



INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION FOR FIJI

A RESEARCH REPORT ON
CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN FIJI



RISING TIDES
REAL LIVES



EXCLUSION
INCREASES RISK



EQUALITY
BUILDS RESILIENCE



INCLUSION
DRIVES SOLUTIONS



NOTHING ABOUT US
WITHOUT US



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Inclusive Climate Action for Fiji (ICAF)

Research Report

Assessing and Strengthening
Disability Inclusion in Climate Change Action
and Disaster Resilience in Fiji



Impact of Climate Change on Persons with Disabilities

January 2026



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Acronyms

CBDRM	Community-Based Disaster Risk Management
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DCC	Department of Climate Change
DPO	Disabled Persons Organisation
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FCEF	Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation
FDPF	Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GCF	Green Climate Fund
ICAF	Inclusive Climate Action in Fiji
IVDP	Integrated Village Development Plan
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MWCSP	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NDP	National Development Plan
NDRRP	National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WG-SS	WG Short Set on Functioning

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Executive Summary

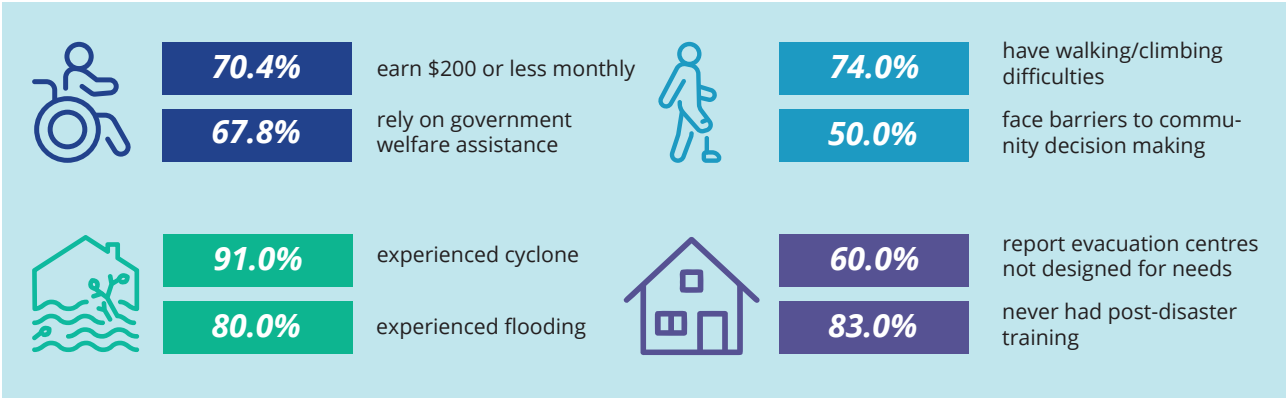
This report presents the findings of the **Inclusive Climate Action for Fiji (ICAF)** research team, which examines the extent to which climate change adaptation, mitigation, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts in Fiji are inclusive of persons with disabilities. Drawing on quantitative surveys, focus group discussions, and high-level stakeholder consultations, the study provides evidence on the lived experiences, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and systemic barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the context of recurrent climate hazards.

KEY FINDINGS

Quantitative

Table 1: Indicator and Statistic/Findings

Indicator	Statistic/Findings
Poverty	70.4% of PWDs surveyed earn \$200 or less monthly; 67.8% rely on government welfare as primary income.
Chronic Disaster Exposure	91% experienced cyclones; 80% flooding; 61% within the last 3 years.
Critical Service Gaps	Only 17% receive NGO assistance; 83% have never had post-disaster training.
Inaccessible Evacuation	60% report evacuation centres are not designed for disability needs.
Mobility Barrier	74% have walking/climbing difficulty with the most prevalent impairment domain.
Exclusion from Decision-Making	50% face barriers to community decision-making.
Water & Food Insecurity	90% face water shortage and 84% food shortages during disasters.
Policy-to-Practice Gap	No evidence of government Climate Change programmes at community level.





Policy Analysis & Stakeholder Consultations

Table 2: Indicator, Finding and Implication

Indicator	Finding	Implication
Policy Framework	Strong legislative recognition of inclusiveness but weak enforcement.	Policy commitments not consistently implemented at community level.
Institutional Coordination	Limited formal coordination between DCC and NDMO; institutional silos.	Fragmented planning for inclusive DRR and climate adaptation.
Budget & Financing	Reliance on donor-funded, project-based initiatives.	Sustainability risk: disability inclusion not institutionalized in ministries core budgets.
Data Systems	Absence of reliable disability-disaggregated data.	Weak targeting, monitoring, and accountability.
Evacuation Infrastructure	Many centres classified as partly accessible are functionally inaccessible.	PWDs avoid evacuation centres, increasing risk exposure.
Emergency Operations	72-hour rule places burden on households to self-supply essentials.	Disproportionate impact on economically vulnerable PWDs.
CBDRM Model	Community responders prioritize household safety; migration reduces trained capacity.	Delays in evacuation and support for vulnerable groups.
Disability Approach	Risk of reverting to charity-based framing instead of rights-based model.	Undermines autonomy and systemic inclusion.
Private Sector Engagement	MSMEs face barriers to implementing inclusive employment practices.	Requires guidance, incentives, and cross-sector coordination.

