

Voices from Ground Zero; a FRIEND experience post TC Winston in Ra province, Fiji

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Abstract

The frequency of disasters like cyclones is expected to increase in the small island developing states of the Pacific region. The complex disaster and post disaster environments continue to challenge humanitarian practitioners to find effective and people centric approaches.

In the wake of the devastation of Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston, many organizations like FRIEND participated in the humanitarian aid efforts with the hope to provide comfort and to reduce suffering.

This paper is an account of FRIEND's humanitarian encounters in the declared Ground Zero-Ra province, Fiji within a 12 week period post disaster and is presented using an integration of the phenomenological and narrative methods. The paper describes the explicit experiences of victims and communities, their resilience characteristics, the needs that arose and how they were addressed and the various gender roles that played out during this period. FRIEND also shares its methodology of responding according to these specific post disaster dynamics.

Other associated issues and the recommendations posed are captured from the voices of the victims of TC Winston in an effort to contribute to better approaches in the future should the need arise.

Key words

Category 5 Tropical Cyclone, Tropical Cyclone Winston, Ground Zero, Humanitarian services post disaster

Introduction

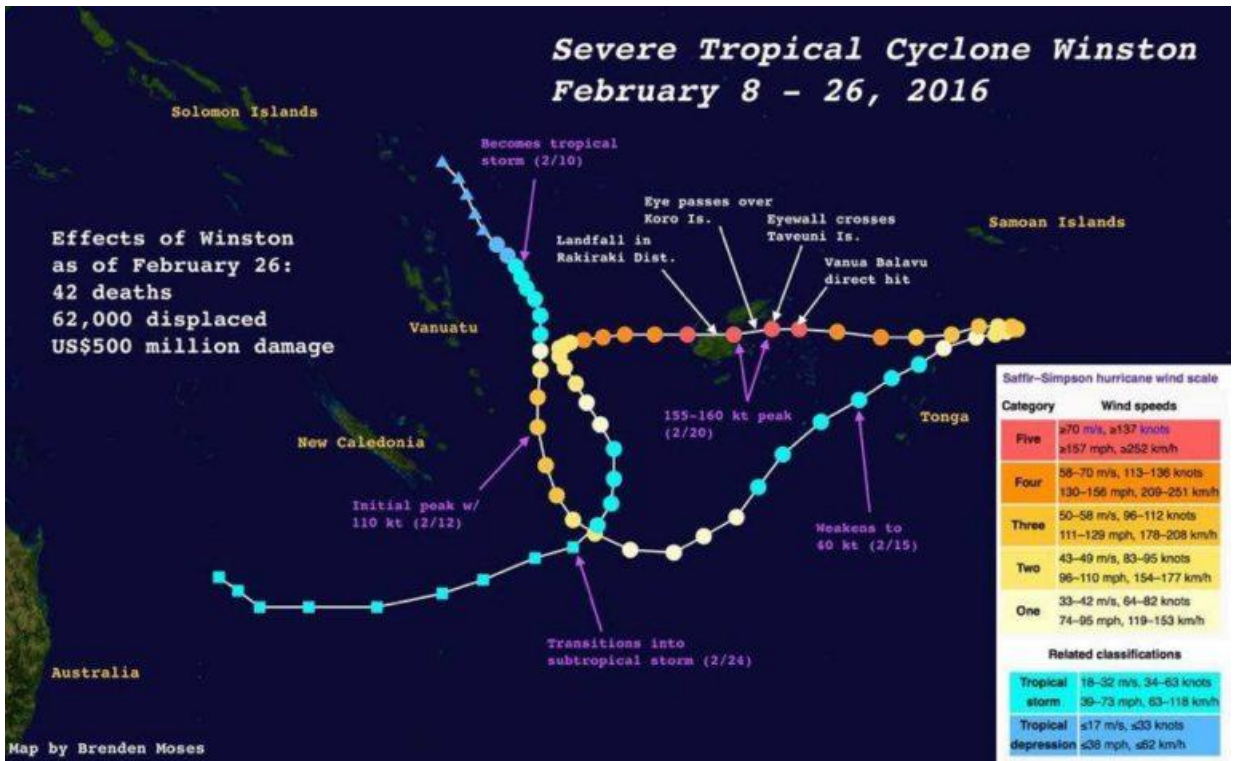
Winston, a Category 5 cyclone hit Fiji on February 20th to 21st 2016. It was the second strongest cyclone in human history and the worst that the Southern Hemisphere has ever recorded.

It occurred during the latter part of Fiji's cyclone season which is from mid-November to mid-April and this period is usually characterised by heavy rainfalls and flooding with hot and humid conditions in between. The last major cyclone that affected Fiji was on December 17th 2012 – Category 4 Tropical Cyclone Evan which was preceded by two major floods and caused devastation mostly around the Western part of Viti Levu, the Yasawa and Mamanuca group of islands.

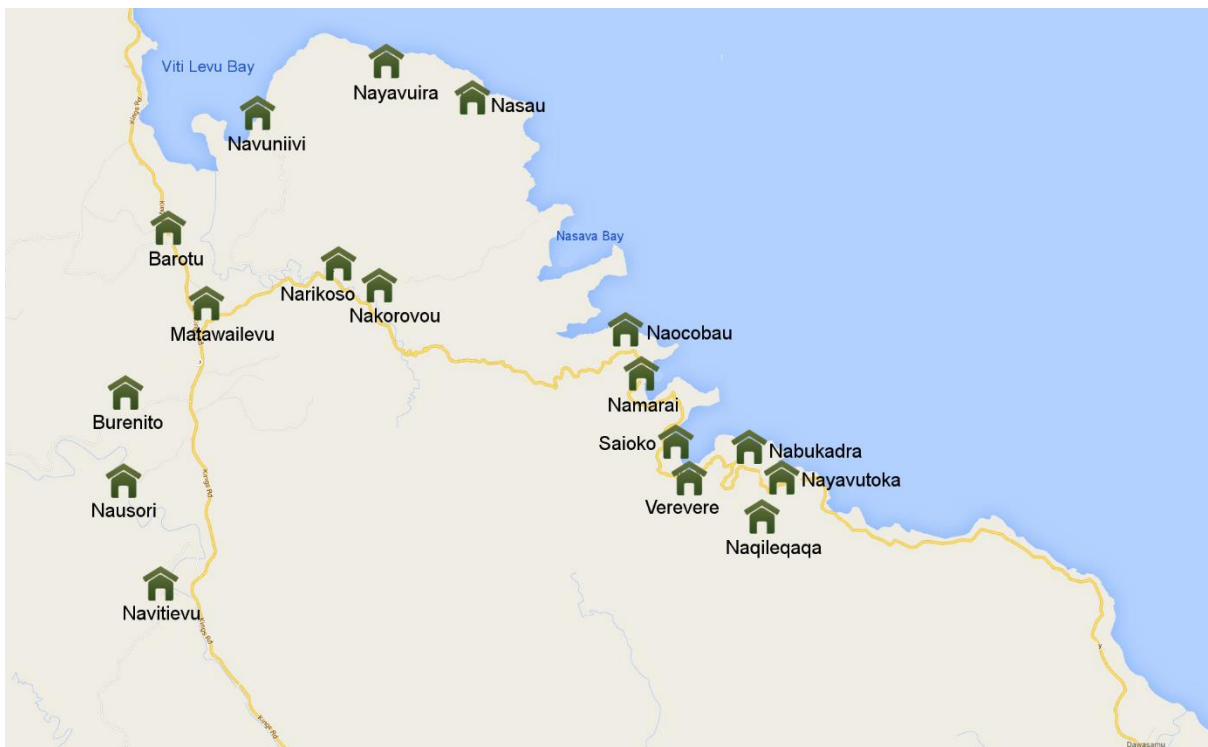
According to the UNISDR (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) Disaster Web, Fiji recorded 124 natural disasters in the 37 years to 2009. Of these 50% were cyclones 33 % floods and 8% were earthquakes. There are usually many recorded events but few (cyclone Eric and Nigel in 1985 and Cyclone Evan in 2012) are significant enough to be recorded in most people's minds because of the devastation caused. TC Winston is one such catastrophe labelled by the elderly as the most horrific they have encountered in their lifetime.

Tropical Cyclone Winston was first announced by the Fiji meteorological office to be close to the Fiji region on February 11th 2016 and it started as a category 1 that was headed for the Lau and Lomaiviti group and was to exit near Tonga after causing relatively minor damages there. However, it changed course and headed back for Fiji, only this time it had quickly flexed its muscles and by the time the first warnings were announced it had grown to be between Category 3 to 4. The Lau and Lomaiviti groups were the 1st to feel the increasing strength that were enough to cause significant destruction especially to the two islands of Vanuabalavu and Koro.

TC Winston followed a pathway that was atypical of most cyclones that have affected Fiji in the past and this was confirmed by the Fiji Meteorological Office and through the narrated experiences of those that were old enough to ascertain the hypothesis. It made landfall when it was Category 5 (wind speed >280km/hr) and the areas that were at the receiving end of this brutal force was the Northern parts of Tailevu, the entire Ra province and the inland parts of Naitasiri, Ba and Navosa that are closer to Ra and the western tip of Viti Levu.



Source : <https://higginsstormchasing.com/the-life-of-tc-winston/>



It caused relatively lesser degree of damage to the Tavua, Ba and Lautoka corridor while Nadi was almost untouched. Sigatoka only recorded flooding of low lying areas. The wind therefore left the tip of Viti Levu and headed for Vanua Levu through Cakaudrove province waters. On the way it affected Koro again and caused devastations to Taveuni, the coastal areas of Savusavu and the nearby villages and communities and finished off its round of Fiji in the province of Bua where it rampaged through the coastal to the interior parts of the province.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) announced the death toll of 47 that was directly caused by the cyclone, an estimated 30,000 homes were destroyed, 229 schools, 10 health facilities, public infrastructure like wharfs, bridges, roads, water pipes and reservoirs, electricity and telecommunication poles and towers were severely affected, significant damages to the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries were estimated to cost hundreds of millions of dollars while industries and companies in the same areas had to be closed because of direct damage and reduced operational capacity as a result of the above issues.

This paper is a narrative account of the shared experiences of the people in the villages, settlements and individual homes of Ra province – the declared ground zero area.

The objectives of the study are;

- To highlight the needs of those affected by the cyclone in their own voices
- To show how the affected communities addressed their own needs and how these needs were met by humanitarian aid providers.
- To discuss the unmet needs as described by the victims of TC Winston
- To capture the interchanging gender roles during and after the cyclone and the different dynamics of these roles.

The chaotic environment created by such a catastrophic event also meant that a lot of issues that relate to humanitarian efforts unfolded, these issues are also described.

This study is a result of the collaborative efforts of the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) a local development NGO and PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) a well-established India based research institute. The research was funded through Strengthening Citizen Engagement Initiative in Fiji implemented by UNDP and funded through the European Union.

FRIEND is a development NGO that has expertise in integrated approaches to improving the social status of rural and underserved communities in Fiji, through successful livelihood projects that takes into account social and health resources and challenges.

One of the many challenges continuously faced in development are natural disasters and their negative impacts. FRIEND therefore by default has had to evolve a humanitarian methodology as a contingency approach to its development strategies because these same communities are at the receiving end of both development aid and humanitarian aid

interventions. This has proven successful following the learning from EU funded GROW Livelihood program post TC Evan in 2012.

FRIEND draws its humanitarian approach from its understanding of local psychosocial and cultural contexts, the existing strengths and challenges and the appropriate needs assessment tools that continues to provide valuable levers of change and yielding sustainable outcomes for communities through continuous dialogue and consultations.

Following TC Winston, FRIEND had to carry out its own capacity assessment as the headquarters is located midway between Lautoka and Ba and the surrounding area received some damages to homes and public infrastructure. This time was also used to mobilise support for food, water and clothing from its network of friends (regular citizens and corporate entities). We wish to acknowledge the support of those who assisted in anyway in our humanitarian efforts.

The recommendations put forward by FRIEND have been coined in a format that is intended to amplify the voices of those who were too traumatised to speak from an aid recipient chair, especially the women, children, people living with disabilities & chronic debilitating diseases and the elderly. They were often provided services without even being consulted on their needs and strengths often resulting in aid being irrelevant to their needs.

Methodology

FRIEND shares its experiences from week 1 to week 12 post TC Winston as staff and management consulted the communities at each stage while providing humanitarian assistance. These experiences were drawn directly from the consultations and observations with the people affected while simultaneously assisting to address their needs with them. The local contributions to the narratives were from those directly assisted by FRIEND as well as those who were not served by FRIEND but reside within the boundaries of Ra province.

Immediately after the cyclone, FRIEND carried out a Rapid Needs, Resilience and Vulnerability Consultations & Assessment of Ba province (Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, and Tavua) and Ra province in the accessible areas of the districts of Rakiraki, Saivou, Nalawa and Korotubu. This involved consultations with affected people/ groups of people and making observations of real challenges and existing resources. This activity also involved the distribution of food, water and clothing.

The areas were then categorised according to the following characteristics found:

1. Severity of devastation
2. The necessity and vastness of needs
3. The capability of the community to address these needs
4. The accessibility of the community by service providers

According to this, a decision was made for FRIEND to prioritise Ra province and to begin focused interventions on the districts of Korotubu, Nalawa and to move towards Saivou and Rakiraki because the latter two had good accessibility.

The following narratives therefore are a documented account of the consultations and observations carried out from February 22nd to May 4th 2016 while simultaneously carrying out humanitarian work. Observations from follow ups carried out until May 30th have also been included in discussions.'

The following methods were used to collect data:

- Formal consultations with individuals and groups from both the I Taukei communities and from those of Indian descent.
- Informal consultations with individual and community groups
- 1 to 1 interviews (framed questions) with community members who may or may not have been assisted by FRIEND.
- Community group interviews (framed questions) with those who may or may not have been assisted by FRIEND.
- SWOT analysis of affected communities.

This paper therefore combines the Phenomenological and Narrative approaches of research to fully and explicitly describe the feelings of victims of TC Winston and the sharing of the needs dynamics and the way forward is in the hope that the learning could be a useful tool in serving the next vulnerable population should an unfortunate event of similar intensity and severity affect Fiji again.

Background: The Experience

1st week post TC Winston

The stillness of Sunday morning 21st February brought mixed feelings of relief that the cyclone was over and at the same time, fear of what was yet to be discovered. Lautoka city was covered with branches of trees and rubbish scattered on the roads. There were a few cars manoeuvring through the debris on the roads as people were already out to see for themselves the results of the previous night's strong winds. The road to Tuvu (FRIEND HQ) revealed broken power lines and damages to several roof tops and we could count 4 houses that were brought to the ground.

As we came up Tagaloli hill we saw on the hillside ahead, the walls and rooftops of newly built metal framed buildings shattered and scattered randomly over the entire hilltop. We knew that there were seven of these decent sized homes built by an NGO that was meant to look after widows, and our office was only 500 metres away downhill on the other side. Across the road we saw a few farm homes that were partly damaged and more roof tops blown away.

We arrived at the office site with much relief that the only damages were to guttering and down pipes. There were small branches of trees scattered everywhere but the concrete main office, the food production centre and the new 2 storey building which was still under construction with the skeleton and roof cover still intact. This brought a huge relief to the staff present that morning as we realised how fortunate we were to have only minor damages after what we had just witnessed uphill. One of the staff reminded us that this time we were spared as TC Evan in 2012 had destroyed our office and two other training buildings. All the vehicles were unscathed and only 2 of the more than 30 permanent staff had partial damages to their homes but were ready to come to work. Our borehole water supply was affected as electricity was down but we managed to hire a neighbour's generator to pump water to a 15000 litre tank to be able to start operations at the office. The next few days were spent putting down hurricane shutters, and cleaning up the entire 5 acre compound which also has a bee farm. Communications were maintained with mobile phones and charged laptops with internet with our network of friends (Development and humanitarian donors, corporate and citizens in Fiji and abroad) to try and secure humanitarian needs as we prepared ourselves for community assessments.

After a proper briefing of all staff that involved sharing of experiences and feelings, the map for the Rapid assessment and consultations was drawn. We set out first to visit the communities we serve in around the office and the greater Lautoka and Ba town and farm areas.

Villages like Matawalu, Vitogo, Vakabuli, Namoli, Lauwaki and Viseisei had an average of around 10% (of total number of homes) damaged and of those around 1-2 % were totally destroyed. The village halls and churches were intact and used as evacuation centres with only several families occupying these. The Turaga ni Koros (TNK) or the village headmen met with us with the statistics they had gathered. We had assisted these communities post TC Evan in 2012 so as they shared their experiences and statistics, there was anticipation already in their voices that we would do the same. We had to keep expectations in check as we assured them that we were there to listen and consult on needs while we provided basic humanitarian needs. We encouraged them to organise themselves and start to assist each other with clearing the debris. They were assisting each other with food and shelter as there were more houses standing.

The residential and farming communities of Drasa, Paipai, Lovu, and Lauwaki had similar damage rates and they asked the same questions as that of the villagers. The Advisory councillors we met also shared that there had been a lot of sharing of food and home spaces with those that were affected. A few women and men had questioned when the food rations by government was going to come and whether there would be a similar housing assistance like the one post TC Evan. It was early days to answer these questions.

Ba villages of Nailaga, Nataleicake, Koroqaqa, Votua, Nawaqadamu, Balevuto, Natunuku, had around 10-15% home damage rate with ~2-3 % of these totally destroyed. Most schools in Ba were severely damaged even though they were evacuation centres. Community members from two coastal settlements; Natavarau and Nakavika, were in Raviravi Primary school. 3 women and 2 men shared the story of how the roof of the 3 classrooms they were

in suddenly gave way to the strong winds and the desks that they had to take cover under were getting difficult to hold still. A man then broke through 3 floor planks and all went through and lied down underneath the 2 feet high space for 4 hours. They mentioned that the children cried throughout the night from cold and fear.

Farm homes in the Ba sugar belt areas had higher percentage of damages compared to the Lautoka areas and a common sight was blown roof tops and occasionally missing walls as well. In both Lautoka and Ba villages and populated residential communities a common sight observed was groups of men working together to put back roof tops and erect walls of homes. Individual homes had their own family members cleaning, clearing and sunning beddings and clothes and occasionally an individual was seen trying to patch a roof or a wall.

The sports stadium in Ba - Govind Park was severely damaged and the surrounding residential areas received damage from broken rain tree branches which was a common sight near the Ba Mission Hospital side of Ba town. A family who returned from the hospital told us that now they had to wait longer hours because of power and water cuts and staff shortage.

The NDMO (DISMAC) Western office was visited next which was located at the Commissioner Western's office and was the main data collection and operational decision centre. A meeting was held with the operational head of the team - the DPO, the Officer in Command (OC) of the Duke of Edinburgh Barracks the Western HQ of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, other Ministerial head of Departments and a representative of FCDP (Fiji Community Development program) a locally run program by DFAT Australia Aid.

We were briefed that Ra province had been declared "GroundZero" as confirmed by the Prime Minister's declaration on national news after he visited the Western division. We were told that Government was currently focused on ensuring that the access issue was addressed first which was the temporary repair of roads and bridges and clearing of all major roads and tributaries. We were informed that there was enough donated food rations to cater for the whole western division (affected communities) for the next few months. The food rations were going to be prioritised for evacuation centres first then the rest of the communities would be served later. We were also informed that tents and tarpaulins were on its way and would be delivered as soon as they arrive and when the damaged home numbers for each community was available to the DISMAC offices in Lautoka and the branches which were now set up in the District Offices in Ba town, Tavua town and Rakiraki town.

We had secured a funding of \$104,000FJD through Fiji Community Development Program (FCDP) to undertake humanitarian work in an area in the Western Division that we had prioritised. The amount we proposed was higher but there were other NGOs that shared the allocated funds managed by FCDP. We had proposed assisting with shelter materials, beddings and NCD medications and outreach clinic. We received cash donation from Munro Leys, Board members, staff members, concerned citizens, International Women's Association (IWA), A former Fiji citizen group in Brisbane and Fijian Indian Association in

Wellington. Donations also came in the form of food rations from the Motibhai Group of Companies and other companies provided cartons of water, baby diapers and many citizens brought clothes. FRIEND staff and friends also mobilised dry clothing from their homes and communities and these were packed and ready for distribution. With this initial injection of assistance we set out to do further assessment and distribution in Tavua and Ra.

2nd week Post TC Winston

Sunday 29th February 2016 was an inspiring day from the start as we reached the Tavua boundaries. The roads were clogged with private vehicles which at first seemed like people sightseeing. We then noticed that these were ordinary citizens who had come out to deliver food, clothing, beddings, shoes and school stationery. There were also big trucks with a few men on the back tray filled with food rations. There were individuals, couples, families, faith based groups, workers groups, companies and groups delivering aid items funded by citizens in Fiji and residing in overseas countries. We saw more of these as we went inland. The distribution was done randomly as they saw the need and it was non-discriminatory. Many attempted to reach out as far in the interior areas as they could.

The affected community members who received these items on most occasions did not even know who the helpers were. There were tears of gratitude as they were only able to say that these items were from a group in Suva or a company in Nadi. Those distributing did not seem to worry about visibility of their actions.

The extent of damages in Tavua villages, communities and farm homes was around 50% of total number of homes and around 35% of these were completely destroyed. Villagers mentioned that even though most of the damaged homes were assessed as partially destroyed, the structural integrity of the buildings have been severely compromised. A discussion with the District officer in Tavua revealed that the inland areas of Nadarivatu and Waikubukubu had significant destruction as well and the challenge was that a few of the government buildings were completely destroyed so their capacity was compromised. We later travelled to these areas.

As we moved from Tavua and headed towards Ra province, it became clearer that we were now entering ground zero. The destructed percentage of homes increased to 80% and three quarters of these were total destruction. The destruction of forest areas was also visible as the hills and mountain ranges looked bare and grey with the appearance of a “wasteland of logs with only a few crooked posts standing in an acre of bare land” as described by an elderly man of Matawailevu village.

Villages in the districts of Rakiraki like Naseyani, Drauniivi, Togovere, Naivuvuni and Rakiraki are quite close to the main highway and more coastal which made the rapid assessments simpler. However the community members were observed to be still in shock and not much had happened in terms of cleaning and clearing debris in and around the village boundaries. They had received rations from church groups and citizens who came in private vehicles.

We decided to enter the Korotubu coastal road that begins at Matawailevu village. Matawailevu had 87 % of homes destroyed. Some villagers took shelter at the village hall and the Methodist church.

A 50 year old woman recalled how she and her husband were confused about the strength and direction of the wind which made them keep their family including their grandchildren at home. The roof and walls of the house were dismantled by the wind force and they had to take cover under the floor. The grandchildren were wet, cold and crying fearfully so the husband decided to go and check the pastor's house if it was intact enough to provide cover. He shared that he was blown by the wind right under the floor of the pastor's house. He made his way slowly towards the bathroom wall and found that the Pastor's wife was taking shelter in there. Three quarters of the pastor's house was blown away also. He decided to go and check on his family but was still trying to leave when he was hit by a flying piece of roofing iron which injured his leg badly. This was bandaged by the pastor's wife who managed to control the bleeding. The next day when the wind subsided he was taken to Rakiraki hospital and received dressings and paracetamol. A few days later the wound was badly infected and he had to be taken again to Rakiraki hospital and then referred to Lautoka hospital where he had surgical debridement of the wound and had to be admitted for injections of antibiotics because the infection had spread to his blood. They were thankful that no life was lost but were still not sure where to start from.

Nakorovou village (Mataso subdistrict) had 85% total homes destroyed and all of the 15 % standing were partly damaged. Most of the villagers were sheltered in the concrete Methodist church. More than 40 families were crowded in the church which only had a toilet but no bathroom facility. The Turaga ni Koro (TNK) shared with us that the 1 week spent together under those conditions had become unbearable. Conflicts had started to arise when food rations were delivered because different women had different opinions about what to cook and how much and there had been heated arguments that was almost turning physical.

A formal consultation was carried out with the evacuees and the majority opinion was that they needed to have a decently roofed shelter for the individual families to quickly move into so they could make decisions especially about food on their own and have a private space to store whatever valuables they had been able to collect from the debris.

Food they said was enough. There was enough cassava and taro available that was going to last for another 2 weeks. Some women had also gone to the nearby river for fish and mussels. A group of young men had started chopping the trees and big branches that were brought in by the wind and flood waters at the height of the cyclone. Water source was not affected for the village and only minor damages affected some pipes.

The next village in the sub district of Mataso was Narikoso village which had only 35 % damage rate. It was well hidden in a valley protected from one side by a hilly terrain that stood in the way of the wind direction. Their main issue was that the bridge across the nearby river was washed away partly from the main road end. When we entered the contracted company by Government (Higgins) was already doing repair works.

The TNK told us that the outside settlements under his jurisdiction were much more affected than the village itself. The nearest of these settlements had 14 homes and a church building all of which were reduced to the ground during the cyclone. The community members which were made up of 90% young families with nursing mothers, toddlers and infants were evacuated to the nearby Mataso primary School, one of the few schools that survived the cyclone in the entire Ra province. The school is located near Narikoso village and protected by the same hill from the wind direction as well. The families in the school were now feeling anxious as the instruction was given for all evacuees in schools to vacate for schools to start. They were worried especially the nursing mothers, infants and toddlers who did not have a dry and safe place to go to should they be forced out of the school. They acknowledged the help provided by the head teacher and teachers but also realised that the decision to vacate was a directive from the headquarters of the Ministry of Education.

The men in the communities were still shocked and were only able to search for wild yams and ferns to make hot soup for the breastfeeding mothers. Every time they went near the rubble of their home they felt a mental block that seemed to stop them from moving any further, even with thinking. "Home is where the heart is" a 35 year old father of three said. "When that is taken away I feel like a lot was lost – aspirations, memories, struggles and successes. Building materials you can replace but those things cannot be bought".

We drove from there up a mountainous terrain that was more terrifying with all the vegetation severely affected and added to risk of the treacherous road. Naocobau village was the first community we came across downhill towards the coastline of Korotubu District. From the top view it was obvious that there was 100% destruction of the village. The only standing structure was the Methodist church but even that only had the four concrete walls and some framing of the roof structure.

A 76 year old elderly male shared how the whole village was distributed between the church and the concrete village hall for safety. They watched in horror as they saw whole houses lifted into the air, spun around and dismantled. The thundering sounds were so frightening that they cried silently without tears trying very hard not to show the women and children who were clinging to them. The roof of the church gave way as well as the hall structure. The hall then started to get torn apart and everyone ran outside and laid on the ground and held on to the concrete base of the hall and that of the water tank which used to be attached to the hall for roof rain water collection. Those in the church hid under the hard wood benches and held on to these as the roof and the wooden purling and rafters broke and cracked and were blown away letting the force of wind and rain in. A few women who were part of the church evacuees said that for a while they thought that even the heavy benches were going to be lifted into the air.

Having lost every structure in the village, the community walked for three miles to take shelter at the Korotubu District School. Two weeks later tents had arrived but were only enough to provide shelter to 46 % of the total households. A 42 year old mother mentioned that the tents were only suitable for drier and less windy conditions. They preferred to stay at the school because it provided a dry and warm space and did not have sleep disturbances in managing ground water and moisture inside the tent, but now that the notice was given

to vacate the school premises they were worried as only 12 out of 26 families had a tent and others did not know how to move back. Men were looking for debris tins to build but much of these were blown into the seas. They were thankful to a few companies from Nadi who brought hot cooked food which was the first decent warm meal they had after the cyclone. Food rations were delivered only to the school because it was the evacuation centre listed. Those that had moved to the village to start their rebuilding were struggling.

The assessment moved on to the villages of Namarai, Saioko, Verevere and Nabukadra. The home damage rate for these villages and their settlements was 90 – 95 % and almost all of these were complete destruction. Distribution of tents had reached these villages but was enough to provide shelter to 40-45 % of the total households affected. Food rations had arrived. People appeared still in a state of shock and no major cleaning or clearing was happening. People were observed to be repetitively coming out of community hall taking a look around the rubble of what was left of their homes and returning to their spot in the community hall to lie down.

Nabukadra villagers were in the village hall during the peak of the cyclone and as the winds died down huge waves crashed ashore and took down any building that remained standing from the wind effect. A good number of families had sought shelter in a building on higher ground and were unaffected by the waves.

The TNK shared how everyone was thankful that there were no deaths or major injuries. A group of women also shared how they were fortunate to have just had a Disaster Preparedness Workshop conducted by a local NGO—PCDF (Partners in Community Development Fiji) in the last few months and a Disaster management committee was set up. The women mentioned how lives were saved because the training was put into practice and the risks were managed well. The Disaster committee also acted quickly when the main reservoir was damaged. They got the saved village water funds, hired a carrier to Suva and purchased the necessary equipment needed. They then looked for the alternative water source they had identified much earlier prior to the cyclone and piped clean water to the village and the outside settlement. They then requested the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) to improve the construction with concrete.

Consultations with each of these villages showed that a lot of people had brought in food but because almost everyone were in the same few buildings, this was shared and it was getting more difficult to manage especially with the need to avoid conflicts. Most of the women interviewed said that they wanted to be in the comfort of their own home. The environment in the evacuation centres or the shared buildings in the villages (the ones that survived the cyclones) was adding more stress to them.

In Verevere village the men had fixed the walls and roofs of 3 homes that remained apart from the church and hall. This allowed for some families to be shifted in to share spaces and clear some much needed space in the overcrowded village hall. They had also tried to put together 2 lean to type shelters from the debris that was scattered throughout the village. However they said that these shelters were only good for dry weather because used roofing

iron badly damaged by the cyclone leaked. They had straightened these out as much as they could to make as dry a roof as possible.

The TNK at Namarai village which is also the location of the Government station (health centre, Police Post and Fisheries department), said that there was a lot of timber trees that were felled by the cyclone. What would make sense was to have chainsaws that were capable of cutting these into timber planks of the required sizes. This sentiment was also voiced by many men along the villages of Korotubu District.

Formal consultations were held with each of these villages to assess their needs, resources and strengths. They all requested assistance with roofing iron and chainsaws. They were assured that their need of a dry roof would be addressed as soon as the roofing iron was delivered by the supplier in Suva that FRIEND knew dealt with quality and standard corrugated roofing iron. The villagers said roofing iron was their major need as there was enough timber lying around to construct frames and floors and the damaged roofing iron could be straightened and used for walls. The communities were then requested to start dividing into groups for cleaning and clearing, planting for food security, building and cooking. The men and male youth were quick to take up the cleaning, clearing and building roles while the women and female youth volunteered to find food from the sea, rivers and the damaged farms, cooking, preparing food for everyone. The idea that they were going to have a new dry space they could start calling home became a hopeful.

Due to the number of households affected, FRIEND worked out with the village carpenters the amount of roofing iron needed to build an 18ft x 12 ft Lean to temporary resilient home. It would require 6x 12 ft roofing iron to put a dry roof to that size of a home. Each affected household would also be assisted with 1 kg of 4 inch nails, 1 kg of 3 inch nails and 1 kg of roofing nails. The total calculated cost of assistance to each family (6x 12 roofing iron & 3 kg of nails) was \$ 194.00FJD for temporary dry shelter until organised shelter plans were rolled out by other agencies and the Government.

As we made our way back and forth to the Ra province we noticed citizen groups, families and individuals distributing food and clothing to these areas with the attitude of same genuine care seen in Tavua.

3rd week post TC Winston

The week began with the distribution of roofing iron and nails to the communities that were already assessed and for which consultations had yielded agreements of cleaning, clearing and building to be started by the villagers themselves. FRIEND staff verified the list of names by checking where the homes were, amount of damage before providing relief items to ensure that all those who had damaged homes and did not have a dry roof were assisted.

We simultaneously moved our assessment to Nalawa district villages of Nausori and Burenitu, both villagers well known for their farm produce and export capabilities. We arrived at the Nausori Bridge to find that it was badly damaged by the flood waters. According to young men who were present when we arrived, it was thunderous and forceful

and brought pine trees, branches and debris which all got stuck on the side and created a dam. The water started to divert more towards the road end of the bridge, digging onto the side and resulted in a huge landslide that created a huge rift that totally disconnected the bridge from the roadside. The dam also caused cracks to form.

As older men arrived to assist us while we waded across the now shallower yet still swift river they explained that most of the men had gone to play and watch rugby at a tournament in Barotu which was around 10 kilometres away and stayed back there in the early evening to enjoy the after match kava sessions. They were on their way back to the village in a 3 tonne carrier when the cyclone hit. They stayed inside the carrier which had to stop at a favourite shopping centre and was left at the mercy of the wind. They endured the full force of the cyclone inside the carrier. They got off and started walking towards the village when wind subsided. It was already early morning when they arrived at a settlement just immediately before the village. They met a family whose house was totally lifted while they were still inside and was smashed onto a huge rain tree. The children escaped but their 40 year old mother was caught inside and was killed in the process. Their father was away in Rakiraki town during the event. The Turaga ni Koro described how they had to slowly bring out the broken pieces of the woman and wrap these in a blanket in front of her children. They then walked to the damaged nursing station which was also near the destroyed police post. They reported the matter and a burial order was given. They came back and buried the woman at around midday, the TNK himself presided over the funeral. Her husband arrived 2 days later only to be relayed the tragedy that befell his family.

Nausori village had 90% of total homes destroyed. The Church, village hall and a few other homes were standing even though they received some damage to their roofs. The women relayed to us heroic stories of youths that saved women, children and the elderly and moved them to the evacuation centres at the height of the cyclone.

They were not visited by anyone for 2 weeks and that meant that food quickly ran out. The men went out to the damaged farms to see whatever they could salvage from the cassava and taro farms. The women went to the calmer river to catch fish. The elderly men and women shared how most of the other villagers did not realise that they were not eating because they wanted the children to have enough to eat.

The consultation with Nausori villagers revealed the need for food rations as no organisation had dared to cross the river. Fortunately we had brought the food rations in a 3 tonne truck that travelled with us and these were delivered to them immediately. They also requested assistance with roofing iron and nails and voiced the need for a dry roof for each family. A 56 year old man shared how the environment in the village hall and church was not dignified for women and girls. They had built pit latrines from debris to ensure their women and girls had some degree of dignity while visiting the washroom and changing after a bath in the river. This was another reason why they felt that a small temporary home should be built as soon as possible to ensure safety, protection and dignity of grandmothers, mothers, wives, daughters and granddaughters.

Burenitu village is one of two biggest villages in the whole of Ra province. 134 homes were destroyed, 100 of which was complete destruction. Many more had partial damages but the TNK mentioned that if they were considered then the ones that really needed assistance would be unfairly treated. The women who greeted us told us that two local churches were the first to arrive bringing food rations and clothing. An NGO also brought food and clothing and government food rations arrived shortly after that.

As we worked through the week and continued to share our methodology through social media, several friends and citizens residing overseas pledged funds for purchasing of the home pack (6x 12 roofing iron and 3 kg of 4", 3" and roofing nails). We also shared the needs expressed by communities especially those that have land and timber trees that were either standing or felled by the cyclone, to have ripping chainsaws available.

The European Union facilitated loan of 4 ripping chainsaws through the Reforest Fiji Project office, Project Monitoring office and Fair Trade office in Lautoka. Two friends of the organisation who wished to remain anonymous donated another 2 ripping saws.

Another round of consultation was conducted in the communities of Korotubu that had received the building materials. They reaffirmed their need to have chainsaws to utilise the ready felled trees for timber. A meeting mobilised all the Turaga ni Koros and young men who had operated ripping chainsaws before. The results of the meeting were:

- That each Turaga ni Koro was to seek the permission of the elders and landowning units to use the trees for timber for the building of their homes.
- A team of chainsaw operators will start cutting timber from Nakorovou then move to the other villages. Each village that was having their timber cut was to feed the operators (from their share of rations).
- Each household that needed to have their timber cut was to purchase around \$120 worth of fuel and engine oil (from the family support from FNPF etc).
- The cutting team will agree to have a licensed operator take them through safety training and machine maintenance tips
- A licensed chainsaw operator in the area was present and he volunteered to train and start the process with the cutting team.
- The cutting team had delegated responsibilities and it included cleaning, maintenance and a records person who entered details of hours spent and the amount of timber being cut.
- All the operators agreed that they would not be financially compensated for the hours they spent with the cutting team.

The oldest in the cutting team was a 38 year old married man and father of two and the youngest was a 17 year old. All of these young men had lost their homes. When one of them was interviewed when they had reached the 4th village he mentioned in Fijian that "all in the district are family, we have to help each other". When the chainsaw team started, the number of temporary resilient homes already built with the assistance of roofing iron and nails were 329 and costed ~\$73K FJD.

4th-6th week post TC Winston

The following 2 weeks we started to assess the farming areas and settlements that were more populated by those of Indian descent. Most of them lived individually so the assessment process was anticipated to be slower as consultations had to take into account the fact that these communities were unfortunately poorly served. Due to the non-clustered distribution of homes it was easy to erroneously analyse their situation as “better”. The following are accounts of these almost forgotten families.

Most of the respondents we interviewed had lost their houses either completely and/or partially. The first reaction of many was that they were caught unaware as the early warning of cyclone was for Suva and not for their area. Most of those in these areas mentioned that the cyclone was at its peak from 3pm to 5pm in the evening.

Many of our women respondents are mothers and/or grandmothers with school going children. Their first reaction was to protect their children and grandchildren. During the cyclone children were kept safe by putting them under bed, study table and in some situations bathroom as it was better placed to take shelter in, away from the stormy winds.

A farmer from Barotu, narrated how his wife carried her young grandchild and sat on the commode to save herself and her grandchild from getting cold as their house was completely destroyed and floor flooded. Their clothes were already wet from the rains. They could not go anywhere and had to stay put as the roof of their house blew away. Only the porch remained. The roof and walls of the rest of the house were blown away by the strong winds. His house is on the main road and a little far away from the main settlement. Because porch was intact most onlookers did not realise there was no house left at the back. Some citizens had provided tarpaulins which they used to cover the porch where they slept, cooked and stored all the debris collected.

A mother from Bainisoqosoqo shared how she had to take shelter in her van for two days with her husband and young daughter. They remained in that situation for four –five hours on the night of the cyclone. She shared that her daughter was so petrified that she started her menstrual cycle. After the storm subsided, she came into the house at around midnight and searched for clothes for her daughter. All the clothes had gotten wet but somehow she managed to find a couple of dry clothes for her daughter to change into them. Her house was also blown away in the cyclone.

A hotel worker said that from radio announcement they understood that the direction of cyclone was towards Suva. Living near the shore, her family of fishermen owned three boats. On the day of the cyclone, she came early from work. As soon as she reached home, she received a phone call from her in-laws’ place that their roof/house had collapsed in the cyclone. By then, the wind had strengthened. As a precaution, she asked her children to sit tight under the study table. The wind became much stronger and the roof started to give way. She managed to cover her children with her body as she could see a wall collapsing on the table. She somehow managed to save her kids but was injured as the wall fell on her. Due to strong winds the walls and roof of her house collapsed one by one. She advised her

kids to protect their nose and ears from water when it started flowing above their necks as they tried to take shelter in the van.

A mother who lives in Volivoli settlement with her husband, in-laws (father and mother) and two small children said they were well prepared and had stocked up groceries on Friday, a day before the cyclone hit. At around four in the afternoon, on the fateful day, strong winds blew off roof of their sitting room. She was, at that time, working in the kitchen. Suddenly, the kitchen roof also blew off and everything was drenched and scattered due to heavy rains and gusty winds. Her father-in-law suggested them to take shelter in a neighbour's house. They crawled to the neighbour's house due to gusty winds leaving everything behind. Around one in the night her father in law and husband somehow managed to come back to their house to take stock of the situation. They collected some food material which was soaked. They stayed with the neighbours for a couple of days.

