

Community Resilience in the Pacific: Research exploring monitoring, evaluation and learning

LEARNING REPORT FROM A CASE STUDY IN FIJI

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CITATION

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PHOTOS

As indicated

FRONT PAGE PHOTO: Community member in Naviyago Village, Fiji working on a fishing net.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Context



INTRODUCTION

Research aims and context

The aim of this research was to learn about monitoring and evaluating community resilience in the Pacific through the application of a **Community Resilience Framework**.

Research was undertaken by the **University of Technology Sydney, Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS-ISF)** in partnership with the **Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Fiji**, in 2023.

The research used ADRA Fiji's **Pro-Resilience Project** and UTS-ISF's **Community Resilience Framework** as an entry point to learn about community resilience in Naviyago village, Western Division, Fiji.

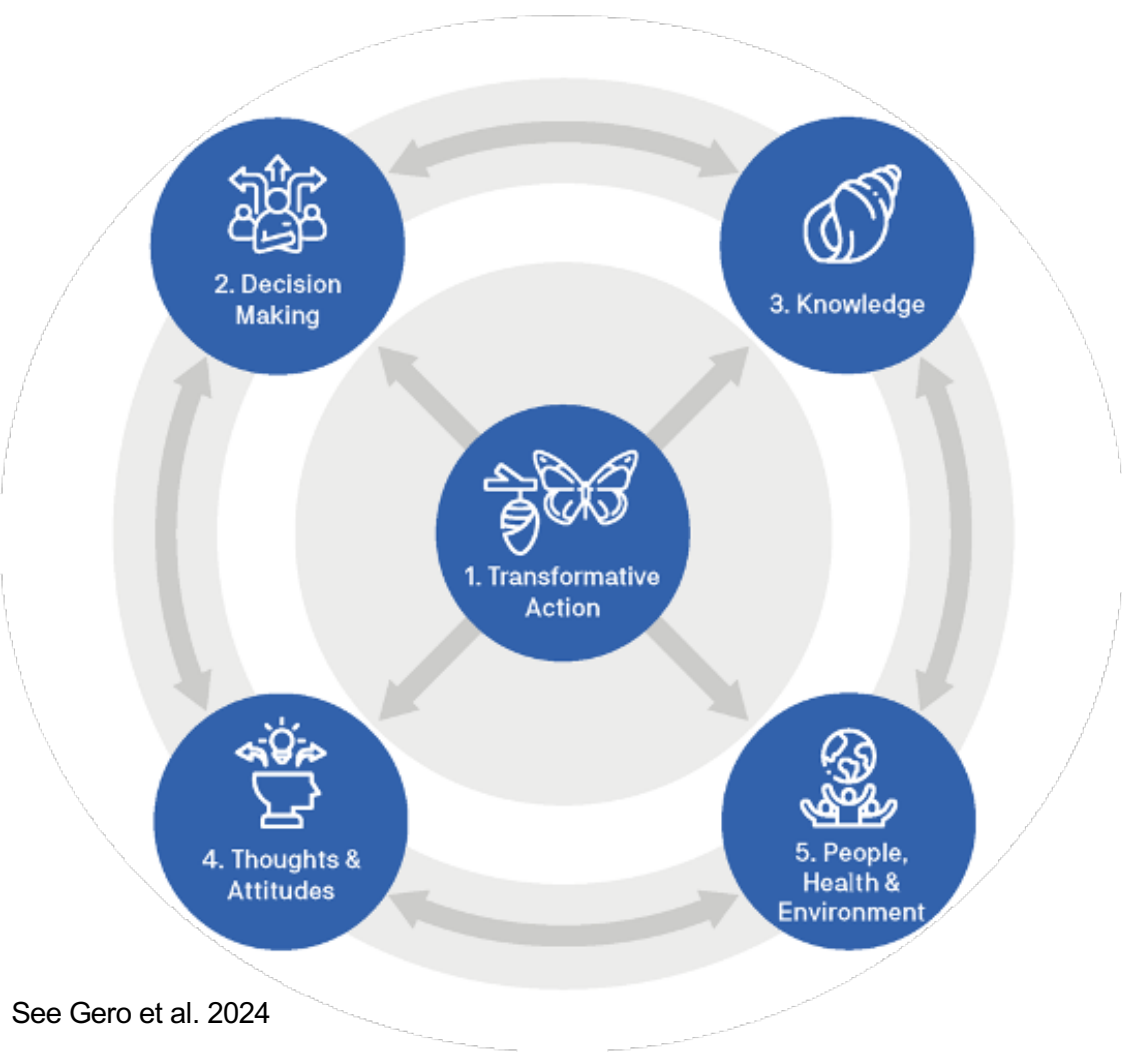
UTS-ISF and ADRA Fiji researchers **co-designed appropriate processes for learning about community resilience**, which revealed valuable insights from the community.