Sections

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Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

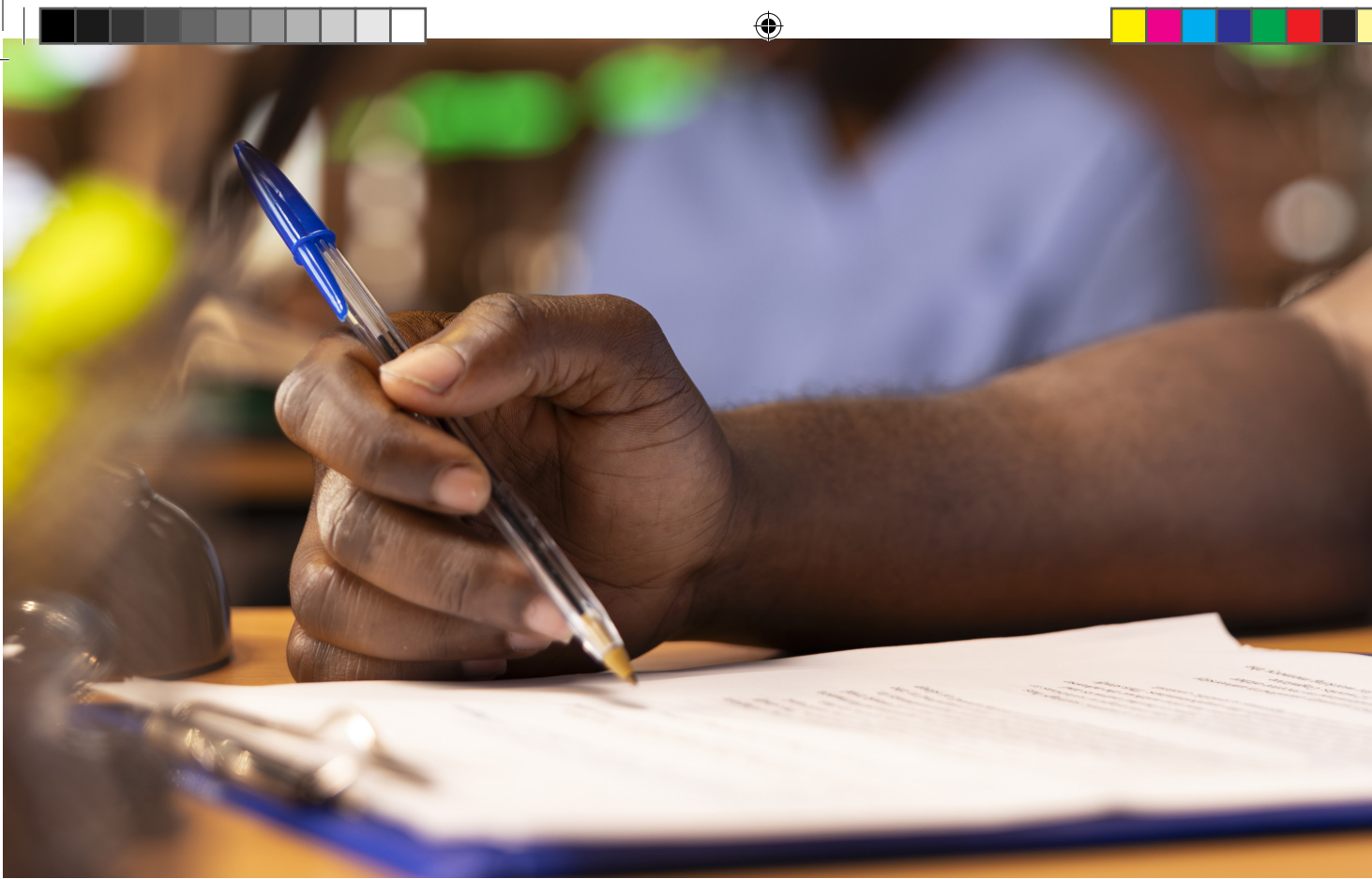
Fiji, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), faces escalating climate risks including tropical cyclones, flooding, drought, sea-level rise, and associated hazards.

Persons with disabilities (PWDs), who comprise approximately 13.7% of the population according to the 2017 census, are highly likely to be disproportionately affected by these climate-related hazards due to compounding socio-economic vulnerabilities, physical accessibility barriers, and systemic exclusion from disaster preparedness and response systems.

1.2 National and International Policy Framework

This research is situated within a robust legislative and policy context:

- **Fiji Climate Change Act 2021:** Provides the legal foundation for national climate action, adaptation, mitigation, and climate finance coordination.
- **National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 (NDRMO Act):** Expands NDMO's mandate under Sections 4 and 7 to include biological and technological hazards, aligning with Sendai Framework Target E.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018:** Establishes the legal framework for disability rights, accessibility standards, and inclusive services.
- **National Development Plan (NDP) 2025-2029:** Mandates creation of resilient multipurpose evacuation centres accessible to PWDs.
- **National Adaptation Plan (NAP):** Guides climate adaptation strategy at national and subnational levels.
- **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** International framework ratified by Fiji, mandating inclusive disaster risk reduction.
- **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030:** Target E specifically addresses disability inclusion in disaster risk strategies.
- **Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy 2021-2024:** Guides DCC's inclusion initiatives.



1.3 Research Objectives

1. Assess the lived experiences, barriers, and needs of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change and disaster events across Fiji's Northern, Central/Eastern, and Western divisions.
2. Identify policy-to-implementation gaps in disability-inclusive climate action and disaster resilience at the community level.
3. Evaluate the accessibility and inclusiveness of evacuation centres, early warning systems, and community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) mechanisms.
4. Develop evidence-based, actionable recommendations and practical inclusion guidelines to strengthen disability-inclusive climate resilience.
5. Advance meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) in climate change decision-making processes.

1.4 Main Initiative

To ensure Fiji's climate change and disaster resilience initiatives leave no person with disability behind through evidence-based assessment and actionable inclusion guideline, further emphasizing the *"Nothing about us without us"* principle.

Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative surveys, qualitative focus group discussions, and stakeholder consultations to assess disability-inclusive climate action in Fiji.

The quantitative component generated disaggregated data on socio-economic status, disaster exposure, accessibility, and coping capacity through structured questionnaires administered across the Northern, Central/Eastern, and Western divisions. Critically, the data were disaggregated according to specific impairments, allowing the study to measure the differentiated impact of climate-inclusive interventions on persons with disabilities (PWDs) rather than treating them as a single homogeneous group.

Participant selection drew on the Fiji Disabled People's Federation network, which comprises five affiliated organisations and twenty-two community-based branches spread across Fiji. This network provided coverage of the Western Division (including Nadroga and Navosa), the Northern Division (Bua and inland Labasa), and the Central Division, ensuring that respondents were drawn from a geographically and contextually diverse sample. Data collection was carried out by three volunteers working alongside the Consultant.

