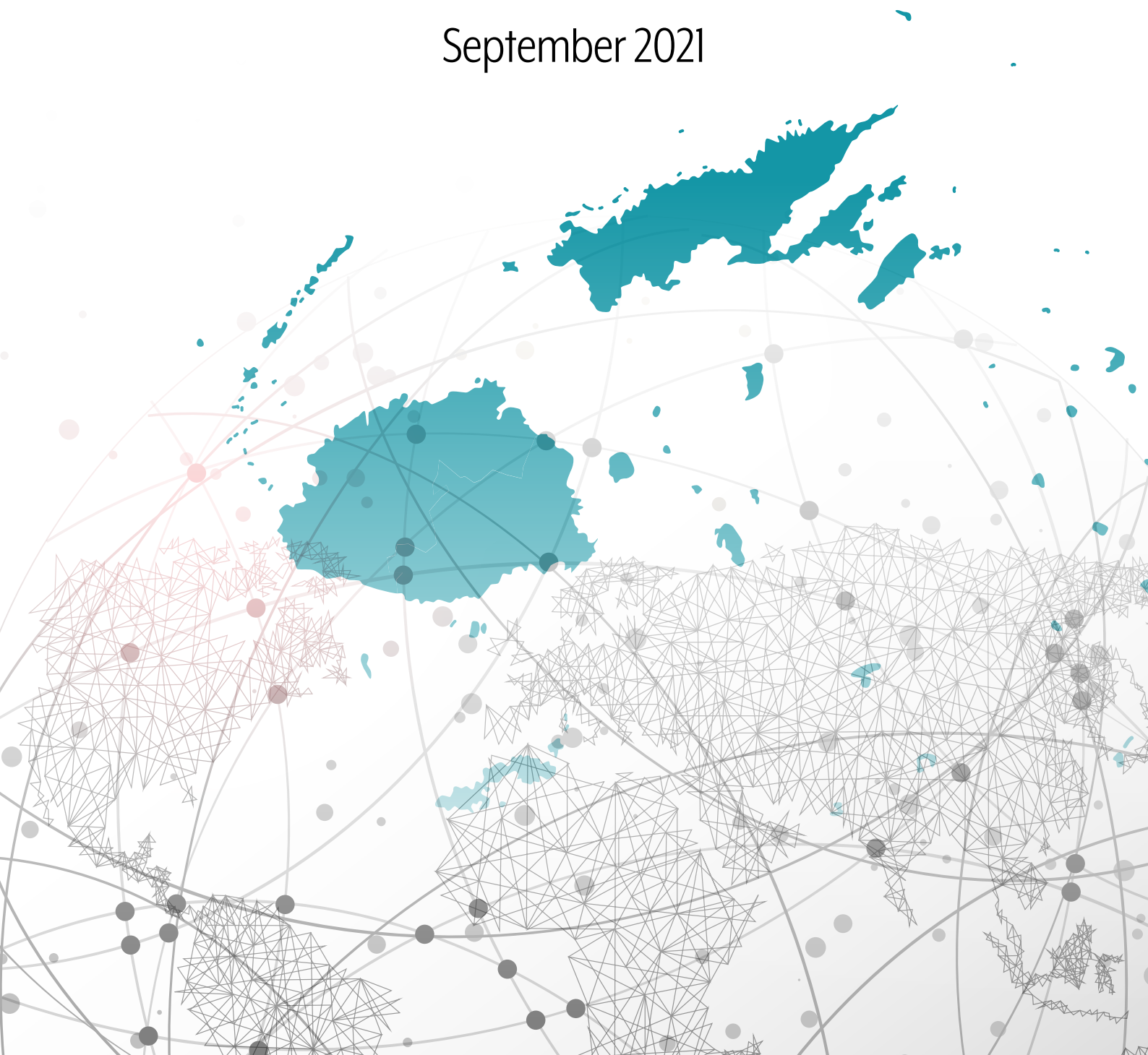# Status of Two-Way Communication in Fiji

