

**No wait: No gud u late – Market Vendor Disaster Preparedness
(Solomon Islands pijin - Don't wait: it's no good if you're late)**

Have you ever gone into a building that's new to you and thought: where's the fire escape? Or perhaps you have made arrangements for someone to be your emergency, out-of-town contact to be phoned by your 'nearest and dearest' when home, for whatever reason, becomes unreachable? Hmm, chances are that you probably haven't.

Raising awareness of natural hazards and trying to avert disasters or at least lessen any impacts may not feature highly among most people's daily priorities, but for market vendors in municipal markets across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu building capacity and being prepared literally means saving lives and livelihoods during times of disaster. All three Pacific nations are among the most exposed countries in the world to natural hazards, with Vanuatu often having the unenviable misfortune of being top of the global list in terms of risk indices.



Rakiraki Market, Fiji: Foundations of the vendors' accommodation centre and the stub of the tree (silhouetted) that collapsed on the building are all that remained after the destruction of Cyclone Winston.

All fruit and vegetable markets are vulnerable; often coastal and low-lying, they are prone to numerous potential hazards: cyclones, storm surges, flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis and fire, and some have been adversely affected in the very recent past. Rakiraki Market, Fiji, was badly damaged during Cyclone Winston in 2016, and requires a complete rebuild (currently under construction); the five ring road markets in Vanuatu were destroyed by Cyclone Pam in 2015 and still await redevelopment (work is to start soon); and several markets in Fiji flood frequently, with Nadi and Ba Markets displaying above-door watermarks left by recent, severe flood events.



LEFT: Ba Market, Fiji - market master's office, with three pencil-line marks showing the water levels for the 2016, 2012 and 2009 floods (in order of magnitude).

RIGHT: Nadi Market, Fiji - a vendor points out two white lines on a central post, either side of the support joist, indicating recent flood-water levels.



The context and challenge

Working with 22 markets in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the UN Women *Markets for Change* project aims to ensure that markets are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory places of work where vendors, most of whom are women, feel empowered. Yet during extreme climatic and disaster events, agricultural supplies are interrupted, immediately affecting the availability of produce post-disaster and impacting on yields during recovery. The result, heavily impaired market operations.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, as well as having to cope with the disruption to the market workplace, women also have greater household care concerns and responsibilities. The development of climate change and disaster preparedness strategies and the strengthening of vendor capacities are vital, therefore, to ensure the resilience of this highly-feminised market sector.

Market vendors fall into two groups: permanent vendors, who sell every day at the market and often buy produce from farmers to sell on (wholesalers); and, casual vendors, farmers and growers who either trade at the market a few days a week or more irregularly, whenever they have surplus produce to sell.

This creates a challenge in disaster preparedness. How do you get key messaging across to vendors who attend the market only infrequently? This was one of the questions posed during the disaster-training workshops held at each of the participating markets.



Port Vila, Vanuatu: A fitting venue for a workshop – the Evacuation and Training Centre of the Vanuatu Christian Council

The response

Posters and practice! The development and sharing of simple messages – actions that vendors can take at the market level – is central to preparedness and raising awareness. Messages can be broadcast over the public announcement system on a regular basis or they can take the form of posters for market display. Audio messages must be audible to all, and therefore, broadcast in the languages of each market, and printed materials must be easy to understand even for those who may struggle with literacy.

Misunderstandings need to be avoided. In March this year, a fire broke out at a food outlet in Honiara Market, Solomon Islands, and panic ensued with people running in all directions. Some vendors knew that there was a fire, others thought that there was a big fight, and still others heard

that a tsunami was coming. The word for 'fire' in the language of southern Malaita, a neighbouring island to Honiara, is 'suna', and it is believed that vendors from Malaita were shouting 'suna' which others misheard as 'tsunami'. Injuries were reported from the resultant crush to escape.

Knowing how to react in any given emergency can ease fears and reduce panic. Two examples of educational materials, developed as part of the project, are shown here. The first relates to actions in response to a tsunami warning. Most markets because of their location receive tsunami warnings, yet previously, many markets may not have identified an area of high ground where vendors should head nor the easiest route to get there; and the urgency to reach the nearest elevation immediately after a strong earthquake may not have been generally known, despite a possible tsunami following in a matter of minutes.

TSUNAMI WARNING

Move to high ground immediately

A tsunami is a series of waves – the first may not be the biggest

NEVER go down to the sea to watch a tsunami - You cannot out run or out swim a tsunami

ALWAYS follow instructions immediately



At flood-prone markets, vendors normally prepare well in advance by watching the weather and packing up produce after a day or two of heavy rain. But all markets are susceptible to flash floods as a result of blocked drains or a torrential, local downpour. Seasoned vendors at Suva Market recall that several years ago, a blocked drain was blamed for a rapid flood that had vendors sitting cross-legged on their stalls looking at each other for the day. Previously, few vendors considered the impact of such localised risks and adapted their selling environment accordingly.