At each selected branch, data were gathered not only from individuals with impairments but also from their parents or guardians, as well as from Community Health Workers (Nasi ni Koro) and village headmen (Turaga ni Koro). These community figures were deliberately included because they belong to the same communities as the participants, and their perspectives and lived experiences were considered essential to understanding the broader social and environmental context in which PWDs experience climate-related risk.

The qualitative component, conducted through focus group discussions, explored lived experiences, barriers, perceptions, and community-level realities that could not be captured through numerical data alone. In addition, consultations with government ministries, Disabled Persons' Organizations, and relevant stakeholders provided institutional and policy-level perspectives. The integration of these methods enabled triangulation of findings and strengthened the analysis of gaps between national policy commitments and implementation at community level.

2.2 Study Area and Population

The research covered three geographic divisions of Fiji:

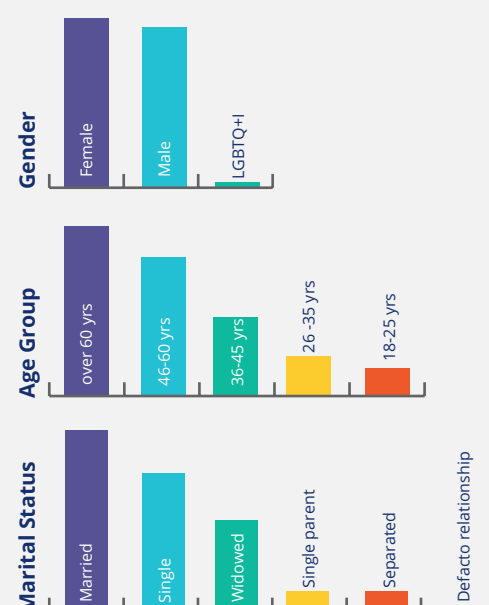
Northern Division	Central/Eastern Division	Western Division
Includes communities in: Bua (Cavaga, Nawaido, Makolei), Cakaudrove (Tukavesi), and Labasa areas.	Includes communities in: Rewa (Burebasaga, Vutia, Vunisinu, Nadoria), Tailevu (Lomainasau, Nabitu), and Suva-Nasinu urban settlements.	Includes communities in: Ba (Nailaga, Sorokoba), Tavua (Korovou), Nadroga-Navosa (Balenabelo, Lawai, Yaroma, Navuevu), and Nadi (Navoci, Narewa).

2.3 Sample Size and Demographics

A total of 115 persons with disabilities were surveyed across the three divisions.

Table 3: Demographics

Demographic	Category	Count
Gender	Female	58
	Male	55
	LGBTQ+I	2
Age Group	18–25 years	7
	26–35 years	10
	36–45 years	20
	46–60 years	35
	Over 60 years	43
Marital Status	Married	46
	Single	35
	Widowed	23
	Single parent	5
	Separated	5
	De-facto relationship	1



2.4 Data Collection Methods

2.4.1 Individual Surveys (Quantitative)

A survey was administered to collect quantitative data from persons with disabilities across all divisions. The structured questionnaire captured demographic characteristics (sex, age group, location), socio-economic status (education, employment, income sources, welfare dependence), exposure to different types of climate-related hazards, accessibility of water and evacuation centres, and experiences during recent

disasters. Closed-ended questions allowed for the measurement of frequencies and proportions, enabling comparative analysis across divisions and vulnerability categories. The survey instrument was designed to generate disability-relevant, disaggregated data to quantify patterns of disaster exposure, coping capacity, and institutional accessibility gaps. Data were compiled and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, primarily frequency distributions and percentage analysis, to identify prevailing trends and to complement qualitative insights from the focus group discussions.

As far as the quantitative aspect of this study is concerned, it's crucial to recognize the potential biases and limitations in the sampling methodology. The sample size of 115 respondents across Fiji's divisions may not be fully representative of the broader disability community. Factors like accessibility, outreach methods, and self-selection could have skewed participation towards certain demographics or areas.

The underrepresentation of younger age groups, especially in the Northern division, and the slight overrepresentation of females, may reflect sampling challenges rather than actual population distribution. The reliance on surveys, focus groups, and observations may also be subject to selection and response biases, as participants who chose to engage may differ from those who did not.

Thus, the quantitative findings should be considered exploratory and indicative, not conclusive or generalizable. More rigorous probability sampling, larger samples, and inclusion of marginalized subgroups (e.g., LGBTQI+) are needed to validate and extend these insights.

Nevertheless, this disaggregated quantitative data provides a starting point for understanding the diverse realities of PWDs in Fiji regarding climate change and disaster risk. It highlights the importance of intersectional analysis and context-specific interventions that account for the heterogeneity across age, gender, and geography. However, the qualitative insights gathered through focus groups and community observations offer valuable depth and nuance to complement the quantitative findings.

2.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (Qualitative)

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted as part of the field research initiative to capture the lived experiences of persons with disabilities in relation to climate change and disaster risk. Using a structured FGD guide, facilitators collected both demographic and qualitative information through participatory group dialogue. Each session began with the recording of personal details (name, community, gender, and age group), followed by guided discussions organised into thematic sections: awareness and understanding of climate change; climate change and disability inclusion; coping capacity at household and community levels; recruitment and inclusivity of Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) teams; and the linkage between CBDRM and broader climate action initiatives.

The discussions explored types of disasters experienced (e.g., cyclones, flooding, drought), accessibility of evacuation centres, early warning systems, physical and logistical barriers faced by PWDs, emotional responses to climate stress, and the extent to which climate projects were inclusive and sustainable. Facilitators encouraged open dialogue, group presentations, and reflections to ensure meaningful participation and to uphold the principle of *"nothing about us without us."*

Data generated from these FGDs were triangulated with key informant interviews and policy consultations to identify implementation gaps between national legislation and community-level realities, thereby informing evidence-based recommendations for disability-inclusive climate resilience in Fiji.

2.4.3 Stakeholder Consultations (Policy Advocacy)

To complement the community-level field research and to assess the policy-to-implementation landscape, targeted stakeholder consultations were conducted with four key national institutions. The ICAF consultation team, met with the Department of Climate Change at Level 2, Bali Tower, 318 Toorak Road, Suva on 29 October 2025, where Climate Change Senior Research Officer Michelle Baleikanacea, Policy and Research Analyst, and Manager of the Climate Change Division Genevieve Jiva discussed the Department's role in climate governance, adaptation and mitigation coordination, and the acknowledged gaps in disability-disaggregated data, cross-agency coordination with NDMO, and targeted preparedness for persons with disabilities.

A consultation with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection was held with Principal Welfare Officer Madam Salote Biukoto at Level 1, Suva Street, Toorak, focusing on the Ministry's mandate for disability rights in disaster risk reduction and evacuation centre management, which revealed persistent issues of functional inaccessibility in evacuation centres, weak enforcement of the 2018 Disability Act standards, and an estimated six genuinely accessible community halls nationwide.

The team subsequently consulted with the National Disaster Management Office at Level 3, Nasilivata House, Ratu Mara Road, Samabula, engaging Senior Policy Officer Shaya Malini and Lead Project Officer Joji Waqata on the operational realities of the NDRM Act 2024, the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management model's vulnerabilities, including the household-first prioritisation by committee members and trained responder attrition through labour migration schemes and the critical 72-hour self-supply burden that disproportionately affects persons with disabilities.

Finally, a consultation with the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation examined the barriers to disability-inclusive employment, identifying attitudinal, physical, policy and communication obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in the labour market, particularly within MSMEs.

Collectively, these consultations confirmed a consistent pattern across all four institutions: while Fiji's legislative and policy framework broadly recognises disability inclusion, significant gaps persist in enforcement, operational coordination, data systems, budgetary allocation and community-level implementation underscoring the urgent need for the coordinated, evidence-based reforms recommended in this report.

2.5 Data Analysis

The analytical framework for this study combined quantitative, qualitative, and policy analysis approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of disability-inclusive climate action. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentage calculations, to summarize patterns in income, disability domains, disaster exposure, and access to services. Cross-tabulations were conducted by division, gender, and type of disability to identify disparities and intersectional vulnerability trends.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions and open-ended survey responses were analysed using thematic analysis, where responses were coded and grouped into recurring themes such as accessibility barriers, coping strategies, institutional gaps, and exclusion from decision-making.

In addition, a structured policy gap analysis was undertaken by comparing legislative provisions and institutional mandates against field-level findings, enabling identification of discrepancies between policy

commitments and operational practice. Together, this integrated analytical framework ensured triangulation of evidence and strengthened the validity of conclusions and recommendations.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical research principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, accessibility, and respect for participant dignity. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained, depending on participant preference and accessibility needs.

Special attention was given to accessibility and reasonable accommodation to ensure meaningful participation of persons with diverse disabilities. Where required, accommodations included simplified explanations, assistance from caregivers, provision of large-print materials, flexible interview formats, and the use of local facilitators familiar with participants' communication needs. Focus group venues were selected based on physical accessibility where possible.

Section 3

Field Survey Research and Findings

The disaggregated data from the 115 surveys, focus groups, and community observations across Fiji's Central, Northern, and Western divisions sheds light on the study's demographic and geographic composition.

Age-wise, the 46-60 years group had the highest representation (35), followed by 36-45 years (20), 26-35 years (10), and 18-25 years (7). 43 respondents were over 60, with the Western division having the most (26). The Northern division lacked representation in the 18-25 and 26-35 age groups.

Gender-wise, females slightly outnumbered males (58 vs. 55). The Western division had the most females (30), followed by Central (18) and Northern (10). Only 2 respondents, both from the Western division, identified as LGBTQI+.

Geographically, the Western division had the highest participation (57), followed by Central (38) and Northern (20).

Table 4: Division by Age-groups

Division	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-60 years	Over 60 years	Total
Central	2	5	10	11	10	38
Northern	2	2	1	8	7	20
Western	3	3	9	16	26	57
Total	7	10	20	35	43	115

Table 5: Division by Gender

Division	Female	LGBTQ+I	Male	Total
Central	18	0	20	38
Northern	10	0	10	20
Western	30	2	25	57
Total	58	2	55	115



50%
Female



48%
Male



2%
LGBTQ+I

Total
115

33% Central Division

17% Northern Division

50% Western Division

3.1 Socio-Economic Vulnerability Profile

3.1.1 Education Attainment

Table 6: Educational Level

Education Level	Respondents
Primary School	41
Secondary / High School	40
Technical / Vocational School	23
Bachelor's Degree	6
No Formal Education	4
Other	1
Total	115



Only **6 out of 115** respondents held bachelor's degrees and were permanently employed.

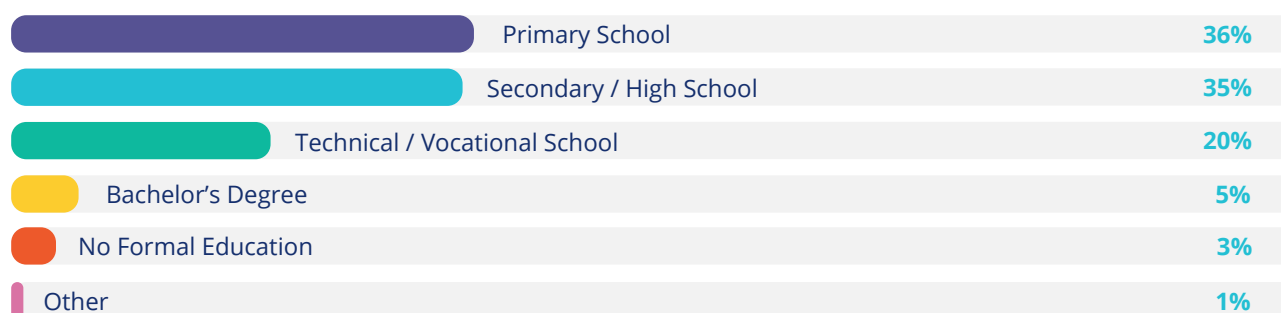


Figure 1: Level of Education

Only 6 out of 115 respondents held bachelor's degrees and were permanently employed, primarily within disability-affiliated organisations. The majority had primary or secondary education only, reflecting significant barriers to educational progression for PWDs.

