban areas, the weakness of the cluster system in urban environments has become a pressing issue for attention, as noted in a recent report:

*“The traditional cluster system does not lend itself to the complexity of needs, services and systems across an urban landscape with humanitarian agencies struggling to deal with the complexity, density and built environment of towns and cities or [un]able to take full advantage of the potential a city has to offer”.*¹⁵

As a result, the sector is calling for approaches that are more responsive to complex systems, collaborative in their interventions, and inclusive of marginal and diverse stakeholders (such as those with disabilities or living in informal settlements).

Multi-agency, multi-sector collaboration and assessment

Despite significant investment and improvements to disaster response, challenges continue to arise in relation to the current post-disaster assessment process. Assessment duplication, the absence of centralised and standardised data and assessments, and gaps in implementing learning from previous disasters all contribute to the needs of some people affected by disasters not being met. A closer look at the key phases of disaster response helps us to understand strengths and weaknesses in the current system.

In the context of Fiji, initial damage assessments (IDAs) are coordinated by the Divisional Commissioners and are carried out within 48 hours of the disaster. The IDA identifies damages to

¹⁵ International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2015) Humanitarian Crises in Urban Areas: Are Area-Based Approaches to Programming and Coordination the Way Forward?

structures, and loss of lives and livelihoods. Based on information collected, the initial response is planned which includes food assistance and emergency shelter. The data collected are generally used by all stakeholders and in the case of Cyclone Harold assessments undertaken by the government were used by Red Cross and other agencies too.

The IDA report forms the basis of Detailed Damage Assessments (DDA). Within a month of the IDA, a multi-sectorial technical team including participants from relevant clusters undertake a DDA to confirm recovery and rehabilitation needs. Following the DDA, data is circulated to the clusters via the NDMO and response plans are developed and initiated. While the IDAs and DDAs are coordinated by government bodies, there continues to be instances where organisations undertake their own assessments using separate forms leading to assessment duplication and data incompatibilities. The decision for stakeholders to adopt alternate or additional assessment tools may be due to gaps in the information being gathered at present, such as the absence of social inclusion data in the governments IDAs.

This data gap has led FCOSS to develop a separate assessment process to account for social inclusion and vulnerability. One key informant noted that the Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Housing, and Ministry of Agriculture all have their own assessment forms for DDA which creates confusion among stakeholders with replication of data. Similarly, the Red Cross has their own IDA form and while there is coordination of data between Red Cross, Divisional Commissioners/District Officers and AHP partners, differing definitions and criteria across assessment can create challenges when determining need and the prioritisation of response.

“That’s an issue for us. To develop a standard Initial Detailed Assessment. Sometimes the communities get overwhelmed with the assessment that is going on. The first group they come in and do the assessment, then another group they come and do different assessment. And then they are looking out...waiting for assistance...” Fiji Government Respondent

Further consultation undertaken by FCOSS of DCOSS representatives identified a need for a National CSO reporting format which covers national, subnational, and community based CSOs. The reporting templates provide an opportunity for those working in sub national and community based organisations an opportunity to contribute to the data collection based on their own organisational assessment tools and community volunteer observations.

Efforts are underway to standardise assessment forms across government, Red Cross, and civil society organisations. A core focus of this process is to ensure that assessments are developed in a way that allows efficient completion so not to overwhelm and overburden communities.

The recent workshop (November 2020) facilitated by the Fiji Ministry of Defence and the Australia Pacific Security College on Climate Induced Security challenges highlighted the importance of collaboration across every level of government in response to natural disasters. Collaborative decision-making across the whole of government, as well as civil society, is critical for well-integrated responses to climate-induced security challenges. This was referred to as a ‘whole of nation’ approach. Leveraging military capabilities and resources remain essential in responding to natural disasters efficiently given their capacity for national coverage and their role to ensure national security. By recognising the existing systems and processes, and working with a shared purpose, NGOs, civil society and government can effectively foster resilience in Fiji.

Despite the challenges associated with multi-agency and multi-sectorial approaches to assessment, there are promising practices emerging. AHP partners currently undertake a pre-distribution assessment to determine progress of their relevant projects, identify what is still pending, and update their data for wider use. The pre-distribution assessment is carried out after the DDA has been done and different response and recovery initiatives mobilised. The pre-distribution assessment phase also allows for the identification of vulnerable groups and mechanisms for targeted distribution of needed goods and services. Following Cyclone Harold, AHP partner organisations along with district officers conducted pre-distribution assessments. They supported collaborative multi-agency assessments enabling partner organisations to target specific community groups and contribute to assessments of other community groups through better coordinated assessments and information/expertise sharing. For example, under the AHP, the Fiji Disabled People's Federation shared their assessment findings with Live and Learn (Fiji NGO) to inform their broader strategies and programs for recovery for persons with a disability.

"I think the approach toward coordination can still be improved ... done in a way that at the end of the day it's about the beneficiaries and not us. It's about the beneficiaries, it's about getting out to them as quickly as possible but in a coordinated manner so that we are not replicating and there's a lot of inefficiency that takes place" NGO Respondent.

Not only do shared assessments reduce duplication of data and over-assessment of communities, they strengthen collaborative relationships between organisations and help to break down engagement barriers with vulnerable and diverse populations groups. Following TC Harold, FCOSS advocated to the Fijian government for the Rainbow Pride Foundation (RPF) to be part of a joint assessment in Kadavu. This was RPFs first time engaging in multi-sectoral assessment with the Fijian government, having previously conducted their own assessments through community networks.

As a result of this collaborative partnership, RPF now have direct relationships with government officials involved in disaster response. In practice, the relationship, facilitated by the AHP platform, has supported the improvement of data collection tools to better integrate information on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and disability. While the Fijian government and RPF continue to use their templates, the data from RPF is used to complement government data, thus contributing to the response and recovery work. The next step may be to develop a more integrated data collection approach. This joint assessment partnership is in its infancy; however, it highlights the value of leveraging the expertise of different sectors and agencies to strengthen and streamline the post-disaster assessment process. Similar CBO and government collaboration has been occurring with FCOSS providing a focal point and occupying office within NDMO during post disaster response work. This has reportedly supported NDMOs ability to engage with local CSOs through the existing FCOSS relationships.

Many are learning by doing. Lessons are being applied from Cyclone Winston relating to NGO and government coordination. NGOs often respond directly to communities they already work in. While it makes sense for organisations to support communities where existing relationships exist, issues with coordination and collaboration result in some communities receiving duplicated services and assistance (particularly if multiple NGOs work within them on different issues), while others receive no help. In situations like this, communities can become disenfranchised by the very systems that are working to support their recovery.

*"...we are trying to work with our AHP partners because we know our reach is limited. We cannot be in all communities but the partners they work in different areas so for us, [partnerships] are transforming our work from status quo to transformative."
RPF Respondent.*

Those interviewed indicated that coordinated and collaborative responses are occurring; however, they lack consistency and tend to break down between the initial rapid response and the longer-term recovery efforts. Additionally, while collaborative practices are improving there continues to be a siloing of sectors, with governments institutions collaborating with other government institutions, and NGOs working alongside other NGOs.

In an effort to break down the siloing of sectors, mechanisms are being established to increase collaboration. The AHP is one platform that appears to be increasing collaborative practice between government, INGOs and CSOs. AHP participants report that the platform has created the space to bring together stakeholders from different sectors and programmes, creating opportunities for collaboration. Due to their unique relationship with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) the platform has also brought key government agencies into the fold. But a critical review of practice could help to ensure genuine partnerships are established with equitable access to resources, data and decision-making processes. Some local NGO representatives still felt undervalued and unable to access resources they needed while others noted that the AHP model needed to fit into the existing system rather than trying to develop a new mechanism which causes confusion and disruption to the system.

