

Fiji Gender, Disability & Inclusion Snapshot

TC Harold, COVID-19 and TC Yasa

December 2020

This Snapshot identifies potential gender, disability and inclusion issues from TC Yasa based on TC Harold experience as well as anecdotal data and Initial Damage Assessments. Its objectives are:

1. To inform the programming of AHP partners on the different needs, risks and capacities of women, men, boys and girls of different marginalised groups including people with disabilities and people of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC); and
2. To support the Fiji Safety and Protection cluster in advocating for protection-integrated programming across the TC Yasa response.

KEY MESSAGES

- Natural disasters do not affect everyone in the same way. Social structures, customs and roles mean that people are affected differently, some worse than others. Marginalised groups may include women, girls and boys, people with disability, older people and people of diverse SOGIESC. It is important to make sure that everyone, including members of marginalised groups, have their needs assessed and addressed by disaster responses.
- Involving women, youth, people with disability and people of diverse SOGIESC in disaster response helps the whole community recover faster and build resilience. A disaster response should keep community members safe, help maintain their dignity and provide protection (i.e. prevent and respond to exploitation, abuse, violence and injury).
- In addition to leading to more effective disaster response and recovery, addressing gender, disability and inclusion supports Fiji's ambition to leave no one behind "regardless of geographical boundaries, gender, identity, ethnicity, physical and intellectual capability and social and economic status" as outlined in the National Development Plan 2017-2036.

Key Gender, Disability and Inclusion Analysis findings: COVID-19 and TC Harold

- Women's roles of care-giving and domestic duties have greatly increased due to COVID-19 restrictions including lockdowns and the closure of schools.
- COVID-19 and TC Harold severely affected Fijians' short and long-term resilience as many are resorting to the use of detrimental coping strategies such as reduction in food intake, barter of assets, reduction of expenditure on health or education.
- The increased levels of stress and tension are widespread with greater potential for violence, but adequate psychosocial support services are lacking.
- Many unemployed people have shifted their families back to their villages and islands and this urban to rural drift may further stretch the constrained services in rural areas.
- Social protection schemes for marginalised groups exist but are limited and access was restricted by COVID-19 preventative measures, particularly for people with disabilities.
- At the community level, the activities of many decision-making structures and groups such as disaster and health committees and women, church and youth groups were suspended due to COVID-19 social gathering restrictions. Decisions are being made by the *Turaga ni Koro* (village headman), thereby putting at risk the gains made in inclusive governance.

TC Yasa initial findings

A State of Natural Disaster was declared effective from 16 December 2020 for 30 days. The Declaration allows the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to call all of Government's assets to be on standby to be mobilised for the TC Yasa response. Early damage assessments indicate about 93,000 people in Fiji were directly affected.¹ Immediate relief efforts are focused on the restoration of critical infrastructure and essential services and the provision of food, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene kits.