3.1.2 Income and Livelihood

Income distribution reveal a pronounced concentration of respondents in the lowest income brackets, highlighting significant economic vulnerability among persons with disabilities. More than half of respondents (53.9%) earn between \$101–\$200 per month, while an additional 16.5% earn below \$100. Combined, this means over 70 per cent of participants live on \$200 or less monthly, indicating deep income insecurity.

Only small minority report earnings above \$500 per month (10.5%), and just 3.5% earn more than \$1,000, suggesting limited access to stable formal employment or higher-paying livelihood opportunities. This income profile underscores the structural economic constraints faced by persons with disabilities and helps explain their heightened exposure to climate-related shocks.

With limited disposable income, their capacity to prepare for disasters, invest in resilient housing, access assistive devices, or recover from climate impacts is significantly restricted. The findings therefore reinforce the intersection between poverty, disability, and climate vulnerability, demonstrating that economic marginalization remains a critical determinant of adaptive capacity.

Table 7: Distribution by Individual Monthly Income Range

Individual Monthly Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below \$100	19	16.5%
\$101-\$200	62	53.9%
\$201-\$300	17	14.8%
\$301-\$500	5	4.3%
\$501-\$1,000	8	7.0%
Over \$1,000	4	3.5%



Over 70 percent of participants live on \$200 or less monthly, indicating deep income insecurity.

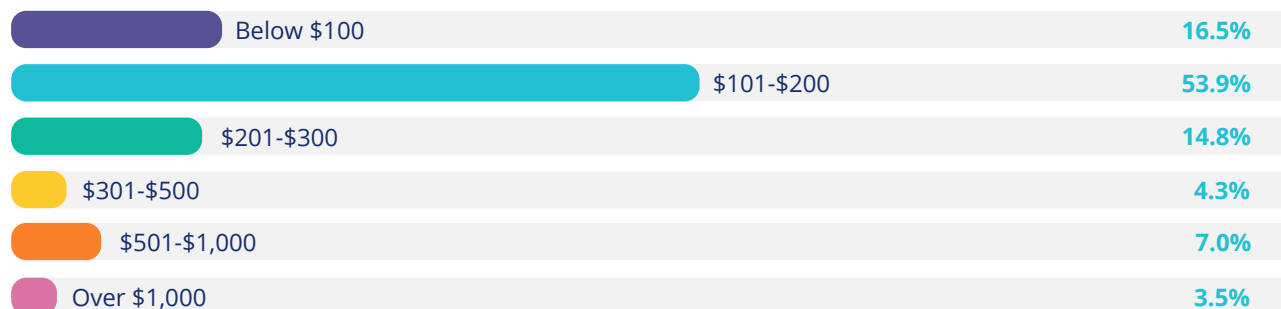
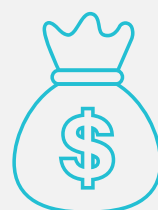


Figure 2: Individual Monthly Income

Household income also indicate widespread economic hardship among households. Nearly 68% of households earn \$200 or less per month, with over one-third surviving on below \$100. Only a small minority report incomes above \$300, and very few exceed \$1,000. This distribution reflects significant household-level poverty, which limits the capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related shocks. Low household income directly constrains resilience investments such as housing repairs, emergency supplies, and access to essential services, reinforcing the intersection between poverty, disability, and climate vulnerability.

Table 8: Household Monthly Income - Percentage

Individual Monthly Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below \$100	42	36.5%
\$101-\$200	36	31.3%
\$201-\$300	18	15.7%
\$301-\$500	7	6.1%
\$501-\$1,000	8	7.0%
Over \$1,000	4	3.5%



Only small minority report earnings above \$500 per month (10.5%), suggesting limited access to stable formal employment or higher-paying livelihood opportunities.

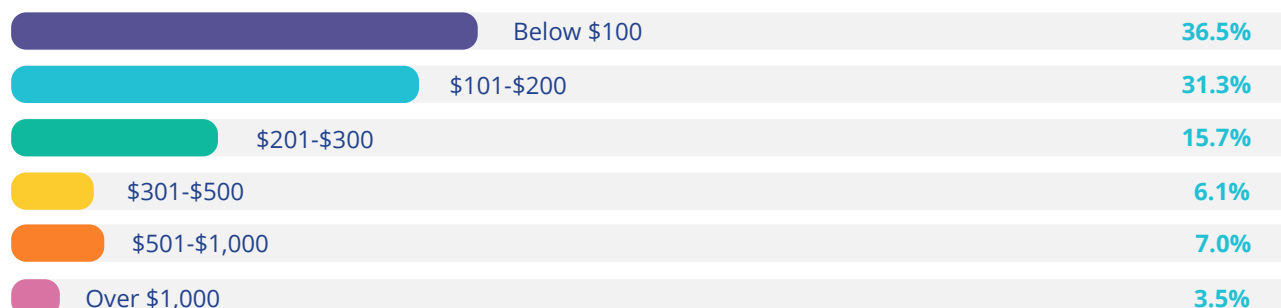


Figure 3: Household Monthly Income Percentage (%)

Table 9: Distribution by Income Sources

Income Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Government Welfare	78	67.8%
Farming	38	33.0%
Business	25	21.7%
Office Work	11	9.6%
None	8	7.0%
Market Vendor	7	6.1%
Fishing	4	3.5%
Carpentry	1	0.9%
Labour	1	0.9%
Taxi Driver	0	0.0%

