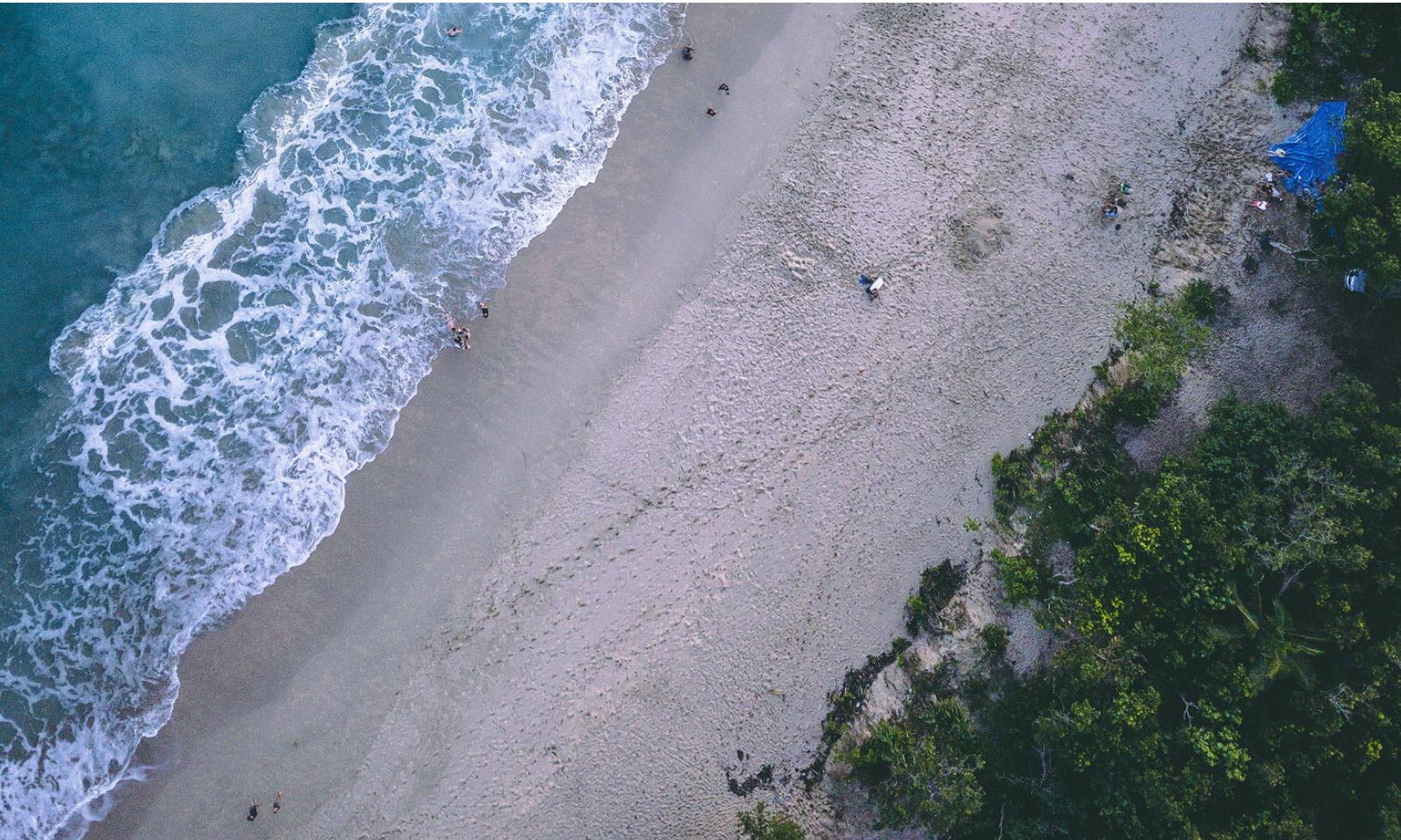




Pre-positioning locally led communication and community engagement networks

Learning from Fiji and Vanuatu

August 2022



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About this paper

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Foreword

It is not unusual for an emergency aid responder to check the accountability box by diligently providing regular updates to local communities; conducting extractive needs assessment ‘consultations’ through multiple agencies to signal ‘participation’; or by having multiple agency-level communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) initiatives that scramble to set up in the midst of a disaster and end when the response concludes. But each of these requires a high-cost start-up response injection, with no sustainable components, and demands the same level of ‘foundational’ funding time after time.

CDAC Network’s innovative national programmes for CCEA set far more ambitious goals, seeking to fundamentally transform the nature of collaboration between communities and those working to serve them in a crisis. They are complemented by Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) expertise in understanding how people affected by crisis experience the quality and effectiveness of aid provision, and how to best support them to influence the efforts undertaken on their behalf.

This paper explores CDAC and GTS’s facilitation of locally led communication and community engagement (CCE) Platforms in Fiji and Vanuatu, building on more than a decade of experience of testing, developing and implementing collective models of working. These CCE Platforms are broadly inclusive and embedded within the existing formal institutions that support crisis preparedness and response, reaching beyond government to include many other collaborators.

Learning is a big part of what CDAC Network does, and we hope that by reflecting critically on our work and sharing these reflections we’ll help build evidence for why two-way communication is essential for effective humanitarian work. If you have experience building similar CCE Platforms then we’d love to hear from you and continue learning together.

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Glossary

CCE	communication and community engagement
CCE Platform	this refers to the CCE working group in Fiji, the CCE sub-cluster in Vanuatu and their CCE partners at provincial, national and international levels.
CCE Sub-cluster	in Vanuatu, the CCE Platform is coordinated by the CCE Sub-cluster within the National Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (NETC) (see section 1.2)
CCE Working group	in Fiji, the CCE Platform is coordinated by the CCE Working Group based within the Fiji national communications cluster (see section 1.1)
CDCCC	Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee
Clusters	The Pacific Humanitarian Team operates under the co-leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinators in the Pacific. They use a regional cluster approach modelled on the international system. This regional cluster is used to support nationally led disaster management when requested by national governments. Both countries have national cluster systems that link up national and international disaster response and development agencies.
CSO	civil society organisation
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FCOSS	Fiji Council of Social Services, made up of national NGO partners
National Coordinator	National CCE Coordinator funded by CDAC Network and working within the country NDMO
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office

Executive summary

In recent years, government and civil society in Fiji and Vanuatu have championed the importance of local leadership in humanitarian action. Between 2018 and 2022 they worked with CDAC Network and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS), with funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to establish communication and community engagement (CCE) platforms for disaster preparedness and response.

The partners planned for these platforms to (1) be locally led and (2) improve two-way communication between affected communities and disaster preparedness and response actors. The third objective of the project was to capture and share learning with others to encourage a similar approach to CCE across the humanitarian sector. This paper is one of the ways that learning from the projects is being presented to a wider audience. The paper highlights key learnings from the first two project objectives, as well as insights for scaling the CCE work and making it sustainable (see Figure 1).