Multi-sector collaboration between the private sector, government and NGOs occurs between FCOSS and the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council (FBDR). Established in response to poor coordination between the private sector and government in procuring supplies for relief and recovery work during Cyclone Winston, the FBDR membership consists primarily of business organisations with some engagement by NGOs and government partners. A monthly forum provides a platform for discussion relating to climate change, disaster, and resilience building in an effort to strength disaster preparation, response, and recovery. Currently FBDR are not represented in the NDMA and as such are not represented on the NDM Council.

*"...over the last 3 years since Winston, working closely with the commissioner's office and the NDMO there has been a level of trust that we have built between partners and so the sharing of information I have experienced this time around was much easier than it was previously"
NGO Respondent.*

Following Cyclone Harold, FBDR developed a list of suppliers from their member base for various products and services from which the Fiji Government was able to procure. With COVID-19 impacting the distribution, the government approached FBDR to help procure transportation of goods to the

outer island. For example, Patterson Brothers, an FBDR member, supported the distribution of goods from Natovi Jetty outside Suva Lockdown area. Given the growing need for better communication and coordination between the private sector, NGOs, and government, FBDR are now lobbying the government for a seat on the NDMC.

The lack of collaboration with the municipal councils on disaster management is a concern,

“NDMOs role now is just to coordinate with the donors, with the partners. Through our clusters, we have managed to assist some communities that were not assisted through the Ministry of Economy.” Fiji Government Respondent

particularly as current urban planning and management policies do not reflect climate and disaster resilience considerations. The Town and Country Planning Department is a key government agency for urban resilience; however, they are not represented or engaged as a department but represented by their line ministry which is the Ministry of Local Government. The changing resourcing of key government agencies raises concerns, in particular NDMOs

reduction in power and resources is impacting on their capacity to coordinate and influence recovery response.

At a regional level the Pacific Resilience Partnership¹⁶ was identified as being a positive step towards collaboration across Pacific island countries. Greater regional collaboration supports lessons sharing and the dissemination of information to respond to disasters more effectively and efficiently. Stakeholders recognised the value of this mechanism and noted the opportunities for further development including establishing a stronger platform for disaster response agencies, like NDMOs, to work together in times of crisis. Additionally, several interviewees noted the need for greater collaboration in and between Clusters outside of disaster periods. One suggestion was to establish a quarterly meeting schedule to maintain the engagement and strength preparedness programs.

“I think one of the learning is coming through from Harold is the need for clusters to be meeting regularly, even during peace times. Because clusters also have a role to play in preparedness and response.” Fiji Government Respondent

Localised responses

Increasing urban populations and the emergence of more formal practices of governance and leadership have highlighted the need for stronger mechanisms to respond to disasters within a local urban context. The hierarchical system of disaster recovery, including the cluster system whereby assessments and coordination occur at a national level often result in a gap of genuine representation from the local level. This is proving to be an increasing issue in urban settlements as there can be a breakdown of local leadership and an uncertainty about who is representing them.

Recognising the value of community representatives trained in disaster preparedness and response, efforts are underway to strength local response capacity and capability. NDMO are currently piloting a ‘Community-based Disaster Risk Management Training Manual’ to train community volunteers. As part of this pilot, youth volunteers are trained in on-the-ground assessment and relief work following a disaster. NDMO are working towards an online platform for IDA/DDA, whereby trained community volunteers undertake local assessments. The intention is to develop a standardised manual, similar to one used to facilitate training in WASH related issues, so that it can be used by

¹⁶ <http://www.resilientpacific.org/pacific-resilience-partnership/>

CSOs. This would help to ensure a consistent and standard level of training is provided, and respond to the NAP Framework commitment to localised and contextual response systems. It was reported that this manual, as well as a set of standard operating procedures are being adapted to address the unique needs of the urban informal settlement populations.

Similarly, Red Cross Committees are established in villages and settlements where local people take an active role in recovery efforts. Alongside the *Turaga ni Koro*, a community committee comprising youth, women, LGBTIQ and male representatives meet monthly to discuss local disaster related projects. The Red Cross Committee members are trained in early warning and early action, disaster response, and first aid. The active function of the committees varies significantly with some engaged

“TC Winston invited a lot of humanitarian actors. Some from overseas with experience from Syria, from Iraq and they all applied the same context to Fiji. But in Fiji, its completely different” Fiji Government Respondent.

in regular meetings and activities and others lacking in momentum and in some instances lying dormant. More could be done to scale up this initiative and ensure greater consistency across communities — this might be most effectively achieved through NGO-government partnerships.

The function of the Red Cross Committees in informal urban settlements is more complicated. A combination of poorly defined formal governance structures, the weakening or absence of chiefly leadership, and the increase in urban employment that draws people away from community, all contribute to engagement challenges with informal settlements populations. Nonetheless, in communities where the Red Cross had established community committees, these proved highly effective in response to TC Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic. Using their networks of community committees, the Red Cross successfully reached out to 83 communities in a month, 38 of which were in the greater Suva urban area. While volunteers’ skills were limited in relation to the health needs of COVID-19, they were trained in community assessment techniques and could successfully identify post cyclone damages and community needs in an effective way.

In addition to the committee networks, the Red Cross are currently working with the Ministry of Youth and Education to reinstate the Junior Red Cross Program which is designed to build disaster

“We find closer to urban centres communities are a lot less engaged, further up we go, they are more engaged. Informal settlements are a whole different culture. It is almost individualistic” NGO Respondent.

preparedness and response capacity in school students including first aid training. In 2014, the Junior Red Cross Program had 720 registered schools with teachers who facilitated the training. This is an important step toward a ‘whole of nation’ approach to resilience building.

Sector specific community capacity building initiatives are also being implemented at a local level by international NGOs. Shelter specific projects including IFRC/Habitat for Humanity’s Participatory Approach to Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) toolkit and IFRC Shelter Kits place the recovery ownership and responsibility with the community. Local community members are supported to reconstruct post-disaster with resources and training provided either in advance, or at the point of recovery. One interviewee noted the need for additional preparedness and recovery training to occur at a local level in an effort to shift the community’s mentality away from “waiting for the government” and towards “self-directed and locally actioned responses”.

Community focused assessments carried out by the government and NGOs have also supported the identification and distribution of other post-disaster needs including food packages, cash, and seeds and seedling. While these assessments may not always be carried out by community members, they are targeted at understanding local need. For example, Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) were able to distribute seeds to communities who wanted to re-establish gardening and boost food security. The value of locally focused assessments means assistance is targeted to needs. Some felt without locally-based assessments, seeds may not have been distributed at all, or distributed to those without the need.

“...a model globally of standardisation and because of lack of funding around mitigation and preparedness that when you go into the disaster and reconstruction phases, the solutions are not as localized as they should be. So usually what happens is when there is a disaster not everybody is prepared for it, solutions are helicoptered in and because it is so chaotic, you just deliver” NGO Respondent.

Live and Learn uses group discussions and key informant interviews to engage the community in programming and recognises that the existence of their prior relationship in the informal settlements makes humanitarian work effective and efficient. They use information they have through their development programming to inform their humanitarian response work, collaborating across different organisational programs. As noted above, the weakness of leveraging prior relationships is that some communities can be neglected, if there is no central system to assess coverage and coordination.

As with many aspects of disaster response and recovery, a localised response is not a panacea and can still result in inequities if not monitored, evaluated and adapted. Interviewees provided examples of assessment bias whereby people in positions of power influenced recovery efforts by exaggerating the outcomes of community-led post disaster assessments. While efforts have been made to improve guidelines and criteria for community-driven assessments, there continues to be challenges relating to power and positions within communities. Arguably though, dishonest influence exists at all levels of disaster response and recovery and should not be a dissuasive factor when encouraging an increase in local engagement and community centred response efforts.

[Adaptive, flexible and realistic processes](#)

Countless post-disaster evaluations and lessons-learned reports offer recommendations to support adaptive and flexible programming and funding. They also advocate for more realistic timeframes for future disaster response. In the Pacific, as disasters increase in frequency and intensity it is not uncommon for one crisis to occur while the previous recovery is still underway. Demands on human and financial resources are increasing, while the capacity of institutions to respond is under strain.