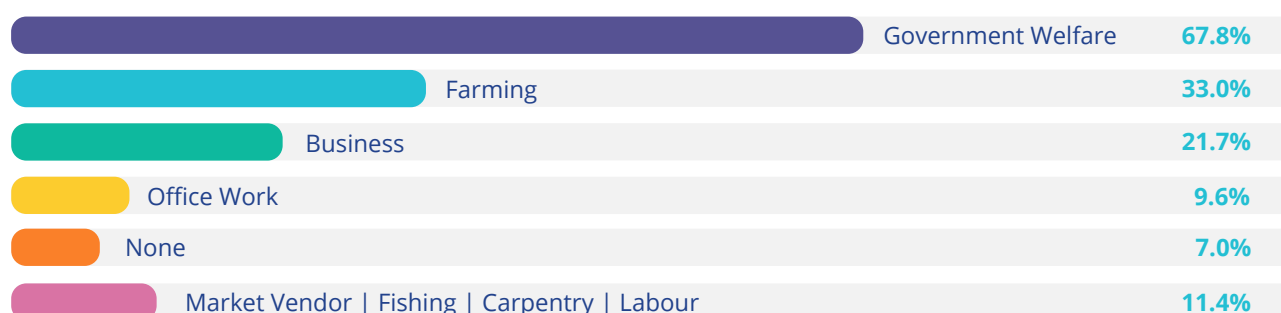


Figure 4: Household Income Sources

The data indicate a heavy reliance on government welfare as the primary source of income, with 67.8% of respondents reporting social welfare support. This underscores the limited access to stable and formal employment opportunities among persons with disabilities. While a notable proportion engage in farming (33.0%), business activities (21.7%), and small-scale vending (6.1%), these are largely informal or subsistence-based livelihoods that are vulnerable to climate shocks and market disruptions.

Only 9.6% report office-based employment, reflecting low participation in the formal wage sector. Very small proportions are engaged in fishing, carpentry, or labour, and none reported employment as taxi drivers. Overall, the income structure highlights economic precarity, dependence on social welfare protection systems, and limited diversification of sustainable income sources, which directly constrains adaptive capacity and resilience in the face of recurrent climate-related hazards.

3.1.3 Access to Services, Training & Education

The quantitative results indicate significant gaps in respondents receiving government assistance and support related to disaster preparedness and response. While a majority (69.6%) reported receiving general government assistance, access to more targeted support was lacking.

Only 17.4% reported receiving NGO/FBO assistance, and post-disaster training reached just 16.5% of respondents. Most concerning, only 19.1% said evacuation centres in their community are disability-inclusive, with 59.1% responding 'No' and 24 respondents (19.1%) 'Don't Know'.

In terms of community adaptability, nearly half (47.8%) believe their community can adapt to disasters, but a sizable 13.9% said No and 44 respondents (38.3%) were uncertain.

Overall, the data reveals major unmet needs in providing PWDs with tailored assistance, training them on disaster preparedness, ensuring accessible evacuation facilities, and building community resilience. The high percentages of ‘No’ and ‘Don’t Know’ responses across multiple indicators suggest PWDs are being left behind in DRR efforts.

Table 10: Receiving Assistance and Support

Indicator	Yes	No	Don't Know	% Yes	% No	Gap Assessment
Government Assistance	80	35	0	69.6%	30.4%	30% unserved
NGO/FBO Assistance	20	95	0	17.4%	82.6%	83% unserved
Post-Disaster Training	19	96	0	16.5%	83.5%	84% untrained
Evac Centres Disability-Inclusive	22	68	24	19.1%	59.1%	60% say No
Community Can Adapt	55	16	44	47.8%	13.9%	38% uncertain

The survey results reveal the lack of disability-inclusive evacuation centres in the community surveyed. 59% of respondents said centres are not designed to accommodate various disabilities, while 20% were unsure. Only 21% affirmed the centres are accessible.

This could indicate that most evacuation facilities lack crucial accessibility features like ramps, accessible toilets, and wheelchair spaces. The high uncertainty also suggests poor communication about shelter accessibility, which could deter PWDs from evacuating and put their safety at risk.



Are Evacuation centres disability-inclusive ?

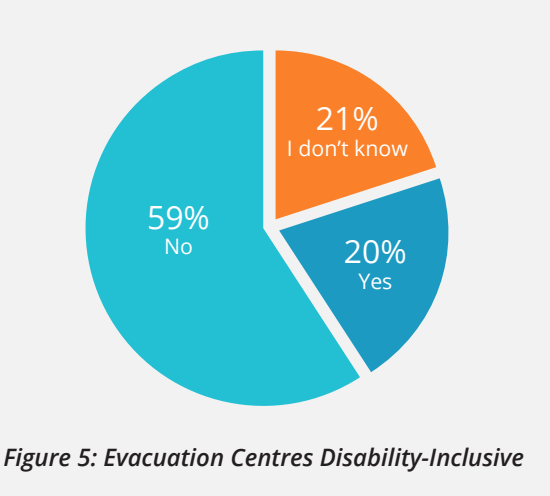


Figure 5: Evacuation Centres Disability-Inclusive

3.2 Disability Profile

3.2.1 Types and Severity of Disability

Disability status in this study was assessed using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions (WG-SS), an internationally recognized tool designed to identify functional difficulties across six core domains: seeing,

hearing, walking/climbing steps, remembering/concentrating, self-care, and communication. The Washington Group approach focuses on functional limitations rather than medical diagnoses, enabling comparable and policy-relevant disability statistics.

The findings show that walking/climbing difficulty is the most prevalent impairment domain, with 73.9% reporting some level of difficulty, followed by seeing (53.0%) and remembering (37.4%). Self-care difficulties were reported by 33.0% of respondents, while hearing (20.0%) and communication (13.0%) were less prevalent. The distribution highlights mobility-related impairments as the dominant functional challenge within the sample, which has direct implications for evacuation planning, infrastructure accessibility, and inclusive disaster preparedness.

