

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

Webinar 6: Addressing Data and Knowledge Gap on Internal Displacement in the Pacific

Summary

Purpose

The first of a series of webinars on Internal Displacement, held in December 2020, brought to the fore the reality and complexity of disaster and climate related displacement in Titiana (Solomon Islands), Vunidogoloa (Fiji), Ping Lap atoll (Federated States of Micronesia), and Bikini atoll (Republic of the Marshall Islands). At the same time it underscored the need for the development and implementation of evidence-based policy and durable actions to prepare, prevent and respond to internal displacement. In this context it is important to unpack the data challenges and the knowledge gaps hindering the capacity of countries to meaningfully monitor, measure and manage risk and losses related to internal displacement associated with climate change and disasters whilst also highlighting best practices that can address such challenges and gaps. Availability, quality and accessibility of data including capacity, definitions and approaches behind its collection and capture are critical to inform policy and durable actions targeted to the needs and context of Pacific countries and territories.

Background

Ms. Litea Biukoto, Disaster Risk Team Leader for the Pacific Community (SPC) and **Mr. Nacanieli Bolo Speigh Project Manager for the Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement (PRDD)** co-moderated this session. The moderators highlighted this webinar, the second in this series, will hear from NGO's, Academia, and UN Agencies perspectives to spotlight some practices that could be shared regionally and globally.

This webinar was the first to be screened live via the PRP Facebook page.

Key Messages

Key messages that were emphasized by the panellists:

According to **Semiti Temo**, the real challenge going forward is to focus on defining and identifying displaced households and/or person including during the initial phase of the response so that their needs are properly and correctly identified and addressed. Semiti further added that what is missing in the disaster space is the knowledge that helps in defining what a displaced person is particularly in the context of the Pacific and in the various stages of a disaster. Whilst there are global guidelines on what a displaced person is, the context and scenarios are different and need to be adapted to the Pacific.



Joseph Foukona, shared that one of the challenges most countries in the Pacific face is translating international standards and frameworks on Internal displacement as part of their domestic policies and laws underpinned by a rights-based approach. Furthermore, in terms of durable solutions for internal displacement, an important aspect of is consulting internally displaced persons during the different stages of displacement.

Jessie Connell, highlighted that the displacement tracking for Tropical cyclone Harold showed what might be possible if we invest in such systems and structures that support good data collection at the local level, especially when dealing with a similar situation in the future. It also demonstrated the importance of these local networks and the community disaster committees across Vanuatu, and the need for these focal points to be supported and strengthened and trained in the downtime when there is no disaster, so they can be ready to rapidly report on displacement needs when disasters do happen.

Summary of Discussions and Interventions from Panellists

Semiti Temo, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting Manager with the Pacific Delegation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) societies shared gaps and challenges on disaster displacement data and knowledge drawing from TC Harold and TC Yasa response. Semiti started by highlighting that though the discussions in this webinar are focused on the Pacific, the IFRC Pacific is part of the global IFRC and Red Cross network. IFRC recently released its Strategy 2030 which is basically a guide on IFRC focus for the next 10 years from 2021 to 2030. Migration continues to be a key focus, but with the Strategy 2030, IFRC have gone into a more outcome approach as opposed to a sector approach. It also recognizes the need to move away from an ad hoc approach to a more structured strategic and principled approach. Under this focus for the Asia Pacific region, the target over the next 5 years is to have 75% of all Red Cross national societies undertake a needs assessment and integrate migration and displacement into their strategic plans. Semiti further shared that in the context of the Pacific and based on experience at IFRC, the focus should be the other way around, that is unpacking knowledge because it has been more the lack of knowledge first which then leads to the lack of data and the challenges that exist in disaster displacement. So the focus for IFRC is to first conduct a needs assessment to determine what the needs are and as a first step agree on a definition of what a displaced person or displaced households is. The current technical definition of internal displacement is someone that moves from their home to another place as a result of a disaster. Reflecting on experiences in the Pacific including with TC Winston in Fiji and Ambae Volcanic eruptions in Vanuatu, people have had to move to other areas within the country due to their 'homes' no longer habitable fitting the current technical definition of internal displacement. However, in terms of the gaps and challenges around definitions of internal displacement, further experiences from TC Winston, TC Harold and TC Yasa, noted that people were identified as displaced if they are living in evacuation centres but once disasters are over, people tend to naturally return to their homes. When these people return to their homes and without any clear definition of displaced persons, they are lost in the process. However when conducting follow up during the recovery phase, these people though back in their 'homes' still live in tents, still need a shelter and they face challenges with water and sanitation, basically ticking all the boxes under the current definition of displaced people or households. Added to that are mental and physical health issues arising from this impact. So, the real challenge going forward is to focus on defining and identifying displaced households and/or person including during the initial phase of the response so



