



# YOUTH

IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION  
IN FIJI **RESEARCH REPORT**





**REPORT PREPARED BY:**

Iris Low and Leaine Robinson – *Collaborate Consulting Pte Limited (CoLAB)*

**Report Edited by:**

- Josefa Lalabalavu (*AHP Fiji Chairman*)
- Iliapi Tuwai (*ADRA Fiji Country Director*)
- Ana Alburquerque (*ADRA Fiji Programmes Director*)
- Christine Lemau (*ADRA Fiji Senior Programmes Manager*)
- Paulini Vakacegu (*ADRA Fiji AHP MERLI Officer*)
- Angelina Taufaga (*ADRA Fiji AHP TC Yasa MERLI Officer*)

**Front Cover Image:** Balekinaga youth group participating in a Disaster Risk Reduction Training

The publication was produced with the financial support of DFAT.  
Its contents are the sole responsibility of ADRA and do not necessarily reflect the views of DFAT.







## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
1. Introduction.....	9
2. Background.....	9
2.1 Youth in Fiji.....	9
2.1 Fiji's Humanitarian Response Context.....	10
2.2 Youth in Humanitarian Action in Fiji.....	12
3. Research Approach.....	13
3.1 Research objectives.....	13
3.2 Research questions.....	13
4. Methodology.....	14
4.1 Research Methods.....	14
4.2 Analysis.....	15
4.3 Ethical Practice.....	15
4.4 Limitations.....	15
5. Research Findings.....	16
6. Key considerations for enhancing youth participation in humanitarian action.....	33
Conclusion.....	35
Annexes.....	37
Annex 1: Terms of Reference.....	37
Annex 2: Research Plan.....	37
Annex 3: References.....	38

## ACRONYMS

<b>ADRA Fiji</b>	Fiji- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (with reference in the Research report as ADRA's capacity as the MERLI Lead under the Fiji AHP Country Committee
<b>AHP</b>	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
<b>AI</b>	Appreciative Inquiry
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona Virus Disease 2019
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>CWG</b>	Cash Working Group
<b>DIVA</b>	Diverse Voices and Action
<b>DCOSS</b>	District Council of Social Services
<b>FCOSS</b>	Fiji Council of Social Services
<b>FDPF</b>	Fiji Disabled Persons Federation
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FRCS</b>	Fiji Red Cross Society
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
<b>MERLI</b>	Monitoring Evaluation Research Learning and Innovation
<b>MoHMS</b>	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
<b>MYS</b>	Ministry of Youth and Sports
<b>NDMA</b>	National Disaster Management Act
<b>NDMC</b>	National Disaster Management Council
<b>NDMO</b>	National Disaster Management Office
<b>NEOC</b>	National Emergency Operation Centre
<b>OPD</b>	Office of Persons with Disability
<b>RPF</b>	Rainbow Pride Foundation Fiji
<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
<b>TC</b>	Tropical Cyclone
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team would like to express heartfelt appreciation to all those who shared their time, experience, and expertise to make the *'Good practices of involvement of youth in the humanitarian arena and feedback mechanics in the context of Fiji'* research possible, in particular, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency Fiji staff, in particular, Program Director Ana Alburquerque for the opportunity given to CoLAB to conduct this research. Special thanks to Christine Lemau, Senior Program Manager at ADRA Fiji for the overall support and guidance during the research as well as facilitating introductions to key stakeholders for interviews and the focus group discussions.

The evaluation team is deeply grateful to individuals who participated in interviews, focus group discussions, and completed the survey. The information shared has contributed greatly to understanding youth engagement in humanitarian action and what is needed to better support their participation.

The research team is inspired by the organisations that support youth participation and with the many initiatives of individual young men and women and groups of youth around the country and their contribution to humanitarian action. The research team acknowledges that the research was limited by time, budget and scope, and therefore should be considered as a basis for more in-depth research on youth engagement in humanitarian action in Fiji.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Humanitarian Partnership in Fiji program support has enabled the assigning of the Youth In Humanitarian Action in Fiji research to be conducted. Under AHP Fiji Country Committee Coordinator Plan International Fiji - ADRA provides the Fiji in country support in MERLI and Communications with the product commissioned the Research with the CoLAB Consultancy; intentions that the Research will provide informed approaches to building capacities with young people in humanitarian action, ensuring meaningful participation and inclusive engagements.

ADRA together with implementing partners as listed below;

1. Live and Learn Fiji/CARE Australia
2. ADRA Fiji (CAN DO Fiji) – supported by ADRA Australia and Caritas/CANDO Australia (CANDO local partners include: Salvation Army, Fiji Council of Churches, Caritas, Anglican Church, Ola Fou, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church)
3. Habitat for Humanity Fiji – in partnership with Habitat for Humanity Australia supported by Oxfam
4. Save the Children Fiji – supported by Save the Children Australia
5. Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF) – supported by PIA
6. Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) – supported by PIA
7. Empower Pacific – supported by ChildFund Australia via PIA
8. Oxfam in the Pacific – supported by Oxfam Australia
9. Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) – supported by ChildFund Australia via PIA

*Apart from out implementing partners being a key implementer with ADRA's intervention* a key sub-group within communities that ADRA works with, both in program delivery and as direct beneficiaries, are youth. ADRA Fiji commissioned this 'Good practices of involvement of youth in the humanitarian arena and feedback mechanics in the context of Fiji' research to document how youth have participated in humanitarian action in Fiji, what is enabling positive youth engagement in humanitarian action, and opportunities to enhance youth engagement in humanitarian action in Fiji.

The research was conducted during November 2021 and January 2022 and involved ADRA Fiji staff and a sample of 43 people in Fiji.

### What this research report does

- Documents how youth have participated in humanitarian action since 2019 and approaches that enabled positive youth engagement
- Documents the impact of COVID-19 on youth participation in humanitarian action and whether engagement approaches adapted as a result of the COVID-19 context
- Uses a qualitative approach depicting the voice of youth through feedback captured during interviews and an online survey, and secondary documentation on youth and humanitarian action in Fiji to demonstrate youth engagement in humanitarian action
- Identifies key considerations for enhancing youth participation in humanitarian action in Fiji

### Key findings

- **The research found that youth are participating in humanitarian response programming, and at all levels of the disaster cycle, from preparedness to recovery, including engaging at the policy level and in research, their participation is most visible in disaster response, compared to preparedness and recovery phases, and at humanitarian policy and decision-making spaces.** At the preparedness phase, youth are involved in training, information dissemination, planning, leading at community level to ensure vulnerable groups are looked after and ensure the safety of villages/communities. At the response phase, youth are involved in two key ways: 1) packaging, distribution of relief items, technical support to humanitarian actors, initial damage and needs assessment, assisting at evacuation centres and 2) Supporting referrals to service providers, establishing youth led virtual spaces and networks, providing psychosocial support. At the recovery phase, youth are helping communities with early recovery. Youth are also involved in research, issues-based engagement as advocates and activists through youth led networks on issues related to food security, climate change, inclusive humanitarian action and engaging at the policy level.
- **Research feel that more youth in Fiji are now engaged in humanitarian action.** Approximately 64% of online survey respondents agree and strongly agree that more youth in Fiji are now engaged in humanitarian action. This is also the view from KIIs, majority of who agree that youth are more visible in humanitarian action. Despite high engagement, stakeholders also expressed that youth are still not aware of nor understand the humanitarian response system and how to access these spaces.
- **The research found that while there is high youth engagement in humanitarian action, their engagement varies, is not equal and representative, and that the extent to which they engage is influenced by a number of factors** including: ethnicity, gender, geographic location of youth, ability and lack of support from the adults in youth's lives.
- **The major adaptation to youth engagement in humanitarian action since 2019 has been during COVID-19 where more youth are involved in COVID-19 response** as part of humanitarian organisation programs, and as volunteers supporting government's COVID-19 response efforts. Being involved in humanitarian action was also a means of getting an income for those youth whose livelihoods had been impacted by COVID-19. Stakeholders highlighted during interviews that there was an increase in the number of young people joining as volunteers, most of whom had lost their jobs due to COVID-19, were from single income families and so were looking for employment to supplement their lost income.
- **Youth were able to adapt to virtual ways of engaging as they were already confident and competent to participate and use online platforms and tools.** For example, Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji who were already using Facebook to engage with their 500 plus members in their network, continued to use Facebook messenger and email to engage with their members during disasters and COVID-19 response. The organisation believes that with digital technology, more young people are engaging and being reached.



- **Humanitarian and youth-led organisations adapted their programming to develop programs to meet the emerging needs of youth and changing context during COVID-19.** During interviews, stakeholders described how they adapted their programs and approaches in response to the priorities identified by youth impacted by COVID-19 such as delivering mental health, livelihoods focused programs, priorities identified by youth. Organisations also reported using tools such as the Kobo Tool for the first time, to document the experiences of girls and young women impacted by cyclones and COVID-19.
- **Engaging in humanitarian action is important to youth in Fiji.** Based on interviews and online survey responses, all research participants agree that engaging youth in humanitarian action in Fiji is important as youth are the future leaders and decision makers, leaders in their own right. In addition, youth should be involved in all aspects of development including humanitarian action that affects their lives, particularly in knowing what to do to prepare for and respond to disasters. Youth are also able to mobilise quickly to help people in the community who are vulnerable, helping to ensure no one is left behind during disaster times. In addition to their physical ability to move quickly and assist with response (distribution, evacuation centres, packing of relief items) youth also have strong community networks and alongside women, are often the ones in communities who care for and know who are the sick, vulnerable and marginalised in a community.
- **Approaches that are supporting youth engagement in humanitarian action:**
  - Embedding youth in formal organisation governance structures helps to promote meaningful engagement with youth, empowering them with decision-making and leadership roles.
  - Partnerships that are supportive of youth enables youth to claim and assert their rights as leaders.
  - Volunteerism is still recognised as a key opportunity for youth to gain valuable experience and capacity building, and build their networks.
  - Strengths based approach in leveraging youth's existing skills and expertise enables youth to mobilise quickly.
  - Leadership within organisations that understand the importance of youth and their contributions helps to keep youth motivated and engaged in programs.
  - Having good geographical outreach helps to ensure more diverse youth are engaged in programs.
  - Dedicated youth focused and youth led humanitarian programming that supports youth as leaders and ensures programs benefit diverse youth.
- **The research found that youth are engaging in feedback mechanics** through organisation structures and programming approaches (social media and dedicated online chat groups such as Facebook messenger, Viber, face-to-face meetings), where their feedback is informing humanitarian programming delivered by organisations. However engaging youth in feedback mechanisms is not consistent across humanitarian stakeholders and there is limited evidence on how youth perspectives inform humanitarian programming and decision-making, particularly at policy levels.
- **Barriers to effective youth engagement in humanitarian action**
  1. **Lack of inclusion in decision making:** Terms such as 'good leadership' were used by some of the key informants to describe the existing leadership barrier preventing youth from being involved in decision making processes and staying motivated to continue to be engaged throughout the response and recovery phases of humanitarian response programming. Closely linked to the issue of a leadership is the lack of a culture of positive engagement. For instance, young people who participated in the research felt that young people are rarely consulted before making a decision.