September 2021

Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS), with support from the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)
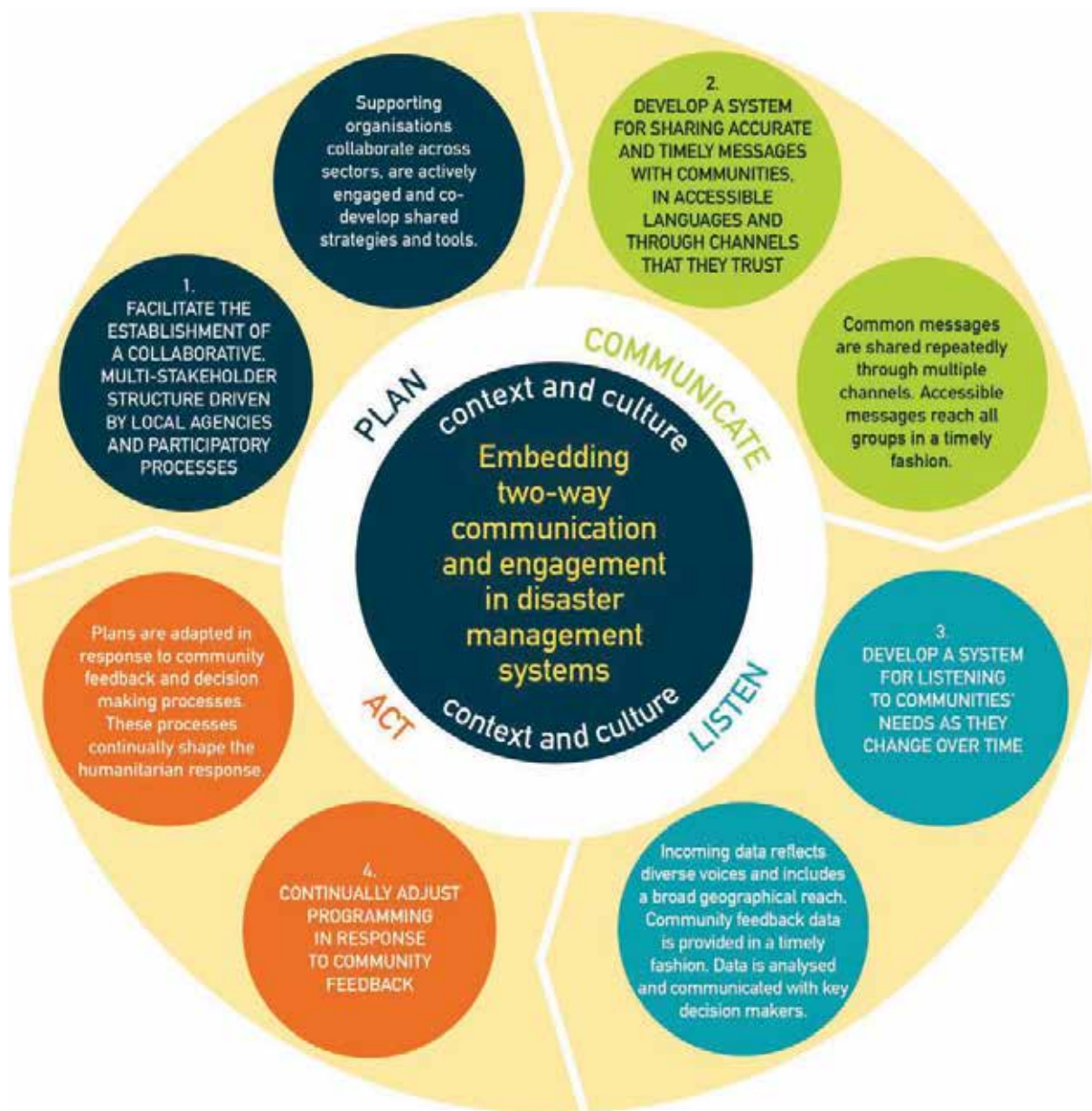
Contents

Figure 1: How two-way communication and community engagement with disaster affected communities can be embedded in national and sub-national disaster management systems

Executive Summary

While the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of effective two-way communication with affected communities, global evidence from humanitarian responses since 2010 suggests that Communication and Community Engagement (CCE) enhances the effectiveness of aid, fosters greater accountability and trust and improves outcomes for affected peoples.

CCE gives priority to sharing life-saving, actionable information with people affected by disaster using two-way communication channels so aid providers listen to and act on people's needs, suggested solutions, feedback and complaints, and people receiving assistance have a say in and lead decisions that affect them.

This report presents the results from a survey on the status of two-way CCE in Fiji. The survey was administered online, targeting members of the Communication and Community Engagement (CCE) Working Group, a sub-group under the Fiji Communications Cluster, and other partners in the disaster management and humanitarian sector. 41 organisations responded to the survey.

The sending of relevant information through community-preferred and trusted communication channels is critical to forewarn and help prepare communities before, during and after a crisis. Information shared at the right time saves lives and property and minimises damage and loss of life.

The survey indicates the importance of information provision is well understood in Fiji. All organisations surveyed share information with communities using a variety of channels. The most popular is Facebook, which is widely used in Fiji, followed by in-person community visits. Promisingly, almost 70% of survey respondents share information about how to provide feedback to service providers. 84% of respondents reported that they coordinate community messaging with other organisations to support consistency and clarity.

Almost all respondents confirmed that they collect community feedback. Feedback is any positive or negative feedback on the experience of those affected - on the humanitarian actor or on the wider humanitarian system on the aid (including information) they have or have not received. Feedback from communities can shape and improve the delivery of services to better meet community needs. Good feedback practice does not just happen once, but is an ongoing cycle. There are various ways and means of collecting feedback, but regardless of the feedback channel selected, it is critical to have a systematic approach and to ensure diverse community voices are heard across different issues.

One third of survey respondents collect feedback by proactively asking questions on set issues, while two-thirds collect feedback through a combination of both reactive and proactive approaches to feedback collection. As for the timing of feedback, 4 out of 5 responders reported collecting feedback at all points in the response cycle, including before disasters strike. Almost 50% of respondents said they would like to collect more open (non-quantitative) data. Positively, the survey also found that 89% of organisations share their feedback findings with other organisations.

A summary of the key recommendations are presented below and more detail is provided in the body of the report. In order for the recommendations to be implemented, further collaboration and partnerships with a diverse range of organisations will be required. NDMO, CDAC and its partners welcome further discussion in this regard.

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Organisations should continue advocating for collective and systematic CCE. In doing so, they should **assign dedicated staff** to undertake CCE activities, including for robust information management, data analysis and information sharing. They should also ensure sufficient **financial and technical support** is available to support effective CCE and information management.

2. Organisations should ensure they **coordinate** communication messaging with other agencies to ensure consistency and uniformity.

3. As with outgoing communications, using **multiple channels** for incoming feedback, **aligned to community preferences** supports the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups and ensures strong data quality.

4. Develop **common feedback questions**, which can be integrated into existing surveys and disseminated by a diverse range of stakeholders to harness the huge analytical power in sharing data sets.

5. In certain responses, a **common feedback mechanism** should be developed to incorporating accessible and trusted feedback channels for collecting community and individual feedback. This also requires formal sharing of data between agencies, especially on standardised questions or indicators.

6. Ensure questions relating to **community information needs and preferences** are integrated into cross-sectoral assessments and surveys.

7. Advocate for the need to **'close the feedback loop'** while also leading by example. **Share findings back to communities** and include details about how your organisation plans to use the findings.

Introduction

A significant and growing body of evidence is demonstrating that better communication and engagement with communities enhances the effectiveness of aid; fosters greater accountability, transparency, and trust; and improves outcomes for affected peoples.[1]

As part of a DFAT-funded project in Fiji, aiming to support more consistent and systematic response-wide two-way communication and community engagement within the humanitarian sector, a survey was conducted to understand the status of two-way communication between humanitarian providers and the communities they seek to serve.

