Webinar Series on the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) and the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP).

Webinar 2: Local Humanitarian Action for a Resilient Pacific.

Summary

Purpose:
The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is compounding the Climate Emergency as well as creating additional and separate negative impacts. Yet during such trying times, a consistent positive theme has emerged across the region: Effective local action based on strong local capacity. Webinar 1 focused on the governance arrangements within a multi-hazard scenario. Webinar 2 focused on the local actors calling for transformation at all levels and between all stakeholders to ensure effectiveness and efficiency during any disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Webinar 2 was conducted as a Talanoa Session focusing on Local Humanitarian Action for a Resilient Pacific. It was facilitated by the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Humanitarian Localisation sharing perspectives from women, youth and people living with a disability including recent experiences from TC Harold where localization was accelerated due to COVID 19 restrictions emphasizing and strengthening the case for local action based on local wisdom, ownership and leadership.

Background
The TWG on Humanitarian Localisation aims to establish communities of best practice actively engaging in knowledge sharing in disaster preparedness, response and recovery as a means to mobilize transformative action across all stakeholders. Its membership includes various humanitarian and development actors from government, civil society, private sector, Faith-based Organizations (FBO) and Community-based Organizations (CBO) covering over 22 Pacific Islands and Territories.

As highlighted by Susan Grey, Executive Director of Femlink Pacific and one of the co-chairs of the TWG on Humanitarian Localization in her opening statement, this webinar is part of that ongoing knowledge sharing and learning. She also emphasized upholding commitments for meaningful inclusion of all diverse women and people with disabilities in decision making and supporting them as first responders in all crisis setting.
Summary of Discussions and Interventions from Panelists

Kathryn Clarkson of IFRC and Emeline Siale Ilolahia of PIANGO co-facilitated the webinar with the objective of sharing experiences and learning of Humanitarian Local Actors from diverse sectors to contribute to the knowledge resource base of the PRP on Humanitarian Localisation including further articulating the relevancy of Humanitarian Localisation in times of COVID19 and the learning that can be incorporated into the next cyclone season planning.

Ms Vani Catanasiga, Executive Director of Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) shared experiences on coordination arrangements and lessons from TC Harold with local humanitarian action. According to Vani, the Fiji Natural Disaster Management (NDM) Act of 1988 was ahead of its time in terms of localization with layers of humanitarian coordination written into the Act from the national to sub-national right down to the district level. FCOSS and Fiji Red Cross are mandated in the Act as members of the Disaster Council, however the Act doesn’t specify how and what role the different membership of the various committees can play. Experience has also seen that at the sub-national level with communities facing the brunt of the impacts there have been bottlenecks delaying support to communities. To bridge that gap, in 2019, FCOSS with Childfund Australia and Planned International worked together on a CSO protocol for sub-national coordination. It was put into the test in 2020 in response to COVID-19 and TC Harold which enabled over 300 volunteers to be deployed who assisted government with contact tracing, LTDT campaigns, filling in a vacuum in humanitarian space during a time when movement of personnel was restricted. Scenario planning that directly involves and is grounded in ensuring dignity for communities is key including taking into account and building on the strength of communities for more sustainable humanitarian response measures.

Ms Vanessa Lolohea, Tonga National Youth Congress, shared her experience as a youth engaged in humanitarian action. Tonga National Youth Congress have been actively engaged in disaster preparedness, response and recovery measures specifically around retrofitting program with evacuation centers around Tonga including setting up emergency evacuation committees at village level, water purification activities and water distribution to the smaller outer islands and training on hygiene and sanitation. They also engage in livelihood programs post disaster that includes seed distribution and saving, planting material and harvesting. They also work closely with Tonga Caritas, Red Cross, Council of Churches and other community church groups to ensure no duplication of work. They are also part of the cluster system and see the need for a national policy on volunteer work especially when partnering with the different lead ministries under each cluster to ensure consistent and effective engagement with villages and communities. This could include formalizing CSO engagement under each cluster to enable CSO to work more independently, more efficiently and enable them to make timely decisions.

Ms Lanieta Tuimabu, Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) and co-chair of the TWG Humanitarian Localisation, shared findings from the mapping survey of localization actors in the region including perspectives from people living with a disability. For the survey, 123 responses were received from humanitarian organisations and actors covering 21 Pacific countries and territories and 15 cross-cutting sectors. Key challenges and opportunities identified included capacity building and development, funding resources and mobilization, governance and accountability, gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). In terms of disability inclusion, organizations for persons with disabilities are best fitted to advocate on issues that affect them during disasters. Localization in the context of disability inclusion
should be ‘Nothing about us Without us’. FPDF is building capacity of its people to prepare them and enable them to respond during peace time and disaster response phase which includes having national and sub-national DRR resource teams that can be mobilized during preparedness and response phase of any disaster. In the current COVID-19 situation, building the capacity of peoples with disability to have a better understanding and be able to share the knowledge learnt, so that peoples with disability are protected and safe during any emergency situation. Work closely with other CSO and local actors that are mainstreaming disability inclusion into humanitarian space, including with FCROSS on the CSO protocol, Live & Learn on their emergency response training at divisional level so that people with disabilities are able to be supported and are part of the response measures.

**Talanoa Session:**

**Ms Vani Catanasiga** and **Mr. Meiapo Faasau** (IFRC) responded to the question raised on the role of FCROSS as coordinator vs responder. There is no specific mention in the Act for FCROSS to coordinate CSO, but there is an expectation. The review of the NDM Act process is expected to be completed by end of year and there is hope that it would be clearer on FCROSS and Red Cross role including recognizing and using other humanitarian actors, application of the CSO Code of Conduct and core standards, clarity on the processes and procedures to be met to mitigate issues of misuse of funds and/or goods for humanitarian aid. It should also take into consideration what is available on the ground to enable effective coordination and response.

In terms of preparedness, a stocktake of hazards and risks need to be managed to prevent and protect from future risks and hazards progressing from a disaster.

**Ms. Alisi Tuqa** (PIPSO) responded to the question of how the private sector dealt with TC Harold in the context of COVID-19 impacts, lessons learnt and how it can inform preparation for upcoming cyclone seasons. Past experiences have been around coordination and mobilizing the membership of the private sector including the bigger companies around business rehabilitation and humanitarian response including providing necessary services during disaster. It is also important to look at businesses as employers in the context of protection of employee needs during times of disaster. They are also agents of change and if looking at preparedness under the corporate social responsibility banner within the context of disaster and resilience more broadly, partnership with the private sector, including through industry associations (telecommunication sector that can be critical to progressing communications), towards targeted initiatives is an opportunity to be explored.

From the development partner context, **Ms. Tiare Eastmond** from the USAID Bureau Humanitarian Assistance in terms of how donors need to adjust within the COVID-19 context in terms of localization, shared that TC Harold was an eye-opener and drove home the localization agenda including highlighting the need to preposition supply at the national level and increase capacity for local manufacturers for such supply. Recognize first responders and local teams on the ground with remote support. Aerial surveys were important and informative but cannot replace on grounds needs based and in-person assessments which provide a multi-sectoral view further emphasizing the important role of local actors. There is lack of familiarity with the US humanitarian assistance system which requires formal request from the national government.

Responding to how does coordination among NGO’s differ around pandemic or public health
disasters and other disasters. COVID-19 has highlighted the need to revisit coordination approaches with Vani emphasizing that consistent messaging and consolidated approaches and 2-way communication with communities no matter which government ministry is taking the lead is critical to avoid confusion. Siale further added that the current humanitarian architecture and mechanisms have been limited to cyclones, clear directions on tsunamis and scenario test runs on such disasters without any sense of the impacts of a health pandemic such as COVID-19. So when it happened, there were no clear directions with no action for a while, but then when TC Harold hit, CSO fell back to their default roles and responses they were used to and comfortable with. Without TC Harold inaction by many of the humanitarian actors may have gone for a longer period of time. It is also now necessary to incorporate the actions that can be taken around the social and economic impacts from COVID-19 as they are now becoming a humanitarian issue, so a broader look beyond current disaster approaches.

Sandra UN Women also agreed that the conversations need to be amplified and driven at the national level with national level response should be the paramount focus. The localization agenda and coordination at the national level is key. Protection cluster repurposing their approach taking into consideration moving away from face to face to online services. COVID-19 turning from a health crisis emergency into a socio-economic crisis and when should we now be transitioning from humanitarian to development approach.

Wrap-up

Recognition of CSO and local actor engagement in the protocols and legal frameworks with clear roles is necessary. Fiji and other countries are currently reviewing their relevant legislative frameworks. The PRP Technical Working Group on Risk Governance is also looking into the responsiveness of legal frameworks in the context of natural hazards inclusive of health pandemics. There is acknowledgement that there is a breakdown in traditional coordination mechanisms and the need to focus on what can be fixed now in preparation for the next cyclone season with work to continue on strengthening the multi-hazard approach. Preparedness needs to be inclusive of local actors, peoples with disabilities and other vulnerable groups as well as engaging the private sector as major procurers of necessary supplies to ensure the right supplies are in place for timely and effective response. COVID-19 has highlighted how we should work more differently to prepare for upcoming cyclone seasons. Some thought-provoking questions posed by the participants that can guide ongoing discussions on Localization:

- How best communication between local NGO’s to the UN and other donor coordination mechanisms at the regional level can be improved and strengthened?
- How can information that can assist donors gauge the capacity of local actors be obtained as it would be very useful as in the case of USAID, they are mindful of not overwhelming and breaking the system?
- Need to also question the regional and global architecture around disaster coordination and whether it suits these new situations, the types and intersections of disasters with socio-economic crisis. Coordination should be supporting the local agenda, be driven locally as well as being effective and responsive.
Meet the Panelist

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MODERATORS

Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia
Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organizations

Ms. Kathryn Clarkson
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Opening remarks by the co-chair of the TWG Humanitarian Localisation

Ms. Susan Grey
Femlink Pacific

PANELISTS

Ms. Vani Catanasiga
Executive Director
Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)

Ms. Vanessa Lolohea
Tonga National Youth Congress

Ms. Lanieta Tuimabu
Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) and co-chair of the TWG Humanitarian Localisation

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