2. **Geographical and Cultural barriers:** Youth who reside outside of the urban areas are engaged in humanitarian action through their own youth groups affiliated to their villages, communities, or faith-based youth groups. Youth in urban areas have more affiliations to formal youth groups and established humanitarian organisations as well as opportunities for volunteerism. All (13 out of 13) participants in KIIs agreed that youth in different locations and ethnic groups do not participate equally in humanitarian action, either due to their geographic location, ethnicity, or cultural reservations. All (13 out of 13) participants also agreed that overwhelmingly it is the iTaukei youth that are involved in humanitarian action and that engaging with Indo-Fijian youth was more challenging due to cultural reservations in young people staying overnight in villages/settlements or working late at night, particularly for young women and this meant that organisations would need to provide the necessary assurance about security, transport, and safety.
3. **Power Dynamics and culture of silence** was also described as a barrier for youth participation, particularly in the iTaukei culture where young people are silenced and there is a fear to speak up due to the culture of respect.
4. **Perception that youth lack relevant capacity and expertise to effectively engage in humanitarian action:** In addition to the dominance of a culture that highly values social and cultural status, one of the most frequently brought up barriers to true and effective youth engagement in decision making in humanitarian action is the perception that youth lacked capacity and expertise. However, key informants and survey responders are implicit that young people should be part of the solution to the difficulties they face and in humanitarian action, not merely a problem to be resolved by others or just a set of helping hands.
5. **Financial resources:** The lack of financial resources as a major limiting factor to youth engagement were highlighted as a barrier by key informants and survey participants. Youth actively self-mobilise and engage in humanitarian action, most times as volunteers working with either no or low remuneration.

#### Key considerations for enhancing youth participation in humanitarian action

- **Young people should be at the centre of humanitarian action and be supported in their participation and leadership in responses.** The humanitarian system is dominated by established organisations and often fails to listen to, be accountable to, and be accessible to formal and informal youth groups. Strengthening young people's participation and leadership at all levels before, during and after emergencies, is crucial to advance localisation in an inclusive and effective manner.
- **Young people are first responders and must be included in decision making and leadership positions at every stage of humanitarian action.** Power dynamics too often exclude young people from decision-making spaces and reduce young people to being seen as mere labour or victims. It is essential to ensure youth representation on existing decision-making structures (for example community disaster preparedness committees and other community and faith-based structures), but also to support youth-led initiatives to be better recognised and integrated with existing decision-making processes, policies, and protocols.
- **Young people are uniquely placed to play a valuable and necessary role in humanitarian response and can be put in the driving seat for humanitarian response if their engagement is formalised in organisations and if they are engaged in training and mentoring programs.**
- **Partnerships that are supportive of youth enables youth to claim and assert their rights as leaders.** Partnerships that are based on mutual respect, where partners regard youth as leaders in their own right provides a strong basis for effective partnerships, and gives their organisation the confidence to approach partners to articulate the concerns and priorities of youth.

- **Strengths based approach in leveraging youths' existing skills and expertise enables youth to quickly mobilise.** Organisations should harness the skills and experience of diverse youth to enable delivery of more efficient and effective programs. Utilising youths' digital and technology savviness to mobilise resources including manpower through its networks can support immediate humanitarian response.
- **Having good geographic outreach helps to ensure more diverse youth are engaged in programs.** Organisations with a de-centralised approach to their engagement with youth, having locations across the country to help promote reach to diverse youth.





## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *'Good practices of involvement of youth in the humanitarian arena and feedback mechanics in the context of Fiji'* research commissioned by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Fiji within its' AHP Country Committee MERLI. The research acknowledges the role of youth in humanitarian action, as beneficiaries of humanitarian support, and their engagement in humanitarian action programs, processes, and systems. The research aims to document the lived experiences of youth in Fiji in engaging in humanitarian action, highlight strategies that are promoting positive youth engagement in humanitarian action, and identify areas for improvement.

ADRA Fiji contracted Iris Low and Leaine Robinson of CoLAB to conduct this research. The purpose of the research is to:

- To document how youth have participated in humanitarian action in Fiji between 2019 – 2022 and to identify approaches that enabled positive youth engagement, with particular focus on how these approaches adapted within the context of COVID-19.
- Identify lessons and provide recommendations for engaging Fijian youth in humanitarian action.
- Identify good practices of feedback and complaint mechanics in Fiji in the context of humanitarian action and youth involvement

This report outlines the research findings and proposes considerations to strengthen youth engagement in humanitarian response programming. Findings reflect feedback gathered from youth and key stakeholders on how youth are engaging in humanitarian action, what is working to enable positive engagement, and ways humanitarian action can better promote youth engagement. The research team hopes these considerations to enhance youth engagement can help inform ADRA Fiji's future humanitarian programming in Fiji.



## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Youth in Fiji

Fiji has a very young population, in 2019-2020, over half of Fiji's population are under the age of 30<sup>1</sup>. Youth in Fiji are defined as those between the ages of 15 and 35 years and in 2017 comprised 32% of the population<sup>2</sup>. Over 50% of youth live in urban centres. Within urban areas, there is a relatively even proportion of females and males. There are higher proportions of young women amongst 15-19yrs (50.7%) and 20-24yrs (50.2%) age groups. Young men make up higher proportions of the 25-29yrs (50.4%) and 30-34yrs (50.6%) age groups<sup>3</sup>.

In 2012, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) was created with the mandate to develop youth and sports policies to support the administration and delivery of government's programs in the youth and sports sector in Fiji<sup>4</sup>. Fiji has a (draft) National Youth Policy (2017) which provides the overarching framework on advancing empowerment of youth to participate and contribute to Fiji's development. The draft Policy reflects the needs of youth, is inclusive and is aligned to key national frameworks and policies, namely the 20-Year National Development Plan (2017-2036) and the National Youth and Sports Strategic Plan (2018-2022).

The National Youth Council, originally established in 1975 with a mandate to advise the Minister of the MYS on issues of concern to young people, became an independent autonomous organisation in 2016 and acts as a consultative and coordinating organisation for its members, advocating the needs and issues of youth, and supporting the implementation of youth focused activities<sup>5</sup>. The Council's role is mandated in the National Youth Policy (Section 5.5 and 16.5.1) and the MYS Strategic Plan<sup>6</sup>.

There is a myriad of issues that Fijian youth are concerned about. The cost of living, family problems and the price of property were some concerns of youth ahead of Fiji's 2018 election<sup>7</sup>. Gender disparities in labour force participation rates of young women and young men in Fiji exceed 30%. Young Fijian women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience not being employed, in education or training opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

Young people in Fiji are increasing their participation, in diverse ways, either as activists, or as part of collectives, through formal and informal networks and organisations. There are youth-led organisations, active in areas of mental health, gender and human rights discrimination, climate change and environmental conservation<sup>9</sup>.

At the community level, youth participate in schools, tertiary institutions, village, and community youth clubs, including faith based groups. Volunteering exists as the most common form of youth participation – within civil society groups, local communities, and the church. The National Volunteer Centre, established in 2010 is supported by the Fiji Council

<sup>1</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey Main Report. Retrieved from: [https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/HIES\\_2019-20/2019-20\\_HIES\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/HIES_2019-20/2019-20_HIES_Main_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2017) 2017 Population and Housing Census Release. Retrieved from: <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/2007-census-of-population-and-housing.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Youthpolicy.org (2014). Fiji youth factsheet. Retrieved from: <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/fiji/>

<sup>5</sup> National Youth Council of Fiji Facebook page. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/NYCFiji/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> RNZ (2018) Mixed voter mood among young ahead of Fiji elections. Retrieved from: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/368940/mixed-voter-mood-among-young-ahead-of-fiji-elections>

<sup>8</sup> International Labour Organisation (2020). Pacific Labour Market Review 2020. Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/suva/publications/WCMS\\_754824/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/suva/publications/WCMS_754824/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Australian National University. Patrick Vakaoti. Fiji elections and the youth vote- token or active citizenship. Retrieved from: <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p337333/pdf/ch082.pdf>



of Social Services (FCOSS) and Vodafone ATH Foundation promotes volunteerism amongst unemployed young people as a path to securing employment. Many young people engage in some form of volunteering in their different settings, thus making significant community contributions. Youth-led organisations are different from the informal youth-led groups and are more focused on issues. Groups such as Kids Link Fiji, Youth Champs for Mental Health, Young People's Concerned Network, and the Drodrolagi Movement were some of the first established youth-led organisations in Fiji. Programs provided by Leadership Fiji and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Young Women's Forum and Emerging Leaders Forum are focused on promoting leadership of diverse youth across Fiji.

The reduction in voting age to 18 years saw young people vote for the first time in the 2014 elections. This brought to the forefront, young political activists, and movements such as 'Be the Change' campaign, and the young women led Fiji Young Women's Forum and Fiji Youth Democracy movement established to promote critical discussions amongst youth on democracy, human rights, and the constitution.

## 2.1 Fiji's Humanitarian Response Context

According to the WorldRiskIndex, Fiji is ranked as the 12th most hazardous country in the world based on its high exposure to natural hazards and relatively low capacity to cope with disasters<sup>10</sup>. Analysis from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts that Fiji has a 70% chance of experiencing a significant<sup>11</sup> disaster related to natural hazards on an annual basis<sup>12</sup>. The Government of Fiji estimates that cyclones and floods are likely to result in an average annual loss of 5.8% GDP<sup>13</sup>. Fiji has experienced multiple shocks, between 2000-2016, a total of 41 climate related disasters occurred in Fiji, resulting in 237 deaths and loss and damage of FJD3.2 billion<sup>14</sup>. Fiji's humanitarian response has focused on responding to consecutive tropical cyclones since 2019, including the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. For Fiji, the COVID-19 pandemic started during the end of the 2020 cyclone season, resulting in Fiji responding to two disasters that year, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold and COVID-19.

Within this context, Fiji's humanitarian response is characterised by key systems, policies, and frameworks:

- National cluster system comprising eight clusters: health and nutrition; shelter; education; food security; safety and protection; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); logistics; and public works and utilities
- Key policies and legislation: National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) (1998); National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018- 2030); National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management (2017); Tsunami Response Plan; Education in Emergency Policy (2014); National Adaptation Plan; and Standard Operating Procedures- Fiji National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC).