Communication and Community Engagement gives priority to sharing life-saving, actionable information with people affected by disaster using two-way communication channels so aid providers listen to and act on people's needs, suggested solutions, feedback and complaints, and people receiving assistance have a say in and lead decisions that affect them. It also prioritises keeping people in crisis connected with each other and the outside world. (CDAC 2019, p10). Figure 1 above illustrates a process for embedding two-way communication into national and sub-national disaster response systems.

The effort to strengthen consistent and systematic two-way communication with affected or at risk communities aligns with the Fiji National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management[2], which emphasises the development of strong national information and communication platforms that facilitate rapid collection, analysis, and dispersal of information on disaster risk management and humanitarian action, including harmonising national community and public warnings, messaging, advocacy and awareness building, and gathering feedback on community concerns (section 3.2(e)).

Unloading of relief items for villages on Kadavu island after TC Yasa Picture: Fiji NDMO

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1   CDAC 2019, Collective Communication and Community Engagement in humanitarian action: How to Guide for leaders and responders, February 2019, at: http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20190205105256-aoi9j.

2   The Fiji National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management. Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. Approved by the Fiji Cabinet on August 15, 2017.

The survey was facilitated and conducted by the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network[3] and Ground Truth Solution[4] (GTS) on behalf of the Communication and Community Engagement (CCE) Working Group[5] under the Fiji Communication Cluster, in partnership with the Fiji National Disaster management Office (NDMO). The survey was administered online, targeting members of the Communication and Community Engagement (CCE) Working Group, and other partners in the disaster management and humanitarian sector.

Purpose

The survey aims to:

1. Capture how organisations and Ministries in the humanitarian, disaster management and international development sectors (including those responding to pandemics and epidemics) are communicating with their communities.

2. Understand organisations' perceptions of how communities prefer to share their experiences of humanitarian agencies, their services, the wider humanitarian system, and the information they have (or have not) received during crises.

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3   The Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network is a growing platform of more than 30 humanitarian, media development, social innovation, technology, and telecommunication organisations, dedicated to saving lives and making aid more effective through communication, information exchange and community engagement. For more information, visit http://www.cdacnetwork.org/.

4   Ground Truth Solutions is an international non-governmental organisation that helps people affected by crisis influence the design and implementation of humanitarian aid. For more information visit https://groundtruthsolutions.org/about/.

5   A Communication and Community Engagement Working Group was established as part of the National Communications Cluster in 2019, led by the Fiji Ministry of Communications and the National Disaster Management Office, with the support of the Fiji Council of Social Services and UNICEF as Co-Leads.

Survey Findings

The findings of this survey need to be shared, discussed and used by all actors - both locally and globally. While the data is about Fiji specifically, the resulting insights are pertinent to all humanitarian actors, and we encourage additional in-country and global discussions on these findings.

Response Statistics

A total of 60 organisations were sent the survey. Responses were received from 41 organisations making a response rate of 68%[6].

Of the 41 responses, 13 (30%) were Fiji Government organisations operating at the national level; 12 (27%) were national NGOs, while 9 (21%) were international NGOs. The rest were a mix of donors, sub-national government agencies or "others". This represents a good cross-section of the humanitarian sector in Fiji.

Staff capacity

Effective two-way communication requires organisations to have specific staff responsible for both communication and community engagement on a full-time basis. From the organisations surveyed, 37 (84%) have dedicated CCE capacity. Of these 37, the majority had 4 or more staff responsible for CCE activities, suggesting a significant pool of CCE specialists in Fiji. A similar number of respondents reported having dedicated information management capacity. Dedicated CCE capacity is important as it enables more systematic and consistent two-way communication with affected communities.
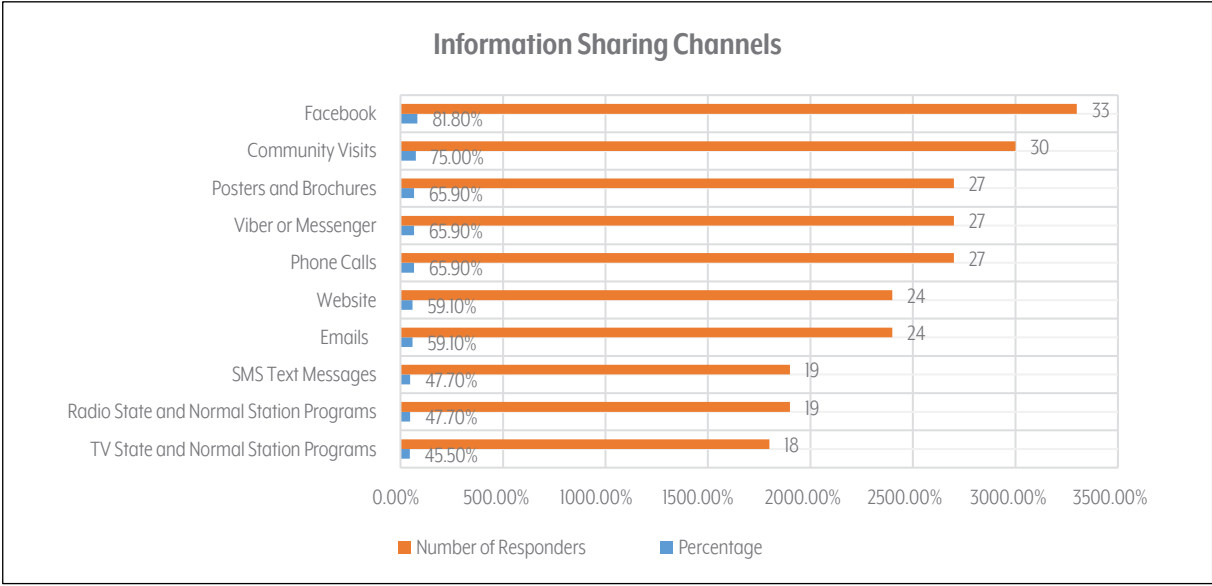
Similarly, information management is also key to CCE. It supports more coordinated and response wide CCE, supports implementation of the cycle of inform-listen-respond, helps the internal management cycle run smoothly and ensures data is used to maximum benefit within an organisation. Without it, there is a danger that incoming CCE data does not inform or improve programming or decision making. Alongside this staff capacity, organisations need the appropriate systems and technologies in place, to either send out or receive information, but also to document, record and analyse findings for action. Training staff in these tools is often overlooked.