An advisory councillor shared till last minute they had the information that the cyclone was approaching Suva. His daughter, who is based in Suva, called him to say that cyclone had changed direction and was in fact going to hit Rakiraki. Within a short while heavy winds started blowing. He and his wife decided to stay put in their house as they could not go to any other place. The school, which generally is used as evacuation centre during cyclones, was too far away and they could not have managed to go there. Being close to shore a tidalwave brought in a lot of water along with rains and the whole house was flooded. Their brand new car also sustained damage in the cyclone. However, the roof of one of the rooms was not destroyed. His brother's family took shelter with him as the house next door sustained damage.

A mother of four from Barotu lost her house in the cyclone. Her husband grows sugarcane. Their crops were destroyed in the cyclone. She is unsure how they would build their lives again. A poor farmer family, the family had slowly built their home. One of her daughters stays at home now. She has completed education till Form Three. Two of her daughters go to school and son is pursuing studies in Suva. She shared that when the government announced reopening of the school, they had no choice but to send their children to school. Their house is a bit isolated from the main settlement. Even to access the school is a challenge for the family. Currently, the family doesn't have any cash to spare and can hardly meet demands to send children to school. During cyclone, the books and uniforms were also damaged which didn't help the matters.

Another mother from the same area shared her despair with us when she heard the announcement to open schools. Their house was completely damaged in the cyclone. Her two children's books, bags and uniform were scattered during cyclone. She shared that even school building was badly damaged. There are only two classrooms and one office from where the classes are running. Many classes were held from tents. Most respondents interviewed expressed their anxiety in sending their children to school as the structures were mostly destroyed making it unsafe for habitation so soon. Classes were being held either in tents or in damaged classrooms. The tents were very hot due to its material. The crowded number of children only added to their misery.

One of the students expressed her deep anguish over loss of her note books and other study material during cyclone. In her case all her books were soaked. She shared that she had the habit of preparing short notes when studying and had put in a lot of effort to study hard so that she could score good marks. Now all her notes were gone and with it the hope to do well was also lost. Although she had re-joined school but her motivation was at its lowest. She expressed her anxiety and helplessness in relation to this situation. She wasn't sure how she would do everything again. She also spoke about her experiences after going back to school where other students shared about their families' stories of survival during the cyclone. One of her classmates lost her mother. She said that this particular girl seemed to have lost interest in studies and this situation makes her feel very disheartened.

Another student shared that he was extremely anxious when he first came back to school after cyclone. He, in fact, did not want to come to school but stay back home and help his family. Many of his friends also felt the same way. Initially, they would all talk about cyclone and how they would like to be at home with their families. However, he has now accepted the situation and has been trying to adjust to schooling in tents.

During group discussions and individual interviews two men respondents shared that during the day they would search for the debris (roofing iron, wood etc.) which was in good condition to reconstruct the house. From next day of cyclone, men started searching for roofing tins, household utensils and other items that were blown away in the storm. Most of them had put together at least one room to keep themselves and necessities dry from rains. In Waimari settlement both women and men shared that there were cases of theft on the night of cyclone itself. Even after that, in the nights, they felt that someone kept coming back to their houses. In Bainisoqosoqo, the men shared their fear of theft and other forms of violence as a greater risk as there were no proper locking system and/or proper rooms to store and safeguard them from such incidents.

A few respondents did talk about higher stress levels especially those who took shelter at other people's houses. A woman admitted that she found it very difficult to stay at the neighbour's house. The sons and grandmother in that family did get into arguments with her. There were many families staying with them. She said she had to cook food for all the people when she was there. After two days, she asked her father in law to return to their house.

Although men did speak about frictions in the family they opined that it was nothing serious. However, they did share that every day they had been going out to look for their belongings (tins, utensils, wood etc.) which had been blown away in the cyclone. This has added to their stress levels. Providing for families under these conditions had become very difficult for them and worrying about damaged crops and lack of livelihood is a major concern for them.

The roofing iron and nails were also distributed to the areas of Bainisoqosoqo and Barotu.

A team from FRIEND visited the villages of Veidrala, Nasau, Nayavuiria and Navuniivi all coastal villages that could only be accessed by boat. Of the 4 villages, Nayavuiria was least affected as it was well hidden by a hilly terrain. Veidrala was the worst affected with almost

98% of total household destroyed. By the time we arrived there, government, and several NGOs had visited the area and distributed food, clothing, tarpaulins and tents. An NGO in Lautoka called Empower Pacific had also carried out psychological first aid through counselling in Veidrala. We met the TNK and a few village elders and women who requested for roofing iron. They would have probably heard of our approach as a significant number of their children attend Mataso primary school as boarders. The parents had to walk for two hours to school for their turn on the roster for cooking at the school. During the peak of the cyclone a father did not know else to save his children but to cover them with a wet Fijian mat and told everyone to lie flat on the ground. These saved their lives and the story also made its way into the local daily –Fiji Times.

Roofing iron and nails were distributed to these villages as well. The villagers organised their boats to receive the materials delivered to the Namuaimada beach. And at the end of 6 weeks the outcome was that around 700 resilient temporary lean to type homes were built with a cost of \$150k FJD, \$60 k of which had been contributed by citizens.

Throughout the 4 week period we had conducted outreach medical clinics in all the affected areas assessed irrespective of whether they received FRIEND roofing and nails assistance. The services provided included Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) checks and medications, dressing, treatment and referral of appropriate cases of injuries and infections, community physiotherapy and relaxation exercises to alleviate stress.

These services were continued beyond the timeline of this paper.

6th to 8th week post TC Winston

FRIEND realised that the village of Nayavutoka, and the 4 villages in the Bureiwai sub-district, namely Matainananu, Delaiyadua, Nadogoloa and Naivoco, all the remaining coastal villages of Korotubu district could have been missed out. These villages are located in the border areas between the two provinces of Tailevu and Ra and as such were vulnerable to being left out as one of the TNK mentioned it is usually because both government administrators from the two provinces that have some overlapping jurisdictions tend to assume that the other will take care.

We arrived at Nayavutoka and realised that they were still in a state of shock even though it was now 6 weeks post cyclone. A group of women and men discussed how the church which was the evacuation centre had lost its roof at the height of the cyclone so everyone including small children that took shelter inside ran and hid in some small caves, and underneath big rocks.

The TNK shared how he had went around the village 3 times announcing the cyclone and the evacuation locations, urging them to move. To his disappointment a few heeded his calls as most he said remained in their homes. Everyone decided to start moving when the cyclone was at its worst. The cyclone brought huge waves in as well and 2 people died because of the waves; a 90 year old woman who was bedridden and a physically disabled 32

year old man who was also relatively bedridden. Both drowned underneath the waves as the rest of their family members fled for their lives.

The TNK himself saved a female cousin who was almost dragged away by the returning current of the huge waves. She gave her last cry for help in the darkness. TNK recalled a faint voice that was almost lost in the thundering waves and the remaining sounds of strong winds. "I had an instinct that a female voice was coming from that direction. I went for it and managed to grab her hand in time. I also could not see properly so we could have been both swept away".

Nayavutoka had almost 100% destruction of homes and other buildings. The building materials were distributed to them but we saw that their movement was much slower than the rest of the villages.

The village of Delaiyadua also had a death but it was of a courageous woman as described by village men; their village nurse. She had helped a lot of people into safer buildings as the wind ravaged through the villages destroying 90 % of total homes in all 4 villages. During her last attempt at getting some people into safety, she was crushed by a blown away house. The family and fellow villagers had to wait for the cyclone to pass, to start arranging for her burial. All the while she was laid covered with a blanket and according to her family members it would take time for them to have closure because she did not get the dignified ceremony she deserved.

The villagers took shelter at the Bureiwai District school which itself was severely damaged. Consultations with the villagers revealed the same need for a dry roof to be able to better the lean to type homes they had built from debris. The arrangement was made to deliver to these villages. However, while FRIEND made the procurement, another NGO supplied roofing iron (10 x 8 feet) to only two of the villages. We had to request that the balance was what we would give and to divert the rest of the roofing iron we bought to another community that desperately needed something but had nothing except tarpaulins.

A second Tropical Cyclone Zena also formed around this period and was announced as a Category 3 cyclone. It brought gale force winds only but there was heavy rainfall that caused flooding in low lying areas in the Ra province. The communities that had built the temporary homes were grateful that they were dry and warm. A group of TNKs shared how they only had to make a call for preparation this time around and everyone responded accordingly. An elderly couple shared how they felt sorry for the children as they could see extreme fear in their eyes and actions. The grandmother told us that her 6 year old granddaughter ran and sat crouched at the corner in the bathroom when she heard the TNK shouting out the preparation instructions.

We came back to the inland area of Saivou district and assessed the villages of Nabalabala and Nativi. These villages had only received the first round of food rations, allocated for one month however the amounts were sufficient for only a week. Nativi village received tents that catered for 50% of the total household affected. Nabalabala had yet to receive tents and tarpaulins. More than 80% of homes were severely destructed for both villages. The TNK mentioned that they had to endure the heavy rainfall that came with TC Zena.

The activities of the timber cutting team were monitored as they made their way from one village to the next. At Nabukadra village, a Ministry of Forestry delegation stumbled on them and realised the efficiency of the approach. Nabukadra village received 6 ripping chainsaws with 2 Forestry officials and started to cut the timber for every home.

The FRIEND mobilised cutting team therefore moved to the next village to cut their timber. The villagers however waited for the Government mobilised team because they were offering to buy the fuel and pay for the trees being cut. They also paid the village operators monetary allowances. As we moved around Nalawa areas the request for chainsaws had been voiced also by these villagers in this district.

A consultation with the villages of Korotubu district that had the services of the chainsaws alerted FRIEND that UNDP was bringing in 3 chainsaws per village to clear debris. There seemed enough machines in their district considering there were 6 operational at Nabukadra and potentially 9 more that UNDP will provide for 3 villages. It was time for other districts to benefit from the same approach.

