

# Habitat for Humanity Evidence Brief

October 2024



## Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity's vision is for a world where everyone has a decent place to live. A leading global non-profit working in more than 70 countries, our mission is to build strength, stability, and self-reliance through shelter. We work in partnership with communities and stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific region and the world, to eliminate sub-standard housing through integrated community development approaches. Our strategic focus is to recognise the key role that safe and adequate housing plays in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, building household-level resilience to the ever-increasing threats of climate change.

## Problem Description

**Displacement and loss of safe and adequate housing is a major impact of climate induced disasters.**

- With over 140 climate change induced disasters in 2022 alone, hundreds of thousands of people are forced to flee their homes in the Asia Pacific region due to the devastating impacts of climate change combining with inadequate housing.
- Between 2010 and 2021, 225.3 million people were internally displaced in the Asia Pacific region, 95% of which were due to the impacts of climate and weather-related disasters such as cyclones, monsoon rains, floods and storms (ADB and IDMC, 2021).

**Australia's development partners in Pacific Island states and South and South-East Asia are most at risk due to high numbers of people living in informal settlements and along coastlines.**

- The largest population in the world living in informal settlements is in South and South-East Asia, over 370 million people (UN Statistics, SDG Report 2021), while 50% of residents in Pacific towns also live in informal settlements (IDMC, 2020).
- A person living in Asia-Pacific is twice as likely to experience a disaster event that increases the risk of losing their home, bearing the brunt of climate change impacts.

- The IPCC is calling for upscaling existing mitigation and adaptation options across systems "prioritising finance to reduce climate risk for low-income and marginalised residents including people living in informal settlements."

## Challenges in current aid and development program

There are currently silos in development programs and funding that are diminishing the effectiveness of climate resilience investments for the most at risk.

- Transformative, cross-sectoral solutions are needed to breakdown these silos, guided by local experience of their interconnected vulnerabilities and strengths.
- Addressing agriculture, water and energy in climate investments is critical but does not build the household level resilience needed for communities to withstand climate shocks.

## What is the solution - Building household resilience to climate change-induced challenges

There is a growing evidence base of good practice, methodologies and tools in multi-sectoral, locally-led approaches.

### Case Study

#### Evidence of good practice: Project - Vunuku Village Fiji Master Plan (DFAT ANCP-funded)

At the core of the Vunuku Master Planning project is an integrated planning and development approach that recognises the multi-faceted nature of climate resilience from local community perspectives. Local leadership, inclusion and strong local governance are the driving forces behind the ongoing implementation of the Master Plan in Vunuku. The long-term sustainable outcomes continue to be achieved by the community themselves, who developed the plan together with support from Habitat for Humanity, fostering a deep sense of local ownership and commitment.

- Project design facilitated locally-led planning processes that assisted the community in identifying multiple areas of development to enhance resilience at both household and community levels, garnering support from community leaders and government stakeholders.
- Core project component was community capacity development and trainings to implement and manage locally identified development priority initiatives through the Participatory Approach to Community Climate Resilience (PACCR, adapted from IFRC's PASSA) and Habitat for Humanity's Build Back Safer (BBS) model.
- Three years on from the development of the Master Plan, a current post-project impact assessment reveals invaluable results and outcomes have been achieved

through local leadership in identifying priority solutions:

- **Local Ownership** – 100% of households interviewed are aware of the Vunuku DRR Master Plan and associated activities, which is communicated to them through the existing traditional local governance mechanisms.
- **Housing and Evacuation** – the project funded the renovation of the community hall roof and the construction of a demonstration home with BBS training for a person with a disability. BBS training led to a local carpenter becoming qualified and registering a business to assist Vunuku and neighbouring communities with housing construction and improvements.
- **WASH** – the community has secured funding from another service provider to install a 10,000L rainwater harvesting tank to reduce vulnerability to drought and salt-water ingress.
- **Nature-Based Solutions** – the community has built trenches to reclaim and reinforce the riverbank, preventing erosion to reduce vulnerability from ingress while improving access to the river.
- **Livelihoods and Economic Resilience** – the community established a Crab Fattening enterprise that employs young people, men, and women, expanding through

collaboration with the Fiji Ministry of Fisheries. The local Disability Committee established and manages a 'Mushroom project' which is thriving, while women engage in new income-generating activities like handicrafts and sale of traditional food within the community. Proceeds from these initiatives are channelled towards financing the DRR master plan activities.

- **Gender and Disability Inclusion** – Significantly increased participation of women on the Village Development Committee resulted from the project, with the community recognising the significant contributions made by women across various domains. The Vunuku Disability Committee is one of the most vibrant and engaged groups in the Rewa province, financially self-sufficient through this project initiative.

- **Safety and Accessibility** – the village has successfully secured funding from another service provider to instal 20 solar street lights, creating a safe and secure environment for women, children and people with disabilities.
- **Financing** – Since 2019, the community has successfully financed its own development activities, growing from an initial fund of less than \$65 AUD to a total of \$6,500 AUD to support various projects. Technical expertise to ensure effective implementation of certain activities within the master plan requires engagement of external stakeholders.
- **Scalability** – The Provincial Council is sharing Vunuku's Master Plan with neighbouring communities as best practice to strengthen local resilience. However, further verification is planned to confirm its broader applicability.