Information Sharing

Information sharing includes the passing of information from organisations to communities and among individuals within a community. Information sharing is key to CCE, whether targeting a specific community or providing information for the general public, as was the case with Covid-19 messaging. The sending of relevant information through community-preferred and trusted communication channels is critical to forewarn and help prepare communities before, during and after a disaster. Information shared at the right time saves lives and property and minimises damage and loss of life. The survey indicates the importance of information provision is well understood in Fiji.

All organisations surveyed share information with communities using a variety of channels. The most popular is Facebook, which is widely used in Fiji, followed by in-person community visits. Remote parts of Fiji are at risk of missing out on key messaging, and so most organisations use multiple channels to maximise their reach.

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6   Due to the response numbers, we are unable to disaggregate findings by different demographic variables, but when taken together these responses provide a valid and actionable set of data.

Information Sharing Channels

Channel	Percentage	Number of Responders
Facebook	81.80%	33
Community Visits	75.00%	30
Posters and Brochures	65.90%	27
Viber or Messenger	65.90%	27
Phone Calls	65.90%	27
Website	59.10%	24
Emails	59.10%	24
SMS Text Messages	47.70%	19
Radio State and Normal Station Programs	47.70%	19
TV State and Normal Station Programs	45.50%	18

■ Number of Responders ■ Percentage

The type of information or content of messages shared with communities is as important as the choice of communication channel, and influences communities' preparedness, their response, and their ability to recover after a disaster. The vast majority of organisations share information on how best to prepare for a disaster. It is promising to see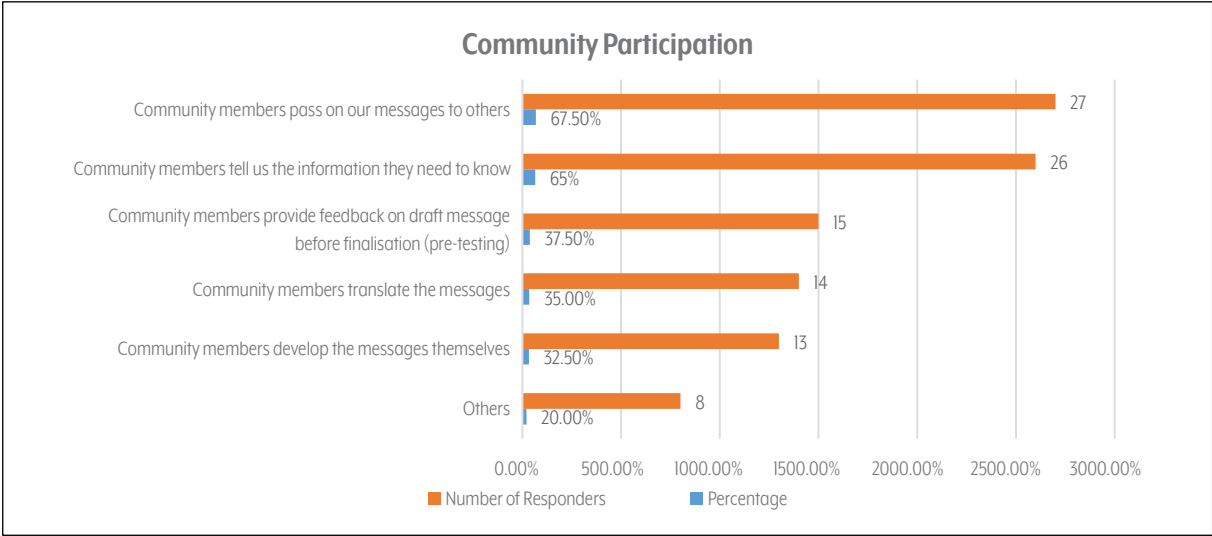 that almost 70% also share information about how to provide feedback to service providers. As discussed further below, aligning community preferences – both on content and delivery method – is critical for effective information sharing.

Types of Information Shared

Type	Percentage	Number of Responders
How to prepare for a disaster	90.50%	38
Support services available	71.40%	30
How to provide feedback on disaster response efforts	70.00%	29
How to provide feedback on my organisation's program	64.30%	27
What to do when a disaster strikes	64.30%	27
Health information	52.40%	22
Prevention of gender based violence	45.20%	19
How to make a complaint against my org or our staff	38.10%	16
Selection criteria for service	28.60%	12
Other information for the safety of the communities	23.80%	10

■ Number of Responders ■ Percentage

Community Participation

Like effective information provision, community participation enhances the effectiveness of disaster management and aid provision. Engaging people and their communities improves disaster preparation and ensures the delivery of quality recovery programmes. In addition, it can enhance social inclusion and bring greater transparency and accountability to the whole humanitarian system. The survey first looked at community participation in outgoing information sharing – which can be critical in ensuring messages are clear, well-understood, locally relevant and are trusted by those who need to react to them. Community participation varies among the responding agencies.