Plants and vegetables growing in a backyard garden in Naviyago Village, Fiji. Photo: Tazrina Chowdhury

INTRODUCTION

The UTS-ISF Community Resilience Framework



Building blocks of adaptive capacity

Asset based determinants:

Human and social capital

Access to resources

Adaptation options

Information and awareness

Psycho-social based determinants:

Past experiences of events

Competing concerns

Community defined determinants:

Community defined

- The Community Resilience Framework was developed to help define, assess, and support community resilience building in the Pacific.
- Framings of community resilience are often based on deficit models that focus on vulnerability and gaps and overlook the existing resources and capacity within communities.
- The Community Resilience Framework presents an alternate view that draws on strengths-based principles and systems thinking, through holistic and integrated perspectives of community resilience.
- The Community Resilience Framework is proposed as a practical tool which can be used in research, program design and implementation, to inform strategic policy as well as facilitate MEL.

INTRODUCTION: Community Resilience Framework - Details

Five elements of a resilient community



1. Transformative Action: Evolving, dynamic and undergoing transformative change in response to disturbances, whilst retaining core elements of the community's identity. Aspects of change might be present in behaviours, actions, relationships, policies and practices within a community, and may reflect anticipatory actions in response to early warnings to reduce risk.



2. Decision Making: Inclusive of robust leadership and governance. This includes participation of diverse voices within communities (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.



3. Knowledge: Combining local and external knowledge. This element demonstrates strengths-based principles by prioritising existing cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, and bringing in external knowledge as needed e.g. climate change projections about sea level rise.



4. Thoughts and Attitudes: Incorporating a willingness to accept change and respond and adapt. A resilient community is able to accept new ways of doing things and willing to take on new knowledge about climate change.



5. People, Health and Environment: Acting in balance within biophysical limits to support thriving communities. This element recognises the need to work within the limits of the environment, which may be changing as a result of climate and disaster risks.

Building blocks of adaptive capacity

Asset-based determinants of adaptive capacity:

Human and social capital: Elements such as governance, leadership, traditional and modern skills, institutions, change agents, health, support services and networks.

Access to resources: Access to land, fisheries, supply chains and incomes, and also resilient infrastructure such as evacuation centres or climate resilient water and sanitation infrastructure.

Adaptation options: Options for adaptation such as through the ability to grow or acquire food or money (e.g. through employment, selling goods or remittances).

Information and awareness: Access to information regarding climate and disaster risks and the awareness and ability to analyse and act on this information.

Psycho-social determinants adaptive capacity:

Personal experience of past event/s: Individual history of experiencing severe weather events influences adaptive capacity. Intense personal experiences result in higher levels of preparedness, however facing multiple and/or severe events can have negative impacts on mental health.

Competing concerns: Individuals or communities facing multiple stressors unrelated to climate change and disaster response may de-prioritise climate change given their focus on more immediate concerns.

Community defined determinants:

Community defined building blocks acknowledge the need for local understandings and experiences of climate change and the importance of cultural and political perceptions of risk.

INTRODUCTION: ADRA Fiji's Pro-Resilience Project



Naviyago Village, Fiji.
Photo: Anna Gero

This research explored community resilience in a location where ADRA Fiji had recently implemented its **Pro-Resilience Project**.

ADRA Fiji's Pro-Resilience Project, **funded by the European Union with a budget of AUD 3.54M** (FJD 5.2M), aimed to enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities and subsistence farmers in drought-prone areas of Fiji.

The project was active from **2018 to 2021 in Macuata and Ba provinces**, and targeted 50 communities. The project engaged 10,000 subsistence farmers (with at least 30% being women) and involved 150 Community Volunteer Mobilisers.

The focus of the project was to **strengthen community resilience through drought resistant agriculture**, ensuring food and nutrition security, and conducting community awareness activities.

The project impact reached about 35,000 households, also benefiting government officers, civil society organisations (CSOs), private sector entities and the wider community.

One of the locations where the Pro-Resilience Project was implemented was Naviyago village in Ba Province, which is a village in Western Division.

Naviyago was chosen as the location for this research because it provided a source of rich learning about resilience, given the community had undertaken a range of food security, nutrition and gardening activities as part of the Pro-Resilience Project.