Key learnings

Step back so local systems can lead

From the start, CDAC Network and GTS worked collaboratively with national government and other partners, following local priorities and embedding the project in local disaster response structures to earn credibility and trust. Doing this, and building on existing networks, helped to keep CCE work active during peacetimes. The funding from DFAT was flexible enough to allow local concerns to be prioritised, which kept stakeholders engaged in CCE activities. A large part of the project was concerned with capacity building and accompanying local actors to deliver consistent communication during times of disaster, as well as gathering, analysing and sharing feedback through the CCE Platform. CDAC Network and GTS found that there was confusion among local and national response partners around what CCE is and how it relates to other similar activities delivered by humanitarian agencies. Through the CCE Platforms, they sought to unify communication and feedback systems within both countries.

Seek diverse feedback and adapt

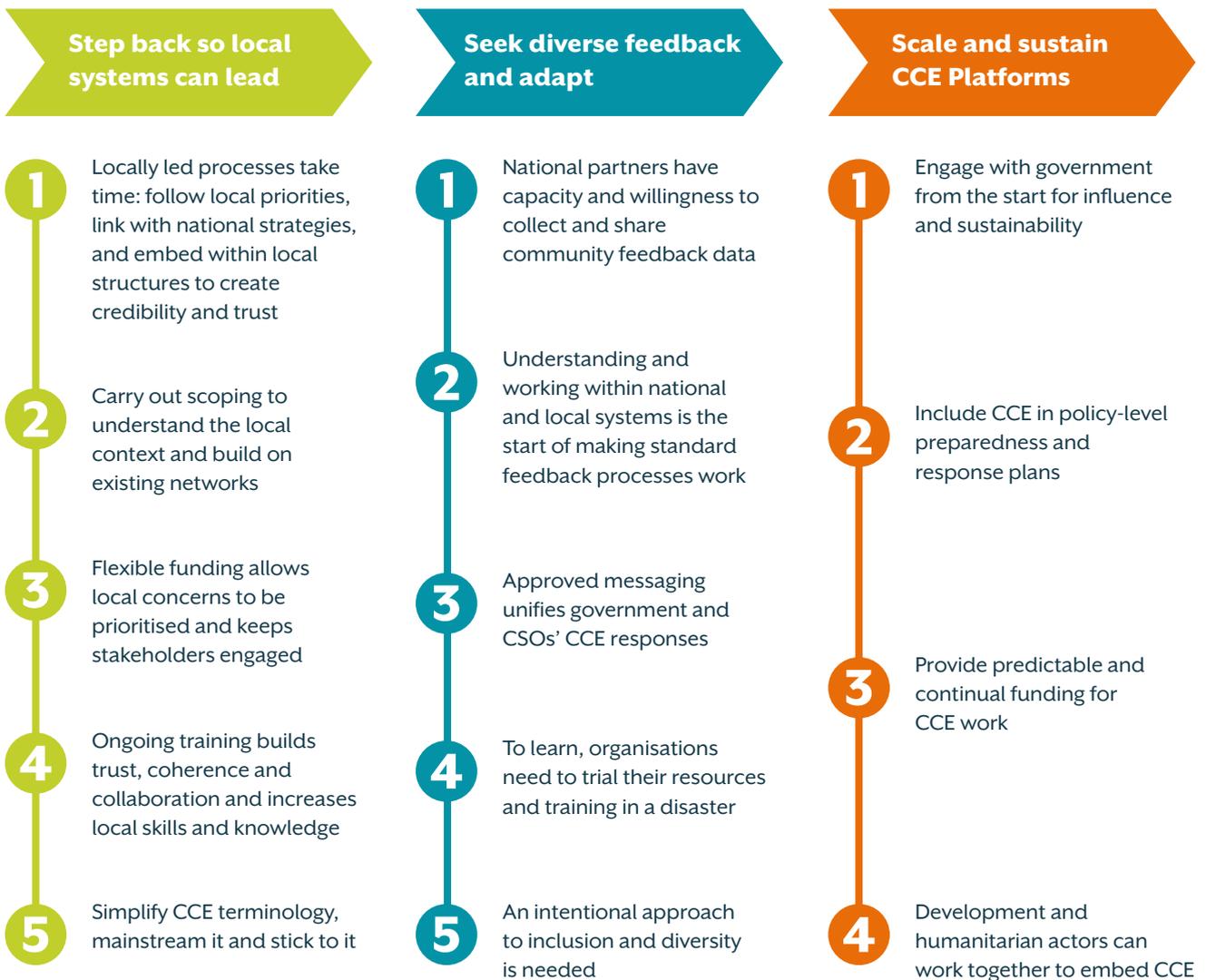
In both Fiji and Vanuatu, there was local capacity and willingness to collect and share community feedback data. In some cases, there were also pre-existing feedback mechanisms to build on. The teams found that two-way feedback mechanisms benefitted from being tested and adjusted during real disaster responses, but that it was difficult to find time to carry out simulation testing. Both teams developed approved messaging for disaster response and a bank of resources to be used by CCE Platform members. This messaging helped to unify government and civil society organisations (CSOs)' CCE work, and ensured life-saving messages were ready when a crisis occurred. The project utilised pre-existing national and provincial networks as the foundation of feedback collection and response. The extent to which standard approaches

were established varied across the country contexts, with Vanuatu achieving a more standard approach across the Platform while Fiji built on existing channels to strengthen individual agencies' feedback collection and response.

Scale and sustain CCE Platforms

The intention of the project from the start was to ensure the sustainability of the CCE initiative by working through national governments, non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners and communities. This is in part to ensure that knowledge, expertise and CCE processes remain within the countries at the end of the project. Additionally, many of the national partners were also engaged in development activities, and this may help CCE work continue through peacetimes. By working within government disaster response systems at national and provincial levels, the CCE Platforms gained credibility and influence and, in Vanuatu, this led to CCE work becoming embedded in national preparedness and response plans. However, the teams acknowledged that some level of continued funding will be needed to ensure the coordination of CCE work across the Platforms.

Figure 1 Snapshot of learning



Introduction

The international response to Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 led to a shift in the dynamics of humanitarian response in Vanuatu and the wider Pacific region and a recognition of the need for more local leadership (VANGO et al., 2019). In the years since, the governments in both countries have strengthened their National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs) and championed local leadership. The frequency of natural disasters combined with strong NDMOs and civil society leadership have facilitated these shifts.

In 2018, CDAC Network and GTS began supporting both countries to strengthen CCE in humanitarian response as part of wider efforts to operationalise two Grand Bargain¹ commitments: localisation and the 'Participation Revolution'. Recognising the necessity of supporting local leadership, CDAC Network and GTS aimed for the project to be embedded in local institutions and to be broadly inclusive. Many humanitarian actors in Fiji and Vanuatu already had communication networks and feedback mechanisms in place, and these were valuable starting points for building the locally led platforms (CDAC Network, 2022a; key informant interviews; see Box 1).

The project had three outcome goals:

1. Government-led platforms for CCE are pre-positioned and lead to sustained improvements in communication with disaster-affected communities during preparedness and response.
2. Humanitarian responders are better prepared to systematically listen and respond to the views of people impacted by crises and adapt programming accordingly. Perceptual data from crisis-affected people will inform the nationally led communication platform.
3. Capture learning for scaling up localised CCE platforms across the sector.