TC Yasa Initial Findings	Protection Implications and Risks
<p>Shelter: With 1,365 houses partially damaged and 547 completely damaged, many households may have no house for many months. On 26 December, a total of 5,373 evacuees were still sheltering in 145 evacuation centres (ECs) in the Northern and Eastern Divisions² with other affected families likely to be staying with family or community members.</p>	<p>Increase in violence against women and girls (as found during the TC Josie/ Keni response). People with disabilities having inadequate access to toilet and washing facilities. Persons of diverse SOGIESC unable to access adequate temporary shelter (including ECs) due to pre-existing social stigma and lack of community acceptance.</p>
<p>Electricity: According to Energy Fiji Limited 11.5% of all areas in Labasa had power supply by 28 December; however all areas outside of Labasa Town are yet to be energised. Due to severely damaged infrastructure, Seaqaqa and Dreketi are still without power while power has been restored to 52% of areas in Savusavu.³ Although 116 EFL workers have been sent to the North to assist with the restoration of power, some areas could have no power for months as every metre of the power line has to be physically inspected and safely repaired where required before it can be energised. Lack of power also affects communication for those who are unable to charge their phones.</p>	<p>Women, girls, boys, people with disabilities and persons of diverse SOGIESC affected by domestic violence, child protection issues or requiring support in terms of health and medical supplies are unable to contact the violence, child protection or disability referral services due to no communications access. Safe well-lit access to toilets, evacuation centres and other facilities may also be affected by the lack of electricity.</p>
<p>Food Security & Livelihoods: Most households in affected areas rely on the agriculture sector - semi-subsistence and commercial agriculture - for their household food and nutritional requirements. The agriculture sector in the Northern Division has suffered significant impacts including cash crops, vegetables and sugarcane farms. While agricultural officers have yet to put a dollar value to the damages, the Ministry of Agriculture has provided a first round of assistance through the distribution of seeds and cuttings for short-term vegetables, day-old poultry chicks with feed and sugar to bee farmers. This assistance will continue for the next four months. The Ministry of Sugar Industry is yet to comment on assistance to sugarcane farmers. There are likely to be issues with food security for months to come.</p>	<p>For women and girls, food insecurity leads to additional domestic burdens due to the traditional role of food preparation and provision. Girls may miss school due to additional hours required at home and women and girls have increased protection risks due to having to travel further to obtain food. The risk of family violence increases as stress on the family intensifies. People with disabilities, the elderly and children may face nutrition and subsequent health issues due to inadequate food access.</p>
<p>Health & WASH: The Northern Division had existing issues with Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) which are likely to be magnified by TC Yasa. This will add to the burdens being faced by affected families who have lost homes and gardens. In addition, Fiji is facing a rising crisis of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including diabetes, with around 80% of deaths caused by an NCD. Many of those deaths are premature. Chronic conditions of family members coupled with the fact that much commonly-needed medication, while free of charge, is frequently unavailable adds to burdens and stress for affected families. Water supply was restored to the majority of metered customers in the Northern Division by 22 December and the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has since focussed on non-metered areas, conducting damage assessments and carting water to affected areas (once the Fiji Roads Authority approved the use of all main roads in Vanua Levu on 20 December). The public has been urged to continue to store at least five to seven days of drinking water for use and to boil it before consuming.⁴</p>	<p>Women and girls face additional domestic burdens due to their traditional role of caregiver for the sick, elderly and people with disabilities. Women and girls face additional domestic burdens and risk to violence as they travel further to search for and carry water. Women risk losing access to contraception if they are unable to travel to health centres. People with disabilities, the elderly and children have increased risk of contracting waterborne diseases due to the lack of WASH supplies coupled with risk of increased risk of NCDs due to poor nutrition.</p>

¹ <https://www.fijitimes.com/adb-to-give-2m-for-relief-work/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/FijiNDMO/>

³ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/115-of-all-areas-in-Labasa-now-have-power-supply-4xf58r/>

⁴ https://www.facebook.com/WaterAuthorityofFiji/posts/3417655545024131?_tn_ =K-R

Education: Some schools in the Northern Division sustained extensive damages due to TC Yasa while others are being used as evacuation centres. With the new school year scheduled to begin on 19 January 2021, authorities have described options including deferring the new school year date or relocating students to other schools in the area.⁵ As three months of the school year were lost due to COVID-19 in 2020, there is potential for education in affected areas to be affected for the second year in a row.

Girls and boys education is disrupted as schools are being used as evacuation centres. **Girls and boys with disabilities** may be less likely to return to school in the new year.

Additional risks:

- **COVID-19:** In addition to the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 that are already being felt, the potential for lockdown due to outbreaks is still a threat, as well as other precautionary measures. For example, the COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Taskforce (CRMT) announced the cessation of all inbound passenger flights to Fiji from 24 to 28 December 2020. This period enabled the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to review border quarantine processes in light of the discovery of a more contagious strain of the novel coronavirus in the United Kingdom (UK), a strain which has reached Australia.
- **Cyclone season:** As cyclone season doesn't end until 30 April, there are still months to go and two to three cyclones have been predicted for the season.
- **La Niña:** The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has confirmed that La Niña is officially underway in the Pacific, meaning higher than normal rainfall for Fiji. This will affect food crops, hygiene in the time of COVID-19, and safety with the impacts of floods and/or landslides.

Implications for Gender, Disability and Inclusion

- **Women's workloads:**

Women's workloads are likely to increase as women play key roles in all of the sectors mentioned. Women are largely responsible for care of homes, food preparation, vegetables gardens, fetching water if needed and boiling it, as well as care-giving of children, ill or elderly family members, and people with disabilities. In addition, while it has not been much of a holiday season for families in affected areas, family and religious gatherings place additional burdens of cooking and cleaning on women. As women are largely responsible for care of children, school holidays also mean extra work for them. Both options being discussed for education - deferring the start of the new school year date or relocating students to other schools – will create added burdens for parents and particularly women. In addition, with significant impacts on livelihoods, any reduction in household expenditure on health, education and other services means increased burdens for women and girls.