Fiji's disaster and humanitarian response at the divisional level includes a de-centralised approach with Commissioners in each Division assuming authority and responsibility of divisional disaster committees in times of disaster response, reporting up to the National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)<sup>15</sup>. In the wake of TC Winston and COVID-19, Fiji has adopted innovative disaster responsive social protection, through the provision of top-up payments (cash and food voucher) to existing social welfare beneficiaries and cash assistance to people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also informal working groups amongst humanitarian actors such as the Fiji Cash Working Group that aims to ensure a more coordinated approach to humanitarian response specifically with agencies delivering cash and voucher assistance initiatives.

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in Fiji are also key humanitarian actors in preparedness, response, and early recovery efforts. FCOSS and its sub-national bodies, the District Council of Social Services (DCOSS) is mandated by the NDMA to coordinate civil society during a disaster response. The Fiji Red Cross Society (FRCS) is auxiliary to the Government of Fiji in delivering emergency and humanitarian assistance and other care related services to people and communities of Fiji. The organisation's work is delivered through a network of 16 Branches and two Divisional Centres across Fiji. Other key

<sup>10</sup> UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> The analysis defines significant as a disaster which involves 10 or more deaths, 100 or more people affected, declaration of a state of emergency, or a call for international assistance.

<sup>12</sup> UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Republic of Fiji (2019). Voluntary National Review: Fiji's progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25011Fiji\\_VNR\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25011Fiji_VNR_2019_final.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> IIED Winterford, K and Gero, A (2018). Humanitarian response for development in Fiji: lessons from Tropical Cyclone Winston. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/10853IIED.pdf>

CSOs that have humanitarian focused programming include Save the Children Fiji, ADRA (Fiji), Live and Learn Environment Education (Fiji), and organisations also bring a specific focus within humanitarian response such as Empower Pacific, Medical Services Pacific, Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF), CARE in the Pacific, in protection and psychosocial support; and femLINKPacific in promoting women's access to disaster and climate change information through a network of women community leaders. Key donor funded programs such as the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) Disaster Ready program includes a consortium of International Non Governmental Organisations (INGO) and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) working to promote more inclusive disaster preparedness and response.

The Fiji CSO Alliance for COVID-19 Humanitarian Response, made up of eight local CSOs (Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Citizen's Constitutional Forum, Social Empowerment and Education Program, femLINKPacific, and Rainbow Pride Foundation (RPF)) formed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in Fiji and is providing immediate relief to marginalised communities affected by the pandemic, including advocating on emerging and existing humanitarian and human rights issues such as food security, access to justice, health and education services.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Youth in Humanitarian Action in Fiji

Youth are among groups of people more severely affected by natural hazards compared to people who have more resources, wealth, and power. Along with women, children, elderly, people with disabilities, people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation, youth are more likely to be unemployed, have less access to resources to help them recover from shocks such as natural disasters or adapt to climate change<sup>17</sup>.

Global evidence asserts that youths are particularly vulnerable to impacts of economic crisis and natural hazards. In Fiji, unemployment among young people aged 15-24 years pre-COVID-19 was 18.2% and was projected to increase between 29% to 37% by the end of 2020 as COVID-19 impacts employment of young people, disrupts education and training and challenges to young people entering the labour market<sup>18</sup>. However, there is limited evidence about how natural hazards directly affect youth in Fiji, including on issues such as employment<sup>19</sup>.

Despite their vulnerability, youth in Fiji are not passive bystanders when it comes to humanitarian action. Youth in Fiji are visible, playing active roles in humanitarian response efforts including in cyclone response and COVID-19 response.

<sup>16</sup> Devpolicy blog by Nalini Singh and Maryann Lockington (2020). Fiji civil society driving the COVID-19 humanitarian response. Retrieved from: <https://devpolicy.org/fiji-civil-society-solidarity-driving-the-covid-19-humanitarian-response-20200604-2/>

<sup>17</sup> UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The Fiji Times (2020) Youths jobless rate may go up-Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.fijitimes.com/youths-jobless-rate-may-go-up-report/>

<sup>19</sup> UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>

Examples of youth in humanitarian action include:

- FRCS, volunteer, and staff (75% of which are young people) played an active role in Fiji's COVID-19 response, working alongside the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MoHMS) on activities such as vaccination roll out, assisting with vaccination registrations, data entry and helping to tackle vaccine hesitancy and the spread of misinformation about the virus.<sup>20</sup>
- Youths of Veikoba Settlement in Nasinu rallied together to support the most vulnerable in their community during the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2021 by hosting a youth food drive for the elderly. This was an initiative of FCOSS's Nasinu DCOSS.<sup>21</sup>
- Mataikadawa youth group, a settlement in Navua, registered as a youth group in 2020 and is made up of youth who were laid off work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since registering, the group has managed to buy off two fishponds from the village, cultivate one acre of land and starting planting vegetables and root crops which they have since harvested and sold as their income generating initiative.<sup>22</sup>
- Since restrictions lifted in September 2021, Youth Champs for Mental Health team have been visiting local communities raising awareness around mental health/wellness during a pandemic. These community dialogues are aimed at raising awareness around mental health, the services that are readily available and the importance of support, coping mechanisms and self care.<sup>23</sup>
- Rainbow Pride Foundation PRIDE Hub leaders living in a remote community in the highlands in the border of Tailevu and Naitasi led the Vatukarasa Village/Coloi Food drive because of the loss of income for the people at Vatukarasa Village with the aim to assist 64 families including families with infants, expecting mothers and the elderly with food packs.<sup>24</sup>

Further examples of youth engagement in humanitarian action can be found in Table 1.

In addition to roles at the response level, youth are also engaging at the policy level, using social media as a platform to advocate more inclusive humanitarian action<sup>25</sup>, and at government convened dialogue spaces to advocate climate justice issues<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Reliefweb. UNOCHA (2021). Pacific: Young people encouraged to join the fight against the pandemic. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/fiji/pacific-young-people-encouraged-join-fight-against-pandemic>

<sup>21</sup> Fiji Council of Social Services Facebook post June 1, 2021. Accessed from: [https://m.facebook.com/FijiCOSS/posts/4114500095282079?locale2=hi\\_IN](https://m.facebook.com/FijiCOSS/posts/4114500095282079?locale2=hi_IN)

<sup>22</sup> The Fijian Government. 2020. Group Sets Example of Youth Empowerment. Accessed from: <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/Feature-Stories/Group-Sets-Example-of-Youth-Empowerment>

<sup>23</sup> Youth Champs for Mental Health Facebook post. October 12 2021. Accessed from: <https://www.facebook.com/youthchamps4mentalhealth>

<sup>24</sup> Rainbow Pride Foundation 4 LGBTIQ Rights and Equality in Fiji Facebook post. June 25 2021. Accessed from: <https://www.facebook.com/rainbowpridefoundation>

<sup>25</sup> In 2019, Youth Activist and Political Candidate Leslie Tikotikoca advocated the need for more accessible evacuation centres and inclusive disaster response in an Facebook post. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/meetleslienfp>

<sup>26</sup> In March 2021 Two hundred Fijian youths participated in a three-day National Youth Climate Action Summit aimed at advancing youth-led community initiatives, and gathering youth perspectives on Fiji's Climate Change Bill. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/hundreds-fijian-youth-add-their-voice-national-summit-nations-climate-agenda>



## 3. RESEARCH APPROACH

### 3.1 Research objectives

The research aims to document the experiences of youth engaging in humanitarian action in Fiji including how approaches have adapted within the context of COVID-19. The research seeks to understand what approaches are working well to promote youth engagement in humanitarian action, with a focus on feedback and complaint mechanisms. The findings from the research will help to inform ADRA Fiji's future programming to support youth engagement in humanitarian action.

The objectives of the research as outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) are:

- To document how youth have participated in humanitarian action in Fiji between 2019 – 2022 and to identify approaches that enabled positive youth engagement, with particular focus on how these approaches adapted within the context of COVID-19.
- Identify lessons and provide recommendations for engaging Fijian youth in humanitarian action.
- Identify good practices of feedback and complaint mechanics in Fiji in the context of humanitarian action and youth involvement

### 3.2 Research questions

The research aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How have youth in Fiji participated in humanitarian response programming/humanitarian action/disaster cycle and how has this evolved since 2019?
2. How did youth participation adapt and shift ways of working within the context of COVID-19?
3. Why is engaging in humanitarian action important to youth in Fiji? What has enabled positive youth engagement in humanitarian action?
4. What are the barriers/constraints to effective youth engagement in humanitarian action?
5. What are the opportunities for future youth participation in humanitarian action in Fiji?
6. What are key considerations for youth participation in humanitarian action in Fiji?

The research integrated the following cross cutting issues to ensure an inclusive approach to the research: rural/urban; communities/settlements; disability; gender equality; diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC).







## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Methods

The research was qualitative, drawing from both primary and secondary sources of data and was guided by the use of Appreciative Inquiry theoretical framework.<sup>27</sup> Research methods included document review of 14 publications from sector-wide based literature; four KIIs with representatives from CSOs, two FGDs with youth engaged in humanitarian action and one CSO FGD. A online survey was completed by 30 youth. A total of 43 people (23 Male, 20 Female and 7 persons with disability) and six CSOs participated in the research. This report contains two stories of successful youth engagement in humanitarian action, at the individual level and at the organisation level, connected to a youth and organisation we interviewed. Social media listening was conducted linked to the stories of success as well as to supplement secondary data. Interviews and FGDs were largely conducted remotely except for one FGD which was conducted face to face.



<sup>27</sup> Appreciative Inquiry theoretical framework takes a strengths-based approach to identify what is working well, what have been the successes, what has enabled this success and how to build on successes to improve the future.



## 4.2 Analysis

Qualitative data from documents, interview transcripts and social listening excerpts were analysed using a research framework to answer the key research questions. Data was compared and contrasted to build an understanding of similarities and differences between stakeholders. In the drafting of the research findings, learnings from interviews with CSOs and Youth as well as survey responses from youth were the primary focus while the document review provided supplementary material.

For the purpose of this research, the focus is youth between the ages of 18-35 years. This research aims to document perspectives of diverse Fijian youth. This will be done by targeting CSOs that have reach to youth with disabilities, youth in rural/urban/communities/settlements and LGBTIQ+. The survey was disseminated through CSOs that have diverse reach to youth.

## 4.3 Ethical Practice

The consultants ensured relevant ethical and culturally appropriate considerations were adhered to by acquiring prior approval to conduct interviews with youth, facilitated through the relevant CSOs; ensuring interview times were organised according to what was most appropriate for the stakeholder group; obtaining informed consent and involving ADRA Fiji program staff to discuss findings and recommendations, to validate, and ensure these are relevant and feasible. Initial findings were presented to ADRA Fiji prior to drafting of the report.