1 For more information on the Grand Bargain see: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>.

Box 1 **CCE Platforms**

Two-way communication using community-preferred channels can improve the effectiveness of aid by fostering accountability and trust. The communication and engagement with communities happens before, during and after a crisis and facilitates community preparedness, provides life-saving messages, and collects, analyses and uses feedback for accountability and learning (CDAC Network et al., 2021). It enables people to make life-saving decisions and provides entry points for people to contribute to, lead or, at a minimum, have a say in their own response. It enables humanitarian decisions to be shaped by communities, not by outsiders.

CDAC describes its CCE initiatives in Fiji and Vanuatu as a ‘systems-level innovation’ (CDAC Network and GTS, 2020a). The objective is to bring together a diverse range of crisis response organisations involved in communications to create a ‘platform’. This platform is formed of government, private sector, international, civil society and community-based organisations and it aims to coordinate and disseminate information effectively, avoiding gaps, overlaps and contradictions. Information is shared via multiple channels (such as radio, television, social media, loud speakers, posters/flyers or in-person community visits) and at the same time feedback is collected from different sources, analysed and used to inform actions. The project sought to improve two-way communication activities by embedding CCE work in each countries’ existing humanitarian, development and communication systems and processes. Working with existing structures takes time and patience. However, when successful, the pay-off is a more robust, locally embedded system with greater chance of sustainability.

1.1 Fiji

Fiji is an archipelago of more than 300 islands, of which 110 are inhabited (see Figure 2). About 87% of Fiji’s population live on the two major islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Fiji has three official languages – Fijian, English and Hindi – and there are a number of regional languages spoken outside of the two major islands. Since the Fijian population is dispersed across 110 different islands, telecommunication infrastructure and reliability varies considerably across the country.

The project began with a scoping phase to map networks and capabilities. The CCE working group was established as a multi-stakeholder platform consisting of international and national NGOs, government, private sector, media and telecommunications agencies. The group brought together humanitarian and development agencies and international and national partners. The Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)²

² ‘The Fiji Council of Social Services [FCOSS] was established as a network of non-profit organisations in 1957, and now has over 300 members and 200 associated memberships. FCOSS aims to advance social justice and economic development, fostering a strong community welfare sector and capacity building for its member CSOs’ (CDAC Network and GTS (2021) CDAC & GTS final narrative report: year 3, p. 5).

and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) co-lead the CCE working group. The CCE working group has developed communication and engagement resources and coordinated collective action. It sits alongside a second group, the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), which is responsible for telecommunications infrastructure in humanitarian crises.

The National Coordinator, hired by CDAC as part of the project and seconded to the NDMO, leads day-to-day CCE activities and coordinates the CCE working group. The CCE working group was placed within the national Communications Cluster, which is led by the Ministry of Communications and the NDMO. In 2020, COVID-19 disrupted activities across the CCE working group members and partners. When a COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) was established, the National Coordinator provided technical advice and surge capacity (see Figure 3 for a timeline of project activities).

Figure 2 **Map of Fiji**

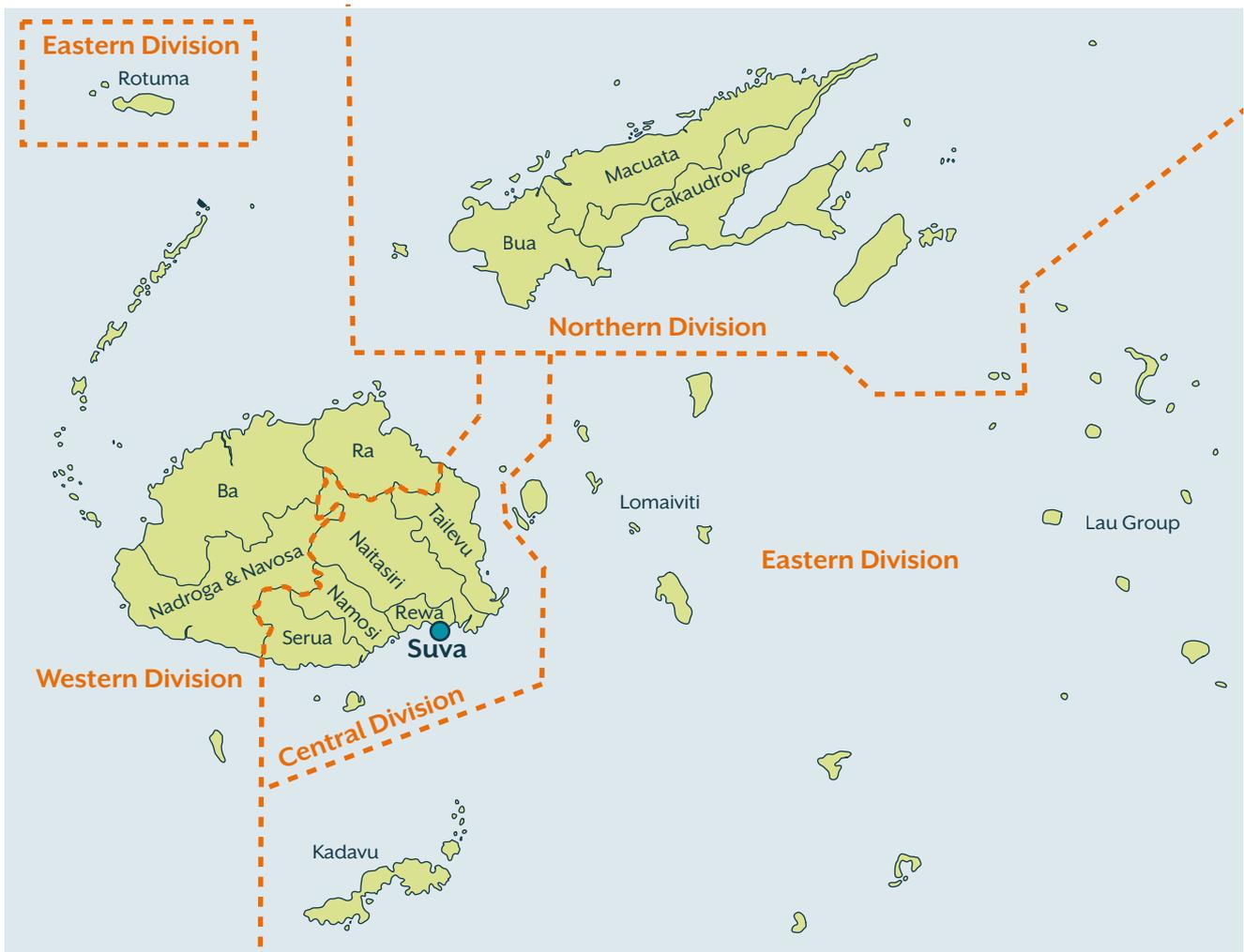
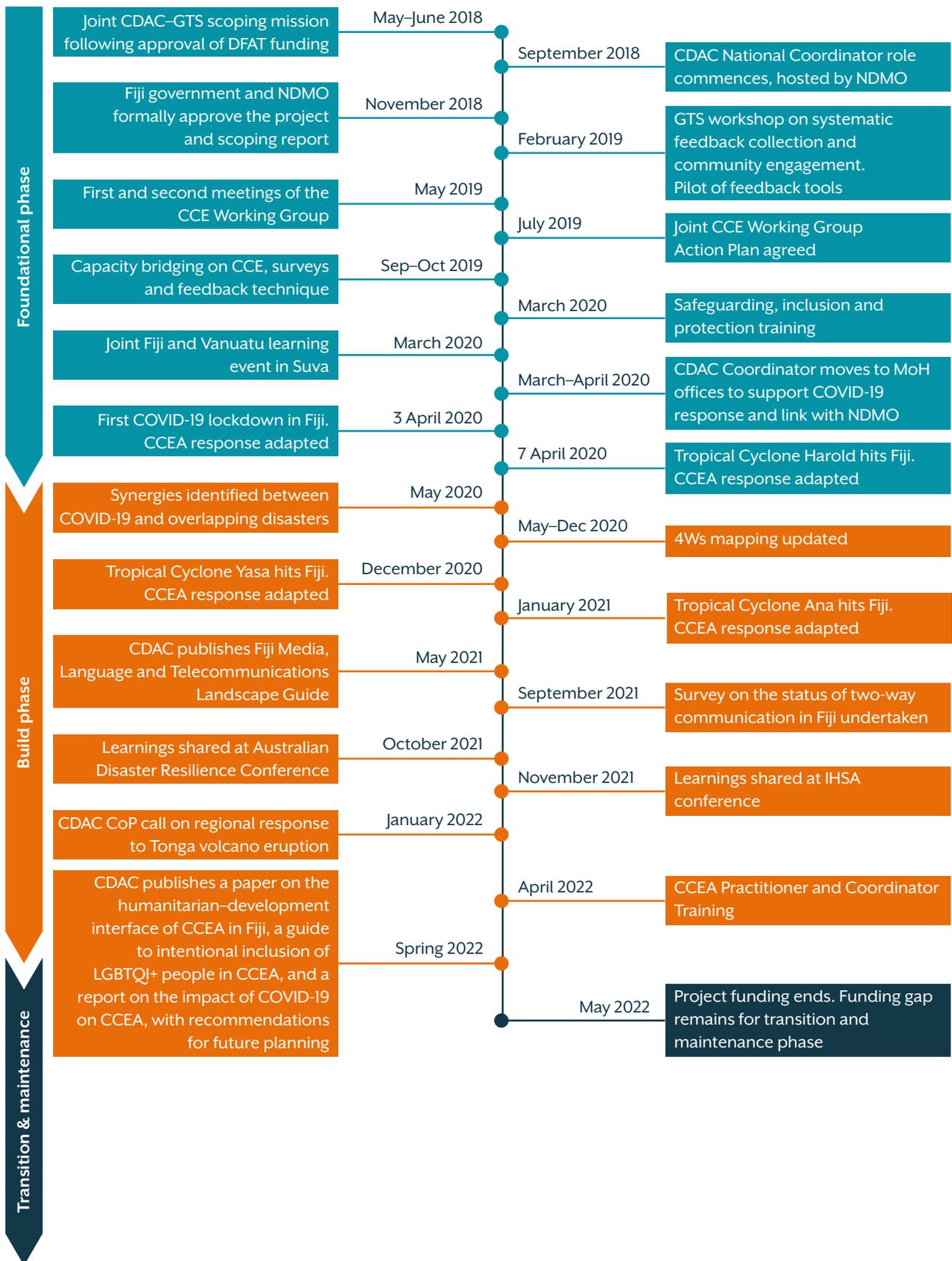