- **People with a disability:**

According to Fiji's 2017 census, 13.7% of Fijians experience disability.⁶ People with a disability are not a homogenous group, and men and women of different ages, in urban and rural areas and with different impairments will experience the impacts of TC Yasa differently. People with a disability in Fiji already experience barriers to services compared to those without a disability due to stigma, discrimination and barriers in the built environment. Girls and boys with disabilities may be at further risk of exclusion from education if remote/ distance learning programmes are not accessible or they do not have assistive devices to allow participation and accommodate learning needs.⁷ Children with disabilities are less likely than others to return to school once schools reopen. People with a disability and their families are disproportionately

⁵ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Deferring-school-resumption-date-or-relocating-students-an-option---Seruiratu-rf8x54/>

⁶ Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Population and Housing Census - Release No.1 - Age, Sex, Geography and Economic Activity, Suva, Fiji: *Fiji Bureau of Statistics; 2018*. Available from: <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/>

⁷ UNICEF, 2020, COVID-19 response: Considerations for Children and Adults with Disabilities: https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19_response_considerations_for_people_with_disabilities_190320.pdf

represented amongst people living in poverty.⁸ Poverty will limit the ability of people with a disability to put in place measures to respond to the cyclone, increasing their vulnerability.

- **Gender-Based Violence / Protection:**

Fiji has extremely high rates of violence against women and girls with 64% of women who have ever been in an intimate relationship having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner in their lifetime. A rise in violence was one of the impacts of COVID-19, with a significant increase in calls received by the National Domestic Violence helpline in April, 50% of them related to COVID-19.⁹ Violence often increases after disasters and this is highly probably again after TC Yasa with multiple sources of tension and stress in affected communities. Women's access to justice may also be affected.

In addition, there is much potential for sexual exploitation and child abuse to happen, especially for girls and women with less safe access to toilets at night, facilities not having sufficient lights, locks on doors, etc. The many workers travelling to the North to provide assistance include military, police, workers restoring power and water, fixing roads and bridges, construction crews, NDMO and other government assessment teams, as well as staff and volunteers of CSOs. These workers are largely men. Responders need to be reminded of the Code of Conduct for All Workers in Emergencies.

- **Child Protection:**

Two needs are likely to arise based on experience from previous crises:¹⁰

1. Psychosocial support for children who are experiencing trauma due to fear during the cyclone and loss of familiar environments and objects; and
2. Some children may require support as a result of neglect, abuse, exploitation, witnessing or experiencing GBV, and separation from families, all of which typically increase in crisis times.

- **Different ethnicities:**

Some affected areas are largely *i-Taukei* while others are largely Indo-Fijian. This has implications for translations of IEC materials, languages spoken by responders, and food distributed.

- **Inclusion in decision-making:**

In the haste to respond, decisions may be made quickly and without consideration of the actual needs of different groups. In order to Build Back Better and address inequities, women and members of marginalised groups need to be involved in decision-making. All responders must be reminded of the importance of assessing and addressing the needs of all groups in communities and involving them in the decisions that will affect their lives.

- **Marginalised groups:**

In the Northern Division, many people may not have had full-time jobs or been involved in large-scale cash crops but still had access to income-generation by working as occasional labourers or marketing vegetables or fruit twice a week. TC Yasa may have affected their access to cash at a time when it is most needed.

- **Remote rural areas:**

Isolated settlements away from town face added challenges due to the multiple impacts of TC Yasa. In addition to damaged houses, food sources have been destroyed and livelihoods lost with the destruction of crops and livestock. A number of communities are off-grid and reliant on solar systems that they have installed themselves. Solar systems may be damaged and a further concern for those still making payments for those systems is that their livelihoods from sugarcane and other crops has been lost. With restoration of services and distributions of food and other items being made to urban and accessible areas first, people in remote rural areas may be further marginalised.

⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development", United Nations, 2018, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/publication-disability-sdgs.html>

⁹ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/National-Domestic-Violence-helpline-record-a-significant-increase-in-calls-received-for-April-485xfr/>

¹⁰ OCHA SitRep#2, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/TC%20YASA%20-%20Sitrep%20%232%20-%202020%20Dec%202020.pdf>