that their needs are properly and correctly identified and addressed. Semiti shared an example on the significant need for psychological support for those people who have lost their houses, their belongings and their livelihoods. As first responders and as part of improving their response measures, IFRC have trained volunteers on psychological first aid that includes Identifying psychological needs or conduct psychological first aid on people followed by referrals to proper authorities or other partners like the Ministry of Health and Humanitarian actors who focus on providing psychosocial and/or psychological support after a disaster. In citing these examples Semiti was of the view that what is missing in the disaster space is the knowledge that helps in defining what a displaced person is particularly in the context of the Pacific and across the various stages of a disaster. Whilst there are global guidelines on what a displaced person is, the context and scenarios are different and need to be adapted to the Pacific and Semiti emphasized that he has not seen any evidence of this being progressed in terms of research and other pieces of work.

Joseph Foukona, Assistant Professor, University of Hawaii, did his research on customary land tenure, climate change and natural disaster displacement and relocation as well as on urban land, land reform, constitutional and governance issues in the region. Joseph shared his thoughts on challenges on data and knowledge on displacement research in the Pacific. Joseph highlighted that in terms of displacement, there are international frameworks that are in place like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Operational Guidelines as well as the Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States. One of the challenges most countries in the Pacific face is translating these international standards and frameworks as part of their domestic policies and laws underpinned by a rights-based approach. Most national disaster management plans are neither specific or explicit in addressing and managing peculiar threats to land, livelihoods and also cultures created by climate change and disaster. So as a result, there is no direct and explicit guidance in law and policy at the domestic level in most Pacific countries with more emphasis on disaster relief and recovery with less attention paid to the prevention of displacement and durable solutions. Joseph highlighted that based on research he was involved in the Pacific, there is no clear strategy to prevent displacement. Also there is an issue in the depth of data regarding hard and soft infrastructure such as information about specific roles of different community members. How does this soft infrastructure look in terms of social organization? What are the roles of different people such as police or community leaders or other actors? The other aspect in terms of knowledge and data is the gendered nature of displacement. In a particular context, what are the kind of approach that different actors take to address specific circumstances of women, youths, girls, and LGBTQ. The other aspect is lack of data on how different circumstance of displacement is addressed. Also the intersection of displacement and sustainable development goals in relation to addressing the direct causes of and coming up with durable solutions for displacement as it is most often connected to entrenched poverty and inequality. Joseph emphasized that these need to be unpacked in the context of prevention of displacement.

In terms of protection during displacement, there are key international standards and guidelines which Pacific island countries have drawn on and accommodated as part of their domestic policy and laws. So, domestic frameworks cover areas like responsibility of various actors at the national, provincial and local levels and addressing evacuation camp management disaster risk reduction and so forth. However, one of the challenges is coordination among the various actors. Also implementation of legal and policy frameworks for the protection of internally displaced person during displacement appears to put more emphasis on disaster relief than on specific needs or protection of people during displacement. For example, in the case of Solomon during the flooding that happened



in 2014, the existing legal framework did not provide mechanisms for internal displaced persons to raise their complaints or concerns regarding how government agencies or other actors addressed their issues of protection during displacement.

Finally, other aspects in terms of displacements is durable solutions. One of the important aspects of durable solutions is consulting internally displaced persons during the different stages of displacement. For example consultation with internally displaced persons whilst in evacuation centres and during relocation. Relocation of internally displaced persons is usually part of government policy action but there is not much data in terms of how durable solutions have been captured in this stage. International frameworks identify key factors that affect whether any solutions dealing with displacement is considered durable, which include safety and security, adequate standard of living, access to livelihoods, restoration of housing, lands and property, access to documentation, family reunion, and participation in public affairs, access to effective remedies and justice. Based on the research Joseph is doing, capturing some of these factors remains an ongoing challenge, but in terms of data and knowledge it is important to explore as well as unpack because in some of these areas there is really a need for data as well as knowledge.