Figure 3 **Timeline of significant project activities in Fiji**



1.2 Vanuatu

Vanuatu consists of 83 islands, of which 65 are inhabited, and hosts several active onshore and offshore volcanoes (see Figure 4). Vanuatu has three official languages – Bislama, English and French – and many indigenous languages are spoken throughout the islands. It is less economically developed than Fiji but is consistently rated as one of the happiest nations on the planet due to its people achieving long, happy lives using limited environmental resources (Happy Planet Index, 2019).

The same approach as in Fiji was used to set up the CCE Platform in Vanuatu. A scoping phase was used to map networks and capabilities. A National CCE Coordinator was seconded to work within the NDMO and to act as a secretariat for the CCE Sub-cluster (see Figure 5 for a timeline of project activities). The CCE Sub-cluster sits in the National Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (NETC) and is co-led by the NDMO and Vanuatu Red Cross Society, placing communication activities directly within the NDMO (CDAC Network and GTS, 2020a). The CCE Sub-cluster brings together a broad range of agencies, including local and international NGOs, media, telecommunications, government donors, heads of government departments, and representatives from all clusters, almost all of which are led by Vanuatu nationals (CDAC Network, 2022b).

Vanuatu's NDMO also hosted an information management role funded by GTS, the technical partner for the project. These roles provided constant advocacy and support for CCE across NDMO activities (ibid.).

In order to simplify terminology, this paper will refer to Fiji's CCE Working Group and Vanuatu's CCE Sub-cluster as 'CCE Platforms' from here on.

Figure 4 **Map of Vanuatu**

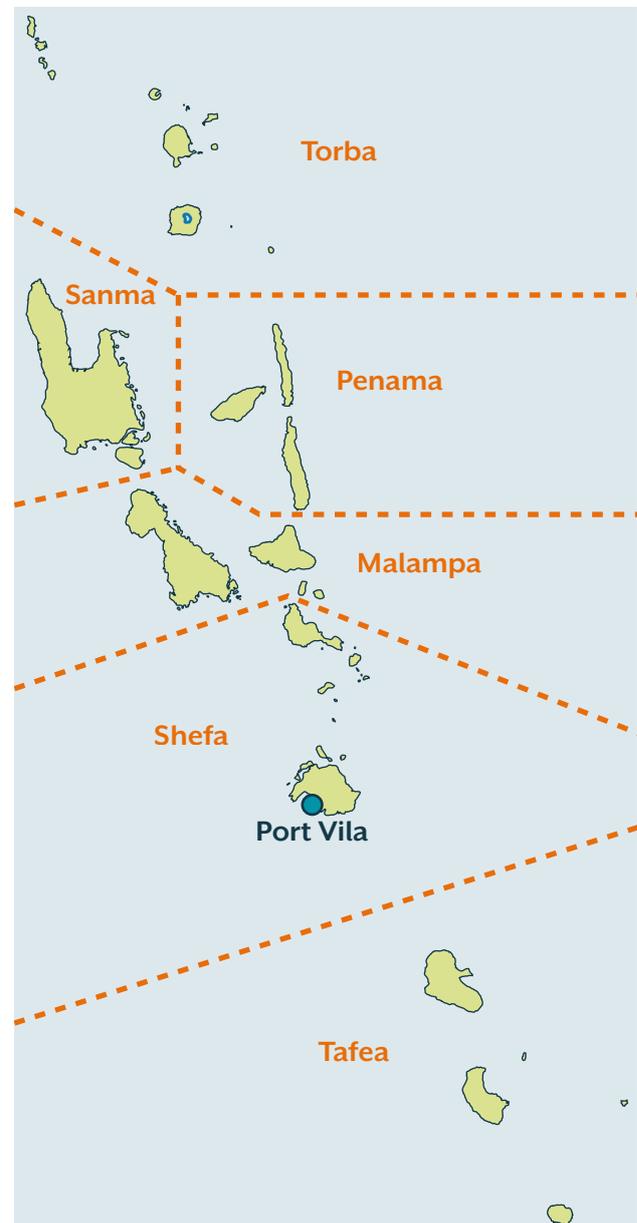
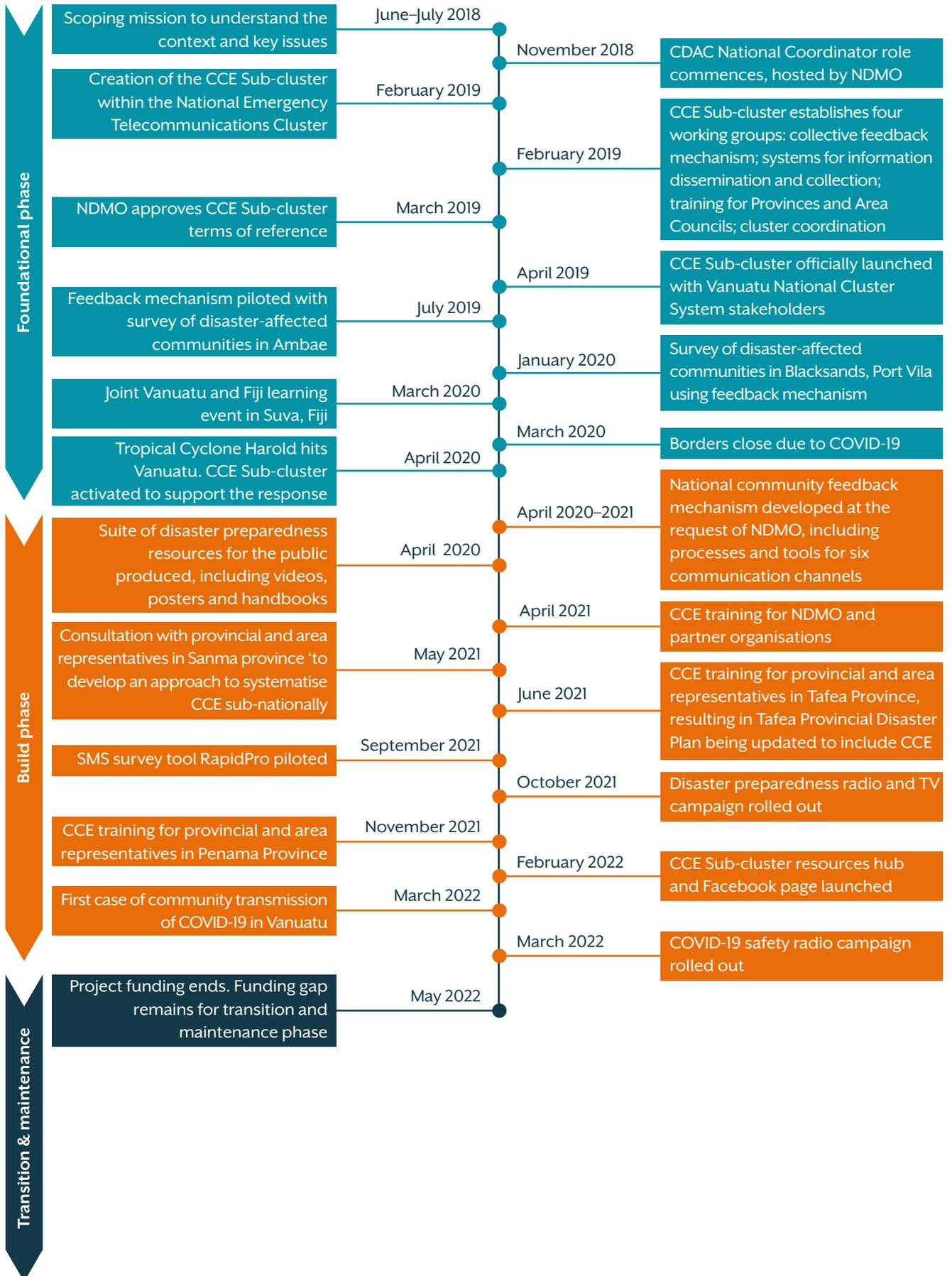


Figure 5 **Timeline of significant project activities in Vanuatu**



1.3 About this learning paper

This paper captures key learning points from the four years of project implementation in Fiji and Vanuatu. It brings together information from the country teams, government departments and NGO networks. Sharing learning was a key outcome of the project, with a number of resources produced following research locally and globally (see the Appendix for a list of project resources).

This learning paper builds on the rich findings in these documents as well as the end of project reports and interviews conducted with the teams in Vanuatu and Fiji and international technical support positions. Due to the short timeframe for bringing this learning paper together, we were unable to gain direct input from the NDMOs or in-country partners – this is a limitation. However, the learning paper has been read and validated by teams in both countries. The paper also builds on a joint Fiji–Vanuatu knowledge and learning event, which was held in Suva in March 2020, two years into the project. The event was organised by CDAC, GTS and CARE Vanuatu, in cooperation with the NDMOs and Australian High Commissions in Fiji and Vanuatu, together with CCE Platform members and stakeholders from both countries.

The paper is structured into three sections, drawing from learning on the two main project objectives: (1) facilitating the creation of a locally led CCE platform; (2) enabling the development of standard two-way feedback processes. The third section draws out learnings for making the platform sustainable and scaling it within a country. Each of these sections provides summary recommendations for those planning to create a similar locally led CCE platform in other settings.

1 Step back so local systems can lead

Summary

1. Locally led processes take time: follow local priorities, link with national strategies and embed within local structures to create credibility and trust.
2. Carry out scoping to understand the local context and build on existing networks.
3. Flexible funding allows local concerns to be prioritised and keeps stakeholders engaged.
4. Ongoing training builds trust, coherence and collaboration and increases local skills and knowledge.
5. Simplify CCE terminology, mainstream it and stick to it.

Localisation has been an important focus of humanitarian work since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The premise of localisation is that international humanitarian actors hand power and responsibilities over to local and national actors. This means ensuring national and local actors lead, make decisions and are consulted at all stages of disaster response. To this aim, the project created locally-led CCE Platforms in Fiji and Vanuatu, building on existing structures. These CCE Platforms were integrated into the countries' disaster response systems and Communication or Emergency Telecommunication Clusters, as appropriate. Each country's NDMO hosted a National CCE Coordinator. This section shares learning on establishing the locally-led CCE Platforms.