We had consultations with Matawailevu village and Burenitu (Nalawa district) and Naivoco village (Bureiwai sub district of Korotubu). Two more new ripping chainsaws were donated by Canada Fund. These were distributed between the three villages and they agreed on the same conditions as initially set for Korotubu villages. The only difference was that each village now had their own operating team and the chainsaws were distributed.

The men and women of the villages in Ra that were assisted mentioned especially in the latter consultations that cutting their own timber was very economical because the “Help for Homes” assistance provided by Government would be spent on other building materials that are usually much cheaper than sold timber.

FRIEND continues to receive requests for chainsaw assistance from villagers in Ra and now Tailevu.

Women in two villages shared with us their despair as microfinance institutions started collections of their pending loans for small businesses. All the businesses and homes were totally destroyed and there were no livelihood options yet they were expected to pay back loans draining any small savings available.

Many villagers informed us that they lost thousands of dollars stored in their homes as bank services were too far to access in their time of need.

Over 12 weeks of providing humanitarian assistance and undertaking continuous consultations, FRIEND carried out SWOT analysis of the livelihood dynamics that existed amid the devastation caused by TC Winston.

Sadly relief agencies brought their own ideas of livelihood options, for example planting for livelihood projects when coastal communities needed fishing gear as they had ready resource and market for their seafood.

A Turaga Ni Koro from a coastal community shared with us that they were provided seedlings, they took these and planted but crops will be yielded in months to come. We

asked him why he did not share his need with this international livelihood program, he said he was not asked so he could not demand, he took graciously what was offered!

All the TNK and advisory councillors shared that they were filling numerous assessment forms for each relief agency however despite all the assessment, services were very slow. Organisations that had conducted assessments in week two still had not brought relief supplies by month three. The TNKs shared that each household had to sign the forms so the youths will run to each household to get these signatures. In one village we saw seven organisations fill assessment forms in one day while we conducted our medical clinic. There was no assessment consultation with any of the communities.

We consulted relief agencies for urgent relief, we were informed they had to tick off requirements before being able mobilise resources. We called organisations who have livelihood resources, we were informed that they were awaiting overseas experts, there will be planning and outcome meetings before resources could be mobilised.

The victims of TC Winston continue to suffer while agencies who raised funds in the name of victims follow through their procedures which delay their community mobilisation for months.

Most agencies were seen distributing the same items. Tool kits was common item distributed by number of agencies and so were wash and hygiene kits.

While delivering our governance programs in non-affected areas we saw distribution of rations, tool kits and tarpaulins to unaffected areas when communities in Saivou that had lost 50-80% of their dwellings could not access any tarpaulins.

In the settlement where our office is located, three rounds of rations were distributed, affected villages in Saivou received only one ration distributed.

We were perplexed when relief agencies had such strong control procedures how the relief items collected in the name of TC Winston victims were making their way to non-affected communities, while those affected continued to suffer in silence months after the event.

Discussion

The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and Responses

The PDNA is a recognised tool used in many countries after a disaster or conflict and the methods used usually follow the UNDP PDNA guidelines or the guidelines by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Institutions. Immediately post TC Winston many humanitarian service providers whether local or international set about doing their PDNAs in the affected areas over Fiji. There were many channels of communications that shared the results of these PDNA reports. The DISMAC and NDMO office had its own data that was shared with NGOs and various clusters (e.g. Shelter cluster and Vulnerability Cluster). Some other NGOs and clusters had PDNA data that were quite different to the DISMAC version.

For some clusters, the forms to be used kept changing week to week as their meetings continued, until 3 months later, forms were still not consistent.

There was much confusion on the use and relevance of some of the PDNA forms and no clear indication on how effective this data collection was and how this was to be used. For example the Help for Home program did not take into account the data collected and collated by the shelter cluster and opted to conduct more assessments.

It is clear that some of these tools are geared only to generate resources at a global scale for humanitarian aid.

One of the many challenges of the post disaster period was that there was no clear coordination to direct service providers to the areas of need and therefore intervene with the relevant responses for the area. Most of the coordination meeting for NGOs and clusters were happening in Suva although the declared ground zero was Ra province (Nakorotubu District).

Citizens, companies and small organisations just distributed where they saw the need while bigger organisations were coming through some coordination either NGO coordination or DISMAC. Much aid made its way to least priority areas when the needs of victims in ground zero areas were still not met.

The Needs that were highlighted were those that many disasters have spelled out-Food, Water, Clothing, Shelter, Medical services and Psychological first aid

The responses therefore reflected these as a lot of food rations, clothes and beddings were collected and distributed by individuals, families, Community Based Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, companies, the government and NGOs.

However shelter as the most urgent need was delayed and so was psychological support.

Communities informed us that the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) had mobilised early repairs and establishing water supply to the villages, settlements, farms and other communities.

A lot of donor funding went into the provision of tarpaulins and tents and these were also distributed. Other organisations were distributing hygiene kits, dignity kits that evidently were a common approach used by International humanitarian aid service providers based on experiences elsewhere. There was no consultation on whether these items were needed by the people. Some international aid agencies were leaving these at central places so there were repeat distributions in some areas and many areas not in need received these while those in affected areas were seen to be under-served.

Resources were spent on chartering planes to get some of these items. If local contexts were taken into account, much of these could have been mobilised locally injecting the local economy.

Unmet Needs

Food

Affected communities in the Ra province continued to voice their concerns over the many needs that were either poorly met or were not addressed at all. Food rations had reached some villages and not others even though they were within the same geographical area and shared the same access roads. Communities were asking as to why there were variations in the frequency, the quantity and quality of the food rations distributed by the same service provider. Some were given 4 kg of rice for a family of 5 to last a month while the next community had 20kg to last the same period.

Shelter

Most of the community members and leaders raised the need for a temporary home. The main reasons for the need were:

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- To provide mental stability to the family because each family member was 'heartbroken' at the loss of the home. An elderly man reminded us of the phrase "Home is where the heart is".
- To protect women and children and put them in the comfort of a home environment where they could eat and rest without having to feel like they have offended anyone, especially with the evacuation centre situation.
- To provide women and girls with dignity and security as the evacuation centres did not allow for privacy, especially on bathing or washroom situations.
- To store whatever 'valuables' they were able to recover from the debris.
- Tarpaulins and tents that were distributed did not suit the weather conditions that they were facing. They lamented that it was still cyclone season and there were constant days of heavy rain and strong windy conditions that easily tore the tarpaulins or made the ground too soggy to live on the tent floors, forcing these victims back into the crowded and unmanageable conditions of the evacuation centres.

The tents and tarpaulins that were distributed only reached 10-15% of the total affected households in each community. This made it quite difficult for the Turaga ni Koros and advisory counsellors to manage and in most circumstances it created conflicts as community members blamed these leaders for favouritism and bias and in a few communities the situation almost turned into physical confrontations.

Two months after the cyclone, shelter cluster records indicated that 25000 allocated tents/tarpaulins was still in their warehouse in Suva that still needed distribution and there were 5000 unallocated tents/tarpaulins. A member of the cluster agreed to conduct assessments in the areas directed through FRIEND however did not distribute in these areas saying the declared Ground zero did not qualify. Two communities in the District of Saivou in Ra province that were visited by FRIEND in the 8th week post disaster had not received a tarpaulin or tent even though the home destruction rate was more than 80% for each

village. Food rations had also reached them once only and they were still waiting and hoping.

Post-Traumatic Stress

Mental instability due to the traumatic situations of the cyclone was a need that was poorly addressed. Most community members expressed a mental block now that their homes were destroyed. While most service providers labelled the loss as that of a house, the victims saw it as the loss of a home. Therefore it was not only about the building and furniture, it was the memories, the aspirations, the achievements and disappointments and the one thing that kept the family together. There was a need to put together a temporary building that at least gave them a sense of home and help them move forward psychologically.

Families and communities where deaths had occurred did not receive trauma counselling. Communities needed to share their experience however despite the number of organisation carrying out assessments, there was little space created for listening.

The early resumption of schools in (especially that of affected Primary schools)Ra contributed more mental stresses and added to the psychological and emotional trauma for adults and to the school children. Many parents and guardians expressed the desire to have these children by their side so they could provide them with tender loving care they needed as they did not have a proper home and had been exposed to extreme traumatic events like death, severe injuries, the violent forces of the cyclone and the fear they saw in their parents, guardians, relatives and other adults that they look up to for protection.

Children boarding at a school at Mataso Primary school had unexplained pain, nightmares, loss of appetite and fungal skin diseases. A group of these students are from Veidrala village which was totally destroyed during the cyclone. Veidrala is partially accessible by a gravel road that ends on a mountain about 3 kilometres away from the coastal village. When the directive was given for the restart of school, these children and their parents had to walk for 4 hours to reach the school, only to be told that the supportive services were not available yet. The parents of these children had to leave the children to stay at the boarding dormitories and wait for school to start while they return to the village to try and rebuild a home. These children walk 3 hours every Friday to go home and on Sunday to reach their school.

Many of these rural schools like Mataso Primary school are also boarding schools and the support services like cooking were not established yet as the parents groups who used to cook on a rotation schedule were from the same affected communities. These added to the parents' list of worries and stress. A cultural group Sangam stepped in to ensure food was provided in these schools as there was no rations provided for schools.

Schooling is largely in tents provided by UNICEF as most schools have been totally destroyed. There have been concerns raised by parents on overcrowding in these tents which are very hot on sunny days and pours through when it rains.

Some of the schools had started without any furniture, teaching materials or spaces. Students and teachers did not get access to spaces to deal with their traumas from crisis and had to dive into lessons.

Several community leaders from affected areas reminded us that there were no public reassuring messages by the government that at least would provide hope and motivation. The pressure was on these community leaders to hold everyone together while trying to make sense of the variances in responses and relief items that arrived. Community leaders said that they had to put aside their own psychological issues and stresses and rise to the challenge which they confessed was a huge challenge. Everyone was overloading these leaders with assessment forms and calling them to meetings.

