

Study on community response to post- cyclone disaster: a case study from three different communities in Fiji

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1. Research background and objectives

Small island states including those in the Pacific are vulnerable to disasters due to their exposure to a wide range of disasters. Natural disasters are prevalent in the Pacific and Fiji is no exception. This study focused on tropical cyclone Winston which affected 60 % of Fiji's population. The cyclone was the greatest to ever affect any island in the South Pacific, with a total estimated loss to be nearly three million Fijian dollars (1.4 billion USD), killing forty-four people in the process. Community social capital play a vital role in understanding and documenting community responses to any disaster. The purpose of this research was to investigate how communities responded by examining community self-recovery efforts and social capital traits. This thesis (case study) assessed the situation before the cyclones, the impacts and response activities of three geographically distinct villages in three different provinces: (i) Nabuna on Koro Island (Lomaiviti Province); (ii) Navala, in the highlands of the main island of Viti Levu (Ba Province); and (iii) Navuavua, a coastal village on the North-Western coast of Viti Levu (Ra Province). The research would contribute to understanding the role of community's social capital in effective disaster response for Fiji and will be critical in community preparations for future hazards.

2. Research methodology

Mixed methodology looking at both qualitative and quantitative data in the case study sites were executed.

1. Field work: qualitative approached semi- structured interviews with government officers and village headmen. Quantitative approached household questionnaires to 170 households in the three villages. Timeline of events was illustrated highlighting community activities from; within the village, contributions from government, NGO's and international organizations and family networks outside the village.
2. Literature review of government reports, situation reports, and past research conducted in community capitals framework, with a focus on social capitals in disaster within a community.
3. Observation: community social networks through working together in recovery activities and impacts of the cyclone in the villages.

3. Results and conclusion

The results showed that the community responded to the cyclone in the communities, utilizing the social capital resources available within. This was prevalent in the reconstruction of houses, as community cooperation as utilized in both Navala and Nabuna village, in Navuavua the family network was utilized in that regard. Self-help strategies were crucial prior to the arrival of government assistance (salvaging crops from farms and distribution of food already available in Navala and Nabuna). The importance of family link outside the village observed in Nabuna, in the formation of the emergency community, and the importance of having a disaster fund for ease of burden from families as seen in Nabuna in the housing reconstruction phase. As seen in this study, social cohesion is the strength in rural communities in Fiji, keeping people from leaving and provides for immediate and easy mobilization of groups within each community. Understanding of community self-help strategies can assist Government and community practitioners improve disaster preparedness in Fiji. Social networks and reliance on family links in Fiji will never disappear and this should only be strengthened so communities are better equipped to respond and recovery from any disaster.