To effectively respond to mounting pressures, adaptable, innovative and flexible programming and funding approaches are essential to achieve long-term, economically sound and scalable solutions. There is some evidence that this is occurring in Fiji.

Cash benefit schemes were first used following Cyclone Winston whereby existing social welfare protection mechanisms were accessed in an effort to provide case support to impacted communities. One cash benefit program, led by the World Food Program provided F\$150 per month to nearly 72,000 people living in the 12 most impacted areas. An impact evaluation reviewing the government-initiated top-up cash transfers to existing social welfare recipients found that three months after the TC Winston, beneficiaries of the scheme were more likely to have recovered from factors such as sickness or injury, repaired their houses or other village infrastructure, bought food stocks, and fixed the damage to agricultural land relative to comparable households that did not receive additional assistance.

Cash transfers are being replicated by ADRA in response to TC Harold to support relief work in Kadavu. Unlike TC Winston, a partnership to supply finances have been established between UNDP and Ministry of iTaukei. To be eligible, community members participate in an awareness session about the program, benefits, restrictions and responsibilities. This is followed by the distribution of food and FJD\$100 per household. Participants can decide whether the money will be used to buy roofing or buy more food. Persons with a disability were given an additional \$50.00 with a total of 280 people with disability being supported. Like the above program, cash payments assist in more rapid recovery.

"...funding opportunities should allow for some flexibility. Flexibility in design - events can occur that can require us to reprogram and I think that flexibility need to be allowed for even in humanitarian program." NGO Respondent

Similar to the cash benefit scheme, the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) provided members access to their superannuation following TC Winston. FNPF members could withdraw FJD\$1000 and up to FJD\$5000 for housing repairs if they could present a property title. Launched relatively soon after the disaster, the scheme was open for 60 days and extended to FNPF members who were not directly affected but wished to help their cyclone-affected families. The World Bank (2017) reports more than 9,000 members withdrew money during this period. A similar scheme was also available post Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 which included a top up by the government.

This scheme is not without its flaws as it is targeted at people working in the formal sector who have a property title, excluding those living in informal settlements and working in the informal economy. However, it offers a reasonably rapid response solution for those with greater financial security while freeing up space for NGO efforts to be directed to those more vulnerable. In addition, the formal investment into construction and recovery generated by superannuation fund withdrawals positively stimulates the informal economy and those whose livelihoods are dependent on it.

Adapting projects to respond to local circumstances often needs to occur after the project has commenced. The shelter response initiated by the Red Cross following Cyclone Winston offers an example of flexible and agile programming that adapted in response to local challenges and unanticipated complications. The initial recovery efforts of Red Cross involved constructing permanent shelters; however, complex approval processes and challenges with land acquisition ultimately resulted in a project standstill. In response, the Red Cross replaced their shelter program with the shelter kit and supported communities to rebuild themselves with the support of construction materials and skill development. Red Cross now works with other stakeholders in the

shelter cluster including Habitat for Humanity, and the Housing Ministry to respond to disaster recovery with the shelter kit that includes toilets, bathrooms, and access ramps. Despite gains, one expert reflected that the kits still need more tailoring to local needs and context.

Reflective practice and evaluation

A quick scan of any major INGO website confirms that evaluations of international humanitarian and development programs are extensive. What's often missing though are evaluations and lessons learned reports that extend beyond the requirements of donors and needs of communication and marketing strategies. While the value and commitment to monitoring, evaluation and learning has increased significantly, many evaluations continue to focus on outputs rather than outcomes or long-term impact for communities. For most organisations, both government and NGOs, the ability to commit to a long-term outcomes-based evaluation within what are already tight timeframes and even tighter budgets, is often the hope but rarely the reality.