## 4.4 Limitations

There are several acknowledged limitations to the research.

**Sample size:** A limited sample of data sources across Fiji was used due to time and budget constraints. While the KIIs and FGDs conducted provided rich learning, we do not claim that our findings are representative of all geographic regions and ethnic groups across Fiji nor do the participants represent the broader demographic of youth, including organisations who engage with youth in humanitarian action.

**Availability of Stakeholders:** The research team relied on ADRA Fiji to make introductions to selected CSOs for interviews, FGDs and for dissemination of the survey. Due to competing priorities of ADRA Fiji and availability of stakeholders at the time of the research, the data collection period was extended to accommodate the target number of KIIs, FGDs and survey respondents. The research team was also not able to interview government representatives and the document review and social media listening enabled the research to capture government initiatives that support youth in humanitarian action, mostly shared in media articles.

**Representation:** While the research team interviewed a representative from a CSO that advocates for the human rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Plus (LGBTIQ+) persons and the survey was disseminated to its members, survey respondents did not self-identify and as such the total number of persons with diverse SOGIESC is not shown in this research although the research includes their perspectives.

**Remote data collection:** Lastly, interviews conducted remotely limits the ability for building rapport with participants compared to a face-to-face interview however CSOs who participated in the research and facilitated youth participation were known to the research team and this helped ease into the KIIs and FGDs. The research team has experience working with youth and utilised this experience to build rapport with youth participants by initiating informal *talanoa* at the start of the interview.

Recognising the challenges associated with the research, the research team recommends that further research be conducted in this area to gather more diverse and representative views.

<sup>28</sup> Appreciative Inquiry theoretical framework takes a strengths-based approach to identify what is working well, what have been the successes, what has enabled this success and how to build on successes to improve the future.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF (2021). Hundreds of Fijian youth add their voice in national summit on the nation's climate change agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/hundreds-fijian-youth-add-their-voice-national-summit-nations-climate-agenda>



## 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings are presented according to the research questions in 3.2. Findings are informed by secondary data collected through the literature review and social media listening tool; and primary data collected through KIIs and the online survey.

### 5.1 Youth participation in humanitarian response programming since 2019

*“The front liners are majority young people.....and in past cyclones – yes. Our volunteers are all young people – at the centre of humanitarian work” Key informant*

The research was asked to document how youth have participated in humanitarian response programming since 2019. The research revealed that youth in Fiji are participating in humanitarian action programming in various ways throughout the disaster cycle in preparedness, response, and recovery. The research revealed that youth participation is most active in disaster response, compared to preparedness and recovery phases, and humanitarian policy and decision-making levels.





The different ways youth are participating in humanitarian action programming is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: How youth are participating in humanitarian response programming

DISASTER PHASE	EXAMPLES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION
<b>Preparedness</b>	<p><b>Training, information dissemination, planning, leading at community level to ensure vulnerable groups are looked after and safety of villages/communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of preparation for disasters, the FRCS trains youth volunteers in emergency response (first aid, community engagement and advocacy programs). Volunteers register at branches nearest to them and representatives from each location at the divisional and national trainings.</li> <li>Spinal Injuries Association train youth as technicians for assistive devices.</li> <li>The Alliance for Future Generations - Fiji communicates with members, keeping them updated on weather bulletins and if bad weather is approaching via their 250+ member Facebook messenger chat group.</li> </ul>
<b>Response</b>	<p><b>Packaging, distribution of relief items, technical support to humanitarian actors, initial damage and needs assessment, assisting at evacuation centres</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority of online survey respondents stated that are currently involved in humanitarian action as volunteers with NGOs (FRCS, FCOSS-DCOSS, RPF, ADRA (Fiji) providing response work (distributing food packs, dignity kits).</li> <li>Representatives from national Office of Persons with Disability (OPD) make up response teams to conduct needs assessment, data collection, response interventions such as delivery of food packs/groceries, assistive device maintenance or replacement. Organisations also provide technical assistance on disability inclusion and response to other organisations and accompany other organisations as part of their response team.</li> <li>For FRCS, in the first 72 hours, young people are there to help in stock movement, assessment and distribution to affected communities.</li> <li>FemLINKPacific distributed over 100 cash vouchers and personal protective equipment to affected women, including young women, from their networks.</li> <li>Assisting Government's COVID-19 response: FRCS volunteers assisted with vaccination roll out administration (vaccine registration, management of sites, details of people, crowd management, verification for screening, follow up for COVID+ patients, follow up on swabbing), data input for MOHMS reporting, drafting release letters, data verification and assisted Ministry of Economy to verify vaccination status of applicants under the cash assistance program.</li> </ul> <p><b>Supporting referrals to service providers, establishing youth led virtual spaces and networks, providing psychosocial support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I work as a counsellor and provide psychosocial services as part of disaster response and recovery" (online survey respondent).</li> <li>FRCS volunteers are trained in Psychological First Aid so that they are equipped as first responders to address communities psychosocial related needs during disasters.</li> <li>Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji disseminated Gender Based Violence related information to their members after disasters.</li> </ul>
<b>Recovery</b>	<p><b>Helping communities with early recovery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DIVA for Equality Fiji provides suicide prevention, counselling, food vouchers to Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender women, including young women. The organisation also builds resilient houses for those affected by the past cyclones, engaging women as builders who have gone through training with the Australia Pacific Technical College and distributes farming equipment to women in the Northern Division (Bua, Cakaudrove).</li> <li>Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji mobilised resources to assist their members who lost jobs as a result of COVID-19 with cash assistance to pay their bills, household needs, and purchase food.</li> <li>RPF provides sustainable livelihood trainings, backyard gardening and training to youths as part of their livelihood programs- turning this into commercial farming ventures.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy and advocacy, research, and data collection</b>	<p><b>Research, issues-based engagement as advocates and activists through youth led networks and youth focused programs</b></p> <p>The research revealed that youth are involved as researchers, advocates, on issues related to food security, climate change, inclusive humanitarian action, and engaging at policy level spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPF in partnership with Edge Effect conducted research titled "Down by the River" to document Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender persons experiences in disasters.</li> <li>FemLINKPacific is focused on documenting the experiences of women, including young women. The organisation conducted a 'Where are the girls' campaign, convening five dialogues dedicated to asking young women about their experiences during TC Yasa and TC Ana and the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their Women's Weather Watch program, the organisation provides a platform for women and young women to talk about disaster preparedness and how they cope with disasters in their community. Women's stories are broadcasted over the organisation's radio station.</li> <li>Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji report that youth studying climate change programs at local universities are also engaged as researchers to conduct research on food security</li> <li>In 2019, Marica Risiata of youth lead organisation, Ignite4Change and a Fiji delegate at the Legislating and Policy-making for Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management Workshop in the Pacific advocated the following "With their ideas, energy and ingenuity to develop new and innovative solutions, young people have the power to improve emergency response at all levels and help build durable solutions for their communities"<sup>30</sup></li> <li>In 2021, two hundred youth from across Fiji participated in a National Youth Climate Action Summit aimed at advancing youth-led community initiatives and youth inputs to the Fiji Government's Climate Change Bill. Fiji's Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, while officiating at the event, expressed the following: "your passion is precisely what the world needs, and your activism and ideas will be what finds solutions to the problems that those before you have created"<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Fiji Red Cross Society.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji.

## 5.2 Research respondents feel that more youth in Fiji are now engaged in humanitarian action.

Approximately 64% of online survey respondents agree and strongly agree that more youth in Fiji are now engaged in humanitarian action. This is also the view from KIIs, majority of who agree that youth are more visible in humanitarian action and their participation is most active in disaster response, compared to disaster preparedness and recovery, including at the policy or decision-making level.

*“They are part of the response. They help to mobilise the community to attend our training; are involved in distribution of food packs after natural disasters and that’s how we have been working with youth; I agree more are involved but only at disasters response level they are not at the decision-making table”* Key informant.

Despite high engagement, stakeholders also expressed that youth are still not aware of nor understand the humanitarian response system and how to access these spaces. Stakeholders highlighted how participation in spaces was also unequal and dependent on a range of factors. For example, youth located in urban areas, or close to government and NGO services and programs; and with access to resources such as internet, a space to meet, are often ones more able to or aware of how to engage in humanitarian action.

*“I work a lot with young people- most times during humanitarian crisis but the response is - we are not engaged and there is no relevant communication to us. They [government, CSOs, NGOs] only get youth who are active in spaces and known to be part of the movement. For us, most of our members are still new to the spaces. For example, when asked if they want to get involved during COVID-19 most of them said they don’t know how to access these spaces...lack of knowledge about how disaster and the humanitarian system works”* Key informant.

The research found that while there is high youth engagement in humanitarian action, their engagement varies, is not equal and representative, and due to varying factors:

### (i) Ethnicity and gender

The research revealed that ethnicity and gender play a role in influencing the extent to which youth from different ethnic groups, and of different genders, participate in humanitarian action. Majority of stakeholders highlighted how participation of Indo-Fijian youth, and youth groups was sometimes not representative in humanitarian action. Young women were also identified as a group that were not as visible in humanitarian action.

*“I would say no, youth do not participate equally in humanitarian action. For example, Indo-Fijian participates very differently to indigenous Fijian. Very different upbringings, for indigenous Fijian it is more communal- Solesolevaki model- through community and church whereas Indo-Fijian often the pressure is to get educated and get a job. So, ethnicity and culture and plays a key role”* Key informant.

*“For Indo- Fijian youth, you see less young women- for example in the North just my observation wise it is very limited- traditional- not a lot of young people are allowed to leave their homes including within the convening spaces. Very limited young women from this group participating”* Key informant.

### (ii) Geographic location of youth

Stakeholders interviewed highlighted that youth located in urban areas, close to services and programs, were able to access and participate in humanitarian action compared to youth in rural, maritime or outer islands. Stakeholders are also more inclined to target youth located in urban areas to participate in

humanitarian programs, meaning youth in other areas miss out and are not represented in humanitarian action spaces, including not having the opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge about humanitarian programming, and disaster risk management.

*“It sometimes really depends on which community and where we engage. For example, during TC Yasa, we mostly only engaged ITaukei youths and communities.....but then when we went to the Western Division, there was more engagement with Indo-Fijian youth because we were dealing with Indo-Fijian communities and we needed Hindi speaking people”* Key informant.

*“Urban centre young people getting involved is very popular, but this is still less in rural areas”* Focus group discussion respondent.

### (iii) Ability and lack of support from adults

During interviews stakeholders highlighted that a lack of support from the adults in the youths’ lives can create a barrier for youth participation. For specific sub-groups of youth, such as youth with disability, this also means further disadvantage from being able to participate in their development.