1.1 Locally led processes take time: follow local priorities, link with national strategies, and embed within local structures to create credibility and trust

Coordinating the CCE Platforms from inside NDMOs fostered a sense of local ownership and helped connect the CCE work to national priorities. The National Coordinator's role was to influence and deliver on the NDMOs' CCE activities. In Fiji, for example, the NDMO requested that the CCE joint action plan be linked to their humanitarian policy (key informant interview). This prompted the working group to consider how they were using their work to deliver on Fiji's humanitarian policy and the government's priorities. The CCE Platforms also helped to bridge the NDMOs with other government departments and clusters across the countries' humanitarian systems.

Creating consensus and aligning CCE activities to each country's disaster response priorities took time. Both teams emphasised that taking time to do this well built a strong foundation for the CCE Platforms' acceptance and sustainability.

1.2 Carry out scoping to understand the local context and build on existing networks

It helps to draw on pre-existing disaster response structures, networks and in-country expertise when setting up the CCE Platform. An understanding of the local context is critical at the outset, but also throughout the project, so that the project adapts to changing circumstances. In both settings, a detailed scoping study identified suitable partners and structures to work with. During the project, the CCE Platform members undertook important foundational work, including:

- mapping and maintaining the 4Ws – ‘who is doing where, when and what’
- developing standard operating procedures, CCE frameworks and pre-agreed messaging resources (CDAC Network, 2020).

In Vanuatu, the project was based in a host organisation – CARE Vanuatu – and was able to leverage their relationships with the NDMO and others to gain credibility and traction. CARE Vanuatu’s human resource, financial and procurement processes were adhered to, and the organisation also provided the project with technical expertise on CCE, gender, and social inclusion and accessibility.

In Fiji, the National Coordinator worked through the platform Co-Lead, FCOSS, and the NDMO to establish good connections with civil society actors. Both platforms intentionally invited membership from a wide range of stakeholders, which raised the profile of CCE across various administrative levels and sectors.

1.3 Flexible funding allows local concerns to be prioritised and keeps stakeholders engaged

In each setting, a component of activity funds was available for priorities identified by the CCE Platform members and NDMOs. This funding played a significant role in keeping stakeholders engaged each year and enabled local agencies and governments to have ownership over CCE activities (CDAC Network and GTS, 2020b). In Fiji, for example, during the COVID-19 response, the project supported FCOSS to deliver a Facebook campaign to promote community success stories of how people had adapted to life in lockdown. The district representatives were trained, both in person and online, by a social media specialist so that they could make short videos to share people’s experiences. CDAC also provided stipends for community volunteers to deliver messages about the benefits of vaccination.

The Vanuatu team were able to trial new SMS community feedback methods using Rapid Pro³ during a coconut rhinoceros beetle outbreak in 2021. This was a valuable pilot of a new feedback mechanism among a highly dispersed population, which enabled the government to monitor the spread of the outbreak over a wider geographical area.

1.4 Ongoing training builds trust, coherence and collaboration and increases local skills and knowledge

Training NDMO staff, platform members, local disaster response actors and communities was a key element of both projects. Training focused on CCE technical training as well as feedback processes, concepts and coordination, and was adapted for different participants' knowledge and language needs.

- **At the national level:** Vanuatu's CCE Platform has four working groups, of which one is responsible for identifying and undertaking training activities (CDAC Network and GTS, 2020b). The Vanuatu team particularly emphasised the role that training played in building CCE capacity of the NDMO and local partners, and strengthening the disaster response system. Employing local consultants to deliver project work in both contexts increased the national pool of individuals with skills and knowledge of CCE and disaster response.
- **At sub-national levels:** In Vanuatu, it is often the sub-national focal points who are mandated to lead during a disaster response. The Vanuatu platform developed a resource pack of local language training resources to be used to deliver training at sub-national levels (ibid.). In addition to training, it was also important to allow time for simulation activities to embed learning, particularly at community level. Simulation exercises were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but training activities led to the formation of provincial CCE working groups that provided local support with disaster communications and facilitated two-way communication between sub-national and national actors (CDAC Network, 2022b). Similarly, in Fiji, CDAC delivered CCE technical training for practitioners and platform coordinators at the national level. They also delivered CCE technical training in Fiji's Northern Division in 2019.

1.5 Simplify CCE terminology, mainstream it and stick to it

There is a lot of jargon in the CCE space. Agencies may use different terminology for what, in practice, can sometimes be very similar, if nuanced, approaches: CCEA, communication for development, risk communication, community engagement, etc. This varied terminology confuses partners, blocks collaboration and creates fatigue (CDAC Network, 2022a). When working in country, CDAC uses the terminology that is preferred locally to achieve a specific goal and sticks with it. Elevating the status of CCE across the clusters was important to ensure consistent practice and shared learning – being clear on

3 An open-source product that allows organisations to build and scale mobile services; see: <https://community.rapidpro.io/>.

what CCE is supports inter-cluster coordination (ibid.). Cross-nationally, the Vanuatu team shared their 'standardised feedback' learning with the Fiji team. This provided locally relevant and tangible examples of CCE activities for the Fiji team to learn from.

Additionally, communities and national NGOs may already practise their own forms of CCE. Working to join up these activities and scale them may be more beneficial than implementing top-down systems. Making information accessible in local languages and braille, and providing practical examples, helps communities to engage with CCE practice (CDAC Network, 2020).

2 Seek diverse feedback and adapt

Summary

1. National partners have capacity and willingness to collect and share community feedback data.
2. Understanding and working within national and local systems is the start of making standard feedback processes work.
3. Approved messaging unifies government and CSOs' CCE responses.
4. To learn, organisations need to trial their resources and training in a disaster.
5. An intentional approach to inclusion and diversity is needed.

Most humanitarian organisations have been improving their one-way information-sharing processes for some time. But two-way communication processes and ways of addressing community feedback are less ingrained (CDAC Network, 2022a). Similarly, standardised feedback approaches across responses are not common. The teams in Fiji and Vanuatu held workshops with the NDMO and CSOs to develop an understanding of what a standardised approach to feedback might include. The Vanuatu team developed a CCE handbook with feedback processes, guidelines and support tools for the platform. These processes were piloted during Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020. The Fiji team created a standardised feedback approach and rolled out training to national and provincial actors, but has not yet piloted the new tools. This section shares learning on strengthening two-way communications.

2.1 National partners have capacity and willingness to collect and share community feedback data

National partners in both countries responded positively to activities to develop standardised processes. In Fiji, for example, a survey was conducted in 2020 to understand the potential for collecting and using feedback data among communities and partner organisations (CDAC Network et al., 2021). They found that community leaders and local organisations were active in collecting feedback and had their own reactive systems for collecting and sharing information. To build on this capacity, GTS and FCOSS conducted training with national NGOs on how to deliver a sector-wide feedback system by developing standard questions. These questions were designed to be integrated into NGOs' pre-existing feedback channels. National partners were also trained in data analysis. This training succeeded in creating a broader understanding of CCE among CSOs and providing them with resources to use and share standard feedback.

