

The **Pacific Insight Briefs** capture climate and disaster integration knowledge, lessons, and insights from the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership (Climate Partnership). The five thematic briefs draw on the experience of the Climate Partnership's community of aid program managers, implementing partners, technical experts, and staff.



Pacific Insight Brief 1 | Community Resilience – Insights through a conceptual framework

Aid investments seeking to build climate and disaster resilience ultimately seek to support Pacific communities to plan for, avoid and cope with the sudden and long-term impacts of climate change and disaster. The diversity of dynamics at community level is therefore critical to consider when designing and implementing aid investments seeking to build resilience.

Local dynamics, including custom, governance, socio-economy and gender and social norms are powerful determinants of the adaptive and transformative capacity of communities¹. As highlighted by the DFAT localisation policy note² - community members and local partners are best able to articulate local strengths, needs and requirements to drive the delivery of more relevant and effective aid.

This brief explores the importance and benefits of working closely with communities as agents of resilient development. Drawing on research supported by the Climate Partnership it presents a conceptual framework as a tool to guide thinking across the aid program cycle.

'Building community resilience is important because it enables communities to strengthen the systems, assets or resources they already have in order to improve their community or the villages' behaviours - or how to withstand or recover from disasters, cyclones or climate change.' (Pacific Insight Briefs interview 2023, Climate Partnership Adviser).



Insights

The Community Resilience Framework (Figure 1) was developed through Climate Partnership supported research and applied in four case studies exploring community resilience in Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Application of the framework revealed how each of the framework's five elements are important considerations for any aid program investment focused on community resilience.

The framework is a tool to guide research, program design and implementation, strategic policy, and evaluation.



Figure 1: Community Resilience Framework

1. Action: Resilience involves evolving, dynamic and transformative actions in response to actual or anticipated disturbances, whilst retaining core elements of the community's identity. Actions might relate to behaviours, relationships, policies and practices within a community, and may reflect anticipatory actions in response to early warnings to reduce risk.

At community level, action is often characterised by responses to shocks in order to return back to normal. Research found that further support is needed to facilitate 'transformational change' – i.e., actions that enable new ways of doing things that adapt to future climate and disaster risk.

Communities are continuously responding and adapting to changes in context and conditions. Aid programs can leverage this dynamism and support integration of short- and long-term climate change risk into existing traditional and local knowledge and decision-making systems to support effective climate adaptation actions.

Climate Partnership supported research found some examples of transformative actions undertaken by communities participating in DFAT-funded Vanuatu Skills Partnership's *Skills for Handicraft* in Vanuatu. Strengthened roles of women (with and without disabilities) in economic activities reinforced resilience to climate change and disaster risks. Women and their families utilised their incomes gained

¹ Warrick et al., 2017 – "The 'Pacific Adaptive Capacity Analysis Framework': guiding the assessment of adaptive capacity in Pacific island communities"

² DFAT Localisation Policy Note April 2021

through selling weaved handicraft products for improved disaster preparedness and response to disasters. Incomes from weaving were also put towards longer-term resilience building actions, including costs for their children to attend school and additional income-earning items such as sewing machines and bread-makers. These transformative actions strengthened household and community resilience to the shocks and stresses associated with climate and disaster risks.

2. Decision-making: Robust and diverse leadership and governance systems have been shown to support resilient development. Decision-making structures include participation of diverse voices (men, women, youth and young people, people living with disabilities, gender minorities and other marginalised groups) for the ongoing leadership and management of community life. Strong governance systems provide a forum where a range of issues relevant to the community, including climate change and disaster preparedness and response, can be discussed and decisions made. The role of the church and other religious institutions in influencing change is significant. Incorporation of formal and informal local governance in programming is a critical aspect of all aid investments aimed at strengthening community resilience. See Insight Brief #4 on Governance for further consideration of governance for resilient development.

For example, the Climate Partnership supported research conducted in Houma Village in ‘Eua, Tonga demonstrated how the Houma community established a new Emergency Committee for disaster preparedness and response with support from Red Cross. The Emergency Committee connected to the village governance structure and was headed by the Town Officer, with seven men and three women members. Women participants in the research described how preparation for tropical cyclones was led by the Town Officer, the Village Council and the Emergency

Committee, and that heads of households also made decisions around disaster preparedness. This provides an example of strengthened local governance that includes diverse leadership and aligns with existing formal and informal governance systems.

