Climate Resilience in the Pacific: Culturally Meaningful Impact Measurement in Fiji

Submitted By: Habitat for Humanity Australia



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Habitat for Humanity Fiji

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: https://habitatfiji.org.fj/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Fiji

City(ies): Suva, Vunuku, Serua

Start Year: 2024 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing & Climate Adaptation
- Housing Data & Monitoring

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Pacific countries are at the forefront of adapting to climate change. A climate resilience measurement framework analysis in the Pacific context related to climate-induced displacement and housing is needed to inform more effective program design and policy for climate resilience in Pacific communities.

While global indices and frameworks aim to track impact of climate resilient development investments, they tend to prioritise quantitative data and often fail to capture the nuanced, diverse nature of success in local contexts, overlooking cultural perspectives, social change and locally defined notions of impact. This disconnect undermines the effectiveness and legitimacy of resilience investments and highlights the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive evaluation frameworks.

This work focuses on iTaukei Fijian solutions that respond to local shelter and basic services needs arising from climate change and the deeply embedded cultural need to preserve ties with home.

Solution Developed

Habitat for Humanity (HFH) is developing a culturally grounded approach to impact measurement in Fiji through village-led master planning that reflects locally meaningful indicators of success. This practice directly addresses the challenge of measuring climate resilience in diverse contexts by embedding Fijian worldviews into program design and evaluation. The current lack of locally and culturally relevant impact measurement data on housing and climate resilience is a significant barrier to achieving it.

Partner communities are Indigenous Fijian (iTaukei), and the key objective is to strengthen impact measurement by integrating eco-relational principles—such as kinship, cultural and spiritual ties to land (Vanua), and the understanding that humans are part of a holistic ecological system. HFH's relational, rather than transactional, engagement model in Fiji is a social and institutional innovation that enhances legitimacy and effectiveness, with outcomes including increased community ownership and organisational learning across HFH. This approach offers a practical pathway for locally-led climate resilience while navigating global reporting requirements.

Implementation

Current PhD research is drawing from recent program experience in Fiji from a more holistic and locally responsive cultural perspective. The completed Vunuku project and impact assessment along with the current pilot project in Serua (2024-2025) are demonstrating achievement of more effective resilience of communities experiencing a process of climate-induced displacement. The analysis of these interventions is informing a scaled-up resilience program in

Fiji (2026-2031), incorporating culturally meaningful project design and impact measurement for effective climate resilience.

Locally-led baseline assessments undertaken with communities and local government is uncovering cultural values and associated identification of targeted interventions to improve the climate resilience of housing and services, as well as skills and knowledge development needs. A Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) masterplan will be completed in Jan 2026, learning from the Vunuku DRR Masterplan 2021-2031, which will be the basis for committee members and provincial government representatives to address community priorities.

Assessing baselines and impacts with culturally relevant output and outcome indicators through reflection sessions, stakeholder consultations, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and surveys will measure any meaningful increase in community resilience to climate related challenges, integrating local Fijian iTaukei worldviews into MEAL systems.

Enablers & Obstacles

Implementation is supported by a deep understanding of cultural, historical, and governance contexts, and by respecting local protocols that foster trust and openness. A research ethic grounded in eco-relational principles, rather than transactional approaches, enables meaningful engagement. Methods aligned with local cultural rhythms and recognition of nuanced community practices, alongside respect for governance mechanisms, are critical drivers for success. Challenges can include short timelines that risk undermining cultural protocols, reliance on Western lenses that overlook local knowledge systems, and assumptions privileging Western perspectives. Treating the community as homogenous rather than acknowledging diverse viewpoints also poses barriers, which can be mitigated through adaptive, culturally responsive approaches.

Results & Impact

Building trust with local communities is the proven first step to enable a more accurate and holistic understanding of community context, including diverse perspectives, as has been experienced in the Vunuku project. HFH's approach has facilitated locally identified community priorities which are embedded in local culture, learning about the nuanced cultural patterns of land use in Fiji, shaped by environmental and cultural drivers. Critical insights around land and culture in Serua between island and mainland are informing the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Masterplan, ensuring relevance and sustainability through local ownership. Embedding local language and concepts is reinforcing Fijian eco-relational principles and demonstrated community leadership in decision-making.

HFH approach to engagement reaches all sub-groups within the community, including low-income households and marginalised groups, ensuring their priorities are reflected in climate,

disaster and risk planning. Alignment with sub-national governance mechanisms strengthens legitimacy and integration with formal planning and development processes.

HFH approach aims for enhanced resilience to climate risks, through locally-led approaches that respect cultural knowledge and practice. Longer-term, this approach supports sustainable housing practices, reduces vulnerability for low-income households, and promotes environmentally responsive development that respects cultural heritage.

Replication & Scale Up

This culturally grounded approach to impact monitoring is being replicated in a new pilot HFH investment in a location (Serua) where climate change threatens housing, livelihoods and wellbeing. The team is engaging through cultural protocols and Fijian research ethics rooted in reciprocity, trust, and eco-relational principles. Understanding cultural ties to land across island and mainland contexts is critical for co-creating appropriate support.

The collaborative partnership between PhD research and Habitat for Humanity involves researching, testing and co-design an approach to generate important evidence around effective climate resilience that will inform a multi-year scaled-up program design development process in Fiji from July 2026.

Embedding Fijian eco-relational principles and this culturally grounded approach to impact measurement will be adapted for other contexts and countries too, aligning investment design with community voices, local cultural norms and diverse perspectives into resilience planning and monitoring.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

Community-led DRR Masterplans are being integrated with government-owned Integrated Village Development Plans (IVDPs) by embedding resilience and more localised, culturally informed strategies at grassroots level. IVDPs are mandated under the iTaukei (Indigenous) Affairs Act and operationalized through the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF), ensuring alignment with national priorities. This approach directly supports objectives in the Fiji National Development Plan (NDP) and National Housing Policy, which emphasise housing quality in enhancing resilience to climate risks.

Lessons & Takeaways

Improvements are ongoing through collaboration with a doctoral researcher, aiming to engage all HFH staff in Fiji in building organisational understanding of eco-relational impact measurement and its distinction from Western transactional approaches. The partnership will

co-design principles and practice notes, and strengthen staff confidence and capacity to identify entry points for embedding and enhancing Fijian eco-relational approaches.