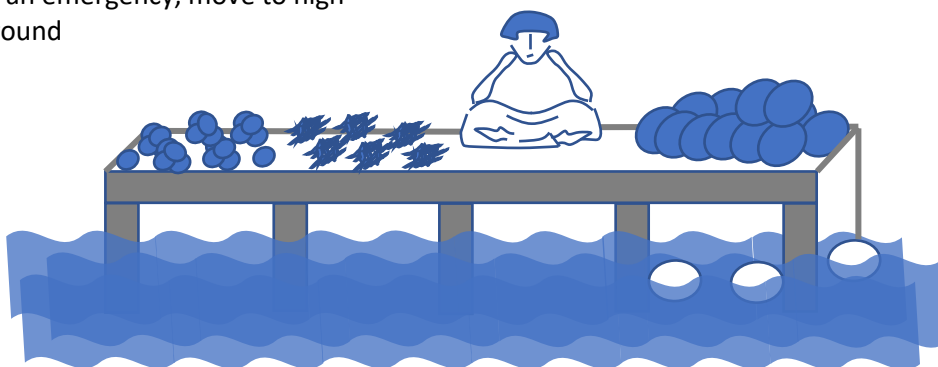
FLOOD WARNING

Lift produce off the floor

Listen and respond to flood warnings in good time

No wait
No gud u late!

In an emergency, move to high ground



Prayer Points:

- Pray for the safety of market vendors, who are exposed to the elements on a daily basis and are at the mercy of potential hazards.
- Give thanks for the UN Women *Markets for Change* project that has empowered women vendors across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
- Give thanks for the work of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) who respond, often in overwhelming circumstances, when disasters strike.
- Give thanks for the ongoing collaboration of market vendor associations, market management, municipal authorities, NDMO and UN Women.
- Pray for effective implementation of the disaster plans and infrastructural action plans developed for each market as part of the UN Women project.
- Reflect on the slogan: Life first; produce later. How can the slogan be applied to your own circumstances?
- What do we prioritise unnecessarily?

The reality

At every workshop, stories repeatedly surfaced of vendors previously ignoring instructions and continuing to sell long after an evacuation announcement had been given. Some vendors in Fiji, where markets can be locked, even take up selling positions outside the locked buildings in such situations. In Lautoka, western Fiji, some of the rural vendors left it too late to head back to their villages during Cyclone Winston and so found themselves moving around the outside of the locked market as the winds shifted with the passage of the storm – a very frightening experience - and at Nausori Market, Fiji, the police had to force reluctant vendors to move along. Among other misdemeanours, you can be arrested for ignoring evacuation orders in Fiji.

Markets in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are open-sided, so it can be even more difficult to persuade vendors to leave. The acting town clerk of Luganville, Vanuatu's second largest urban centre, related that, in May 2017, during Cyclone Donna, vendors repeatedly refused to leave the market until the height of the hurricane was upon them. "Having failed to persuade them to leave perhaps half a dozen times during the previous evening, at half past one in the morning, when conditions were truly terrifying, all the vendors literally ran for the rescue vehicle I was driving!" Philip Isom laughs. But there was a serious point to his jesting.

The message

Time and time again during the workshops, vendors emphasised that preservation of life is paramount. "Life gone, everything is gone..." said Nadi Market vendor, Maikeli Nagoda, flipping his hand over and over. To stress the importance of responding appropriately during disasters, vendors generated slogans of encouragement during each consultation. Below is a list of suggested slogans produced by vendors at Luganville Market, Vanuatu, written in readable Bislama.

Each country team agreed on at least one working slogan. The project strapline in Fijian was: *Liu mada na bula; qai muri nai voli*, which translates as: 'Life first, produce later' - the hard-to-counter, heart-felt sentiments of hard-working vendors. Let's pray that they don't have to remind others of its importance...

Disaster messaging in Bislama

I gat wan laef nomo;
Mas mov kwik tem;
Mas mov kwik taem go long sef ples
– I gat wan laef nomo;
Ron blong sevem laef/ wetem mani;
Yu kam yumi go;
Yu kam folem miyumi tu go;
Giem stret informesen;
Laef emi impoten, yumi mov aot
denja is ahead;
Muv aot, I gat wan laef nomo!



A Hindi-speaking vendor at Sigatoka Market, Fiji, offering a slogan in Sanskrit.

The six-year Markets for Change project is largely funded by the Australian Government and combines two UN Women programmes: Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR).