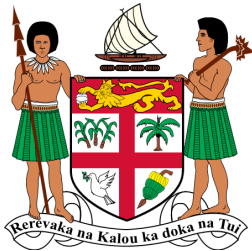


Impacts of climate related disasters and relocation on psychosocial wellbeing *- Fiji examples*

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Layers of trauma – existing before relocation

- Before relocation, affected community are already in a state of trauma
- Many layers of trauma where primary cause is experiencing loss from a disaster event -
 - sudden loss (extreme events)
 - slow and gradual loss (slow onset events)
- Other social factors add to the trauma
- Stories from communities reveal that people are still living with trauma many years after the event (before and after relocating)
- Relocation is an added layer to the trauma – not the start of trauma



Abandoned Tukuraki church

Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – *before relocation*

1. Direct losses due to disaster event

- **Loss of homes** – being rendered homeless, live in temporary shelter
 - ***Displacement*** – prolonged displacement (Nabavatu), undignified removal (Tukuraki)
- **Loss of goods and assets** – men in a village wiped out by flooding 2 years ago still psychologically affected from seeing household goods and appliances that they laboured and saved for many years - all lost in a day. Grieving their lost labour and investments.
- **Loss of land** – not being able to return and rebuild on the land where they were born and raised; land with ancestral ties
- **Loss of lives** – traumatic grieving of death in the village
- **Loss of dignity** – community do not want to be seen in a state of helplessness but some do not have the mental strength to cope

Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – *before relocation*

2. Displacement and shelter (adding to trauma)

- **Tukuraki** ordered to leave their high risk village but with no contingency plan on where they can be sheltered (even if temporarily).
 - Psychologically affected by feeling of “homelessness” and “abandonment”; temporarily stayed with relatives but moved out as some felt they were a burden.
 - Lived in makeshift shelters on roadside and lived in caves for more than 5 years before provided with new homes.
- **Nabavatu** living in tents and temporary shelter since being displaced in 2020 (mostly squalid conditions). Community awaiting for confirmation and provision of a suitable new site since 2020.



Temporary shelter for displaced Tukuraki families

For Nabavatu, the prolonged period of being displaced added to the sense of helplessness, especially among men.

Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – *before relocation*

3. Cultural sensitiveness

Observance of traditional protocols and rituals is significant. Time and space to be made for these rituals despite the “emergency” situation

Case of **Tukuraki** –

- Bodies of the family perished in the landslide were not accorded any **traditional mourning or burial rituals**. Bodies underwent post mortem in an open building, in view of villagers, and then packed in body bags to be buried immediately. There was no time for traditional rituals.
- Villagers only given a few hours notice to vacate their village due to high risk of another landslide.
- No **traditional request** was carried out by authorities; no time given for villagers to give their iTatau (**traditional farewell**) to the vanua. Villagers till today feel that they “fled” the vanua without proper “permission” to leave.
- Villagers still deeply affected by the lack of consideration and lack of respect given to them when they were “herded off like cattle” from the old site. This memory is painfully etched in their minds.

Manifestation of mental grief/trauma (post disaster)

Feeling of insecurity

- **Cogea** village – elderly and children always on high alert and get anxious each time it rains
- **Tukuraki** village – loud thundering sounds (like passing trucks) generates panic as they associate this sound with the night of the landslide

Post-traumatic stress disorder / traumatic grief

- **Nabavatu** – men are lethargic; most have stopped going to their plantations saying that walking plantations over debris and fallen trees is too overwhelming; role as “providers” taken over by the women; for some, the realisation that women are carrying out work they normally do sinks them further into depression.
- **Cogea** – similar to Nabavatu where men are not motivated to labour in their plantations. This may stem from experiencing loss of the fruits of their hard-earned labour that was taken by the flood. Women now driving activities to meet household needs, adding to their burden and stress.
- **Tukuraki** – visitors observe an air of solemnity and quiet dread in the evenings.

*Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – **post relocation***

1. Loss of old site

- **Cultural** and **spiritual** attachment - leaving ancestral land, sacred groves and sites, totems, culturally significant sites, burial sites, memories
- Leaving a **familiar environment** – attachment to the familiar: fishing grounds, hunting and gathering areas (wild food sources), gardens, relaxation and “happy” sites
- Leaving behind **investments** – houses, infrastructure, plantations
- Leaving neighbouring village kin and the **traditional support networks**
- Realising that the **next generation** will not know the old village



Old Vunidogoloa site

*Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – **post relocation***

2. Experiences from the new site

Tukuraki and Vunidogoloa Village

- House plan did not have kitchen which added stress to families, especially women
- Women felt left out of consultations and decision-making on new village layout and house design

Vunidogoloa Village

- Moved inland and some still yearn for their coastal village – miss the sea and fishing.
- House design for nuclear family unit affected family dynamics – behavioural change with no communal safety net.
 - Men more free with their treatment of wives and women more independent from communal obligations which affects village traditional practices.
- Individual family units, easy access to shops, lack of communal gathering ground, decreased communal/village events are affecting cultural roles and responsibilities, spiritual connection to vanua
- Change in social behaviour - increase in alcohol consumption, processed food, break-away church groups, domestic violence, etc. Psychosocial wellbeing of individuals (especially women) and community as a whole are affected by these changes.

Factors that affect psychosocial wellbeing – *post relocation*

3. Coping at the new site

Tukuraki Village

- Regular village gatherings, inter-denominational prayer vigils with neighbouring villages– a form of *solesolevaki*.
- Gathering with their neighbouring kin helped resolved the conflict with the landowning chief of the Tukuraki land who at one stage wanted them removed.
- Women took up new skills and engaged with an NGO to supply handsewn stuffed toys. Men were happy to take over “women” family tasks since the initiative is supporting the family. Mental health strengthened.
- Sharing their story and grief has become part of their healing process.
- Plans are underway to return to the old village and carry out the proper traditional ritual of iTatau



Vunidogoloa Village

- Accessing/visiting old site has provided some comfort
- Sharing experiences with other relocated communities and knowing that they are not alone
- Strengthen traditional structures – village plans, with Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

Planning relocation and psychosocial wellbeing of communities (p1)

1. **Current mental health** of affected community to be relocated need to be considered and addressed when in the pre-planning (assessment stage) for planned relocation.
2. **Mental capability of community** to contribute to relocation efforts to be assessed and addressed - e.g. Nabavatu men contributing to house construction.
3. **Creating space** at new site to healing healing and recovery – e.g. garden, house people can gather, chapel, spot where old site can be seen, etc.
4. **Culture sensitive** and centered approach that supports and encourages iTaukei community to draw mental and physical strength and resilience from their indigenous spirituality, traditional knowledge, communal ties and connection with any new environment.
5. **Appropriate counselling mechanisms** to be identified – pastoral care, counselling services that are culturally sensitive, safe and confidential space

Planning relocation and psychosocial wellbeing of communities (p2)

6. Wherever possible, communities are **relocated close to the former village site** or with easy access to visit the old site.
7. The process of relocation to ensure that **adequate resources**, importantly, **time** is reflective of the needs of the affected communities and for trust-building purposes.
8. Local **counseling practitioners** and/or psychologists are included in the community assessments to provide strategic direction to ensure the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of affected community members are addressed effectively and efficiently.
9. Strategically placed officers and community members, such as Lay Preachers, members of assessment teams are mindful of both the physical and psychological states of affected communities and be **trained** to offer (contextualized) **Psychological First Aid (PFA)**.

VINAKA



Children of Narikoso