Naviyago is also highly exposed to multiple hazards and risks including drought, flood (it is located next to a river) and tropical cyclones.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to learn how to assess community resilience, and to explore what success looks like in terms of a 'resilient community'.

Specific research questions are below.

1. What are appropriate processes to learn about resilience?

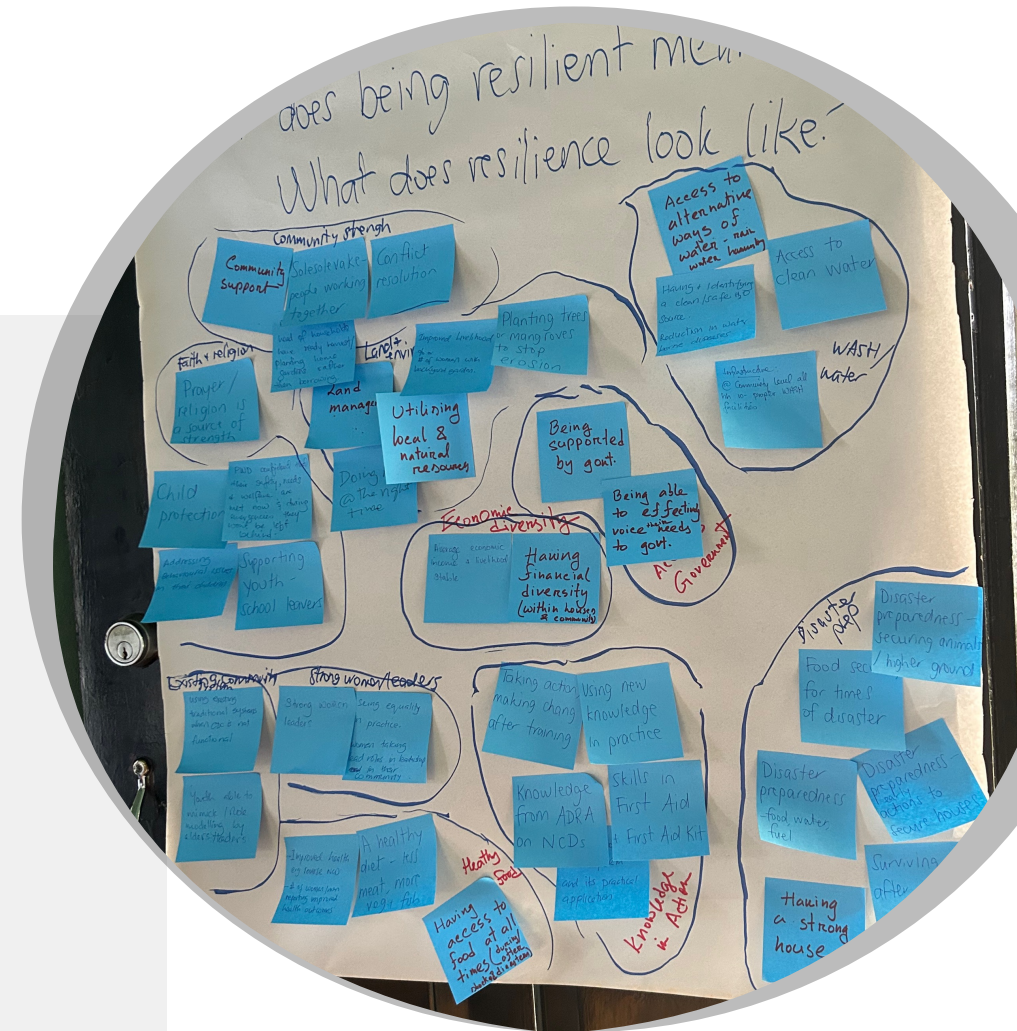
2. What indicators enable the monitoring and evaluation of changes in resilience at community level?

3. What evidence suggests that the Community Resilience Framework reflects aspects of resilience that are important to the selected community?

4a. How might the Community Resilience framework be refined informed by lessons of applying in ADRA projects in Fiji?

4b. To what extent are refinements relevant beyond focus on ADRA projects in Fiji?

5. What lessons can be learned about monitoring and evaluating resilience through the use of the Community Resilience Framework?



Reflection session of the research team following the data collection in the Naviyago community

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Objective 1: To develop practices and processes to learn about resilience in the context of program/project MEL. This may include the development of indicators of resilience, and approaches to assess community resilience.

Objective 2: To apply a Community Resilience Framework, and the process and practices of MEL (e.g. indicators). A strong partnership between UTS-ISF and ADRA Fiji will support the application of the framework and enable useful lessons to be learned and documented.