Medical

Most injuries sustained during the cyclone were treated and evacuated by community members themselves. In most of these communities, medical assistance arrived more than 2 weeks post cyclone and started with distribution of water purification tablets and dressing of small sores and bruises. These however were directed at people who remained at the evacuation centres and community members who had built their own temporary shelters/homes did not have access to these services.

Bigger injuries that were sustained during the clearing of debris were left to the community leaders and family members to manage. There were many cases of infected wounds that ended up in the surgical operating theatre at Lautoka hospital and the transfer of these cases were organised by community members themselves.

The FRIEND approach – Post Disaster Needs, Resilience and Vulnerability Consultations & Assessment (PDNRV C&A)

By default, FRIEND developed a humanitarian arm as the same beneficiary communities from the socioeconomic development activities were affected during natural disasters. FRIEND's humanitarian assistance in the two Major floods and the Category 4 Tropical Cyclone Evan of 2012 exposed major challenging issues and lessons learnt that helped formulate a more strategic and efficient approach to the work on TC Winston. The developed and tested approaches are discussed below.

Consultations and Assessment (C&A)

The definition of the word 'assessment' itself (the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality or importance of something, or the judgement or decision that is made – Cambridge Advanced learners Dictionary) makes the critical step of PDNA a one way process whereby those who carry out PDNA focus on form completion based on "their perceived needs assessment" as opposed to having adequate conversations with affected individuals or groups and find out what the communities' version of the needs are.

The high rate of unmet needs post TC Winston is a reflection of the critical mistake of responding with interventions that were based on a "perceived needs assessment".

Communication could be a challenge at best of times, in times of disaster this had to be managed to try and understand the real issues being faced by the communities.

FRIEND utilised the approaches from its successful livelihood programs and added “Consultations” to the process of assessment. It is only through discussions with affected individuals, groups, and sometimes whole communities that “real needs” are voiced and ensure that interventions are relevant. These discussions could be both formal and informal and the voice/video recording technologies available today are relatively cheaper. Transcribing these to accompany assessment forms then builds a total picture of the needs status.

Another important issue to note especially in a post disaster period is that needs change with time and the responses that have been carried out. It is therefore very important for those carrying out the initial assessments to have consultations and find out the needs that have been addressed and shift to the next prioritised need.

This was a common occurrence in many of the communities in Ra where food ration distribution was duplicated and the surplus food made these communities feel the need to start cooking for aid service providers. While nearby communities received a month’s ration and no one distributed food for the next 4-6 weeks.

From PDNA (Post Disaster Needs Assessment) to PDNRV C&A (Post Disaster Needs Resilience Vulnerability Consultations and Assessment)

The other critical step in the FRIEND approach on post disaster response is to identify the Resilience and Vulnerability status of each identified Need from the community. This is carried out through both consultations and assessments.

Whenever a need is identified e.g. food, the resilience (ability of the community to address this need themselves either partially or totally) and vulnerability (inability of the community to address the need themselves) factors are identified discussed and noted.

Resilient factors may be viewed as strengths, skills and resources while Vulnerability factors are the gaps that communities identify as requiring external assistance to help facilitate and utilise their internal strengths. It is important to note that no two communities have the same Resilience and Vulnerability status for each need. Example – the need for food in Nakorovou village which is low lying area. Through C&A it was noted that the men had collected wild yams and ferns while the women collected river mussels and fish (Resilience). The Vulnerability status was that the cassava and taro was going to rot in a week if not used and only few women had fishing gear, however villages in Saivou did not access to same resources.

An example of how this approach results in efficient use of resources was shown in the “Roofing iron and Nails Distribution” by FRIEND. During the PDNRV C&A almost everyone asked for the need for a small dry and temporary home. They said that there was a need to vacate the unbearable conditions of the evacuation centre so a temporary home would help them start to think and make their own decisions. (The need).

Through the Consultation process they informed us that they had foremen, carpenters and manpower (males and females), there was debris timber that could be used for posts, framing and flooring and there was debris roofing iron that could be collected, flattened and used for walls. (Resilience factors).

They expressed urgent need for new roofing iron to prevent leakages so there is a dry space for the family and nails to secure the structure. (Vulnerability factors).

All the communities shared the same Need, Resilience and Vulnerability situation so FRIEND assessed and decided that the intervention was going to be the provision of roofing iron and nails. The size of the temporary home calculated through the consultations was a 18ft x 12 ft Lean to type with posts. The communities suggested that to build that size required 6 x 12 ft corrugated roofing iron and 1kg each of 4 inch nails, 3 inch nails and roofing nails. The cost of roofing iron and nails for each home (Vulnerability) was ~\$194.00FJD. This should have been provided within two to three weeks.

The Fiji Community Development Program (FCDP) of Australian Aid provided FRIEND with \$104K FJD of which \$80K was planned to address shelter and \$10K for a Medical Outreach. We discussed our approach with FCDP and they agreed for us to implement it. Through this intervention 412 temporary homes were built by community members themselves.

As the work progressed, FRIEND started sharing this methodology to DISMAC, other NGOs, Shelter Cluster and its own network of friends through the meetings, correspondences and social media. Individuals and groups (Citizens) both in Fiji and abroad were impressed with the outcome thus far and donated an additional \$60K FJD. Communities built another 311 homes from this funding.

The result of FRIEND's intervention using the PDNRV CA approach on the Shelter need:

A total of 723 temporary homes built in 20 communities by the communities with \$140K FJD

The other ripple effects of this intervention:

- Communities started mobilising and working together into cleaning and clearing groups, food security groups and building groups.
- Social cohesion restarted and there was more laughter and humour observed.
- They started discussing using the same approach to build better permanent homes.
- Once homes were secured, communities started working on other immediate areas of food security and livelihood.

The ripple effect becomes another success

Further consultations revealed the need to start rebuilding better homes. The Resilience C&A showed that they had timber trees that were already felled by the cyclone. There were chainsaw operators in each community who have experience in ripping trees to make the required timber. There was a licensed operator in one of the villages who could provide the initial refresher training. They had relatives who lived in urban areas in Fiji and abroad who were willing to assist with some rebuilding costs. The Vulnerabilities C&A revealed that they needed the right type of chainsaws (ripping) and an organised plan.

FRIEND then sought the assistance of a few elders to approach the landowners and the community leaders and seek blessings for the plan to form a youth timber cutting group that will cut timber for all the villages in the district. This was successfully carried out and each village sent a few young men to be part of the group.

FRIEND had approached The European Union Suva Office and a few friends to mobilise chainsaws. The EU loaned 4 chainsaws through the Project Monitoring Unit (PMU), Reforest Fiji (SPC) and Fair Trade offices in Lautoka. Individual private donors also provided another 4 chainsaws. The machines and the accompanying safety equipment costs ~\$32K FJD.

Another consultation was held with the communities to create awareness of the timber cutting team and to let them know that they only had to buy the necessary fuel amount to cut the required timber they had quoted for their new home. Each family bought fuel and engine oil worth \$120.00FJD. The hardwood timber that was cut would have costed them \$10k - \$15k FJD should they purchase from hardware companies.

The result at 2 months: All the required timber for stronger homes in 4 communities was cut.

The Ripple Effect continues

The chainsaw cutting and the neatly cut timber pieces grabbed the attention of the visiting Minister for Forestry who directed that more chainsaws be made available to the area. A new group was formed with the inclusion of 2 Ministry of Forestry officials. The Villages in the district of Nakorotubu now have hardwood timber to help them build back better.

Interchanging Gender Roles

The post disaster situation was devastatingly chaotic and emotionally draining for communities that were affected. All the areas that were visited showed how every individual in the affected families and communities taking part in whatever they possibly could to try and create a better living condition than what was at hand.

Teenage girls and nursing mothers were also consulted separately and they identified how stresses took their toll on their emotional state affecting lactation and menstrual cycles. Mothers had bigger challenges in managing small babies in evacuation centres with hygiene and unable to control the cries at night that affected other individuals. Older women with difficulty with mobility also faced enormous challenges in managing bathrooms and hygiene requirements while staying in collectives at evacuation centres.

Both men and women, young and old were observed early on to be collecting debris timber and roofing iron, climbing on roof tops and covering these with tarpaulin, fishing, collecting wild yams and ferns for food, collecting river mussels and shellfish, building temporary shelters, cooking and preparing meals, washing and sunning out clothes and beddings etc.

When asked about the different gender roles, most respondents said that in situations like post TC Winston, everyone responds to a human need and no one sees a role as specific to any gender. "Whatever needs to be done is done irrespective of who is doing it." The women respondents said that there are some types of work like carpentry and building, clearing of

big trees and re-establishing of water systems, that were more suited to men because of the risks and energy levels involved however they have been willing to help whenever needed.

The elderly took it upon themselves to eat only a little to ensure that the very young had more to eat. Some of these presented to the medical outreach clinic with gastritis symptoms and were found to have intentionally missed many meals to allow their grandchildren to have enough to eat.

Children and youth were also observed helping out in the cleaning and clearing process, collecting food and helping with cooking.

The consultative meetings that were held revealed interesting community dynamics and spaces for voices to be heard. Although the Fijian traditional community circle arrangement was seen where the upper semi-circle involved male elders and the rest of the community occupied the other semi-circle, women were seen to dominate the discussions, pushing for the different agendas to be prioritised. It was also commonly observed that women were actually dictating what they wanted to be done and the male elders and leaders made sure that the rest of the community adhered to the instructions. There was effort in every village we worked in to engage the women's groups in planning and rehabilitation.

Although most of the resulting planned activities were implemented by men, women's voices were included in prioritisation of these. The meetings also revealed that women were closely monitoring the stages of cleaning, clearing, rebuilding and planting, criticising any laziness or wrongly prioritised work they saw or observed.

In many of these consultative meetings the chief usually sat quietly and spoke occasionally to motivate, inspire or clarify certain sensitive issues that would otherwise lead to conflict.

These existing resilient systems of good governance and gender equality played a huge role in the quick action of communities in addressing their own needs and in managing external assistance.

Relevance of Aid

Tents and Tarpaulins

One of the most highlighted irrelevant aid identified by communities were tents and tarpaulins. These shelter items however contributed to most of the costs listed by donor countries.

All those who received these tents and tarpaulins were appreciative of the assistance but shared how they struggled to keep the tarpaulins from being blown away by strong winds and heavy rain that was typical of the Fiji weather conditions from November to May. Tents were more stable when tagged to the ground but made the soggy ground conditions a challenge to live with as families had to keep on shifting beddings, clothes and food to avoid getting wet and on many occasions did not allow family members to have decent rest or sleep.

To avoid getting stressed or looking like they are unappreciative of the assistance, community members erected the tents and made tarpaulin shelters beside a temporary home they have built by themselves and used the tent and tarpaulin space for relaxing, eating or family meetings on good weather days.

Most or all of these tents and tarpaulins were brought in as aid items and therefore purchased already from donor countries before being shipped. The availability and the amount distributed were according to the numbers brought into the country and not necessarily according to the numbers needed on the ground. A local shop owner in Barotu said that this methodology does not benefit the local economy. He insisted that humanitarian aid service providers should purchase items that are available or sold locally because these are items that communities are familiar with and in doing so create more work for locals giving local families the needed income.

Most countries brought in different forms of tents and tarpaulins at different time periods post TC Winston. The distribution then was done at the discretion of the service provider and left recipient community leaders with the difficult task of prioritising who should receive these first. These created conflicts. A few advisory counsellors shared they did not have the courage to face the communities with the insufficient amount. He said that everyone was stressed right now and would use him as a venting outlet for emotional trauma and anger.

Some partners tried to balance this aid and spread items around where there was little damage and could survive better than ground zero areas.

Education

When the school started three major agencies and community based organisations all provided school books and bags. One agency chartered a plane to fly in school bags from Europe when these could have been sourced locally as shops in Suva, Lautoka and Nadi were largely unaffected.

Students were sent these items through schools, village headmen, sometimes repeating aid. Parents had to communicate to schools not to send them any more school bags as there were cases of a child receiving three school bags. If the agencies had discussed among themselves their distribution plan, some of the much needed funds could have been mobilised for school lunch.

One damaged boarding had parents patching this up to ensure children have dry place to sleep where some of these resources could be better used.

WASH

Even though shelter was identified as the most urgent need, more funds were allocated to WASH cluster.

All the communities visited organised their water systems and had built their toilet systems using debris materials within the first week after TC Winston.

However the relief agencies placed a lot of emphasis on WASH and were able to raise funds to mobilise flush toilet systems. Several communities had started receiving assistance through volunteers coming to build flush toilet systems.

Fijian communities received them as they wanted to acknowledge the values shown by these individuals. However on interviews, community members mentioned that they thought that these “outsiders” did not understand that the communities had built pit latrines in the first week post cyclone and had fixed the water systems to allow for clean water supply for cooking, drinking, hand washing and washing.

Their “current priority” was to build a temporary home and not a flush toilet that was not usable because most did not come with appropriate fittings to suit piping and needed a concrete septic tank to be built.

Other issues raised by community members were the added obligation brought to the community by the presence of volunteers. They mentioned that it was naturally Fijian to be hospitable to community guests and therefore the unavailability of resources made them feel bad for not being able to serve guests fully the Fijian way.

The men in the communities thought that there was more than enough manpower to build toilets so providing volunteers was unnecessary. They said they appreciated the initiative though.

Recommendations

Incorporation of PDNRV C&A

From the experiences and the lessons learnt on the efficiency of carrying out post disaster responses, FRIEND recommends that the PDNA involve data collection of the Resilience (capacity to address their own needs) and Vulnerability factors (the limiting factors that will give rise to unmet needs) that are present in any affected community.

In addition the word Consultation be added to Assessment to continue to remind Humanitarian aid service providers that it is only through discussions with affected communities that the real needs and their prioritisation can be properly captured and will therefore lead to the most efficient and relevant intervention.

The PDNA therefore be converted to PDNRV C&A.

Utilisation of Rural Teachers and Health officials for PDNRV C&A

Most of the 'PDNA' carried post TC Winston was done by Turaga ni Koros and Advisory Counsellors. The reliability of such information continued to be questioned by all interested stakeholders throughout the post disaster period.

The "outside" community need to realise the mental state of these TNKs and Advisory Councillors because in most cases they were victims themselves. Most of these officials told us that they were receiving only 50% of total needs so they had to inflate the numbers to cater for their communities.

It is therefore recommended that rural teachers and health officials be utilised to do this work. There a few other reasons why this is suggested.

1. Teachers and Health officials usually do community profiles that are regularly updated and vital demographic details are contained in these profiles that reflect demographic and housing details.
2. They are at a more neutral position to do a detailed and unbiased data collection for the communities and the profiles is available as a baseline to verify the details collected in the PDNRV C&A.
3. Education (Children) and health issues contribute the most vulnerabilities issues in the disaster. The PDNRV C&A results when collected by these on the ground officials serve as reliable and vital information for all interested stakeholders and therefore will ensure the most relevant assistance is mobilised at the right time.

Setting up a Post Disaster Immediate Response Unit

One of the recommendations made by communities is for the establishment of a proper immediate response unit to provide immediate access services and immediate medical rescue and referral services.

Communities had to struggle to carry out these activities in the midst of psychological shock and trauma and they feel that many severe injuries could have been managed better and conflicts avoided if those with the appropriate resources and technical skills relevant to our contexts were present to implement such activities. Most respondents recommended collaboration between the disciplined forces and health departments.

Deferring start of school – PTSD in Children

The Post traumatic stress symptoms in children exposed to extreme violent conditions, injuries and death requires a reassessment of the decision to start school 1-2 weeks after an event like this. There was a lack of a supportive environment both at school and at home to allow these children to transition slowly into recovery and healing. In those situations the best environment is with the tender loving care and comfort of their parents and guardians at home. The decision to start school could have been deferred to the end of the emergency period when the same elements that trigger flashbacks like heavy rainfall, strong winds, thunderstorms and lightning storms are expected to significantly subside.

Need for national reassurance

Many communities requested that in the next disaster of such scale, that National Addresses (speeches) should be done over the radio to provide reassurance for many who all those who are affected. They mention that it will help a lot in stabilising them mentally and reduce the conflicts that arise because of misinterpretations of actions or inactions.

Too many NGOs – Inefficient services

The participation of too many NGOs in the humanitarian work especially in the delivery and distribution of basic need items resulted in many incidences of duplication and unmet needs. Many NGOs that received portions of allocated funds were not well equipped to carry out the work and did not have the resources or the logistical experience of working in the communities especially the isolated communities in challenging terrain.

Local development NGOs that are well rooted in the communities and understand the community context should be engaged to assist in assessments and resourced to provide initial care.

It's also important to engage the more **senior and well trained staff to engage with assessments and follow up as communities in** need are in shock and need sensitive engagement. Volunteers could help with service delivery but should not be the front liners doing assessments if community engagement is not their forte.

The Government can formalise recognition of these credible local NGOs which are well rooted in communities and establish policies for Post Disaster Funding intended for NGO service providers to be directed to these entities. This will minimise the inefficiency and wastage experienced during the post TC Winston period where many agencies got engaged but did not follow through with care and service.

Restrictions to new INGOs and International Disaster Experts and Consultants

The post TC Winston period saw a huge influx of INGOs and International Disaster Consultants and Experts into the country. These INGOs have worked in Disasters elsewhere but Fiji. Experiences and methodologies that were pushed were according to an assumption of their perceived needs of Fijian communities.

There were many incidences of aid items going to communities that were least affected and aid items distributed at times when the needs priorities had changed significantly.

Most of these INGOs based themselves in Suva and held various meetings that had questionable activity outcomes.

The huge amount of unmet needs in the worst affected area in Fiji and Viti Levu (Ra province) is evidence of the irrelevance of international perception of the local contexts.

There needs to be strict policies by Government (and monitored by NDMO) of International experts influx and this should be adhered to by stakeholders.

An example of an irrelevant activity is the monetary compensation given to community members for cleaning up their own surroundings. This methodology is detrimental to any future sustainable development initiative that will aim to ensure local ownership and participation. One of the Resilient features of our communities – wilful volunteerism is now severed because of the decision to pay people money for those activities.

There was need for cash in the economy and this could have been directed to creating livelihood activities. Most coastal communities had lost all their fishing gear and boats, if provided these, communities have existing markets for their sea food and could start their own recovery through income earned.

Tents and Tarpaulins vs Roofing iron, nails and building tools

Communities continue to voice their concerns that tents and tarpaulins are not suited to our weather conditions especially during our cyclone season.

To provide temporary shelter/home, we recommend the distribution of roofing iron, nails and building tools. This methodology utilises the existing resilience factors of our communities in their capacity to rebuild and encourages local job creation and improves the local economy. For appropriate situations tents and tarpaulins should still be purchased locally.

Additional Stressors

Microfinance institutions were travelling around ground zero collecting loan repayments and interests when they were fully aware of the absence of any form of income generating projects. Mainly women were partners in these microloan projects and shared how the loan officers from these microfinance institutions have taken whatever cash was available to help them survive and rebuild in these difficult situation.

People in the communities are requesting the government to look into the challenges of microfinance loan repayments in such disaster circumstances. Communities have lost their income generating projects and documentations and are in no condition to deal with their credit situation.

Conclusion

The primary damage that a disaster creates are beyond the control of human beings. What is within our reach and means is the ability to prevent the secondary consequences that precipitate the human suffering. Conflicts, Post-traumatic Stress Disorders, malnutrition, loss of dignity for women, men and children, and hopelessness are some such consequences that can be significantly reduced or totally prevented if the immediate responses and relief processes are managed and tailored well to suit the needs of the affected population.

Category 5 tropical cyclone Winston has taught us many lessons that should allow for us to prepare and plan better. The most valuable of these lessons are those that truly reflect the

current circumstances, needs, resilience and vulnerabilities of the victims and their surroundings.

The efficiency and success of any intervention however depends on the Local Resilience factors identified and built upon at all levels, the community, the stakeholders and on a national scale.

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