



CASE STUDIES

The journey to build Fiji's national communication platform

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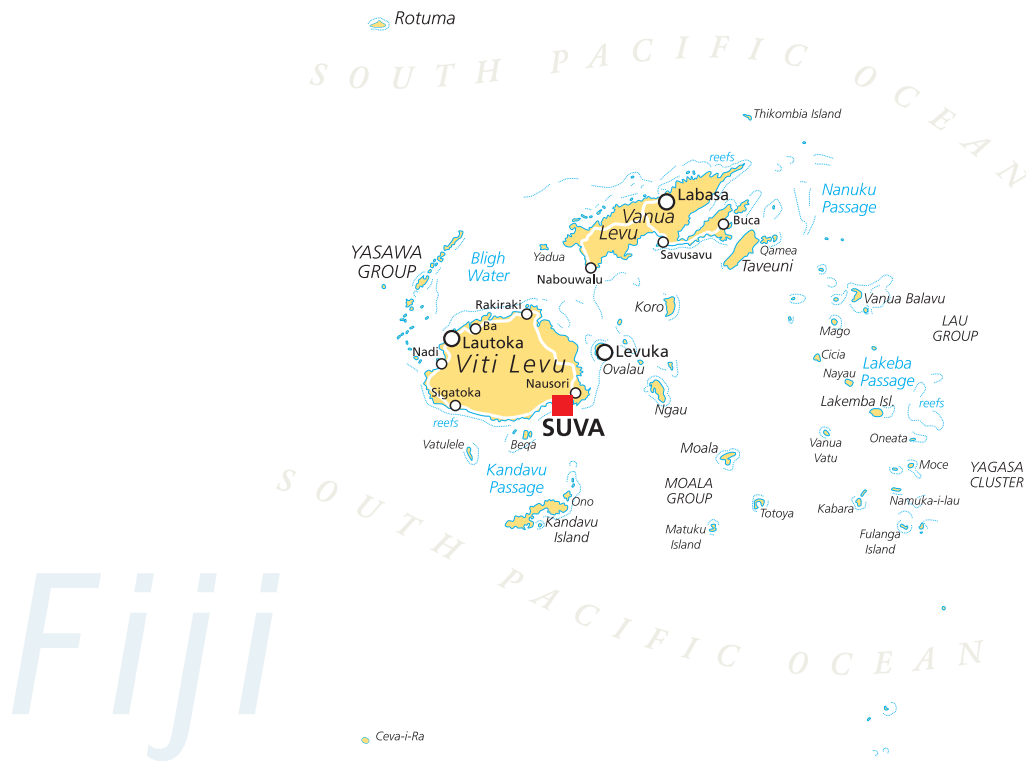






N E T W O R K

CASE STUDIES



Ensuring communities have the life-saving information they need before, during and after disasters

The journey to build Fiji's national communication platform

WHEN COMMUNITIES RECEIVE CLEAR, CONSISTENT INFORMATION that can be used to take action, people have the ability to make important potentially life-saving choices before, during, and after a crisis. If they are also given a voice to share their insights, information, and feedback it is possible for organisations that serve communities in crisis to adjust their strategies and more effectively use their resources. Since 2018, Fiji has worked to build a communication and community engagement (CCE) platform that embeds advanced two-way communication capabilities in the national disaster response system.

While it is common to think of “platforms” as technology services, the intent here is much broader. While technology is an important component, today’s best-in-class national CCE “platforms” include a broad network of organisations that collaborate on communications efforts, create resources such as guides and training that support efforts, and provide governance structures that support an integrated communication framework.

This is critical work. As a Pacific island nation, Fiji’s nearly 900,000 people are exposed to the ongoing threat of tropical cyclones and earthquakes; some notable examples include Category 5 Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa, which made landfall in 2020. Following these emergencies, Fiji was forced to grapple with public health challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The country’s first COVID-19 wave peaked in July 2021, with more than 7,000 confirmed cases.

Fiji’s people and their country:

- » 900,000 people, with most living on the major islands of Viti Levu and Nanua Levu
- » Four official languages Fijian, English, Fiji Hindi, and Rotuman
- » 100+ populated volcanic islands with a tropical climate
- » Spans 2000 km in the South Pacific
- » Very high natural disaster risk including tropical cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and earth quakes

Full cycle of engagement

The government of Fiji has established a broad emergency response system that engages multiple public agencies, private sector businesses, civil society, and international aid organisations. This nationally-led capability enables the country to coordinate and deliver response efforts over its 100+ populated islands. This broad network provides a powerful foundation for response actions, but also comes with the risk that communications issued by multiple institutions will be contradictory, incomplete or have inconsistent availability. Furthermore, these crisis response communications are often one-way, so that communities receiving information have limited ability to provide insights and feedback that could help shape diverse organisations' crisis response.