Objective 4: To document the lessons learned from the research, to share with Pacific and Australian practitioners and academics working in the area of climate change action and community resilience.

Objective 3: To refine the Community Resilience framework and the concept of Community Resilience based on lessons from its application in partnership with ADRA Fiji.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology and approach



Community members of Naviyago village participating in group activity
Photo: Tazrina Chowdhury

RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AND AUDIENCE

Key principles guiding the research were:

- A **collaborative team approach**, UTS-ISF and ADRA Fiji working closely drawing on a strengths-based approach to maximise potential and contribution of all team members
- **Seeking to empower local communities** by avoiding the overuse of negative language around 'vulnerability' to climate change where possible (Fawcett et al, 2017)
- **Appreciation of the localisation agenda**, and genuinely seeking to involve local community members and researchers in data collection and preliminary analysis
- Embedding consideration of **gender equality and social inclusion** into all aspects research practice
- Appreciating that **change is contextual and multi-faceted**, thus changes over time at the community level needs to understand changes other than climate/disaster related drivers
- **Building on existing knowledge** relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction in the Pacific and leveraging from this

Research audience

The research caters to a diverse audience, with a particular focus on those interested in enhancing community resilience to climate and disaster risks in the Pacific.

The following groups and organisations may find the findings particularly relevant:

Donors and development partners such as DFAT and UNDP, regional organisations such as Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Community (SPC), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) and NGOs working in the Pacific,

COMMUNITY RESEARCH METHODS

Through the co-designing process, the research team developed five methods to undertake with the stakeholders identified from the Naviyago community.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)



Three FGDs were conducted separately with youth, men and women in the Naviyago community. These discussions explored the community's collective and individual perception of resilience.

Transect walk



Researchers took a transect walk in the village with youth which enabled researchers to observe the household gardens that youth had been active in building and maintaining, with youth guiding where and what was the focus of observation and discussion.

Interviews



Individuals identified through a stakeholder mapping exercise were asked qualitative questions to explore their views of resilience; to assess the outcomes and impact of the Pro-Resilience Project on their community; and to uncover their perspectives on how the project outcomes contribute to the five elements of the Community Resilience Framework. Interviews were held with Turanga ni koro (community leader), a female Community Health Worker, a Community Mobiliser Volunteer (CMV), a Women Leader, and a Person with a Disability.

Community workshop



A participatory community workshop was held at the end of the data collection activities. The workshop helped to validate and begin to make sense of primary data gathered from FGDs, transect walk and interviews. Participatory activities, such as role play, drawing and mapping exercises, further revealed community members' perceptions of resilience.

Community voting



Participants voted on resilience aspects identified in FGDs and interviews that most resonated with them and their community.

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS

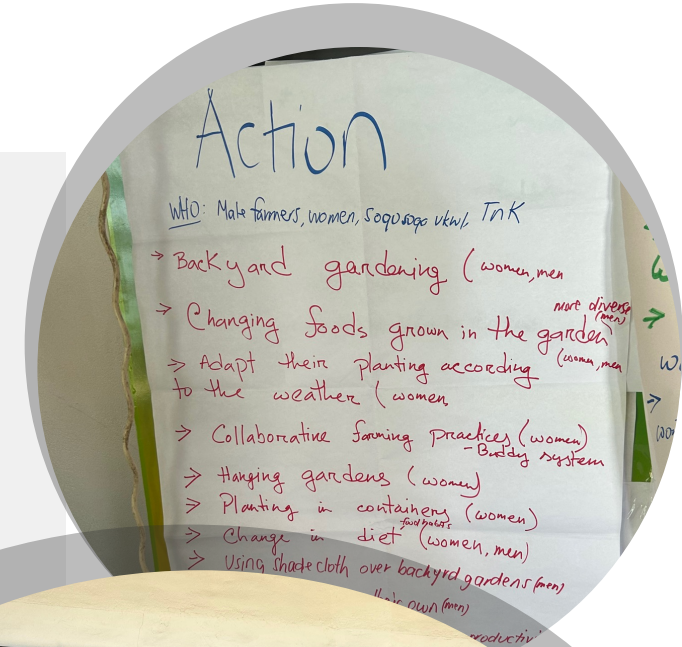
Collaborative sense-making

After completing the data collection, the research team (UTS-ISF and ADRA Fiji) engaged in reflective sessions to analyse their experience in conducting community research and interpreting the collected data within the context of the Community Resilience Framework.

Researcher reflections were essential in linking the information shared by the community with the research objectives, serving as a key data source that bridged community's input with the research questions.