Table 11: Functional Difficulty by Domain

Domain	No Difficulty	Some Difficulty	A Lot of Difficulty	Cannot Do At All	Total with Any Difficulty	% with Any Difficulty
Seeing	54	36	20	5	61	53.0%
Hearing	92	17	5	1	23	20.0%
Walking/Climbing	30	30	48	7	85	73.9%
Remembering	72	36	7	0	43	37.4%
Self-Care	77	31	7	0	38	33.0%
Communicating	100	10	5	0	15	13.0%

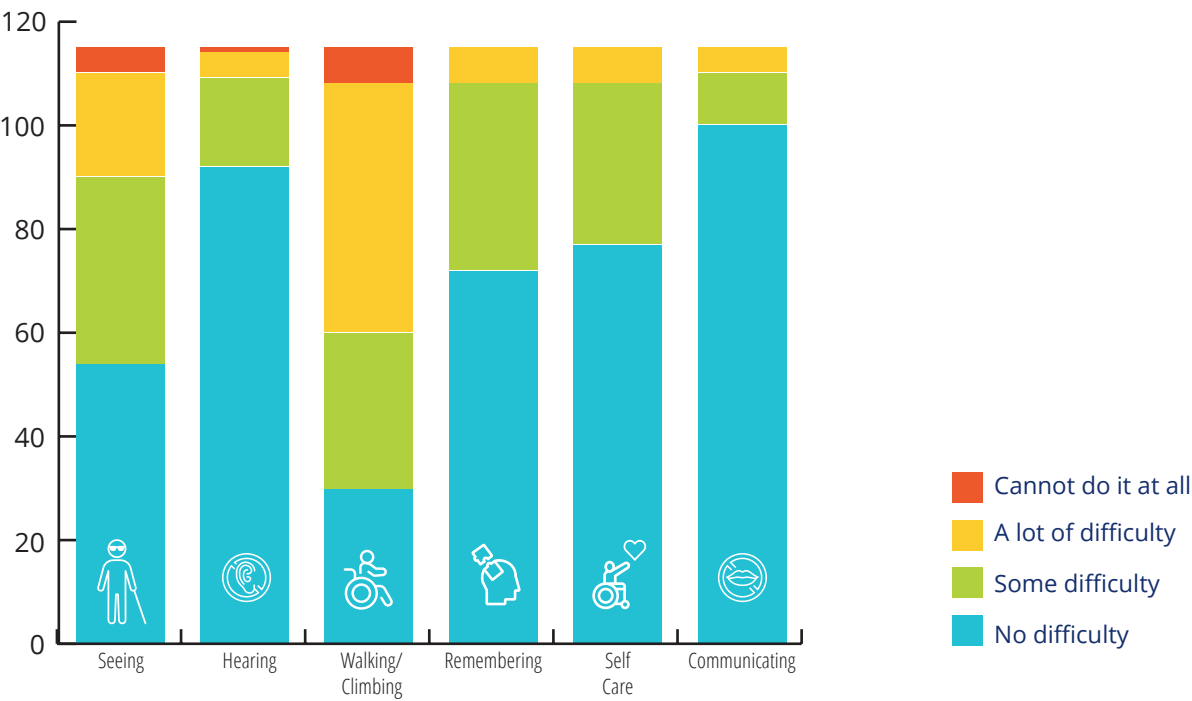


Figure 6: Functional Difficulty by Domain

3.2.2 Assistive Devices

Table 12: Assistive Device

Assistive Device	Respondents			
None / Not applicable	57			
Walking stick	27			
Wheelchair	19			
Walker	4			
Hearing Aid	2			
White Cane	1			
Multiple devices	5			

3.2.3 Daily Life Challenges

The data highlights the multifaceted barriers persons with disabilities face. The most significant challenges include exclusion from community decision-making (50.4%), inaccessible public spaces and transportation (71.3%), discrimination in employment (34.8%), being treated with less dignity and respect (33.9%), gaps in accessing inclusive healthcare (31.3%), and barriers to education (14.8%). These findings underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach aligned with the CRPD to dismantle these barriers.

Key priorities should include actively engaging PWDs in governance and disaster planning, improving accessibility in the built environment, promoting inclusive employment through accommodations and support, combating disability stigma, strengthening inclusive healthcare services, and enhancing inclusive education with teacher training and individualized support. By addressing these challenges holistically, Fiji can foster a more inclusive and equitable society where PWDs can fully participate and thrive.

Table 13: Multifaceted Barriers Faced

Barrier	Yes/Challenge	No	% Affected
Community Decision-Making	58	57	50.4%
Moving in Public (Always+Sometimes)	82	31	71.3%
Securing & Performing a Job	40	75	34.8%
Treated with Less Dignity/Respect	39	76	33.9%
Accessing Healthcare	36	79	31.3%
School & Learning	17	98	14.8%

