

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is projected to have wide-ranging effects on natural resources, environment, agriculture and fisheries. The smaller island states are particularly vulnerable to the changing climate. Fiji is subject to extreme climate events, with cyclones and frequent flooding causing major environmental concerns. Indigenous Fijians (iTaukei) and Indo-Fijians, the two largest ethnic groups in Fiji, have different coping mechanisms to climate-related natural hazards (Brown et al., 2014). iTaukei communities are traditionally stratified and resources are shared among the entire community, whilst Indo-Fijian communities exhibit high level of individualism. This study focuses on an iTaukei village community because of its social support system and communal practices which have high levels of community institutional governance based on traditions (Gawith et al., 2016). iTaukei village communities maintain distinctive cultural values and traditional ways of life that shape gender roles and power relations. Gender is an important aspect of the social structure of iTaukei communities and has a significant bearing on the capacity for communities to build resilience. Although men and women have specific skills that enable them to contribute to building resilience, gendered responsibilities can enhance or reduce the opportunities to climate change adaptation. iTaukei women have experiences and expertise that would benefit community preparedness and increase adaptive capacity to cope with the impacts of climate change however, their voice is not often heard.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Aim

To identify the enabling and inhibiting factors that affect the ability of women in iTaukei villages to build community resilience to climate change.

Specific objectives

1. To identify the key determinant factors that contribute to community resilience in Votua village;
2. To identify the role of women in relation to the key factors for community resilience in Votua village;
3. To describe the social, ecological and economic context of Votua village;
4. To identify the social, ecological and economic factors that enables and constrains women's contributions to building the resilience of Votua village;
5. To develop and recommend approaches for more gender-sensitive interventions designed to enhance community resilience

Research Questions

1. What are the key determinant factors that contribute to community resilience in Votua village?
2. What are the social, ecological and economic factors that determine the resilience of Votua village?
3. How do women in Votua village contribute to community resilience?
4. What factors enable and inhibit women in Votua village from contributing to building the resilience in their community?

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The preliminary findings have indicated three categories of factors for resilience building in the Votua community. These three categories are the social, economic, and ecological resilience that collectively determine the coping, adaptive and transformative capacities of the Votua community against threats posed by climate change. The villagers highlighted the wealth of traditional ecological knowledge and experience they have in dealing with climate variability and change. An active social-ecological system has built an inherent resilience into the Votua community through the availability of diverse ecosystems such as the ocean, farmlands, forests, mangroves, coral reefs, and the river. In all these key findings, women's roles and contributions towards building a climate-resilient community is obvious. The findings also revealed some barriers that significantly reduce women's capacity to adapt to the changing climate. Nevertheless, the study revealed that appreciating the gender dimensions of climate change and empowering women could be the key to building community resilience.



Source: The Fiji Times, July 2015



Source: The Ministry of Women, Fiji, June 2015



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



IMPLICATIONS

Fiji is committed to gender mainstreaming, however still struggles to bridge the gap between policy perspective and successful application of gender mainstreaming. With gender-blind policies and interventions, no knowledge is generated regarding the roles or effects on women vs. men separately, whether differences do or do not exist. Researchers have stressed the problem of a lack of robustly analysed data in the region. Some hesitation about gender mainstreaming is related to the perception of enforced changes to traditional cultural practice. The collection of gender-disaggregated data can inform about gendered roles but does not in itself seek to change those roles. This need for data disaggregation becomes more intense when thinking that, as present, Fijian women hold knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, natural resource management and adaptation strategies. In addition, women usually have the social and intellectual capital that can enable knowledge sharing amongst a wide social network.

REFERENCES

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