Data analysis

The analysis of findings from the data involved a collaborative and consultative approach between UTS-ISF and ADRA Fiji. The researchers convened both in-person and via Zoom© to interpret and make sense of the findings. The team utilised the qualitative data analysis tool, Dedoose©, to systematically analyse the data.



CHAPTER 3

Findings



A group of male community members during FGD session in the community hall of Naviyago village. Photo: Tazrina Chowdhury

APPROPRIATE PROCESSES TO LEARN ABOUT RESILIENCE

Researchers identified six practices that support learning about community resilience.

1

Define the scope and framing of resilience within project context

Scoping resilience in a project through community consultation provides a bottom-up perspective of how, and to what extent, the project can contribute to community resilience.

Describing resilience in a project context can identify how the project's actions affect the broader 'ecosystem' of resilience while also acknowledging areas where project's influence on resilience is limited or absent.

2

Encourage community participation in project learning activities

Project staff spending time in a village or community can help them to build mutual trust and relationships and encourage community members to participate in different MEL activities.

Locally appropriate (e.g., storytelling), innovative, participatory approaches (e.g., role play) to explore community resilience perceptions can help project staff to capture diverse experiences and document evidence of community resilience.

3

Develop clear baseline information, verification and validation of progress / change through diverse data sources

A clear baseline through observation, field visits and existing sources of information form a foundation for tracking progress and change through a project and learn about resilience outcomes.

A clear baseline can be achieved through:

- triangulating evidence through collecting qualitative and quantitative data from different stakeholders;
- engaging different project stakeholders throughout the MEL process and
- conducting quarterly meetings with project managers across various projects for peer learning on MEL of community resilience.

APPROPRIATE PROCESSES TO LEARN ABOUT RESILIENCE

4

Allow time for building relationships and trust, and allow time for changes in community resilience to take place

Building rapport with community through investing time in meaningful interactions, active listening, and collaborative efforts helps to understand the context, strengths, challenges and community's priorities. This supports resilience learning as well as enables a sense of ownership within the community.

Learning about resilience is a long-term endeavour. Projects may therefore consider MEL processes that help to identify 'markers of change' instead of specific changes and think of repeated MEL after a certain period of time after the project ends.

5

Listen to diverse voices to understand different experiences of resilience

People with diverse backgrounds bring different lenses through which resilience can be understood. Listening to their unique experiences contribute to capture a holistic picture of resilience.

Learning from various members of the community, and those outside the community but with connections to local activities such as government staff at subnational or national level, can add credibility to the findings, and verify the observed changes in resilience.

6

Respecting local governance and leadership is important when engaging with communities

A strong focus on cultural protocols when engaging with the community can ensure that interactions are conducted respectfully and in line with local customs, enhancing the community's willingness to participate and share valuable insights.

Approaching a community to learn about resilience by working with the existing community leadership structure can enable coordinated and inclusive community engagement, leading to a deeper understanding of resilience from community's perspective.

INDICATORS FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



Background to indicator development

Since community resilience means different things to different people in different places, designing indicators to monitor and evaluate changes in community resilience requires a **bottom-up process**, based on the local definitions and perceptions of resilience. Community members themselves need to be involved in designing indicators to measure changes in their own resilience.

This research provides a **‘thinking person’s guide’** to support individuals and organisations to design monitoring and evaluation frameworks with principles to embed in the process, and examples of indicators in a particular context (in this case, from research with ADRA Fiji).

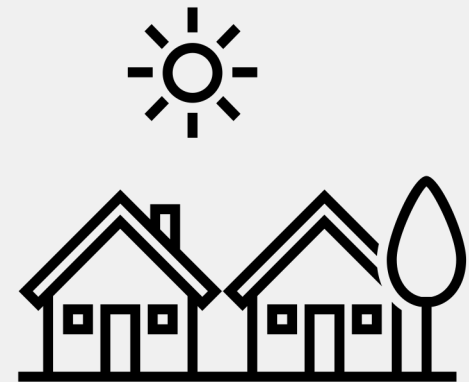
A group of female community members during FGD session in the community hall of Naviyago village. Photo: Anna Gero.

PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

The following five key principles are useful in supporting the design of community resilience indicators.

Principle 1:
Community resilience indicators should be developed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context and purpose, and theory of change of the intervention

- Since 'community resilience' can be interpreted in many ways and building resilience can include a multitude of activities, indicators need to be project and context specific, developed for a particular intervention to contain indicators to a manageable scope – and to align with the project's theory of change. 'Off the shelf' indicators may be useful if they are adapted or augmented for the local context.



PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

Principle 2:

Tracking change, progress, outcomes and impact requires good baseline data

- Building a data gathering phase into an intervention supports the development of baseline data as well as contextual understandings of what resilience means for local communities, and diverse stakeholders within these communities. Depending on the scope of the intervention, some baseline data may measure commonly measured development indicators such as economic, environmental, health and poverty related indicators.

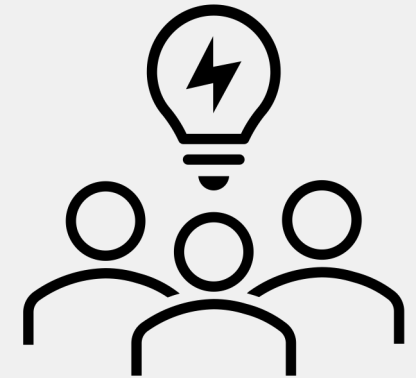


PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

Principle 3:

Indicators for monitoring and evaluating community resilience should be informed by local definitions and future visions of what resilience means through participatory processes

- Diverse perspectives of 'what resilience means' (e.g. views of women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups) should be included in indicator design. Designing indicators requires a clear understanding of local context and should reflect and be connected to community perspectives of, and aspirations for, resilience through a range of participatory activities.

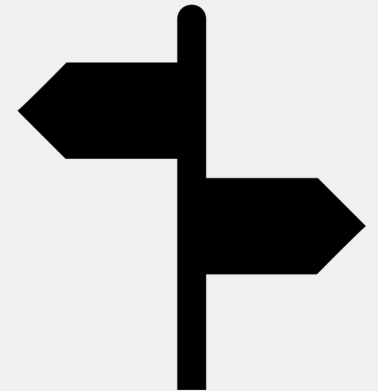


PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

Principle 4:

Different types of indicators are required to monitor and evaluate changes in community resilience

- Uncertainty to climate change requires an adaptive and responsive approach to project design and implementation. Ongoing monitoring is essential to inform adaptive management for projects implemented in dynamic climatic conditions.

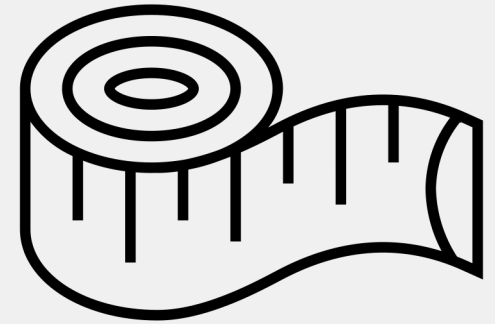


PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

Principle 5:

Community resilience indicators need to measure evolving and dynamic contexts and transformational change, rather than static measures of outcomes, and blend local and external knowledge

- In practice, this means measuring baselines, progress, outcomes and impact at the end of the investment, or even years later. Diverse stakeholder narratives support the documentation of evolving and dynamic contexts and transformational change, and this can be enabled by triangulating with other evidence such as quantitative activities or outcome level indicators. Reviewing and refining indicators over time, in collaboration with local community members, will ensure the measures continue to be relevant in dynamic contexts.





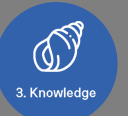
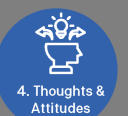

PRINCIPLES TO INFORM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INDICATORS

The table below demonstrates how to action the principles, including examples of when (in the project cycle) the principle could be actioned.

Principle	Prompting question/s	Example of when to action
Principle 1: Community resilience indicators should be developed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context and purpose, and theory of change of the intervention	What is the overarching vision or change objectives of the project?	Design phase, development of theory of change.
	What are the community's aspirations for resilience?	Early consultation with community.
Principle 2: Tracking change, progress, outcomes and impact requires good baseline data	How do different social groups conceptualise resilience?	Baseline assessment
	How can local knowledge play a role in developing baseline indicators?	Midterm review
		Final evaluation
Principle 3: Indicators for monitoring and evaluating community resilience should be informed by local definitions and future visions of what resilience means through participatory processes.	What does resilience mean to different social groups in the community?	Design phase, development of theory of change.
	What participatory activities would be locally appropriate (for different social groups) and useful to learn about resilience?	Early consultation with community.
Principle 4: Different types of indicators are required to monitor and evaluate changes in community resilience.	What activity or output level indicators best capture incremental change?	During monitoring activities
		Midterm assessment
	What outcome or impact level indicators best capture transformational change?	Final evaluation
Principle 5: Community resilience indicators need to measure evolving and dynamic contexts and transformational change, rather than static measures of outcomes, and blend local and external knowledge	Has the project tracked according to plan? If not, how can the indicators be modified to represent the reality of the project/community?	During monitoring activities
		Midterm assessment
	Has the community's perspectives of resilience changed over the course of the project?	Final evaluation