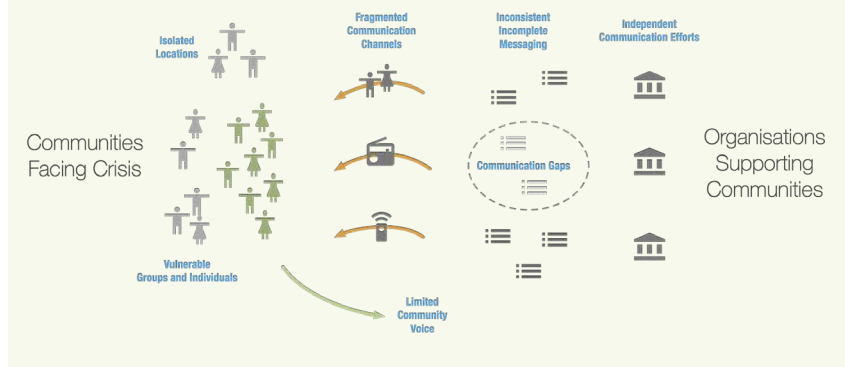
Fiji is addressing these challenges by pursuing an advanced communication framework that seeks to build a complete loop of communication. In this full cycle model of engagement, communities speak, and organisations actively listen.

This complete loop of communications and engagement makes a powerful contribution to disaster response for communities, the government and supporting organisations. When fully realised, this enables active collaboration between individuals facing crisis and the many organisations working to support them. With clear, consistent messaging, content that is trusted, relevant, and actionable, community members can make informed choices and work in concert with crisis responders.

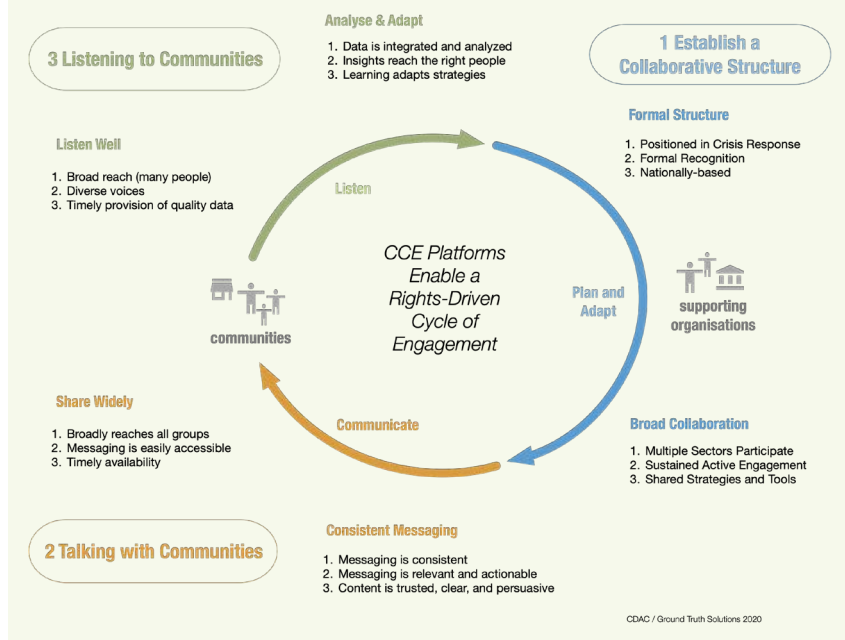
Government, international, and civil society actors leverage the timely insights they receive from communities to shape and execute their response strategies. The goal is to assure that all affected groups are provided with the services they really need can be better addressed if there are well established channels for regular community engagement. Timely insights can also help address operational challenges like duplicated services or efforts that are misaligned with current needs.

Since 2018, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has supported a programme to build sustainable next generation CCE capabilities in collaboration with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), the Ministry of Communications, Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) as well as with UNICEF and other stakeholders. The CDAC Network and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) have worked with this multi-organisation group to provide technical support and support in systems building.