2.2 Understanding and working within national and local systems is the start of making standard feedback processes work

The NDMO in Vanuatu were clear from the beginning that new feedback mechanisms needed to fit into their existing communication framework. The standard feedback processes – questions, analysis and sharing – were developed in consultation with national partners (including international NGOs and cluster representatives) and endorsed by the NDMO. The consultation helped create an inclusive standard feedback mechanism, addressing gender, social inclusion and accessibility. Following Tropical Cyclone Harold, the CCE Platform piloted the standard questions, collecting valuable feedback that was shared with the NDMO. The [CCE Handbook](#) includes these standardised questions (as well as the feedback process) and encourages individual agencies to collaborate by collecting this data from their service recipients and sharing it with each other and with the NDMO for action.

The Fiji team learned that partner organisations communicated with and sought feedback from communities through Facebook and in-person visits (CDAC Network et al., 2021). When the Fiji team considered that feedback was not getting cut-through with government departments during the COVID-19 response, they collated feedback from comments, social media and chat forums during live online press conferences and sent this directly to government-based colleagues so that this feedback could be considered by decision-makers. In both settings, it was recognised that more support was needed within the NDMOs and CSOs to analyse and make use of the feedback data and respond to communities' concerns. In Fiji, the team recognised that they needed to work on changing attitudes to negative feedback, so that it could be considered as valuable information rather than unhelpful criticism.

2.3 Approved messaging unifies government and CSOs' CCE responses

In Fiji, CCE messaging bridged the NDMO and Ministry of Health during the COVID-19 response. The National Coordinator worked between these government departments and brought in extra communication and design staff to develop joined-up CCE messaging. The CCE Platform proactively worked to develop approved messages for Fiji's cyclone season (CDAC Network and GTS, 2021). They ensured messages were sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities, available in three languages where possible, and evidence-informed.

Vanuatu created an open-access library of locally appropriate resources for messaging (see 3.2). Creating and gaining approval for the CCE Handbook was a significant achievement for the CCE Platform. It means responders have access to high-quality, approved and uniform messaging materials that they can deliver as soon as a disaster occurs, and with ongoing support the public will have access to live-saving information to prepare for disasters. The Vanuatu team also provided significant support to the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) unit of the national Ministry of Health to produce COVID-19 resources that were disseminated widely throughout the country.

2.4 To learn, organisations need to trial their resources and training in a disaster

Responding to Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020 saw the Vanuatu team put their CCE work into practice. The response allowed the CCE Platform to draw together communication expertise, including from UNICEF, Vanuatu Red Cross and the communications team of the Ministry of Climate Change and Adaptation (MoCCA). The response trialled early feedback processes, developed messaging assets and delivered them through multiple channels, including videos, Facebook and press releases. The response also allowed the CCE Platform the opportunity to reflect on what went well and how things could be improved.

2.5 An intentional approach to inclusion and diversity is needed

The teams in Vanuatu and Fiji placed great emphasis from that start on including a wide range of CSOs within their CCE Platforms. However, even the best of design intentions does not always ensure active participation of potentially marginalised groups, as one interviewee noted:

One thing that we actively did was try and involve marginalised groups. We went and had a chat with folks from Rainbow Pride [Foundation], but they did not attend meetings, although they were invited to. And we also went to FemLink who ran the women's weather watch. And they also have programmes around LGBTQ+. But [...] although our partners do have their connections and their relationships with them [marginalised groups] and work in these communities and support them, I think we could have done better as a group to ensure that all communities were involved (Fiji Team).

CDAC recently published a guide on intentional inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC, recognising this as a sector-wide challenge (CDAC Network and Edge Effect, 2022). The guide highlights that inclusion of marginalised communities requires dedicated funding to ensure their involvement in meetings, since groups are likely facing multiple barriers to engagement and are often stretched for resources. It also recommends hiring and including people from diverse and marginalised communities in the running of programmes, and offers entry points for engaging SOGIESC communities without drawing unnecessary attention in environments that may be hostile towards them.

3 Scale and sustain CCE Platforms

Summary

1. Engage with government from the start for influence and sustainability.
2. Include CCE in policy-level preparedness and response plans.
3. Provide predictable and continual funding for CCE work.
4. Development and humanitarian actors can work together to embed CCE.

Fiji and Vanuatu share similar challenges to other Pacific Island Countries. Due to their geography and geology, many island nations in the Pacific are vulnerable to tropical cyclones, volcanic activity, tsunamis and earthquakes. Many also have multilingual, dispersed communities with telecommunication and connectivity challenges. For this reason, CDAC planned for this project to provide an example that could be tested and applied across the Pacific context, or wider. The teams in Fiji and Vanuatu operated under different national systems and experienced different challenges and successes. Fiji achieved a lot of cohesion across CSOs through their close engagement with FCOSS. Meanwhile, Vanuatu achieved significant influence and buy-in from the NDMO, embedding CCE practices in national disaster planning. Key lessons have been drawn from across these two contexts to inform others who wish to establish locally led, two-way CCE activities elsewhere.

3.1 Engage with government from the start for influence and sustainability

Through the work of the National Coordinators, the NDMOs learned the benefits of a functioning CCE platform for their response activities. They were also able to see what good CCE and two-way communication and information management looked like in practice. The National Coordinators' ability to listen to and work within NDMO priorities was key to integrating the CCE Platforms. The National Coordinators added value to NDMO operations because they offered skills, capacity and resourcing that the NDMO did not already have. While funding within government departments is often limited, demonstrating the value of CCE over four years created appetite for this kind of role on a permanent basis.

Staff turnover often makes new and innovative projects difficult to maintain. In both countries, teams had to mitigate changes in leadership within government departments and the CCE Platforms. In some cases, the time and resources needed to rebuild working relationships was significant. There was greater need for contingency planning to manage relationships when leadership changed. The team found that building

co-ownership of CCE work across agencies and staff can help to ensure continuity should people move on. Supporting leadership at the community level may also contribute to sustainability, since there is likely to be less turnover of staff and roles.

The people change. Our administration, our responding organisations, they change. But the community, they do not change. Going down to the communities is the same: they get older, but the people are still there (Fiji Team).

3.2 Include CCE in policy-level preparedness and response plans

The teams in Fiji and Vanuatu developed advocacy plans to raise the profile of CCE within the countries' NDMOs. In Vanuatu, this led to CCE activities being embedded in national disaster plans and to training and simulations with sub-national disaster responders at the provincial level (CDAC Network, 2022b). However, despite support at policy level for CCE, there is still not enough financial and human resources allocated to effectively deliver CCE in a sustainable way in either setting. The NDMOs, with responsibility for disaster coordination, would need to budget for CCE roles to adequately fulfil their mandates (CDAC Network, 2022a).

Across Pacific Island Countries there are gaps in legislation relating to CCE and accountability in the humanitarian sector; this can foster misinformation (ibid.). Having clearly defined roles, responsibilities and standard operating procedures integrated at policy level helps to embed CCE platforms and their activities. Lessons can be taken from Fiji and Vanuatu to begin plugging these legislative gaps.