Community Participation

	Number of Responders	Percentage
Community members pass on our messages to others	27	67.50%
Community members tell us the information they need to know	26	65%
Community members provide feedback on draft message before finalisation (pre-testing)	15	37.50%
Community members translate the messages	14	35.00%
Community members develop the messages themselves	13	32.50%
Others	8	20.00%

Face to face meetings are the most preferred forms of two-way communications for communities. Women and children attend a meeting post TC Yasa on Matuku Island, Lau. Picture: Fiji NDMO

Beyond community participation, coordination among different agencies on information sharing helps improve the consistency of messaging, reducing confusion, and extending the reach of messages to target audiences. 36 organisations (84%) reported that they coordinate community messaging with other organisations to support consistency and clarity.

As mentioned, it is also the responsibility of organisations to ensure communication channels are selected in consultation with communities, and in line with their preferences. When asked how communities prefer to receive information, most responders said communities preferred face-to-face interactions. 75% of agencies reported conducting community visits while 84% mentioned visits as a priority channel for communities. Whereas 82% of responders said they use Facebook, only 66% reported Facebook as a priority community channel.

Community Preferred Communication Channel

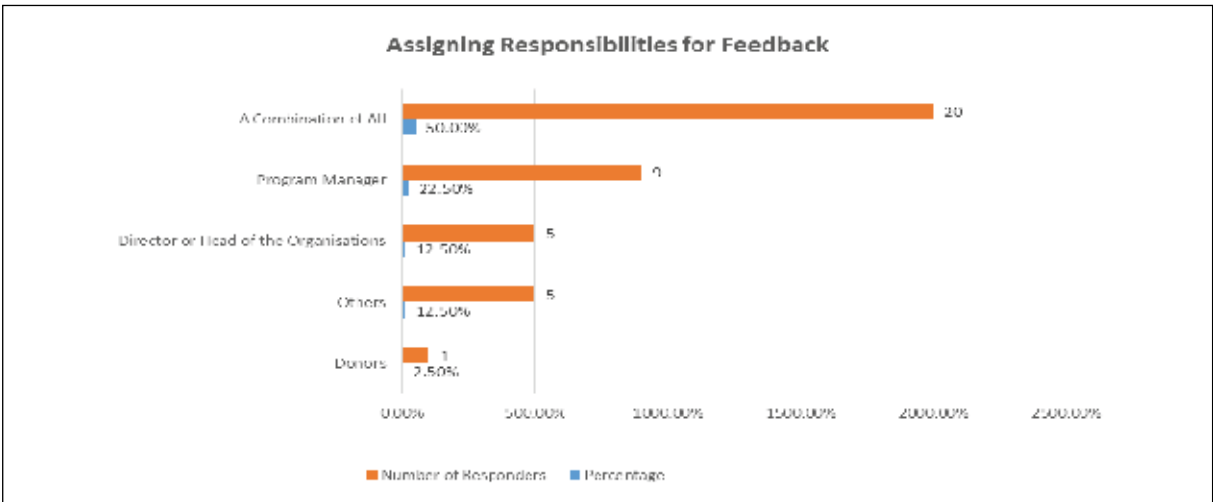| Channel	Percentage	Number of Responders
Prefer to receive information through Community Visits	84.10%	37
Prefer to receive information by Radio thru the State & Station Program	72.70%	32
Prefer to receive information through Facebook	65.90%	29
Prefer to receive information through Posters and Brochures	47.70%	21
Prefer to receive information through SMS Text Messages	43.20%	19
Prefer to receive information through Phone Calls	43.90%	19
Prefer to receive information through the Organisations' Website	20.50%	9
Prefer to receive information through Viber/Messenger	15.90%	7
Prefer to receive information through Emails	13.60%	6
Prefer to receive information through HF Radios	11.40%	5

Community Feedback

Almost all responders confirmed that they collect community feedback. Feedback is any positive or negative feedback on the experience of those affected - on the humanitarian actor or on the wider humanitarian system on the aid (including information) they have or have not received. It is different from a needs assessment, which involves systematically gathering and analysing information relating to the needs, conditions, and capacities of people affected in order to determine gaps between a current situation and agreed standards. Feedback from communities can shape and improve the delivery of services to better meet community needs. It is also integral to improving outgoing communication, and can ensure messages and information are as relevant and effective as possible. As a result, good feedback practice does not just happen once, but is an ongoing cycle.

As with outgoing communication with affected communities, assigning responsibilities for feedback processes is important, as is securing senior leadership buy-in. Selecting the right team members from across and organisation boosts efficiency. Most responders split their roles across different functions.

In designing the methods to collecting community feedback, it is important to note that the high level of authority within the organisation shoulders the main responsibility for community engagement and collection of community feedback. The assignment of responsibility for community feedback should always be clear and pre-determined from the start.

Assigning Responsibilities for Feedback

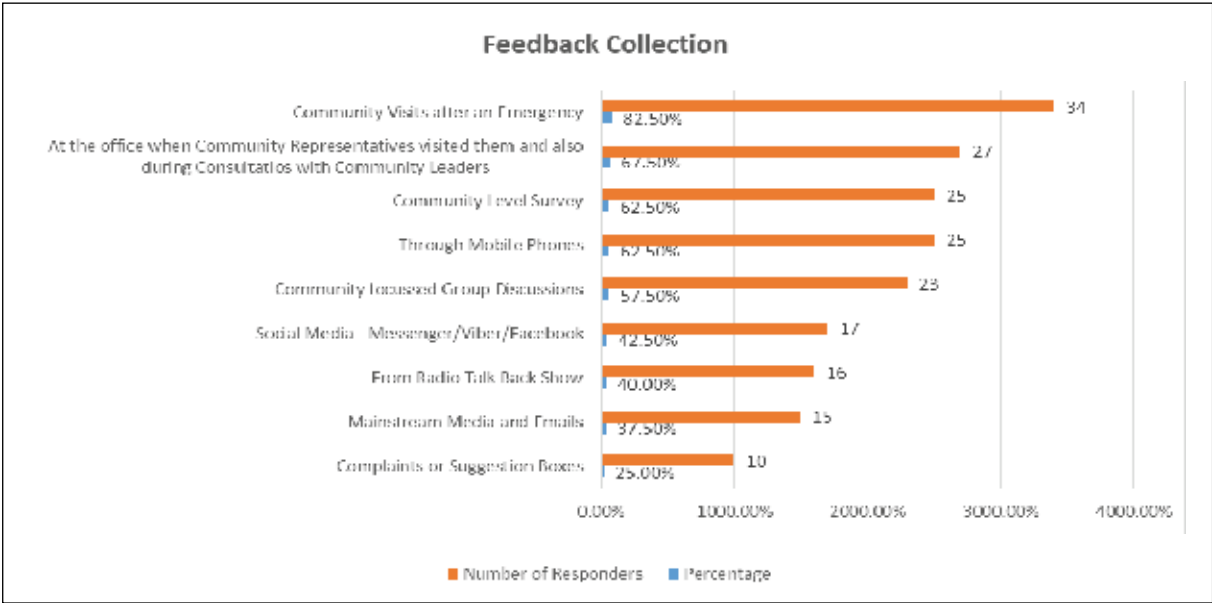| Responsibility	Percentage	Number of Responders
A Combination of All	50.00%	20
Program Manager	22.50%	9
Director or Head of the Organisations	12.50%	5
Others	12.50%	5
Donors	2.50%	1