*“Youth with disability do not have a say because they rely on their families to make those decisions”* Focus group discussion respondent

## 5.3 COVID-19 and the impact on youth participation in humanitarian action

*“Youth are engaged more in COVID-19 and on humanitarian and disaster response this has been the change we have seen”* Key informant

The major adaptation to youth engagement in humanitarian action since 2019 has been during COVID-19 where more youth are involved in COVID-19 response as part of humanitarian organisation programs, and as volunteers supporting government’s COVID-19 response efforts. Being involved in humanitarian action was also a means of getting an income for those youth whose livelihoods had been impacted by COVID-19. Stakeholders highlighted during interviews that there was an increase in the number of young people joining as volunteers, most of whom had lost their jobs due to COVID-19, were from single income families and so were looking for employment to supplement their lost income.

Stakeholders also expressed how youth are quick to mobilise and respond when there is a need to provide help in their community:

*“When there is a call out to help with disaster response or recovery, young people are there....with COVID-19 I saw that through the FCOSS Lami DCOSS group, their food ration distribution was from their own pocket. Those members not affected by COVID-19, some of them were helping and paying from their own pocket”* Key informant.

Youth were able to adapt to virtual ways of engaging as they were already confident and competent to participate and use online platforms and tools. For the FRCS, the move to online ways of engagement meant equipping the organisation and their volunteers with the relevant infrastructure and resources to be able to engage effectively. The organisation purchased conference facilities, desktop computers, internet Wi-Fi for Branches and recharge cards for volunteers. They relied heavily on online chat groups, and different tools such as google documents to communicate and share information as an organisation. According to the organisation’s experience, the sudden shift to online platforms was *“not a culture shock for them as they were young people and knew how to work with their phones”*<sup>30</sup>. For Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji they were already using Facebook to engage with their 500 plus members in their network, and continued to use Facebook messenger and email to engage with their members during disasters and COVID-19 response. The organisation believes that with digital technology, more young people are engaging and being reached. For example, one of the organisation’s partners, youth led organisation Youth Champs for Mental Health, provides virtual counselling sessions, which helps to reach youth in a safer and more cost effective way.<sup>31</sup>

Humanitarian and youth-led organisations adapted their programming to develop programs to meet the emerging needs of youth during COVID-19. Organisations have adapted their programs and approaches to meet the changing COVID-19 context and its impacts on youth:

- **Rainbow Pride Foundation Fiji**

During COVID-19, RPF adjusted their mandate to doing more humanitarian action. From awareness raising on human rights, the organisation has started doing sustainable livelihood trainings, backyard gardening and training and turning this into commercial farming ventures which include youth. The organisation has also increased their work in mental health, an issue that was identified by their youth members:

*“During COVID-19, they (youth) really found it hard, confining, they were struggling and saying that this is a problem for them. So from 2022, we will have a new mental health project to help support our youth in this area”* Key informant.

RPF is also engaging with the Youth Entrepreneurs Scheme to provide training to their youth members, and working on inclusive climate change and humanitarian action through the development of SOGIESC and humanitarian action policy.

- **femLINKPacific**

As part of their COVID-19 response, femLINKPacific used the Kobo toolbox for the first time to gather stories from girls about their COVID-19 experiences. According to the organisation representative, using new humanitarian related tools like Kobo has been a positive experience in helping to reach more girls and women to share their stories:

*“We normally engage in collecting stories, interviewing women for radio programs with this program” “Where are the girls”, it is actually the first time for us to do data collection as convenors, usually our M&E team does this. When we use Kobo toolbox, we are gathering more reach and getting individual perspectives and the data collection is very interesting and varies from urban centre to semi urban and rural – they are being affected in different ways by COVID-19. Stories shared were so emotional”* Key informant.

Another first for the organisation, and something they regard as a success was being involved in delivering food rations and farming tools for women in communities which they report have helped those who lost their jobs during COVID-19, to develop their backyard gardens to help sustain them during the pandemic.

## 5.4 Engaging in humanitarian action is important to youth in Fiji

**Based on interviews and online survey responses, all research participants agree that engaging youth in humanitarian action in Fiji is important** as youth are the future leaders and decision makers, leaders in their own right. In addition, youth should be involved in all aspects of development including humanitarian action that affects their lives, particularly in knowing what to do to prepare for and respond to disasters. Youth are also able to mobilise quickly to help people in the community who are vulnerable, helping to ensure no one is left behind during disaster times. In addition to their physical ability to move quickly and assist with response (distribution, evacuation centres, packing of relief items) youth also have strong community networks and alongside women, are often the ones in communities who care for and know who are the sick, vulnerable and marginalised in a community.

The following quotes from youth in survey responses and interviews reflect why engaging in humanitarian action is important to youth in Fiji:

- *“I strongly believe that engaging our youth in the field is important so that when it comes to crisis like COVID-19, we as the youth are well versed on what to do”*
- *“We are the most mobile hence we can get the work done at a faster rate”*
- *“It can be a life changing experience being a humanitarian, learning lessons such as to be humble, to love, and support.....in this field we try and put ourselves in the victims shoes who are facing many problems”*

**The research found that various approaches at individual, community, organisational, and partnership levels are helping to promote positive engagement of youth in humanitarian action in Fiji. These approaches are helping to promote youths’ leadership role, and provide a platform for them to advocate for more inclusive humanitarian action.**

*“Young people only stay in spaces where they are being heard and there is meaningful engagement.”* Key informant



## Case Study 1: Lavetanalagi Seru

Advocating for inclusive climate justice and humanitarian action at national, regional, and global levels

**Including diverse voices and experiences around the humanitarian action decision-making table can help make a significant difference to addressing complex issues and ensuring humanitarian action is inclusive and transformative.**



For 29 year old Lavetanalagi Seru, seeing the strengths, skills and experiences that youth, in particular LGBTQI community members have to contribute to building a safer and inclusive Fijian society inspires him to advocate in community, national, and international spaces to support the inclusion of more diverse youth in all phases of humanitarian action- from initial disaster preparedness, to response and recovery, and more broadly, ensuring youth meaningfully participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives.

Lavetanalagi is a youth leader and climate justice activist with a background in youth development, gender, human rights and SOGIESC inclusion in humanitarian programming. Lavetanalagi is the Co-Founder and Coordinator of the Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji, a youth led network advocating sustainable and inclusive development. Between 2018-2021 Lavetanalagi managed the Rainbow Pride Foundation (Fiji) SOGIESC inclusion in DRR and humanitarian action program, aimed at building the capacity of humanitarian actors in Fiji to be more inclusive of LGBTQI people, an issue he is very passionate about.

*“How I became involved in the humanitarian action space began out of my passion of working with youth, and later with marginalised groups such as LGBTQI people - and the realisation that these groups continue to be marginalised and pushed further to the peripheries of society, more so during times of disasters. I began to volunteer and work for organisations such as the Rainbow Pride Foundation and Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality to understand how we can bring the issues of these vulnerable groups to policy decision making spaces and ensure that any intervention takes into consideration the needs of these groups.”*

Lavetanalagi has worked on humanitarian action in Fiji at community, and national levels, involved in cyclone response work, training local stakeholders on how to ensure their response activities and programmes are inclusive of LGBTQI people. He has trained government officials working at Emergency Operation Centres and contributed to the review of key national policies and legislation on disaster management, using these spaces as an opportunity to raise awareness and advocate for the differential needs, vulnerabilities and risks that LGBTQI people experience during times of disasters.

He believes it is important for humanitarian and development organisations to consult and work closely with LGBTQI organisations in Fiji who have the relevant experience, skills, and knowledge from their years of working with communities on the ground.

*“Promoting more inclusive humanitarian action also requires organisations to embed inclusion issues such as youth participation, disability inclusion, gender equality and SOGIESC in their practices and policies. This will help ensure services, programs and activities delivered address the needs of diverse people in communities”*

Lavetanalagi has also advocated and presented at numerous international webinars, panel discussions and events on youth participation in climate and humanitarian action. Most recently he attended as a Pacific youth and human rights activist at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, as part of the Pacific delegation Pacific Islands Climate Action Network.

### How can stakeholders better support inclusive youth participation in humanitarian action in Fiji?

*“It is important that communication channels are clear, and how we engage with youth to ensure there is mutual benefit. Listen to youth- what they can contribute, what support they need to do the work successfully- this is one of the key things we advocate in our work, to make sure youth are included from the start – from consultation and design phase, right through to implementation, and monitoring, evaluation and learning, where in the process we are also building a cadre of youth leaders who will be able to effectively coordinate and lead (locally-led) humanitarian action work. If you want to include youth in your programming, include them from the start, and find out what their priorities are and how your work will support them to achieve that”*

This case study was developed based on content from:

[https://www.42d.org/2020/08/17/sharing-stories-of-resilience-and-strength-interview-with-real-life-hero-lavetanalagi-seru/?fbclid=IwAR0JUlyBosZAh1rDwxq7KxplCNfxqIOnnesfT3kjomU\\_cv1XgXDTF\\_TqpGw](https://www.42d.org/2020/08/17/sharing-stories-of-resilience-and-strength-interview-with-real-life-hero-lavetanalagi-seru/?fbclid=IwAR0JUlyBosZAh1rDwxq7KxplCNfxqIOnnesfT3kjomU_cv1XgXDTF_TqpGw) and personal communication with Lavetanalagi Seru (January 2022).

## 5.5 Approaches that are supporting youth engagement in humanitarian action

The research identified a range of approaches that stakeholders are using that are promoting positive youth engagement in humanitarian action:

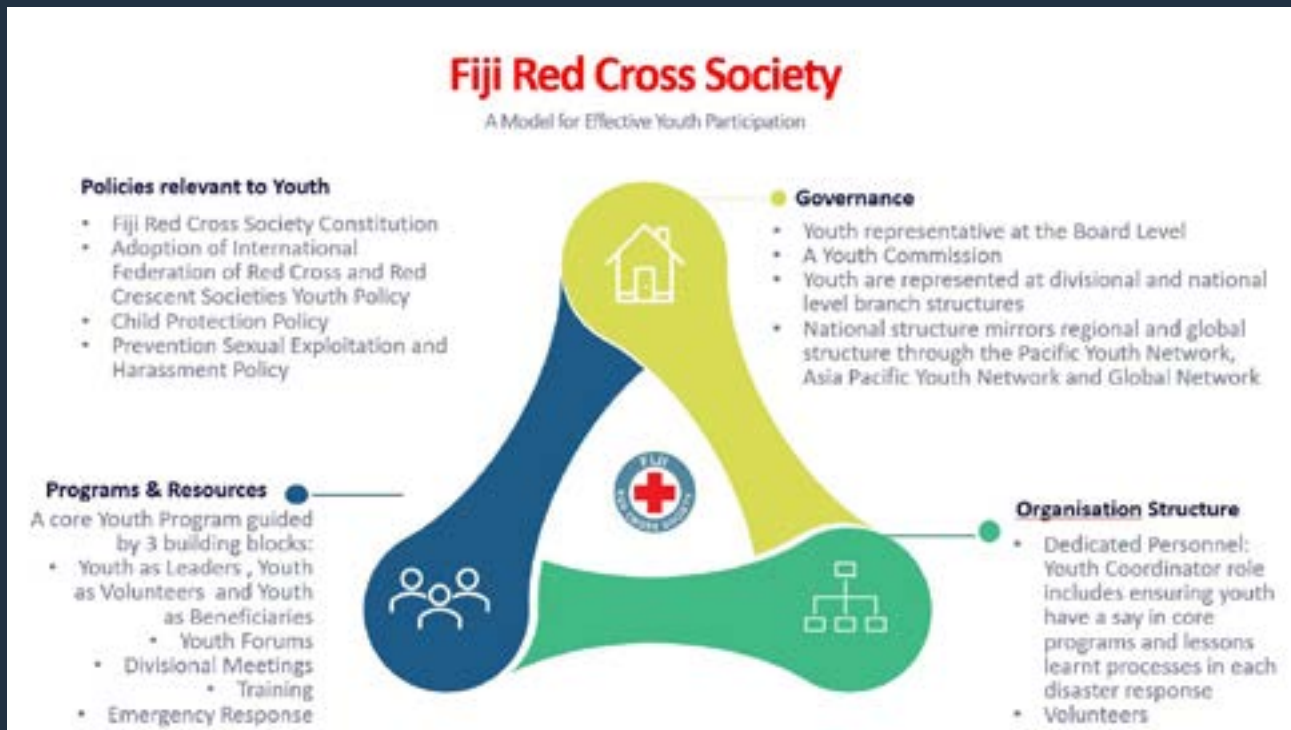
- **Embedding youth in formal organisation governance structures** helps to promote meaningful engagement with youth, empowering their decision making and leadership roles. For example, the FRCS with its core Youth Program focused on three building blocks to support youth engagement: youth as leaders, youth as volunteers and youth as beneficiaries has a specific focus on youth engagement as youth make up the majority of their volunteer and staff base, both nationally and globally (See case study on Page 24 for further details). The FDPF has a youth wing, with a youth Board that are represented on the organisation board level. The youth Board brings in the youth issues and concerns to the organisation and this structure helps the organisation ensure their voices are heard. According to the organisation: *“When young people (with disabilities) lead, there is a shift in decision making and they are very active”* Focus group discussion participant.
- **Partnerships that are supportive of youth** enables youth to claim and assert their rights as leaders. According to the Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji, partnerships that are based on mutual respect, where partners regard youth as leaders in their own right, provides a strong basis for effective partnerships, and gives their organisation the confidence to approach partners to articulate the concerns and priorities of youth. This has been particularly important within a disaster and pandemic context where youths are losing their jobs and experiencing personal crisis- *“Our ability to go to partners to request for their assistance, through funding or funders who are supporting us has really helped us support our members who are in need”* Key informant.
- **The spirit of volunteerism is still recognised as a key opportunity for youth to gain valuable experience and capacity building and build their networks-** *“It is interesting and what boosts my work is when we provide support (different types) in time of need and seeing that smile on their faces during that darkest hour that is it for me – very satisfying. Volunteerism....when you do it with passion it lifts you up”* Key informant.
- **Strengths based approach in leveraging youths’ existing skills and expertise** enables youth to quickly mobilise. During interviews with organisations, particularly those where youth make up majority or all of the organisation’s membership, described how they work to harness the skills and experience of diverse youth, and how this is enabling delivery of more efficient and effective programs:
  - Having a strong youth base with young, energetic people who are able to respond quickly to do work;
  - Utilising youths’ digital and technology savviness to mobilise resources through the use of online funding platforms such as Go Fund Me and youths’ social capital and networks which enable them to mobilise resources at a quicker pace;

- Leveraging the diverse skill-sets of youth members- for example, Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji highlighted how their membership includes lawyers, doctors, teachers, those with experience in developing funding proposals for donors, civil society, and disaster experts who they engage depending on the technical expertise needed- the organisation is able to attract support and partnerships through their members diverse skills and experiences.
- **Leadership within organisations** that understand the importance of youth and the contributions they make, helps to keep youth motivated and engaged in programs.
- **Having good geographic outreach** helps to ensure more diverse youth are engaged in programs. A number of organisations such as the FRCS, RPF, Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji, and femLINKPacific adopt a de-centralised approach to their engagement with youth, having locations across the country to help promote reach to diverse youth. These organisations acknowledge that location is a factor that can influence the extent to which youth can access and participate in humanitarian action programming. Organisations work through branches, hubs, utilise their urban based offices to reach rural and maritime areas to reach youth and ensure their feedback informs programs that are designed at the urban or head office.
- **Dedicated youth focused and youth led humanitarian programming** – across all organisations that participated in this research, each are implementing youth specific programs aimed at promoting different aspects of youth engagement in humanitarian action but with a common intent of supporting youth leadership, and ensuring programs benefit diverse youth in Fiji. For Habitat Humanity Fiji, the organisation has various programs dedicated to promote youth engagement including their Global village volunteer program; working with local youth groups who have a specific focus on addressing housing needs in their communities/ informal settlements; and the Habitat Youth Build Program. The organisation is committed to strengthening its engagement with youth, highlighting the need for more supportive community and social structures that support youth- *“Habitat is still failing at this including the voice of youth in research, project designs.....in Fiji the voice of youth is still not valued....the way we treat the voice of youth in our social structure, as a result, they are quieter and because of this, that is seen as acquiescence – they agree, if they don’t say anything that is agreement but actually we have silenced them”* Key informant.



## Case Study 2:

### The Fiji Red Cross Society: A Model for Effective Youth Participation



The Fiji Red Cross Society (FRCS) is an auxiliary to government and has 16 branches around the country. Their work focuses on building safe, healthy, and resilient communities in Fiji. As a humanitarian organisation, FRCS is dedicated to saving and improving the lives of the most vulnerable through mobilising the power of humanity and the spirit of volunteerism. FRCS has 4 core programs – Disaster Management, Health and Care, Safety and Youth. Whilst FRCS has key programs in various areas, the core of what they do is Youth Program which is guided by 3 building blocks or guiding tools: youth as leaders, youth as volunteers and youth as beneficiaries. Youth make up majority of the FRCS volunteer and staff base. Activities range from effective volunteerism, development of young professionals/employment and a national youth forum. Within its Youth Governance structure, there is a Youth Commission and youths are elected as representatives at the divisional and national level. A Youth representative also sits at the board level and this structure exists through its Pacific Youth Network, Asia Pacific Youth Network and Global network.

During responses, youth have been volunteering at the forefront. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers were young people supporting government. With disaster responses, in the first 72 hours, young people are there to help in stock movement, assessment and distribution to affected communities. Youth are not only involved on response operations but also in programming, including program planning. FRCS provide training to young people including emergency response training (first aid, community engagement and advocacy programs). Figure 3 below provides an illustration of how youth engagement is entrenched in FRCS.



## Stories from the field:

Experiences shared by youth on humanitarian work they were involved in that was a success.<sup>32</sup>

I was one of a four member team that assisted in the distribution of household tool kits for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community and people living with disabilities here in Macuata, Cakaudrove and Bua communities. Disaster response to the Southern Lau Group during TC Harold. It was a successful because we were able to supply them their basic needs to their families to recover before receiving any further assistance. Our work was a success because we had a good team bonding and it was easier for us to make decisions together. We listened to each other's ideas and proceeded in doing our work which enables us to do our work on time and efficiently.

Providing counselling and hygiene talks to students in public schools when COVID-19 hit. It worked because it was for locals by locals, they were able to relate to us and we were able to relate to them, and provide proper help and comfort during a time of need. It was also properly planned out with each other having a designated role, and use of props which helped people in Fiji, who aren't usually well versed in humanitarian actions, about the significance and importance of what we were doing and their access to these services.

Food rations distributions for mainly the LGBTQI Workers who were affected by the pandemic. We managed to distribute some 25 food rations to workers all over Nadi within 2 days. This was a project by RPF. Proud to say I am also a member of RPF. Vinaka!

We have been working with funders especially Urgent Action Funds Asia & Pacific to provide assistance to the sex worker's community in Lautoka by setting up a WASH project at the Daulomani Safe Home which provide shelter to sex worker's community in Lautoka that are experiencing hardships in getting a safe place for shelter. It was through a collective effort and action that made it possible and successful.

**The research found that youth are engaging in feedback mechanics** through organisation structures and programming approaches (social media and dedicated online chat groups such as Facebook messenger, Viber, face-to-face meetings), where their feedback is informing humanitarian programming delivered by organisations. For RPF, through their Youth Pride Hubs the organisation is supporting youth leaders to lead response. According to the organisation, as young people largely work at the coordination and community level, they rely on youth to provide feedback on who needs assistance, especially those most vulnerable and in need. The organisation is also working toward having youth represented at the Board level as another approach to support youth leadership but also ensure youth are provided with relevant authority to engage in decision-making and provide feedback on programs, and influence strategic direction of the organisation:

*"Right now strengthening the hub is important to us so that we are hearing from youth on what projects they want, how they want to implement it and what support they need from us.....hearing their feedback and empowering them. Over the next two years we also want to have young people on the Board and for this to be a decision making/voting role"* Key informant.

For Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji, feedback from youth directly informs their program delivery:

*"During COVID-19 we responded to the urgent need from young people to create safe spaces to share their worries, anxieties and feelings of despair. In partnership with Youth Champs for Mental Health we created virtual spaces where youth could share their feelings, with support from professionals"* Key informant.

<sup>32</sup> The examples were shared by youth who participated in the online survey in response to the survey question: Can you share an example of humanitarian work you did or were involved in that was successful? What do you think made it a success?

However engaging youth in feedback mechanisms is not consistent across humanitarian stakeholders and there is limited evidence on how youth perspectives inform humanitarian programming and decision-making, particularly at policy levels.

*“Often young people have been left out of that discussion, and the decision making, with regard to the MDMO [Ministry of Disaster Management Office] Act of 1998 is that young people are sort of the last to be attended to or the last people that the National Disaster Management Office and other agencies look into”* Key informant



**Figure 1:** Young people are the torchbearers of the sustainable development agenda. There has never been a critical time to include young people in building a peaceful and prosperous world, that puts people and planet at the core. Picture Credit: Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji. Picture Source: <https://www.facebook.com/afgfiji/photos/>

## 5.5 Barriers and opportunities to effective youth engagement in humanitarian action

*“Young people only stay in spaces where they are being heard and there is meaningful engagement.”* Key informant

There is a general sense among the key informants that there has been great leadership and progress by youth and inclusion of youth in humanitarian action in Fiji. Humanitarian response organisations are engaging with youth at various levels and youth themselves have organised and taken leadership in either directly supporting or working with organisations to respond to humanitarian crisis.

*“Having access to more information has allowed for youth to realise their ability and rights in reaching out to implementing organisations for humanitarian action. Youth are starting to feel more confident, especially at grassroots levels to start engagement in their communities”* Survey Respondent.

However, a number of structural and systematic barriers remain that prevent young men and women from participating in humanitarian action. Existing barriers and opportunities from the perspectives of organisations who engage with youth and from youths themselves are outlined below and reinforce findings from the literature review and social listening process. This research reveals four major barriers to youth participation:

### 1. Lack of inclusion in decision making

Terms such as ‘good leadership’ were used by some of the key informants to describe the existing leadership barrier preventing youth from being involved in decision making processes and staying motivated to continue to be engaged throughout the response and recovery phases of humanitarian response programming.

*“If a leader understands the importance and big contributions youth make, that will drive people into the work.”* Key informant.

Closely linked to the issue of a leadership is the lack of a culture of positive engagement. For instance, young people who participated in the research felt that young people are rarely consulted before making a decision. However, they explained that such consultations often took the form of a meeting to inform them of decisions made, and less often occurred in the context of dialogue and deliberation sessions. Positive engagement must be a two-way exchange of information. Young individuals develop every time they pro-actively engage and contribute to decision making. Instilling democratic practices in organisations is an important step to improving a culture of consultation and positive engagement.

Young people are first responders and must be included in decision making and leadership positions at every stage of humanitarian action. Power dynamics too often exclude young people from decision-making spaces and reduce young people to being seen as mere labour or just “boots on the ground”. It is essential to ensure youth representation on existing decision-making structures (for example community disaster preparedness committees, organisation leadership structures), but also to support youth-led initiatives to be better recognised and integrated with existing decision-making processes and protocols. For example, the FRCS not only have youth programs and youth as volunteers, but there is a youth representative at divisional and national level structures as well as at the board level.

*“We need to put in structures that prepare youth to become part of these decision-making processes and those can be things like youth groups, community think tanks, involving youth in research so that they can perceive their environment from the perspectives from different sectors. There needs to be a big shift in trust of the beneficial contribution of youth – a social shift. We are so hieratical – it is reinforced whole through our lives, for example, when we silence the children as they grow up (church, schools, universities), we expect a certain reverence from students, when you get a job they look at your age (older you get the more respect you should be commanding, which has nothing to do with merit). Certainly, a place for that structure but we are moving into a different world and so we should re-examine that.”* Key Informant.

Opportunity: Organisations and networks of young people have emerged at the local, national, regional, and global levels, demonstrating their capacity for advocacy, communication and negotiation, and their commitment to challenging injustice, particularly climate and gender injustice, showcasing youth as leaders in their own right. Examples in Fiji include Youth Champs for Mental Health, Alliance for Future Generation-Fiji, Emerging Leaders Forum of Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and 360.org. Organisations that support the inclusion of youth in its governance structure and programming, such as the FRCS are moving to ensure that youth perspectives are incorporated in everything it does such as planning, programs, operations because young people are key players in the running of things and are agents of change within their communities. Where preparedness and mitigation efforts have already engaged youth organisations, groups, networks and clubs, and where local youth representatives were linked to national organisations or coalitions, it is faster and easier to engage them more comprehensively at the response stage. For example, the FDPF engages with youth from its affiliates in preparedness activities and have been able to engage youth in establishing disability emergency operations centres, conduct needs assessment and provide emergency relief. The Alliance for Future Generations-Fiji partners with other youth groups to provide relief efforts to communities after Tropical Cyclones in 2020 and 2021. The unique advantage of already having youth engaged or connected to humanitarian organisations is that those in youth-led organisations are often already better connected to each other both personally and professionally and have a higher appetite for partnership. Where a leading agency can support is in leveraging these existing connections to convene strategic, coordinated response efforts.

## 2. Geographical and Cultural barriers

Youth who reside outside of the urban areas are engaged in humanitarian action through their own youth groups affiliated to their villages, communities, or faith-based youth groups. Youth in urban areas have more affiliations to formal youth groups and established humanitarian organisations as well as opportunities for volunteerism. All (13 out of 13) participants in KIIs agreed that youth in different locations and ethnic groups do not participate equally in humanitarian action, either due to their geographic location, ethnicity, or cultural reservations. All (13 out of 13) participants also agreed that overwhelmingly it is the iTaukei youth that are involved in humanitarian action and that engaging with Indo-Fijian youth was more challenging due to cultural reservations in young people staying overnight in villages/settlements or working late at night, particularly for young women and this meant that organisations would need to provide the necessary assurance about security, transport, and safety.

Power Dynamics and culture of silence was also described as a barrier for youth participation, particularly in the iTaukei culture where young people are silenced and there is a fear to speak up due to the culture of respect. Youth participation has to be enabled. The demand for recognition of the right of young people to be heard, to have their views given serious consideration, and to play an active role in promoting their own best interests is far from universally respected. This demand represents a profound challenge to traditional attitudes towards young people and implies a radical change in youth-adult relationships in all spheres of life including the family, schools, local communities, programmes, social services, faith-based settings, and local, regional, and national government.

In order for engagement mechanisms to be more inclusive and succeed, they need to be designed in a way that positively engages with and supports youth throughout the country. A limitation of this research is that it did not directly target Indo-Fijian youth as key informants to be able to capture their perspectives and challenges they face in engaging in humanitarian action.

## 3. Perception that youth lack relevant capacity and expertise to effectively engage in humanitarian action

In addition to the dominance of a culture that highly values social and cultural status, one of the most frequently brought up barriers to true and effective youth engagement in decision making in humanitarian action is the perception that youth lacked capacity and expertise. However, key informants and survey responders are implicit that young people should be part of the solution to the difficulties they face and in humanitarian action, not merely a problem to be resolved by others or just a set of helping hands.

“One of the things that holds organisations back from involving youth in decision making process is the perception of the lack of experience of youth – because we are not asking the youth the right questions. When we do project design, we expect that we will engage people with experience (which we think youth don’t have). We need to change the way we ask questions to youth so that we can learn from their experience – that goes for any sector as we make decisions based on our social structures.” Key Informant.

Young people’s interests are often disregarded in public policy. Young people’s interests are frequently overlooked in the public policy sphere in favour of those of more powerful interest groups. It is not necessarily the case that the welfare of youth is deliberately disregarded, but because their voices are not heard and the impact of public policy on their lives is not discussed in decision-making forums, their concerns never reach the top of the political agenda or if they do, it is not genuine participation.

**Opportunity:** While there is still a perception that youth lack capacity and expertise to take on leadership roles or participate in decision making processes, there are national, regional, and global developments that have begun to affect young people’s lives, such as new initiatives, projects, and programmes in which young people are participating in decision-making. Many are beginning to shape the world around them, participating in politics, policy makers, professionals, and the media with their own unique perspectives. Fiji has provided youth many opportunities to engage in national, regional, and international spaces as well as supports their capacity development. For example, the UNICEF supported National Youth Climate Action Summit on the Nation’s climate Agenda in March 2021, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that promotes youth-focused and youth-led sustainable development path through the Youth Global Programme and the Pacific Resilience Meeting Youth Forum.



#### 4. Financial resources

The lack of financial resources as a major limiting factor to youth engagement were highlighted as a barrier by key informants and survey participants. Youth actively self-mobilise and engage in humanitarian action, most times as volunteers working with either no or low remuneration. For some organisations, youth are compensated through a stipend that covers transport, communication cost and meals. For youth with disability, reasonable accommodation should be included to enable their equal participation, such as transport, sign language interpreters and carers support. Majority of youth groups and youth clubs are driven by passionate youth who work voluntarily to serve their community and the needs of community members and function without much funding, often relying on small fundraisers. For established youth groups or organisations that support youth programs, funding is also a challenge often operating in a competitive space for funding with other established CSOs.

#### 5. 6 Cross cutting issues: Rural/urban, Communities/Settlements, disability, gender, LGBTIQ+

The past decade has witnessed the gradual inclusion of a broader range of young people in participatory initiatives. Efforts to create more inclusive programmes involving young women, youth people with disabilities, from LGBTIQ+ communities, work with young people from rural communities, and initiatives at the community level have all brought in a wider engagement of a broad range of young people. CSOs have made an intentional effort to decentralise their operations and programs to be able to have reach to rural and maritime areas and have seen great participation of youth during these outreach. However, there are still significant limitations. For example, young people with disabilities too often remain marginalised and excluded from participatory activities and are reliant on their families to make decisions for them, young Indo-Fijian people are less involved in humanitarian action due to the reservations from their families in working late or travelling far from home.

Greater investment and effort are needed both to include a broader representation of youth in mainstream programmes and to establish forums that allow them to share their experiences and priorities. Too often youth movements can be dominated by the most articulate and socially engaged young people, while the more marginalised groups are excluded. In addition, there is a danger that youth movements may replicate the approach of many adult organisations in working for disadvantaged young people rather than empowering those groups to articulate their own concerns.

*“We want more young people to feel empowered to be part of these (humanitarian)spaces.... They (humanitarian actors) don’t recognise that there are diverse gender identities and persons with disability, there are so many layers of discrimination.... so for young people and their participation in humanitarian action, they need to be empowered to speak their truth.”* Key Informant



**Figure 2:** The journey to reach communities. Volunteers cross rivers, climb mountains and walk for miles to get to those that need it the most. Photo credit: Fiji Red Cross Society. Sourced from: <https://www.facebook.com/FijiRedCrossSociety/>



## 6. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENHANCING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In every humanitarian emergency, even without anyone asking, young people step up and apply their many powerful assets to the response: skills, motivation, energy, creativity, a strong sense of justice and equality, an aptitude for technology, and a capacity for peer mobilisation. In recognition of the emergency responses that young people initiate themselves, duty-bearers are increasingly tapping into their enormous potential for improving humanitarian action as well as ‘building back better’ in the recovery and reconstruction phase. Building on the positive energy of youth and approaches organisations have taken to include youth in humanitarian action, this research provides key considerations for enhancing youth participation in humanitarian action in Fiji.