3. Knowledge: A key aspect of the community resilience framework is recognition of local knowledge. This element demonstrates strengths-based principles by prioritising existing cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, local priorities and aspirations that support resilient livelihoods, and combine with external knowledge as needed e.g. climate change projections about sea level rise. Aid investments can support the combining of local and external knowledge through long term partnerships and building trusting relationships between stakeholders.

The presence and support for local knowledge brokers and locally based leadership on climate and disaster resilient development is key to community resilience. Knowledge brokers can blend and interpret local knowledge, context and strengths with external knowledge and engage with diverse networks to enact change over time. Supporting local knowledge brokers (reflecting the diversity within a community) is an effective approach to building community resilience.

Research undertaken by CSIRO’s Knowledge Brokering for Pacific Futures Project aimed to build the knowledge, tools and competencies for climate resilient development decision-making and establish a network of knowledge brokers and champions in the Solomon Islands and PNG. The Project found that collaboration between organisations, facilitated by local knowledge brokers, was important. Aid investments that embed a culture of learning and reflection across participating organisations and stakeholder groups (e.g. communities, knowledge brokers, NGOs, government and donors) are more

Case example | Strengthening women’s roles in community resilience building



women’s role as first responders in times of disaster and supporting them through dedicated investments that acknowledge and values the important role they play in resilience building.

Women’s Weather Watch began in Fiji as a platform to recognise the critical role rural women play as first responders in disaster preparation, response and recovery at community level. *Women’s Weather Watch* has spread across the region, operating in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga as an information and communication system that connects women leaders with Meteorological Offices and National Disaster Management Offices. The program builds on the strengths of women and the role they play in existing community level networks that then link to national level technical information. Through *Women’s Weather Watch* the information is shared through appropriate messages to Pacific Island communities. This case example highlights the importance of recognising existing local knowledge and structures – in this case, rural

able to navigate complex and dynamic systems such as communities adapting to climate and disaster risks. The Climate Partnership also facilitates local knowledge brokers via the Australia Pacific Climate Alumni Network (APCAN); which is localising climate knowledge to support decision making.

4. Thoughts and attitudes: A resilient community incorporates a willingness to accept change, and respond and adapt, is able to accept new ways of doing things, and has a willingness to take on new information about climate change. Past experiences of severe weather events affect local attitudes towards climate change and how these elements influence community resilience. Aid investments that acknowledge and work with existing cultural attitudes and social norms to affect behaviour change are more effective than those which are blind to, or directly working against, such attitudes³.

Climate Partnership supported research⁴ shows that Pacific communities demonstrate self-efficacy (the belief in personal capability) and collective efficacy, seen through collective action, shared beliefs, community cooperation and social cohesion – all critical aspects of adaptive capacity. These qualities are demonstrated in the way communities draw on their own strengths following a disaster, with an example provided below.

“After Tropical Cyclone Hoha, my house was destroyed. The Provinces came to make an assessment. But I did not wait for assistance from the government – we didn’t get any help from anybody. We just went ahead and repaired the house ourselves.” (Female interviewee, Wala, Vanuatu).

From a climate and disaster resilience stand-point, aid investments can tap into and bolster self- and collective efficacy by working to provide education and training through programs that work with existing community knowledge, assets and strengths and deliver training in ways that align with local culture (e.g. through peer to peer learning or local experts).

5. People and environment: Evidence suggests that climate change impacts are already impacting the resilience of livelihoods, resulting in a need to find new ways of working. Acting in balance with biophysical limits and change is a factor that supports resilient communities. This means working within the limits of the environment, which are likely changing because of climate and disaster risks. Recognising how aid investments influence the way communities interact with and manage the environment, can have real world impact on community resilience building. Some investments may find they face the limits to adaptation and need to be open to alternate resilience pathways for the communities they support (e.g. difficult and complex decisions around village relocations due to sea level rise, coastal erosion or disaster events). Working to support communities to recognise biophysical limits and pressures and identify alternative practices, livelihood options and development pathways may avoid mal-adaptive and unsustainable development in the longer term.