Jessie Connell – Chief of mission, International organization for migration in Vanuatu shared some insights of Vanuatu’s response to TC Harold and experiences with the government of Vanuatu to respond to data and knowledge gaps on displacement in an emergency context. According to Jessie, their experience as one of many partners involved in the response efforts following TC Harold highlighted the importance of having information about displaced populations as quickly as possible following a disaster; who is displaced, where are they displaced, and what needs do they have. It also showed again like in other disasters, how difficult it is to get reliable data on this topic, especially given the remoteness of the locations where people are affected and also in the context of COVID-19 which restricted mobility for TC Harold. In Vanuatu, there are around 100,000 people who live in close proximity to active volcanoes who could be displaced at any time, and this is one reason why Vanuatu has been ranked as the most at-risk country to disasters numerous times now by the World Risk Index. And the impacts of natural hazards are often exacerbated by human factors such as land conflicts and organization. So, all of these pressures make it even more important to be collecting good data on displacement, about who is moving where, where do they come from, what are their needs going forward.

In the context of tropical cyclone Harold, when the rest of the world was grappling with the early stages of the pandemic, Vanuatu was one of the first countries to experience a major disaster at the same time as dealing with COVID – 19. COVID-19 also made it very difficult to respond quickly after the disaster in the weeks that followed with many different estimates emerging about the extent of the damage, the number of people who were affected and displaced and despite preparations there was much debate about how best to get this information. Initial reports suggested that up to 80,000 people, 27% of the population, or sometimes even more had been displaced. These estimates were mostly using information from wind speed and satellite imagery to estimate displacement and were useful in the beginning but also demonstrated a need for a much more rigorous approach to identifying who was displaced and where across the country, especially as the weeks went on after the cyclone.

So, to try and fill this gap the national disaster management office (NDMO), Department of Local Authorities together with IOM and IDMC, PDD and local partners including, ADRA, Vanuatu Christian Council, Oxfam, CARE, Red Cross, all worked together through the new displacement cluster that had



formed to reformulate a methodology to conduct what is called displacement tracking sometimes called a displacement tracking matrix. This was done with the support from the European Union and the central emergency relief fund. IOM works in many countries to support government to do displacement tracking and it takes a different form in each place depending on the context, the type of disaster or conflict that is occurring. Displacement tracking has been done in Vanuatu before, especially to support the Volcanic eruption in 2018, which displaced over 11,000 people. However, for TC Harold a new method had to be quickly developed that was adapted to the cyclone context. The NDMO and Department of Local Authorities drew on their network of local officials to share estimates on the number of individuals in each area council who were displaced in a consistent format. Experience with TC Harold really highlighted the importance of definitions of displacement. In the context of this research, a household was considered to be displaced if they were staying in an evacuation centre or with relatives or an host family because they were not able to return to their home. Evacuation centres included any public buildings communal buildings, it also included other places that people sheltered during the cyclone such as caves and other structures, churches in particular.

The methodology that was developed for displacement tracking in TC Harold enabled a series of revised estimates of displacement including additional information:

- So one month after the cyclone it was possible to estimate that over 9500 people were still displaced across 190 evacuation centers.
- Two months after the cyclone it was estimated that over 6000 people were displaced in both evacuation centers and with host families.
- Following a series of trainings even more detailed data from hundreds of key informants and hundreds of households were collected with some very interesting results:
 - o For example, 46% of those displaced were under the age of 18 years.
 - o Households also reported perceptions of increased instances of child marriage or forced marriage in the aftermath of the disaster consistent with reports from previous disasters such as the Ambae displacement and from the gender and protection cluster for a number of years now.

The methodology also highlighted the ongoing needs around water, health, food and non – food distributions, even months after the cyclone. This data was provided through the other clusters and it was also used in the post- disaster needs assessment to estimate damage and loss. Displacement tracking for TC Harold showed what might be possible if we invest in such systems and structures that support good data collection at the local level, especially when dealing with a similar situation in the future. It also demonstrated the importance of these local networks and the community disaster committees across Vanuatu, and the need for these focal points to be supported and strengthened and trained in the downtime when there is no disaster, so they can be ready to rapidly report on displacement needs when disasters do happen. The Vanuatu government’s decentralization process was also critical to how easily data on displacement could be collected. For example, there is no single consolidated list of village names, which make it very difficult to report on who is displaced where quickly because of the risks of duplication and confusion. IOM is partnering with IDMC and PDD through a regional project funded by EU called the Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement working closely with the governments of Vanuatu, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga. One of the aims is to try and come to a situation where data collection methodologies and reporting are harmonized at a regional level across the Pacific in response to disasters and displacement. This will



hopefully help Pacific governments and communities to be better able to shine a light on the impacts of disasters they are experiencing and be better able to tell stories of displacement that are taking place in their countries.