AHP members all have a standard evaluation across the program and have a collaborative process where the tools and methodology are shared among them. They also plan to use more of KoBo tool¹⁷, a data collection tool. AHP respondent

In the context of Fiji, AHP are providing technical and funding support to build the capacity of their 12 partner organisations in monitoring and evaluation. A baseline study has been conducted and joint forums held. AHP has given funding to FCOSS to develop a CSO protocol for accountability which will be shared with government and other CSOs to set a consistent standard and reporting framework to inform how CSOs operate in humanitarian settings. There is also a push for assessment processes to be better integrated and coordinated.

A common issue identified when reviewing evaluations, and also by those interviewed, is the absence of disaggregated data to tailor interventions to community needs, but also to assess the inclusiveness of assistance. Data disaggregation needs to be improved at the community levels to allow more critical reflection on assistance coverage and possible exclusions (e.g. assistance to those with disabilities, or single parent households). This role may fall to Divisional Commissioners with greater insights into context, and system functions and governance.

There are indications that greater data disaggregation can help enhance system responsiveness. Following the AHP platform trainings about indicators that measure disability, these were included in government post-disaster data collection. It was noted, however, that data collection relating to SOGIESC needs to be improved. The Central Divisional Commission plans to increase their efforts in preparedness by collecting up-to-date information on the profile of communities and working with communities to have their own disaster risk response mechanisms in place that consider community profiles and needs. The ability to access disaggregated data also provides increased opportunity for cross-cluster collaboration, and evaluation of outcomes. For example, nutritional deficiencies in malnourished

"We have foot bridges that are built and within 6 months due to unforeseen flood it is taken away. We have got water tanks being given but hurricanes and cyclones just come by and slash the water tanks. Solar panels are being introduced and lights are provided but when cyclones come, they fall down. Sharing data could improve planning" Fiji Government Respondent.

¹⁷ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/kobotoolbox>

children are further exacerbated following a disaster with the increase in food insecurity. The combined data from the Protection, Food Security, and Health Clusters may provide a more comprehensive understanding of needs and outcomes beyond what each individual cluster would initially be assessing.

Reflective practice offers an opportunity for collaborative learning, planning and action. The Shelter Cluster has been actively developing handbooks to share best practises and knowledge with other stakeholders. In 2019 the Fiji Shelter Handbook was developed to document the process and products available on shelter response and recovery. It provides support to local and international responders delivering national level emergency shelter response programs, but also allows those functioning in other sectors to consider how their interventions can support shelter initiatives.

The NDMO identified the importance of creating a culture of continuous learning and reflection across all levels of government. The Cluster system allows some cross fertilisations of ideas within sectors; however, much more needs to be done to support reflection and coordination between sectors and between levels of governments. The NDMO initiative of inter-cluster meetings is a good start. As are the internal after action review (AAR) reports developed following a disaster response. The AAR process encourages NDMO staff to reflect on the response process, identify what worked well and what could have been don't differently and to air any grievances.

Ultimately, as suggested by the ABA approach, disaster response and long-term development objectives need to be integrated. Creating communities of practice inclusive of government, NGOs and private sector will be key to success. The work of NDMO, FCOSS and FBDRRC has been valuable but more platforms to integrate efforts are still required. Great strides have been made to better account for local needs and make disaster response more inclusive, participatory and adaptive, and there is ongoing work to strengthen interactions between local communities, district authorities and national government.

Next steps

There is no question that Fiji and the Pacific will continue to face large scale disasters. The question that arises is whether the current systems for response are equipped to deal with the increasing severity and intensity of events? The ABA principles provide an alternative framework to support disaster response in the Pacific that is contextually focused, leverages existing structures and promotes increased sector and agency collaboration and coordination. Additionally, they promote the adoption of agile and adaptive response mechanisms and a focus on more sustainable and developmental outcomes.

There is a compelling argument for the Pacific to adopt ABAs as a complementary approach to disaster response; however, it is critical that this is locally driven. As such, this paper presents an opportunity for further discussion and lesson sharing both in Fiji and across the Pacific region to better understand how, and if, ABAs can offer an approach to disaster response that strengthens what currently exists.

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