Fragmented One-Way Communications



The Three Capabilities Underlying a CCE Platform





Building within existing organisations

This case study describes the unique challenges and opportunities that occur when building a robust platform within an existing complex network of crisis response organisations and the communities they serve. Any work that is done must be woven into what is already there, an ongoing creative effort that involves many collaborators. This level of integration and change is made even more challenging by the need to accommodate ongoing response activities and existing organisational priorities.

As a simple metaphor, consider how easy it is to build a house in an open field. All the work can be planned and performed without worrying about anything except finishing the project. By contrast, it is far more difficult to expand a building that already exists in middle of a busy city block. New ideas must fit into existing structures, surrounding constraints must be considered, and all the work must be done taking into account the traffic and activity on the street.

Of course, there are rewards for undertaking a complex challenge like this. The resulting platform doesn't exist in isolation, but rather can draw on the strength of what has already been put into place and become a deeply integrated part of the established crisis response system.

There are three major challenges that are associated with creating the foundation for such a broadly collaborative communication programme.

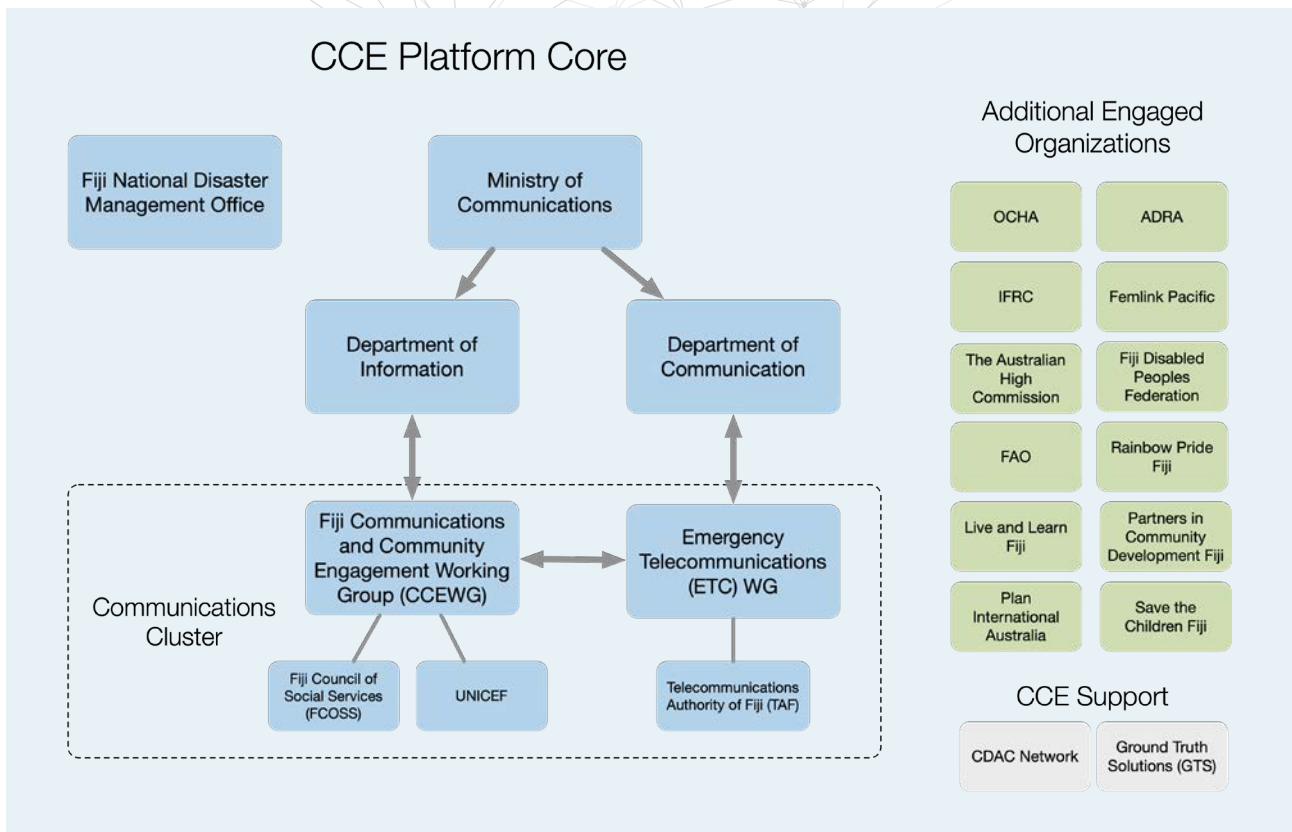
- » **1) Leveraging existing institutions:** The platform must be embedded within the existing formal institutions that support crisis response and preparedness.
- » **2) Inviting in wide engagement:** It should seek to be broadly inclusive, stretching outside government to include many other potential collaborators.
- » **3) Broadly enabling good practices:** Making it possible for many organisations and individuals to apply shared practices and effective communication strategies.