“Climate and weather changes were eroding the resilience of livelihoods and required communities to find new ways of working.” (2019 Internal Climate Partnership research report on community resilience).

Opportunities



Support actions that build on community strengths and minimise ‘analysis paralysis’: Communities, local governments and civil society organisations are required to make decisions in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity. Lack of, or inaccessible information, misinformation, or information overload can lead to decision paralysis. Disregarding local and traditional knowledge is also disempowering for communities. Navigating the drivers of change that are within the control of communities is important. This approach, coupled with incorporating traditional and local knowledge into decision-making (which takes time – see Baru case example below), can reduce the overwhelm felt by communities in uncertain situations.

Invest in community consultation and partnership building: Donor funded community level investments are most effective when they include local inputs and leadership from inception phase to ensure the project is contextually relevant, fit-for-purpose, has local buy-in and is a priority for the community. With adequate planning, dedicated resources and time to build relationships, diverse perspectives, and local leadership can be built into the program.

Donor support through multi-year and flexible funding options provide communities with adequate time to build relationships with program staff, and for program staff to better understand local contexts. Outcomes are defined with local actors, and an iterative approach enables communities to plan and act and learn to inform future investments.

³ See UNDRR, 2022: Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. Our world at risk: Transforming governance for a resilient future

⁴ 2019 Internal Climate Partnership case studies – (currently unpublished)

Case example | A long term partnership to support community resilience in Solomon Islands



The *Baru Conservation Alliance* in Solomon Islands has worked closely with James Cook University over many years to strengthen various aspects of community resilience including ecological conservation and food security. The long-term nature of the partnership has enabled the building of trust and understanding of the different contexts and perspectives between individuals from each organisation. Over time, Baru Conservation Alliance members felt secure in sharing local indigenous knowledge with university researchers. Sharing local indigenous knowledge is a sensitive issue for Baru members and is only done on the basis of trust. Similarly, external knowledge is taken on by communities if it comes from a trusted source and is understood in the local

context. This case example demonstrates the first two opportunities described above relating to information related barriers, and the time needed for effective local consultation.

Internal Climate Partnership research in 2019 on community resilience found that long term investments (i.e. 8+ years) such as Vanuatu Skills Partnership and Kiribati Education Improvement Program were able to modify and adapt activities over multiple years of implementation to better meet resilience needs.

Support community capacity for long term transformative change: Aid investments that follow a prescribed, sequential set of activities that lack the flexibility to account for community and climate dynamics are less effective in supporting community resilience. Learning centred approaches that integrate collaboration with multiple diverse stakeholders are far more likely to lead to transformative outcomes and impacts for communities to better meet resilience needs. This supports communities to incorporate a stronger understanding of the changing nature of climate and disaster risk.

CSIRO's Knowledge Brokering for Pacific Futures Project found that when working to support community resilience, cultures of learning and reflection are effective for strengthening local responses to climate change uncertainty. An opportunity exists for the aid program to build flexibility within design and implementation to account for the need for learning and reflection regarding climate and disaster risk.

Flexibility in design and implementation also accounts for the changing conditions that often emerge in community-level investments, particularly those exposed to climate and disaster hazards and those with multiple stakeholders and partners from diverse backgrounds.

Recognise multiple pressures and priorities faced by Pacific communities: Pacific communities are often responding to the immediate threats of climate change and disasters, which may be prioritised over consideration of transformative and systemic changes needed for long-term resilience building. Communities can be supported to consider short-term urgent priorities without disregarding long-term development goals, whilst also building a risk-informed approach to long-term development planning. See Insight Brief #4 on Governance for further insights.

Build on lessons learned from gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI): Positive contributions to community resilience have been achieved through a focus on gender equality, disability and social inclusion. Climate Partnership supported research in Vanuatu and Tonga highlights how building GEDSI considerations into the design of investments, with resourcing, supporting activities, and expertise is leads to positive community resilience outcomes. See Insight Brief #3 on GEDSI – pathways to resilience.