INDICATORS ACROSS FIVE ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Examples of resilience indicators across five elements of resilience in the Community Resilience Framework:

Sub theme	Indicator type	Example indicator
 Climate resilient agriculture and inclusive food security	Activity / output level (monitoring indicator)	Number of households (HHs) within the community with backyard gardens (# HHs)
	Outcome / impact indicator (evaluation indicator)	Adapting agricultural practices according to be more climate resilient (# of examples)
 Traditional and inclusive community governance structures	Activity / output level (monitoring indicator)	Proportion of the community who are aware of community leadership structure/s and assigned roles of leaders (% of adult population)
	Outcome / impact indicator (evaluation indicator)	Existence of shared male-female leadership (examples/stories of joint male-female decision making)
 Local knowledge brokers	Activity / output level (monitoring indicator)	Number of local leaders sharing knowledge about climate and weather risks in the community (# male local leaders/# female local leaders)
	Outcome / impact indicator (evaluation indicator)	Extent of change in local leaders' traditional knowledge about community's risks and hazards (increase or decrease in degree of traditional knowledge)
 Gender dynamics and role changes	Activity / output level (monitoring indicator)	Number of men and women shifting from their traditional roles (# men / # women)
	Outcome / impact indicator (evaluation indicator)	Extent of change in the traditional roles of men and women
 Diversified food production and source of nutrients for better health outcomes	Activity / output level (monitoring indicator)	Number of households applying diverse approaches in backyard gardening (# HHs)
	Outcome / impact indicator (evaluation indicator)	Extent of change in community's dietary habits and improved lifestyle

A FRAMEWORK THAT REFLECTS ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In Naviyago village, community's definitions of resilience reflects elements of the Community Resilience Framework.

- Researchers identified resilience examples discussed by the communities, linking them to specific elements of the Community Resilience Framework.
- Five examples were chosen by the research team for each element of the Community Resilience Framework.
- Participants had three voting opportunities to express their individual preferences for examples that held significance for them, or best reflected individual perspectives on resilience. 20 community members, including men, women, and non-binary individuals, participated in the voting process.
- The results of the voting indicated that all the elements of the Framework hold significance in reflecting aspects of resilience that matter to the community, with Transformative Action receiving the most votes.

*"During the cyclone we help each other– we look at the houses within community–see if they are okay. We all help to prepare houses and take people to the evacuation centre ...
- Youth, Naviyago village.*

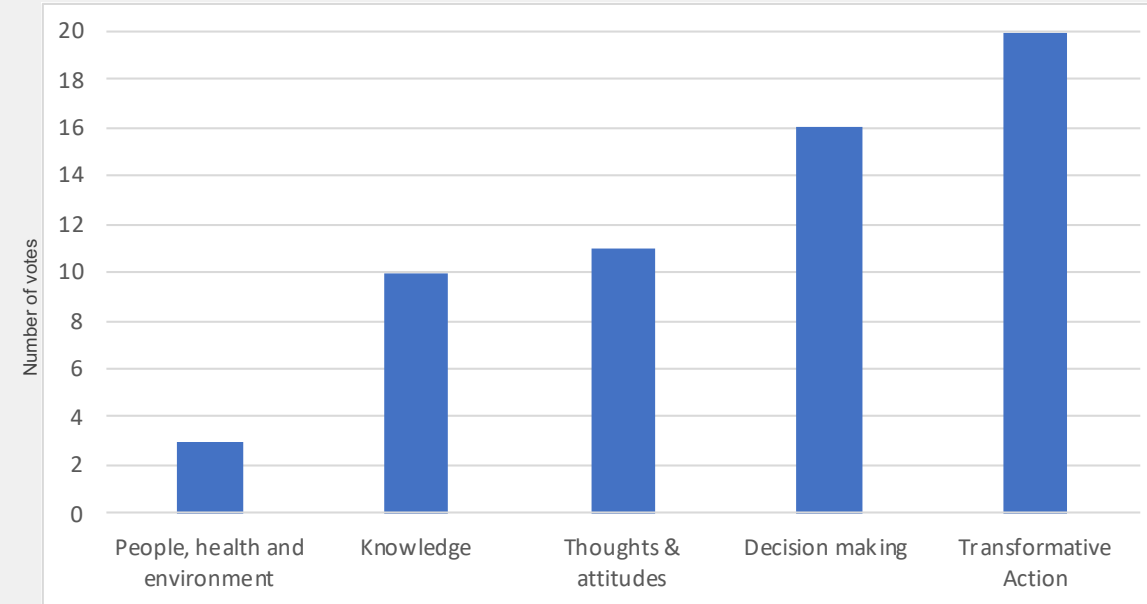


Figure: Number of votes cast by community members for their most preferred examples of resilience

REFINING AND FURTHER APPLYING THE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

The Community Resilience Framework provided a useful guide for learning about resilience within the Naviyago village context.