1. Young people should be at the centre of humanitarian action and be supported in their participation and leadership in responses. The humanitarian system is dominated by established organisations and often fails to listen to, be accountable to, and be accessible to formal and informal youth groups. Strengthening young people’s participation and leadership at all levels before, during and after emergencies, is crucial to advance localisation in an inclusive and effective manner. Maximising the role that young people play in response means not just supporting them to design action plans, but also to lead on their implementation and appropriating resourcing for their participation. Doing so ensures continuity in response and challenges existing perceptions on who is best positioned to lead action in communities, reinforcing the potential of young women and men.
2. Young people are first responders and must be included in decision making and leadership positions at every stage of humanitarian action. Power dynamics too often exclude young people from decision-making spaces and reduce young people to being seen as mere labour or victims. It is essential to ensure youth representation on existing decision-making structures (for example community disaster preparedness committees and other community and faith-based structures), but also to support youth-led initiatives to be better recognised and integrated with existing decision-making processes, policies, and protocols.
3. Young people are uniquely placed to play a valuable and necessary role in humanitarian response and can be put in the driving seat for humanitarian response if their engagement is formalised in organisations and if they are engaged in training and mentoring programs. Due to young people’s levels of education, their networks within the community, networks with formal organisations, eagerness to lend a helping hand and innovative approaches, there are significant advantages to young people participating and even leading humanitarian response efforts as well as taking forward accountability work to ensure open, transparent, and effective governance in emergency settings.
4. Partnerships that are supportive of youth enables youth to claim and assert their rights as leaders. Partnerships that are based on mutual respect, where partners regard youth as leaders in their own right provides a strong basis for effective partnerships, and gives their organisation the confidence to approach partners to articulate the concerns and priorities of youth. This has been particularly important within a disaster and pandemic context where youths are losing their jobs and experiencing personal crisis. The inclusion of a diverse representation of youth will ensure that the needs of persons with disability, women and girls and persons with diverse SOGIESC are included in humanitarian response.

5. Strengths based approach in leveraging youths' existing skills and expertise enables youth to quickly mobilise. Organisations should harness the skills and experience of diverse youth to enable delivery of more efficient and effective programs. Utilising youths' digital and technology savviness to mobilise resources including manpower through its networks can support immediate humanitarian response. Providing awareness to the youth before they are engaged in humanitarian action is important to ensure that volunteers adhere to the "do no harm" principle as front liners and are also aware of their responsibilities and duty in this role. Volunteerism should support the future of youth and their experiences in humanitarian action can influence the path they take in their careers. Organisations should look at opportunities to leverage the expertise and skills of youth beyond a humanitarian response.
6. Having good geographic outreach helps to ensure more diverse youth are engaged in programs. Organisations with a de-centralised approach to their engagement with youth, having locations across the country help promote reach to diverse youth. Location is a factor that can influence the extent to which youth can access and participate in humanitarian action programming. Organisations that work through branches, hubs and utilise their urban based offices to reach rural and maritime areas to reach youth ensure their feedback informs programs that are designed at the urban or head office. Organisations who do not have a volunteer pool can engage in a partnership with organisations who have a de-centralised approach. The process to develop this pool of volunteers should be made widely available to ensure that its volunteer base is representative of diverse youth and is not focused on youth in urban areas only.



**Figure 3:** Young leaders navigated through rough roads to reach members of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation women's network in the Macuata Province. Picture Credit: Fiji Disabled Persons Federation. Picture Source: <https://www.facebook.com/DisFiji>



## CONCLUSION

This research presents the experiences of youth as leaders, advocates, program participants of humanitarian action initiatives in Fiji; and the experiences of CSOs who engage youth in their humanitarian related programming. The research gathered perspectives directly from youth in Fiji, and from key civil society organisations, with further insights gained from the literature review and social media listening.

The research found that youth in Fiji are actively participating in the disaster cycle, particularly at the disaster response level, as first responders, distributing relief items, as technical resources to response teams from other organisations, assisting in the safe evacuation of vulnerable groups in their communities, and at evacuation centres. With their extensive reach and networks, youth themselves are mobilising and organising to ensure youth impacted by disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic, have access to relevant services to meet their needs. Youth led networks are employing a strengths based approach to harness the skills, expertise, and resources of youth, enabling humanitarian action that is delivered in a rapid, and cost-effective way.

In documenting how youth are participating in humanitarian response programming, we found that youth are most active in the disaster response phase. Youth are visible in response efforts, particularly at community level, and specific spaces such as evacuation centres, and working on specific response programs such as assisting the Fiji government's COVID-19 response program. Youth are also advocating for their engagement in disaster risk management processes, and on specific issues such as climate change, SOGIESC, gender and disability inclusion in humanitarian action. We found limited evidence of how youth are represented in government-invited spaces to inform policy, and as previously highlighted, we acknowledge the research sample does not represent the full breadth of youth and humanitarian actors in Fiji. Further research with a more representative sample, in particular government and CSOs with large youth networks, may reveal more examples of youth engagement in humanitarian decision-making.

There are different approaches used at individual, community, organisational, and partnership levels that are helping to promote youths' leadership role in humanitarian action and provide spaces for them to advocate for more inclusive humanitarian action.

Youth can be supported in their future engagement in humanitarian action, particularly in all phases of the disaster cycle, and in organisations and policy-making spaces by supportive adults, partnerships who believe in youth as leaders in their own right, and provide spaces for their leadership. Youths' hope for more engagement of diverse youth in humanitarian spaces, and to be involved from the outset in the design, of humanitarian response programming, including recovery and ongoing monitoring. Youth also want funding and resources to be responsive to their needs, so that they can carry out their humanitarian action effectively, and also be appropriately resourced for their time and efforts in delivering humanitarian action.



Organisations are engaging youth in feedback mechanisms through the use of digital and online platforms and social media, their views are informing program delivery as youth provide direct feedback to ensure more inclusive humanitarian action outcomes. Youth were easily able to adapt to digital platforms during COVID-19 as they were already using online technology to communicate and engage within their networks. Harnessing youths' digital skills and expertise can help to further youth engagement in humanitarian action by ensuring digital spaces are accessible to more diverse youth, including reaching youth in rural, remote, geographic locations by choosing appropriate technologies and approaches that are inclusive and participatory.

At a policy level, there are a range of humanitarian related systems, policies and frameworks that can be leveraged to build a more supportive and enabling environment that promotes youth engagement in humanitarian action. The research revealed limited examples of how youth are engaged at the policy level in humanitarian decision-making, therefore this area requires further research with a more representative sample to document youth engagement at this level, and opportunities to support more youth engagement. Civil society, CSOs and NGOs, including donor and funding partners, can also enhance youth participation in humanitarian action by including them in the design, planning and decision-making of humanitarian response programming in Fiji.





## **Annexes**

**Annex 1: Terms of Reference**

**Attached separately.**

**Annex 2: Research Plan**

**Attached separately.**



## Annex 3: References

- Agenda for Humanity (2020) Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action: <https://agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3829>
- Australian National University. Patrick Vakaoti. Fiji elections and the youth vote- token or active citizenship. Retrieved from: <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p337333/pdf/ch082.pdf>
- Devpolicy blog by Nalini Singh and Maryann Lockington (2020). Fiji civil society driving the COVID-19 humanitarian response. Retrieved from: <https://devpolicy.org/fiji-civil-society-solidarity-driving-the-covid-19-humanitarian-response-20200604-2/>
- Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey Main Report. Retrieved from: [https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/HIES\\_2019-20/2019-20\\_HIES\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/HIES_2019-20/2019-20_HIES_Main_Report.pdf)
- Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2017) 2017 Population and Housing Census Release. Retrieved from: <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/2007-census-of-population-and-housing.html>
- Humanitarian response (2019) Roadmap of adolescent and youth programming in the Rohingya Response: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/roadmap\\_of\\_adolescent\\_and\\_youth\\_programming\\_in\\_the\\_rohingya\\_response\\_-\\_august\\_2019.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/roadmap_of_adolescent_and_youth_programming_in_the_rohingya_response_-_august_2019.pdf)
- IIED Winterford, K and Gero, A (2018). Humanitarian response for development in Fiji: lessons from Tropical Cyclone Winston. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/10853IIED.pdf>
- International Labour Organisation (2020). Pacific Labour Market Review 2020. Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/suva/publications/WCMS\\_754824/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/suva/publications/WCMS_754824/lang--en/index.htm)
- Major Group for Children and Youth (UN General Assembly) Report and Recommendations: Enhancing Youth Participation in the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action: <https://www.unmgcy.org/ha-updates/2020/6/11/report-and-recommendations-enhancing-youth-participation-in-compact-for-young-people-in-humanitarian-action>
- Pacific Resilience Partnership (2021) Humanitarian Action in the Pacific: [http://www.resilientpacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Humanitarian-Action-in-the-Pacific\\_ecopy.pdf](http://www.resilientpacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Humanitarian-Action-in-the-Pacific_ecopy.pdf)
- Pasifika Rising (2019) Pacific Resilience Meeting: Pre-Youth Forum Outcomes Document: <https://www.pasifikarising.org/pacific-resilience-meeting-pre-youth-forum-outcomes-document/>
- Reliefweb. UNOCHA (2021). Pacific: Young people encouraged to join the fight against the pandemic. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/fiji/pacific-young-people-encouraged-join-fight-against-pandemic>
- Radio New Zealand (2019). Call for young Fijians to be included in disaster preparedness. Retrieved from: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/398484/call-for-young-fijians-to-be-included-in-disaster-preparedness>
- Republic of Fiji (2019). Voluntary National Review: Fiji's progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25011Fiji\\_VNR\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25011Fiji_VNR_2019_final.pdf)
- RNZ (2018) Mixed voter mood among young ahead of Fiji elections. Retrieved from: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/368940/mixed-voter-mood-among-young-ahead-of-fiji-elections>
- The Fiji Times (2020) Youths jobless rate may go up-Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.fijitimes.com/youths-jobless-rate-may-go-up-report/>
- UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts->

*Report-27Nov2020.pdf*

- UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>
- UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>
- UN Capital Development Fund (2020). Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards on Vulnerable Populations in Fiji. Retrieved from: <https://climate-insurance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fiji-Economic-Impacts-Report-27Nov2020.pdf>
- UNICEF (2021). Hundreds of Fijian youth add their voice in national summit on the nation's climate change agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/hundreds-fijian-youth-add-their-voice-national-summit-nations-climate-agenda>
- Various websites of organisations that have programs that include youth in humanitarian action: Plan International, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, Women's Fund Fiji, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Save the Children Fiji, Oxfam in the Pacific, Live and Learn Environmental Education Fiji, other youth focused alliances
- Various programs in the Pacific that promote youth participation in humanitarian action: Talitha Project (Tonga); PNG (Equal Playing Field); CARE Vanuatu
- Youthpolicy.org (2014). Fiji youth factsheet. Retrieved from: <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/fiji/>