Community feedback offers a range of potential benefits, and in general, communities are more informed, understanding of the situations, knowledge sharing and far more forthcoming than expected with their feedback. There was quite a high level of consistency in why organisation collected feedback.
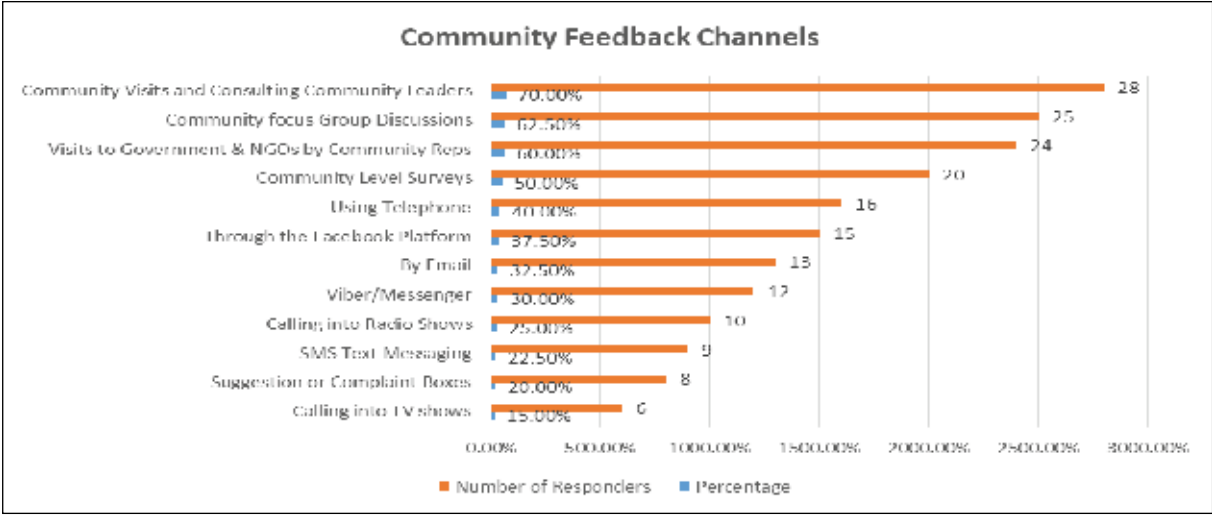

There are various ways and means of collecting feedback, but regardless of the exact mode, it is critical to have a systematic approach and to ensure diverse community voices are heard across different issues. One third of survey respondents collect feedback by proactively asking community questions on set issues, while two-thirds collect feedback through a combination of both reactive and proactive approaches to feedback collection. As for the timing of feedback, 4 out of 5 responders reported collecting feedback at all points in the response cycle, including before disasters strike. The remaining 20% only collect feedback once there is an active emergency.
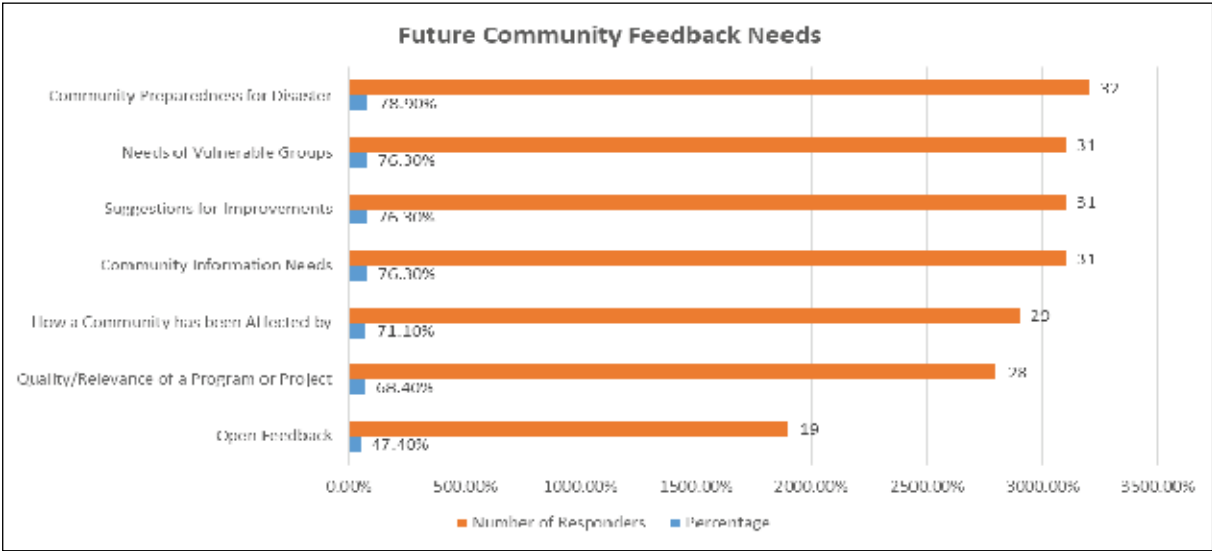
As with information sharing, a range of feedback channels are used, covering remote and in-person collection. When using surveys as a collection tool, most responders favour digital collection techniques such as Kobo toolbox, although the ongoing use of pen and paper remains high. A combination of collection tools ensures the challenges of using a single approach are mitigated – for example, digital collection can be hard during severe weather events where power and connectivity are down. Again, as with information sharing, it is important to have close alignment between community preferences and the tools deployed. Otherwise, the quality and inclusivity of the resulting data can be questionable. Overall, there appears to be relatively good alignment, although as before this question was not asked directly to communities themselves. Fiji has a long history of direct and inclusive face-to-face dialogue sessions called 'Talanoa', and the role of these sessions as feedback collection opportunities are apparent in the survey results, which favour face-to-face community meetings.

Feedback Collection

Category	Number of Responders	Percentage
Community Visits after an Emergency	34	82.50%
At the office when Community Representatives visited them and also during Consultatios with Community Leaders	27	67.50%
Community Level Survey	25	62.50%
Through Mobile Phones	25	62.50%
Community Focussed Group Discussions	23	57.50%
Social Media - Messenger/Viber/Facebook	17	42.50%
From Radio Talk Back Show	16	40.00%
Mainstream Media and Emails	15	37.50%
Complaints or Suggestion Boxes	10	25.00%

As for feedback content, most organisations collect data on how communities have been impacted by disasters, as well as how best to provide support via services and information dissemination.

Community Feedback Channels

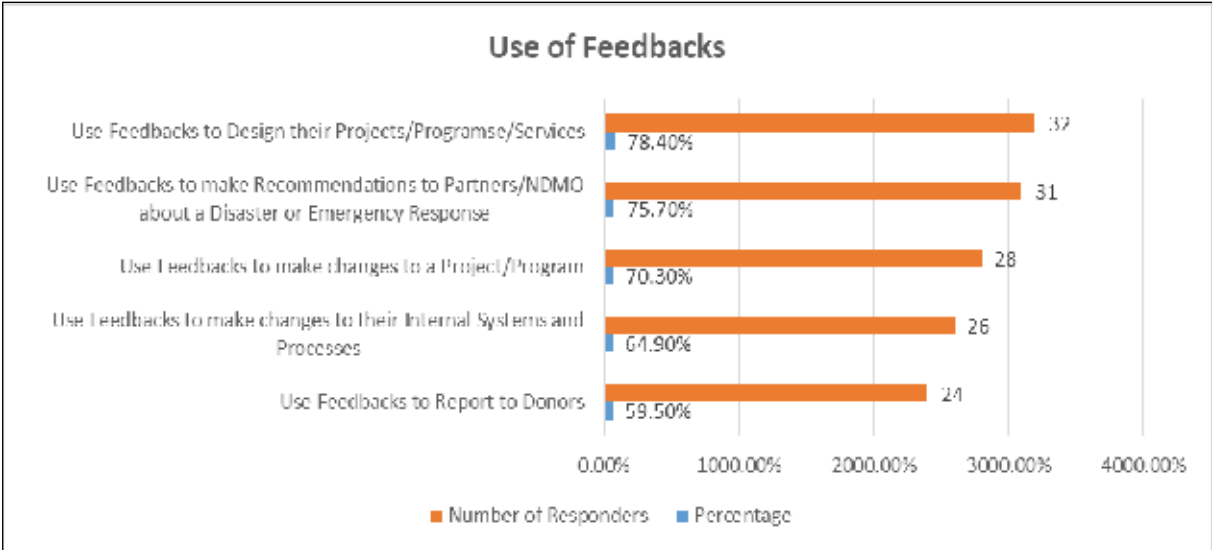| Category	Number of Responders	Percentage
Community Visits and Consulting Community Leaders	28	70.00%
Community focus Group Discussions	25	62.50%
Visits to Government & NGOs by Community Reps	24	60.00%
Community Level Surveys	20	50.00%
Using Telephone	16	40.00%
Through the Facebook Platform	15	37.50%
By Email	13	32.50%
Viber/Messenger	12	30.00%
Calling into Radio Shows	10	25.00%
SMS Text Messaging	9	22.50%
Suggestion or Complaint Boxes	8	20.00%
Calling into TV shows	6	15.00%

Looking forward, organisations were asked what they might collect feedback about in the future. Overall, most organisations are currently collecting the same type of information they would like to collect moving forward. Interestingly, almost 50% said they would like to collect more open (non-quantitative) data. Traditionally this type of data has been challenging to analyse, but there is clearly value in these types of insights.

Future Community Feedback Needs

Category	Number of Responders	Percentage
Community Preparedness for Disaster	32	78.90%
Needs of Vulnerable Groups	31	76.30%
Suggestions for Improvements	31	76.30%
Community Information Needs	31	76.30%
How a Community has been Affected by	29	71.10%
Quality/Relevance of a Program or Project	28	68.40%
Open Feedback	19	47.40%

Using and sharing Findings

Collecting feedback is only one part of the puzzle. Using it is quite different. Positively, less than 10% reported not using feedback findings. Also positively, 4 out of 5 organisations reported sharing the findings back to communities – an important step in making them feel listened to. Moreover, this 'closing of the feedback loop' strengthens relationships between aid providers and communities, and helps empower communities to take ownership of projects and monitor and evaluate their success. Building such bridges is based on trust, and it is perhaps unsurprising to see most organisations prefer to do this face-to-face, as opposed to over social media or other digital platforms. The vast majority shared findings with communities during in person visits, although about 20% also shared findings with communities through their website or over the phone.