## Methodologies and tools for integrated development

- The Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (UTS-ISF) recently presented a **Pacific Community Resilience Framework** (Gero et al, 2024) grounded in literature and community understanding of resilience. The strengths-based framework enables effective locally led development by centring around local voices, perspectives and priorities for climate adaptation and resilience building.
- The ADB's **Building Resilience of the Urban Poor** (ADB, 2022) demonstrates the need for systemic change and new approaches that address underlying structural inequalities and the drivers of vulnerabilities to build climate-resilience. The ADB's framework for change identifies six policy areas for integration at the household, neighbourhood, and city levels, including social protection, housing, livelihoods, health, urban planning and development, and integrated infrastructure.
- Habitat for Humanity's **Participatory Approach to Community Climate Resilience** (PACCR) empowers communities to identify and address their climate risks, including through collaboration with government and service providers. Community-led climate resilience models like PACCR are more likely to lead to sustainable resilience outcomes as they align with the real needs and capacities of the people directly affected by climate change. Experience shows that engaging government in the process leads to administrative, planning and funding support to implement community project priorities. This participatory, community-led approach recognises the interconnectedness of household level resilience with other 'sectors' that are critical for resilience such as WASH, health, food security, livelihoods/economic resilience, social protection and inclusion.

## Benefits

There are multiple benefits for communities from a multi-sectoral locally-led approach to climate resilience.

- Strengthens communities' resilience to climate changes and climate shocks while advancing human development outcomes.
- Promotes gender equality, inclusion and drives preparedness / resilience outcomes.
- Breaks down artificial silos that currently exist between interconnected community challenges.
- Assists achieving the Australian Government's climate objective target in the International Development Policy – 50% of investments over \$3m to include a climate objective by 2024-25.
- Advances the localisation agenda: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) and the World Humanitarian Summit's Grand Bargain which commits Australia to supporting locally led actions to prepare for and respond to disasters.



## What are the human impacts of adequate housing?

As a connector of other critical developmental priorities, adequate housing is fundamental to household and community resilience while inadequate housing undermines development gains from Australia's international development programs.

Research into the social impacts of housing identifies causal links to health, education, income generation and the broader economy. The French Development Agency (AFD) published 'Housing for SDGs' in 2024, which establishes a direct impact between access to housing, improved housing conditions and ten SDGs (AFD, 2024). In addition to the AFD report, the following evidence highlights these multi-dimensional impacts, including:

- **Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence**

Housing vulnerability heightens the risk of sexual and physical abuse and domestic violence, while female-headed households are more likely to be affected by poor housing conditions (Matsie, 2019; IFRC, 2010; HFHI, 2011). Women face greater impacts from climate change due to their reliance on natural resources and unequal access to land, water, and economic opportunities (UN Women and UNDP, 2023).

- **Health and Wellbeing**

Adequate housing improves the health of young children by reducing incidences of parasitic infections, diarrhea, anaemia, and enhances children's cognitive development. Studies have demonstrated the rate of under 5 mortality in adequate housing was 40% lower than those living in inadequate housing (Adebawale, S. A., Morakinyo, O. M., & Ana, G. R., 2017) and can generate a life expectancy increase of 2.4 years (Setchell, C.A., 2001). It also improves mental health outcomes – after securing safe shelter, people feel more in control and have better decision-making capacities.

- **Education**

Loss of housing closely correlates to disruption to children's education and poorer educational outcomes. Supporting people to improve their living conditions in informal settlements can generate an increase in expected years of schooling by as much as 28% (Setchell, C.A., 2001). Habitat for Humanity in Nepal determined school dropout rates reduced by 50% within 2 years of living in adequate housing.

- **Livelihoods, Food and Economic Development**

Small enterprises such as garment making, retail and agribusiness that provide food for families and direct household income are conducted from homes. Up to 25% of all household in cities in developing countries use their home for economic activity – other sources estimate up to 60-80%. Supporting people to improve their living conditions in informal settlements can generate a direct impact of as much as 10.5% economic growth at the household level (Setchell, C.A., 2001) as well as significant job creation within the surrounding community. The loss or damage of a home from natural disasters can therefore lead to significant loss of livelihoods and economic development potential.

### Recommendations:

1. **Integrated Climate Resilience Development Model:** Achieve more effective and transformative climate resilience by shifting from sector-specific prioritisations, to adopt an integrated multi-sector development model that incorporates localised 'household level' resilience. Address the critical role of housing in preventing displacement, responding to climate-induced disasters and achieving climate resilient outcomes for vulnerable communities, women and people with disabilities.
2. **Humanitarian-Development-Climate Nexus:** Strengthen the humanitarian/development/climate nexus by utilising a model of household-level resilience in preparedness, response and risk reduction activities along the humanitarian/development continuum, including through the Participatory Approach to Community Climate Resilience (PACCR) and Build Back Safer (BBS).
3. **Climate Resilience Funding:** Support shelter-related initiatives that scale up household level resilience across communities by enabling local capacities to effectively prepare, respond and reduce risks of climate impacts. Effective interventions range from provision of appropriate information; influencing community behaviours; training in resilient construction/maintenance techniques; influencing building standards and practices; supporting entrepreneurship & small business; demonstration housing construction/improvements; supporting housing markets including supply of local, low cost-materials; and working in partnerships with governments, UN agencies, shelter cluster partners and other stakeholders.
4. **Climate Finance and Innovation:** Support innovative development financing and partnership models with initiatives that support housing market systems and provide scale in climate change adaptation for housing, such as Habitat for Humanity's MicroBuild.