This initiative has been designed to simultaneously address all three of these challenges, evolving the different parts of the platform together.



“Humanitarian response is no longer a knee-jerk response whenever a disaster happens. Building of resilience is key. It is impossible to approach this process without involving the community and having people at the center of the journey.”

AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN, FIJI'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IN GENEVA - 2020 HUMANITARIAN NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS WEEK IN GENEVA



Creating a nationally based foundation

At the heart of the platform is the Fiji Communication and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG). It leverages Fiji's well-established national crisis response institutions by being placed within the national government's Communications Cluster, which is in turn led by the Ministry of Communications and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

The CCEWG focuses on communication and engagement efforts. It sits alongside a second group, the Emergency Telecommunications (ETC) working group, which supports the telecommunications infrastructure. While they both ultimately report to the same Ministry, they are not bound by the limits of top-down control. There is intentional effort to promote horizontal cooperation between the working groups.

This foundation, solidly based in Fiji's national government, is well positioned to integrate the capabilities of additional organisations. As a result, the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) and UNICEF are co-leads of the CCEWG, and the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) is a co-lead of the ETCWG.

Embedding the National Coordinator in the NDMO has helped to raise the profile and priority of CCE. With CDAC technical expertise embedded in the NDMO, the project has influenced how government and civil society view communicating and engaging with communities as a critical modality of disaster preparedness and response. Notably, the initiative focused on localisation and building on existing structures and advancing the capacity of local technical assistance

Many levels of government as well as additional private sector, civil society and international aid organisations have been engaged in this work (see diagram) and the NDMO has formally opened up CCEWG membership to those that have an interest in building communication capacity.

User-centred design, ownership and continuous learning principles shape the project. Uniquely, the CCEWG in Fiji is locally led and owned. As a result, the value of CCE is increasingly acknowledged by the broader humanitarian architecture in Fiji.





Leveraging the power of a broad collaboration

This broad collaboration makes it possible to integrate communication efforts during a crisis. It is a powerful base, but its rich complexity can be challenging to navigate for its many participants.

The effort to build a broad and accessible platform began with the core participants. The NDMO and Ministry of Communication convened multiple meetings of the working group building familiar working relationships that can translate into hands-on action during a crisis response. These meetings, which have engaged 20 different organisations, have been used to shape a common governance approach, provide a shared view of a [Terms of Reference \(TOR\)](#) for the Communication Cluster, create joint action plans for the working group, and explore possible opportunities for collaboration.

During TC Yasa, CDAC supported the NDMO Director and the planning, operations and communications teams with forward-planning, coordination of communications activities, social media management, dissemination of consistent messaging and translations into Hindi and iTaukei.

CCEWG members were also involved in response efforts for TC Harold, from initial damage assessment (IDA) exercises to the dissemination of sectoral messages, demonstrating the value of a dynamic, collective network that can respond to demand, disseminating multi-hazard messaging (before, during and after disasters) in the midst of a global pandemic.

A rapid pivot to address the overlapping COVID-19 response was possible due to agile systems: CDAC was able to provide significant support with communication strategy development and implementation at a time of overlapping and cascading emergencies. The deployment of the CDAC National Coordinator to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) to provide technical advice and surge capacity to the COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) acted as a critical CCE bridge between the NDMO and MHMS, leveraging complementarity of communication efforts. This is important not only because it demonstrates the organisations' ability to be responsive to emerging needs but also because it shows the value of CCE in a response for more effective participation of and accountability towards those affected by overlapping crises.

CDAC's [work on the humanitarian-development CCE interface](#) also sought to strengthen CCE at multiple levels for the longer term.



“Fiji and other Pacific Island countries have experienced a greater number of disasters and a higher intensity of the consequences of those disasters.”

AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN, FIJI'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IN GENEVA - 2020 HUMANITARIAN NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS WEEK IN GENEVA



Developing coordinated communication strategies

Ultimately the value of a CCE platform is in how it is applied to the many crisis response challenges where communications matter. Each crisis situation has periods of readiness, response, and recovery where different communication strategies and content will be needed. Adding to the complexity are the challenges that come with different types of threats and varied community needs.

Clearly no single communication strategy can address all of these different conditions. To foster a resilient creative ability, the CCEWG has worked to produce flexible tools that can support many different scenarios. For example, a new [Fiji Media, Language and Telecommunications Landscape Guide](#) is designed to provide a broad range of information to support the design of coordinated and effective communication strategies. This is intended to be a living document that is continually revised and extended.

Broadly inclusive training programs have also been developed to support this work and have covered common feedback systems and approaches, CCEA Technical Training as well as digital media training. Programmes exploring CCE design and accountability to affected populations (AAP) have been attended by representatives from government, private sector, civil society, and international partners and have been performed in the capital. Efforts to extend training to the country's Divisional level have also been piloted.

**Fiji Media Telecommunications
Linguistics Landscape Guide**

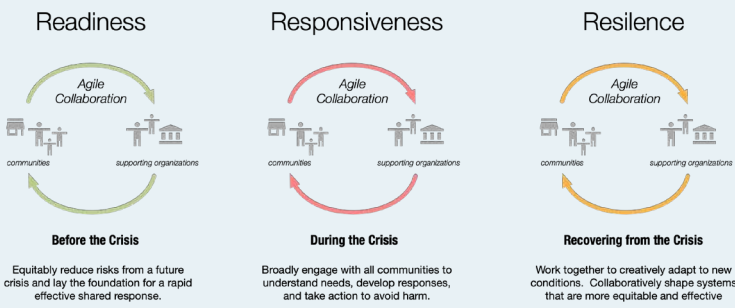
- Inventory of major media outlets
- Additional trusted and popular information sources
- Guidance on information needs assessment
- Data on factors such as mobile phone ownership and social media use

**Accountability to
Affected People Training**





Creating Agile Collaborations that Transform Crisis Response Capabilities



Closing the engagement loop

Integrated communication strategies that talk to communities are only half of a complete Cycle of Engagement. To close the loop, an effective listening capability must also be in place. During the project, the Fiji NDMO approved a concept note setting out the vision for a shared feedback mechanism to operationalise this listening capability, paving the way to build the systems and processes for more systematic feedback collection and response. Common questions relating to community information needs and preferences were also developed for NDMO's IDA. This reflects the growing consensus that information is a concrete form of aid. Tailoring information content, format, and delivery channels to the differing needs of individuals and groups within a community has the potential to save lives and improve wellbeing in a crisis.

A video was also developed, highlighting the benefits of more systematic two-way communication and engagement with disaster-affected communities for CCEWG members and other emergency responders based in Fiji.

In 2021/22, GTS led a deep dive into the state of two-way communication in Fiji. The outcome report, titled [Status of two-way communication in Fiji](#), summarises the extent to which civil society is effectively communicating with, and hearing from, communities. The case studies serve as a useful learning tool demonstrating how diverse organisations are implementing good practice relating to community feedback.

Working with the NDMO, training has been developed to extend the use of community engagement practices to provincial levels, with instruction on the design of surveys, collection of data, and the analysis and use of information. Surveys were also created for the COVID-19 crisis, exploring the impact of restrictions and the awareness communities had around the disease.

In this work, it has been important to recognise that many different groups exist within a single community. Young people, women, people with a disability, elderly, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and members of the LGBGTI community may each have unique insights and challenges. As a result, strategies need to be designed to engage this diversity and avoid the tendency to lean too heavily on traditional positions of power and authority.



Continuous learning

Learning has been documented and shared over the course of the project. A number of presentations, discussions and key research papers were hosted or produced, including the following:

- » [Scoping mission report for Fiji](#) – The 2018 scoping mission report outlined existing capacities, needs, challenges and opportunities for CCE at the collective level in Fiji.
- » [Operationalising localisation and the Participation Revolution: communications preparedness and accountability for disaster response in Fiji and Vanuatu](#) – Provides a summary of findings from the in-person Fiji–Vanuatu learning event, held in Suva, Fiji in March 2020. Nine members of the Vanuatu CCE platform joined Fiji CCE stakeholders to reflect on the strategies, best practices and common challenges of the two-country project and take forward approaches and potential solutions to enable more consistent and systematic two-way CCE.
- » [Framework for assessing success of national CCE platforms](#) – Lays out the multiple elements needed to successfully build and assess the performance of a national CCE platform.
- » [The journey to build Fiji's national communication platform](#) – This case study shares experiences from establishing the multi-stakeholder CCE platform in Fiji and provides an overview of project highlights from 2018 to 2020.
- » [Collaborative communication and community engagement approaches in Fiji and Vanuatu: supporting effective two-way communication with disaster affected communities](#) – This poster accompanied an oral presentation given at the 2021 Australian Disaster Resilience Conference exploring the highlights, good practices and lessons learned from establishing multi-stakeholder, collaborative and locally led approaches to communicating with disaster-affected communities in Fiji and Vanuatu.
- » [The impact of COVID-19 on communication, community engagement and accountability: perspectives from stakeholders, communicators and audiences](#) – Exploring how the communication landscape and information ecosystems in disaster-affected countries have changed since COVID-19. Specific focus is given to how digitalisation, localisation, communication and engagement have evolved since March 2020, including in Fiji.
- » [The humanitarian–development interface of communication and community engagement in Fiji](#) – A snapshot of various humanitarian and development CCE/participation frameworks and systems in Fiji. The paper discusses entry points for effective CCE in crises to inform scale-up and use of findings to better link humanitarian and development planning, implementation and impact.
- » [Intentional inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC \(LGBTIQ+ people\) in communication, community engagement and accountability: a guide on key entry points for humanitarian organisations and practitioners](#) – This guide offers background and entry points for inclusion of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in CCE activities.
- » [Community feedback in Fiji: good practices in community engagement](#) – Case studies outlining what different organisations are doing by way of feedback, highlighting good practice and discussing familiar challenges.
- » [Pre-positioning locally led communication and community engagement networks: learning from Fiji and Vanuatu](#) – The CCE platforms in Fiji and Vanuatu aimed to be locally led, intentionally inclusive of diverse communities and embedded in local institutions. This paper captures key learnings from the project, as well as insights for scaling this type of CCE work and making it sustainable.

Further to the above publications, project learning was also shared at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) 2020, Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2021, World Conference on Humanitarian Studies 2021, HNPW High-level AAP Leadership Event 2022, and the annual CDAC Public Fora.



Looking forward: building on the foundation

Fiji's CCE platform has not been built in a static environment. Rather it has been designed and constructed as the nation faced multiple disasters ranging from weather to disease. These tumultuous conditions are challenging for the government, supporting organisations, and communities, but they also make it possible to test and adapt the platform to real-world situations. This has created an opportunity to mobilise support and focus work around communications and with disaster response more broadly.

Continued progress will require sustained effort that demands both time and resources. Having established a national foundation for the platform there is now an opportunity to extend the reach to sub-national levels of government and invite in an even wider range of collaborating organisations. There are also opportunities to build links between community engagement strategies in disaster response and similar efforts undertaken by development sector initiatives.

There are opportunities to embed CCE in existing programs and in stronger clusters such as the Protection and WASH Clusters to allow for further testing and embedding of CCE practice. CCE could also be integrated into complaint mechanisms or post-distribution monitoring, and CCE-related questions could be added to ongoing assessments.

As with any CCE activities, there is a danger that there will be more emphasis on collecting community views, as opposed to responding to them. All actors have a responsibility to respond to what they are hearing. Showcasing how data is being used will help demonstrate action and remind others about the main purpose of CCE: the improvement of service delivery and outcomes.

Looking even more broadly, the platform work done in Fiji offers a potential template for similar efforts in other countries, and provides a basis for a broader regional communications and engagement effort.

“CDAC Network supports us in a very unique way because it covers communication and focuses on disasters at the community level, and this supports the NDMO in getting key messages out to the community. And this is one of the many reasons I support the work that CDAC does, but I also enjoy working with them because of the people-focused approach that they have.”

FIJI NDMO DIRECTOR, MS. VASITI SOKO, REFLECTS ON THE COLLABORATION WITH CDAC NETWORK - DECEMBER 2021

This case study was prepared and written by independent consultant Dan McClure in 2020, in collaboration with the Fiji team. It was updated in December 2022 by Jacinta Isaacs, CDAC Network's Regional Programme & Insights Lead, Asia Pacific.

All images: Fiji Red Cross.



PLEASE NOTE: This document is a work in progress.

All comments welcome: please send them to info@cdacnetwork.org



GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS

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