Major refinements to the Community Resilience Framework were not needed, and the application in Naviyago village demonstrated its usefulness as a guide for the key elements of a resilient community.

While more work on operationalising the *Building Blocks of Adaptive Capacity* is needed, research showed that the asset based determinant 'Access to resources' needed to be updated to include resilient infrastructure. This refinement will make the Community Resilience Framework more relevant across the Pacific, given the need for resilient infrastructure to support communities maintain healthy and productive livelihoods.



Members of community members voting for relevant examples of resilience.
Photo: Tazrina Chowdhury

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT MONITORING AND EVALUATING RESILIENCE

Seven key lessons have been distilled after undertaking this collaborative research.

Lesson 1:

MEL Frameworks for community resilience need to value the core elements of community identity.

Working with ADRA Fiji in this research provided critical insights into the value of cultural identity and faith as fundamental pillars that define community resilience. During the researcher reflection exercise, ADRA Fiji researchers stressed the need to recognise cultural and faith-based aspects as integral components when monitoring and evaluating resilience.

The research identified the importance of respecting and adequately addressing community protocols and traditional leadership structures to ensure effective community engagement in the MEL process. If MEL activities do not acknowledge community's values, the outcomes of the process may not capture the real project outcomes experienced within the community.

Lesson 2:

Co-design is important to allow for more effective MEL processes for community resilience.

Involving local NGOs in research and in the co-design of learning process enables a comprehensive understanding of a project's resilience outcomes.

Co-designing with communities should be operationalised at the project onset. Involving community members and local stakeholders helps to gain a nuanced perspective of contexts and tailor community resilience MEL approaches to be appropriate and meaningful for communities.

Lesson 3:

Genuine inclusion of diverse community members is essential for gaining insights into the resilience outcomes of a project.

Community resilience is context specific and experiences of resilience will be different for diverse community members. Therefore, the design of MEL activities should ensure inclusivity among different social groups and community members to design MEL mechanisms that reflect this diversity.

Inclusion of diverse voices in MEL processes can be achieved through designing MEL approaches in alignment of community's tradition, local culture and with a keen awareness of cultural nuances such as community norms and informal governance.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT MONITORING AND EVALUATING RESILIENCE

Lesson 4:

MEL approaches should align with existing community governance structures and leverage their existing strengths.

When designing MEL processes, it is critical to acknowledge community's existing social structures and strengths, for example traditional governance and knowledge.

By integrating these elements into MEL indicators for evaluating project outcomes, communities, as well as project stakeholders, can identify what is working well and identify ways of empowering communities through their inherent capacities.

Lesson 5:

Integrating a decolonising approach can enrich MEL processes and contribute to effective learning on resilience outcomes.

This research embedded decolonisation principles by leveraging ADRA Fiji's expertise on localised contexts, as well as intentionally listening and prioritising local voices in learning about community resilience.

A decolonising approach was also enabled through the use of the Framework, which supports and prioritises local perspective and strengths over outside knowledge and views of climate and disasters.

Lesson 6:

The concept of resilience is evolving. MEL of resilience should be nuanced and adaptable for various contexts.

Resilience is a multi-dimensional concept; it can evolve over time and differ significantly across communities depending on social, cultural and environmental factors. Having no universal definition of resilience makes it challenging to assess resilience resulting from a project and make standardised assessment of resilience less effective.

A definition of resilience needs to be determined locally, depending on the focus of the project and nature of the community. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of resilience may vary from person to person, and this variability should be taken into consideration to genuinely assess resilience as an outcome of a project.

Lesson 7:

MEL of resilience should acknowledge that resilience is holistic, overlapping with other community development indicators.

Resilience is a holistic concept and often overlaps with various other community development indicators. Resilience can extend its influence across diverse domains and bring about positive changes in communities' social, economic, environmental, and health-related aspects.

The five elements of Community Resilience Framework recognise the overlaps and allows for a more integrated and nuanced understanding of how one activity or effort connects to multiple elements of the Framework and contribute to building resilience within communities.

CHAPTER 4

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additional resources



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