



Climate Resilient Islands Programme

Case Study: Disaster Preparedness, Fiji

Communities participating in the Climate Resilient Islands programme across Fiji are facing a range of disasters and challenges to their resilience. But many actions are being taken to prepare for disaster and strengthen their adaptation. The country's ND-GAIN Resilience Ranking – measuring Fiji's exposure, sensitivity and ability to adapt to negative impacts of climate change – ranks Fiji as the 88th most vulnerable country, but also the 79th most ready.

Common vulnerabilities

Fiji is considered highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Though exact effects are uncertain, sea-level rise, river and coastal erosion, more intense rainfall and cyclones and worsening drought are all likely.

These impacts have already been reported by almost all of Fiji's CRI communities. The most common disaster-related risks – combining the vulnerabilities, hazard exposure and current climate change impacts – are:

- increased flooding
- increased river erosion and silting
- increased landslide risk
- greater cyclone intensity and frequency
- more extreme heat
- changing rainfall patterns.

Others include limited road access to communities, lack of evacuation centres, housing built in vulnerable locations such as next to a river, increased populations, loss of traditional knowledge and deforestation.

Current capacity to respond

Fiji's Climate Resilient Islands communities are accustomed to disasters such as flooding and cyclones, though response plans and capacity vary. There is a general understanding

in all communities about what to do in the case of an emergency, though formalised plans, designated evacuation centres and training are less common. Five communities have a permanent disaster committee and/or a formalised disaster response plan, with four having neither. Three communities have evacuation centres.

Some communities are quite advanced in their disaster preparation. For example, Vitina has two evacuation centres, a formalised Disaster Management Plan and disaster training done alongside ADRA Fiji, and three formal committees including the Disaster Committee. Responsibilities are shared in the committees, with women included in all, and final decisions are made by popular vote. Naiqaqi also has an established Disaster Planning Committee, and the village hall serves as the evacuation centre, though there are concerns it may be in a vulnerable position, being next to the river.

While not all communities have such formal plans or committees, those that do not still seem to understand proper actions and responsibilities in case of disaster. In Nawailevu, for example, proper process requires the village headman to make an announcement when the Fiji Government's weather office has declared a disaster. Once villagers have been alerted, temporary evacuation centres are made available. The community is aware of this process, though no formal, documented disaster management plan exists. Laucala also has informal plans that come into effect during disasters, though these have not yet been documented.



Challenges

One common challenge to achieving full disaster preparedness is infrastructure. Several communities only have one road to and from the village, making evacuation difficult, especially in cases of floods or landslide. Some also do not have a proper or safe evacuation centre.

Food insecurity, loss of traditional knowledge and degraded ecosystems are also challenges for many communities. Several describe experiencing decreasing crop yields and sources of wild foods, potentially adding to post-disaster risk, particularly in communities whose infrastructure makes them more vulnerable to isolation after a disaster. The loss of traditional knowledge discussed by several communities is also a risk, as that knowledge can often provide understanding of natural disaster warnings and adaptation methods.

Degraded forests, loss of mangroves and coastal systems, and polluted and eroded rivers also significantly increase community vulnerability. These ecosystems often act as natural defences to extreme weather events like cyclones, tsunamis, storm surges and more. The communities seem aware of the importance of these systems for disaster resilience and their effectiveness as a nature-based solution for certain disaster risks.

Resilience planning

Understanding levels of disaster preparedness informs the next phase of the CRI programme – establishing community resilience plans, which involves noting assets most at risk, especially from the impacts of climate change, community capacity for making changes and strategies for increasing resilience.



Climate Resilient Islands aims to strengthen community resilience and adaptive capacity to the impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions working with rural communities in Vanuatu, Fiji, PNG, Tonga, and Tuvalu. The project is a New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade initiative implemented by Live & Learn Environmental Education.