Question & Answer

Is there any specific role for the private sector specifically in data collection and analysis (bit tech companies, for example)? Semiti shared that being able to use mobile devices to conduct assessment and then send it immediately significantly decreases the time for information to be correlated from all the different areas that are affected. IFRC is also encouraging national societies to use GPS locations to make it easier to locate those places especially when some countries have villages with the same names in different locations. In this context, where the private sector could have a role is for example in ensuring connectivity as after a disaster there is significant damages to telecommunication infrastructure. **Jessie** also concurred that the role of the private sector in helping with data collection and communicating that data is huge. Telecommunication networks and internet access in impacted remote areas is incredibly important in terms of getting real-time updates. Software where you can easily import survey responses and see dashboards being produced in real time and very quickly are very helpful. The opportunities to expand the use of existing technology like the block chain technology used in Vanuatu for cash-based responses for tracking displaced populations should also be explored. Also utilizing telecommunication data from people's mobile phones about where they are and where they have moved to track displacement.

Defining displacement, relocation and forced migration also impacts on the degree to which you can access different sources of finance for example, climate finance. Is this taken into account with the current global guidelines and frameworks? **Jessie** responded by highlighting that there have been discussions for decades about ways to define displacement relocation and forced migration. However, people can get very tangled up in trying to distinguish these processes from one another and could have implications for how people may be able to access climate finance now and in the future. Accessing financial support for planned relocation could be one scenario where it could come down to the definition of planned location and even more the problem with identifying the cause of displacement with climate finance usually linked to a very narrow understanding of the impacts of climate change which is where you could have exclusions.

Why is it that we are still in the “lack of data” phase? Is there any regional stakeholder initiative to address this issue? **Semiti** responded that it is not necessary about lack of data. The data is available because everyone collects data. More effort needs to be put into having more common definitions of these terms so that the different data that we collect can be useful across stakeholders and partners. **Jessie** agreed that the issue is not about lack of data. There are lots of data in fact and too much information and especially when in an emergency context, one can be quite overwhelmed by information and data that is not necessarily high quality and is not necessarily the information needed, and is not meaningful enough to inform an effective response. The problem is probably more that there is not enough of the right type of data in a timely way.



One of the challenges in terms of definitions will be getting a shared understanding of when displacement ends. Is this capable of being answered in absolute terms or is it always context specific? Whatever the definition is, it should be anchored in Pacific understandings of home, place and belonging. Is a good starting point to identify what they are and work outwards from there into specific national contexts? Joseph shared that displacement is a term that describes the involuntary nature of movement. In some cases, people experience ongoing issues of displacement, citing an example in the Solomon Islands of informal settlements along riverbanks, that are always prone to and impacted by the flooding. Their displacement will be continuous unless durable solutions are implemented such as relocating these people to a different place, or address their housing, and infrastructure issues. Displacement can be a one-off or ongoing depending on the context. In this context, Joseph agreed that displacement should be understood in terms of home, place, and belonging. So, when it comes to issues of relocation because of displacement, it raises questions relating to people's livelihood or people's connection back to the origins. Most of the people that are exposed to this issue of displacement are usually people that are not quite well off and many of these people live in informal settlements or they live in places that are exposed to all kinds of natural disasters and climate change impacts. According to Semiti, from the perspective of IFRC it is important to have conversations with partners first before we can start to talk about data needs and collecting information. Having a clear definition of what we are working on or what we are collecting is an important starting point.

Wrap-up

The need for clear definitions of displacement has been a longstanding issue particularly in regard to data management and was further emphasized in the discussions today. The discussions also highlighted efforts being made to strengthen networks and systems at the national level to be able to pre-empt issues and enable more targeted support to those affected and to set up a process that allows tracking of those affected. The need to have a human-rights based approach as part of identifying durable solutions around preventing displacement was also emphasized including involving displaced persons in decision making processes to address their own protection as well as being able to identify their durable solutions. Strengthened coordination around displacement or human mobility is also an issue that a number of governments and partners in the region continue to address. There is no single agency that can do this on their own, further underscoring the importance of working together. Informing recovery raises the issue that efforts are usually focused on displacement within the humanitarian period and not necessarily reflecting prolonged displacement in areas that have been affected. The discussions have also highlighted collaboration across stakeholders and equally important involving the local communities and local non-government organizations.



Meet the Panelist

Webinar 6

Addressing Data and Knowledge Gap on Internal
Displacement in the Pacific

MODERATORS



Mr. Nacanieli Bolo Speigth

Project Manager
Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement
(PRDD)



Ms Litea Biukoto

Disaster Risk Team Leader for the Pacific
Community (SPC)

PANELISTS



Mr Joseph Foukona

Assistant Professor
University of Hawaii



Mr Semiti Temo

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting
Manager
Pacific Delegation of the International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) societies



Ms Jessie Connell

Chief of mission
International organization for migration in Vanuatu