3.3 Provide predictable and continual funding for CCE work

Building a CCE Platform requires significant investment of time in networking and building relationships. The teams in Vanuatu and Fiji built their CCE platforms in an unpredictable funding environment, with 1–2-year funding cycles. The short-term nature of the funding meant that teams had to balance their time between:

1. scoping the humanitarian landscape and investing in building stable working relationships
2. developing CCE resources and delivering activities
3. building in sustainability and hand-over measures.

With long-term funding, the teams may have been able to focus on these activities sequentially, providing stability and assurance for national platform partners.

This project has learned that, for CCE platforms to be sustained, they need a minimum staff of a National Coordinator and an information management specialist.

Consistent funding for human resources would help to carry over learning during times of change. This funding could be from government, international donors or both. The Vanuatu CCE Platform is strengthened

by government-based members who are outside of humanitarian funding cycles. In both contexts, the team are advocating for the National CCE Coordinator roles to be taken on by the NDMOs. This would provide some level of continuity and coordination capacity to maintain CCE work across the Platforms.

It is also important to consolidate learning across the Platform by funding elements of CCE implementation (CDAC Network et al., 2021). While both teams have raised the understanding and appreciation of CCE across the country Platforms, and trained CSOs in messaging and feedback processes, agencies need resources to make changes, try out new approaches and create ongoing, sustainable action. Raising the profile of CCEA in the international humanitarian space may also help donors to prioritise maintaining CCE platforms in areas prone to multiple or prolonged disasters.

3.4 Development and humanitarian actors can work together to embed CCE

In Fiji and Vanuatu, many agencies that address disaster response also deliver development assistance. The CCE Platform and its members bridge the humanitarian–development interface and the sustainability of the Platform may be supported by drawing on humanitarian *and* development resources. Development actors may also be well equipped to carry out coordination activities between disasters.

A CDAC study carried out in Fiji found that there is potential for humanitarian and development actors to synchronise their activities to enhance community engagement and two-way communication (CDAC Network, 2022a). This is due in part to a recognition that disasters require a development follow-up, and that development activities can create communities that are better prepared to manage disaster situations.

The team in Vanuatu recognised the pivotal role of the Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs), linking their emergency focus with community organising activities. The chairs of the CDCCCs were included in the Vanuatu provincial training activities as they play an essential role in relaying information to communities and are linked with the NDMO. Development organisations can play a role in collecting feedback before and after disasters – in anticipation of this, the Platforms designed broad feedback questions that could apply outside of a humanitarian situation.

In Fiji and Vanuatu, coordinated humanitarian–development approaches can help to avoid duplication of work, information overload and participation fatigue among affected communities, particularly during times of disaster. Humanitarian actors can deliver assistance more efficiently and appropriately by plugging into a permanently established CCE Platform that is maintained by development actors and government departments during peacetimes.

Appendix: Project resources

The table below shows a list of the key resources and products developed specifically for the Fiji and Vanuatu programmes.

Resource title	Type
Fiji	
Scoping mission report for Fiji	Research
ToR: Fiji Communications Cluster (CCEA WG elements)	ToR inputs
4W template for Communications Cluster	Tool for practitioners
The journey to build Fiji's national communication platform	Case study
CDAC's national communication & community engagement platform in Fiji: a case study	Video
A systematic feedback mechanism in Fiji	Concept note
Case studies on existing feedback approaches across Fiji government and civil society	Case studies
Status of two-way communication in Fiji	Research
The humanitarian–development interface of communication and community engagement in Fiji	Case study
Workshop materials: common feedback approach	Training report/materials
CCE WG member survey: understanding approaches to feedback	Research
Training materials: pre-cyclone training on feedback for the CCE WG	Training report/materials
Workshop guides and handouts	Tool for practitioners
Fiji media, language and telecommunications landscape guide	Tool for practitioners
The importance of two-way communication	Animation
NEOC Communications SoP – contribution	Tool for practitioners
NDMO public information material – 2022	Tool for practitioners
Training materials: data analysis training	Training materials
Training materials: data analysis training for FCOSS	Training materials
TC Yasa NDMO SMS blasts, press releases, social media posts	Community messages
COVID-19 public information material MHMS – 1st wave: Fiji Hindi, Fijian, English	Community messages
FCOSS social media videos during COVID-19 and overlapping disasters	Community messages
NDMO public information material	Community messages
COVID-19 public information material MHMS – 2nd wave: Fiji Hindi, Fijian, English	Community messages
LTTD public information brochures	Community messages

Resource title	Type
NDMO social media tiles	Community messages
Vanuatu	
Scoping mission report for Vanuatu	Research
ToR: Vanuatu Communications and Community Engagement Sub-cluster	ToR
Practical experiences building a government-led CCE platform in Vanuatu	Case study
CDAC's national communication & community engagement platform in Vanuatu: case study	Video
CCE: why do we need to communicate with communities?	Handbook
6 steps to good communication with communities in disasters	Animation
Preparing and responding to disasters in Vanuatu: CCE handbook	Tool for practitioners
Communication saves lives	Poster
Komyunikesen I Sevem Laef	Poster
6 Step Blong Komyunikesen Wetem Ol Disasta Afekted Komyuniti	Poster
COVID-19: how to keep your family safe	Handbook
COVID-19: Hao Blong Kipim Famili Blong Yu I Sef	Community messaging
Communication saves lives T-shirt design	Community messaging
COVID-19: 5 Samting Blong Mekem	Poster
COVID-19: 5 Ting Blong Save	Poster
COVID-19: 5 things to do	Poster
COVID-19: 5 things to know	Poster
Workshop materials: feedback training of trainers	Training materials
Workshop guides and handouts	Tool for practitioners
Vanuatu Communications and Community Engagement Sub-cluster Facebook page	Community messaging
Communications and community engagement resources hub:	Tools for practitioners
Regional and global	
Operationalising localisation and the Participation Revolution: communications preparedness and accountability for disaster response in Fiji and Vanuatu	Research/learning
2022 learning paper: reflection on the Fiji and Vanuatu localisation project four years on	Research/learning
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	Tool for practitioners
Framework for assessing success of national CCEA platforms	Tool for practitioners and evaluators
The impact of COVID-19 on communication, community engagement and accountability: perspectives from stakeholders, communicators and audiences (including Fiji case study)	Research/learning

Resource title	Type
AFAC21 conference paper and presentation	Research/learning
Collaborative communication and community engagement approaches in Fiji and Vanuatu: supporting effective two-way communication with disaster affected communities (AFAC21 conference poster)	Poster
AFAC21 conference illustration: CCE in disaster management systems	Tool for practitioners
Implementing the Grand Bargain on the ground: lessons and reflections from the Pacific (panel and presentations at the 2021 World Conference on Humanitarian Studies)	Research/learning
Learning, engagement and scaling strategy	Concept note

The resources produced for Vanuatu can be accessed through the [resources hub](#).

If you require information on any of these resources, please contact info@cdacnetwork.org.

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CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

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