

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY AND HOUSEHOLD PREPAREDNESS IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Red Cross



IMPACT BRIEF ON THE FLOOD RESILIENCE PROJECT

2019 - 2022

As part of the [Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance](#) (the Alliance), the New Zealand Red Cross and the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#) (IFRC) collaborated to strengthen flood resilience by partnering with communities for disaster planning and evacuation planning, strengthening relationships between stakeholders, authorities and local populations and developing innovative tools that promote household preparedness.

The [New Zealand Red Cross](#), or Rīpeka Whero Aotearoa, is a humanitarian organisation providing key services to vulnerable populations since 1915. The mission of the New Zealand Red Cross is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilising the power of humanity and enhancing community resilience. As climate change and natural hazards have a growing impact, the New Zealand Red Cross engages with communities before, during and after extreme events with the purpose of reducing the impact of disasters.

Floods are New Zealand's most frequent and disruptive natural hazard. As the climate changes, flooding caused by both increased rainfall and rising sea levels – in coastal areas and on floodplains – is expected to increase. The Flood Resilience Project was implemented in two flood-prone locations on the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand, which experience flooding related to cyclones, heavy rainfall and storm surges.

Initially the project was designed with a focus on influencing sector-wide emergency management strategies and policy development. However, it later shifted to focus on the identified needs of the target communities, engaging them and key stakeholders to support inclusive and collaborative disaster risk reduction planning and preparation.



Simon Makker / New Zealand Red Cross



Communities undertook collaborative disaster planning with key stakeholders.

Together with local authorities and partners community emergency awareness, evacuation and response plans and guides were developed through community-based meetings that consider the local cultural and socioeconomic context.

These community-owned plans incorporate local strengths, hazard knowledge and vulnerabilities. The evacuation plan for Edgumbe was summarised and distributed to 650 households.



Communities in the target communities are better prepared for future disasters and have been further empowered to lead their own response and recovery activities.



Communities are better connected and can better coordinate flood resilience practice with local authorities and others.



The innovative Good and Ready program was updated to promote household preparedness.

The Good and Ready program is a step-by-step guide developed by the New Zealand Red Cross to help families prepare for an emergency or disaster by understanding hazards and making and sharing a plan. Applied nationwide, this methodology is a key resource for grassroots disaster preparedness in flood-vulnerable communities. The program is designed to be fun and easy with the purpose of filling the 'intention gap': the gap between knowing one should prepare for disasters and actually doing it.

The program was reviewed and updated using behavioural science theories, which show people adopt disaster preparedness when they see immediate community benefits, respect involved members, and observe others preparing. A step-by-step 'Good and Ready' guide was created to help volunteers and staff engage and implement the program in targeted New Zealand communities.



Relationships between stakeholders, authorities and local populations were strengthened and partners work in collaboration for advocacy for DRR investment.

Alongside local partners, the New Zealand Red Cross successfully advocated for increased flood preparedness investments. They developed a proposal to secure central government funding for a community disaster resilience

network which includes awareness, education and prepositioned materials in flood-prone areas for the local community. New Zealand Red Cross facilitated discussions and contributed funds to this community-led proposal.

INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

As part of the Alliance, the New Zealand Red Cross has undertaken a process of institutional learning, resulting in new capacities, relationships and ways of working.

- The New Zealand Red Cross strengthened relationships with stakeholders including authorities, community leaders and local populations, providing a solid foundation for future collaboration.
- A New Zealand Red Cross Disaster Welfare and Support Team (DWST), one of 18 teams throughout the country, was established in the target region.
- The project team leveraged the Red Cross' role as a connector, supporting relationships between key emergency management agencies and community stakeholders.
- The New Zealand Red Cross effectively managed disaster response to extreme events throughout the life of the project and leveraged public attention on disaster resilience.
- The project developed a flexible and adaptable management approach to deal with unanticipated challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and staff turnover.



The Flood Resilience project has benefited New Zealand Red Cross and the communities it serves by prioritising resources to ensure that flood resilience has been enhanced. The knowledge gained from this experience is to be incorporated into NZRC national programming moving forward.

New Zealand Red Cross project team

Vicky's story

In 2017, the remnants of Cyclone Cook caused heavy rain in New Zealand's Bay of Plenty. The Rangitaiki River breached a stopbank in Edgecumbe, flooding the town, forcing thousands to evacuate, and damaging 300 homes.

Edgecumbe resident Vicky Richards, who would later become the Flood Resilience Project lead in the community, lost her house to the 2017 floods; *"I got a sense I was very unprepared through that time"*. Vicky and her family evacuated just as the floodwater overflowed into the town.

New Zealand Red Cross disaster response volunteers were deployed to support Edgecumbe residents, providing support to the local welfare centre and psychological first aid to residents, and later helping with the town's efforts in disaster preparedness.

"I just wish I was more prepared. I wish that there was something that we could have done more to also help others along the way," said Vicky. In the aftermath, the community came together to stay connected and navigate opportunities for recovery. Vicky reflected on the role of the Red Cross and the next steps for increasing flood resilience; *"it was helpful having Red Cross come and support us. And we want to build on that, we don't want to just rely on that."*

RECOMMENDATIONS

There have been many lessons identified throughout the project in New Zealand, particularly around community engagement and around key ingredients for successful behavioural change in disaster preparedness programs.



Prioritise community engagement in culturally appropriate ways of working.

- Continuously build meaningful relationships and prioritise face-to-face meetings.
- Establish partnerships and collaboration between local government and other emergency management stakeholders to minimise duplication and maximize impact.
- Invest in diverse teams that have local knowledge and connections to develop strong relationships with target communities.
- Integrate local knowledge when identifying local risks and strengths.



Leverage behavioural change theories for deeper impact in disaster preparedness.

- Carefully consider the community perception of risk. If the community perceives low risk, they are unlikely to prepare. If they perceive too high a risk, they may adopt a fatalistic attitude and be less likely to prepare.
- Implement fun and easy preparedness activities in highly vulnerable communities.
- Prioritise regular drills to practice core skills for anticipation, response and recovery.
- Increase the visibility of resilience actions and highlight the role of local resilience champions to generate momentum in the population.
- Shift to broader conversations about disaster risk in contexts where it is challenging to engage community actors in flood-specific conversations.



Prioritise adaptive management for disaster risk reduction projects.

- Develop guiding principles to orient the project that are flexible enough to allow for local adaptation and change in response to emerging opportunities and risks.
- Apply strategies to absorb shocks and disruptions to ensure program delivery.



The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance is a multi-sectoral partnership focusing on finding practical ways to help communities in developed and developing countries strengthen their resilience to flood risk.

Find out more: www.floodresilience.net

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