Use of Feedbacks

Category	Number of Responders	Percentage
Use Feedbacks to Design their Projects/Programse/Services	32	78.40%
Use Feedbacks to make Recommendations to Partners/NDMO about a Disaster or Emergency Response	31	75.70%
Use Feedbacks to make changes to a Project/Program	28	70.30%
Use Feedbacks to make changes to their Internal Systems and Processes	26	64.90%
Use Feedbacks to Report to Donors	24	59.50%

The survey also found that 89% of organisations share their feedback findings with other organisations. Two-thirds share findings during national Cluster meetings, while 40% used other meetings, such as Pacific Humanitarian Team Cluster meetings, or Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) meetings. 58% simply share via email.

Of the few respondents who cited challenges in using CCE data, issues raised include a lack of resources and staff capacity to respond to community requests, as well as challenges in gathering and analysing the data in the first place.

These challenges can be addressed with the followings measures:

1. Conduct regular capacity building for all organisations and all relevant staff.

2. Ensure adequate resourcing of CCE costs are reflected in organisational and project budgets.

3. Establish robust country and regional-level information sharing so all can benefit from collected and analysed data.

4. Establish Collective and standardised approaches to feedback collection, analysis and dissemination so data can be systematically aggregated for further analysis, learning and action.

Recommendations

This survey, while focusing on Fiji specifically, has identified a number of recommendations that are of broader significance and relevance, not only across the whole South Pacific but the international humanitarian sector more broadly.

Overall Recommendations

The report proposes the following recommendations for all organisations mandated for CCE and Two-Way Communication – in Fiji, and beyond.

1. Organisations should continue advocating for collective and systematic CCE. In doing so, they should assign dedicated staff to undertake CCE activities, including for robust information management and data analysis. If it is not part of someone's job description, and moreover, they are not held to account for it; it won't happen.

2. Organisations should ensure they coordinate communication messaging among themselves to ensure consistency and uniformity.

3. As with outgoing communications, using multiple channels for incoming feedback, aligned to community preferences is important to support inclusion of hard-to-reach groups and ensure strong data quality.

4. Organisations should recognise that feedback has multiple purposes. Simply using it for donor reporting misses many benefits; improving service delivery, understanding the impact on outcomes, and better addressing community needs are a few.5.   Share findings back to communities and include details on how you plan to use the findings. Communities need to see their voices are being listened to and that these are contributing to change. This helps build relationships and trust too. Not doing this might mean people stop providing their feedback in the future – the dreaded 'survey fatigue'.

5. Agencies should keep feedback simple, proportional and where possible connect collection activities to other touch points, such as service delivery or post distribution monitoring processes. This can stop feedback simply becoming an add-on, but an easily integrated part of ongoing processes.

6. Harmonise proactive feedback systems with reactive complaints mechanisms, so that regardless of how information is fed into an organisation, it always lands in the appropriate way to maximise its utility. This requires both sources of data to be fed into responsive management systems which can make sure it is acted upon.

7. Only one third of respondents involve the community in message development, which while positive, is insufficient. The quality, and impact of messaging can be greatly improved by involving communities in their design and dissemination, and more organisations need to do it.

8. In certain responses, a common feedback mechanism should be developed to incorporate and utilise all the available commonly used and trusted feedback channels for collecting community and individual feedback. This also requires formal sharing of data between agencies, especially on standardised indicators.

Sharing feedback with the communities and how the organization plans to use the feedback is essential in two-way communications. Women of Ono I Lau, Lau received assistance that was provided as a result of their requests. Picture: Fiji NDMO

Recommendations for humanitarian coordinators, including NDMO offices in, and beyond, Fiji

1. Develop common feedback questions, which can be integrated into existing surveys and disseminated by a diverse range of stakeholders to harness the huge analytical power in sharing data sets. If many organisations use the same core set of questions, these can create a comprehensive and more reliable picture of what is happening across a given context.

2. Ensure questions relating to community information needs and preferences are integrated into cross-sectoral assessments and surveys.

3. Ensure that there are dedicated Staff responsible for coordinating communication and feedback, including information management, data analysis and sharing. Centralised systems may be needed for this purpose.

4. During specific disasters, establish a 24/7 operations function for coordinating national communication as well as monitoring incoming information flows.

Recommendations for Governments, NGOs and donors (local and international)

The report proposes the following recommendations for all Government and Non-Government donors, including those in Fiji.

1. Ensure sufficient financial and technical support for the strengthening of community communication engagement and services support.

2. Ensure sufficient financial and technical support for the strengthening of information management and data analysis capacity.

3. Both local and international NGOs and CSOs should strongly advocate for the need to 'close the feedback loop' while also leading by example.

Conclusion

A disaster, whether natural or human induced, is a serious disruption of the functioning of a community, and can involve widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which often exceed the ability of the affected community to cope using its own resources. Communication and engagement between relevant authorities and affected communities should occur at all stages of the disaster management cycle. Effective communication and community engagement is a potentially valuable way of avoiding and reducing the damage and destruction caused by disasters.

Advances in technology have transformed how communication teams disseminate information to affected communities during times of crises and disaster. The traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers are no longer the primary source of information, as smartphones and tablets enable immediate mobile access to the digital and social media platforms that are increasingly popular in Fiji.

This survey report highlights the status and quality of Two-Way Communication in Fiji. Its findings however have much broader significance. In order for the recommendations to be implemented, further collaboration and partnerships with a diverse range of organisations with a vested interest in delivering effective, consistent and systematic Communication and Community Engagement will be required. The CCE Working Group membership is a perfect avenue for testing and implementing the recommendations. NDMO, CDAC and its partners welcome further discussion in this regard.

Women of Vatulele Island off the coast of Viti Levu are all smiles during a visit by the Prime Minister after TC Yasa. Picture: Fiji NDMO