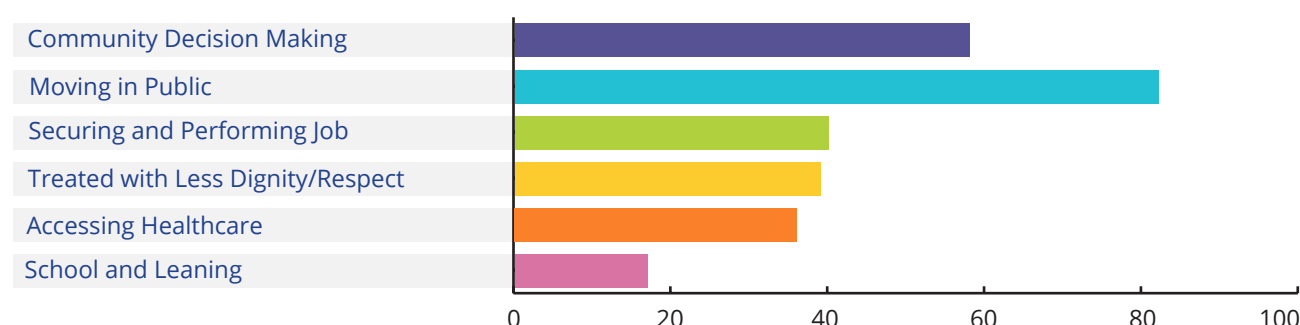
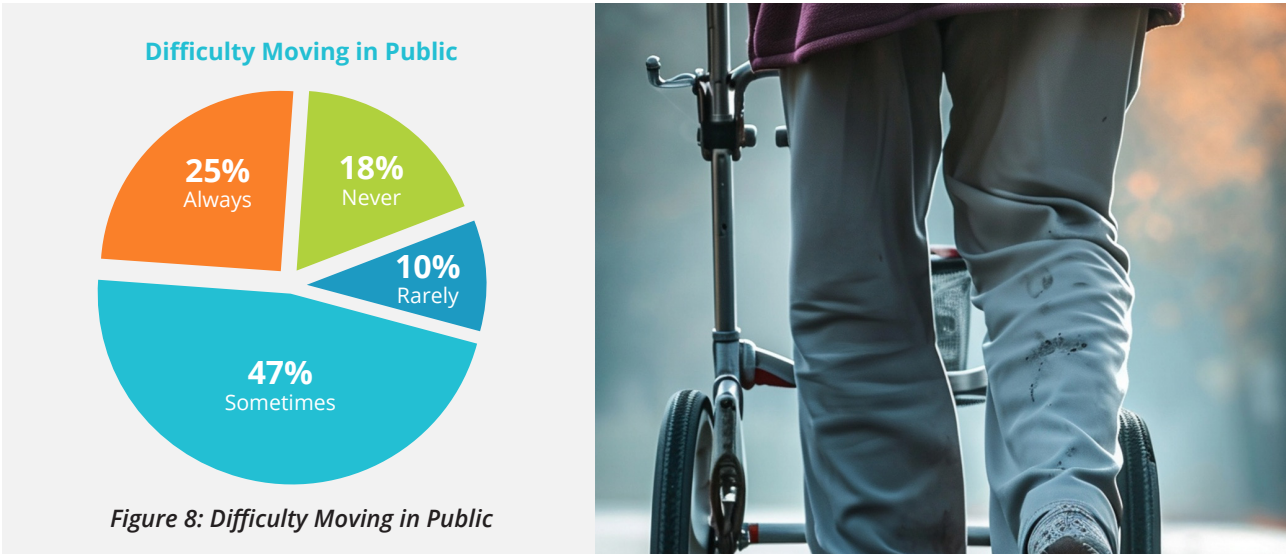


Figure 7: Daily Life Challenges Faced

The data reveals that respondents face varying degrees of difficulty moving in public spaces. While 20 respondents (17.4%) never encounter challenges, the majority experience barriers either sometimes (46.1%), always (25.2%), or rarely (9.6%). This heterogeneity likely reflects differences in disability type, assistive device use, and environmental accessibility. However, with over 70% facing difficulties to some extent, the findings underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to improve public infrastructure, transportation, and spaces to ensure equal access for all.



3.3 Disaster Exposure and Regional Climate Impact

3.3.1 Types of Disasters Experienced

The findings show that tropical cyclones are by far the most frequently experienced disaster among the 115 persons with disabilities (PWDs) surveyed, with 105 respondents reporting direct exposure. This highlights cyclones as the dominant hazard affecting PWDs in the study area. Flooding is the second most common disaster, reported by 92 respondents, indicating that water-related hazards pose a significant and recurring risk to this population.

Other disaster types were reported less frequently but remain important. Drought affected 47 respondents, reflecting longer-term climate stress that can severely impact livelihoods, food security, and health. Landslides or tidal surges were experienced by 18 respondents, while earthquakes or tsunamis were reported by 9 respondents, suggesting these hazards are less common but still present and potentially high impact when they occur.

Table 14: Respondents Affected by Disaster type

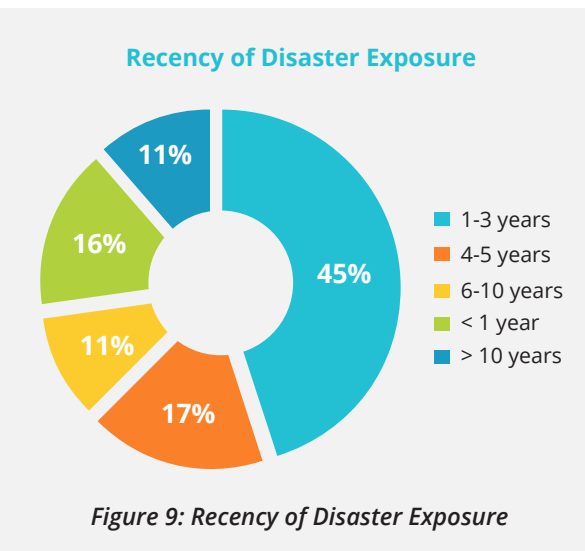
Disaster Type	Respondents Affected
Tropical Cyclone	105
Flooding	92
Drought	47
Landslide/Tidal Surge	18
Earthquake/Tsunami	9

3.3.2 Recency of Disaster Exposure

In terms of recency of disaster exposure, the data indicate that disasters are not historical events but ongoing and frequent experiences for PWDs. A total of 52 respondents experienced disasters within the last 1-3 years, and 18 respondents within the past year, showing recent and repeated exposure. Additionally, 20 respondents experienced disasters 4-5 years ago, and 25 within the last 10 years, demonstrating long-term cumulative exposure. Overall, this pattern underscores the chronic vulnerability of PWDs to recurring climate-related hazards, particularly cyclones and flooding, and highlights the need for inclusive disaster risk reduction and preparedness measures.

Table 15: Recency of Disaster Exposure by Division

Division	1-3 years	4-5 years	6-10 years	Less than 1 year	More than 10 years	Total
Central	21	4	6	5	2	38
Northern	8	7	1	1	3	20
Western	23	9	5	12	8	57
Total	52	20	12	18	13	115



3.3.3 Challenges Faced During Disasters

The data reveals that climate change impacts are being felt unevenly across the division surveyed, with the Western region emerging as the most severely affected. This region reported the highest numbers of water shortages (53), food shortages (51), crop destruction (51), crop disease (33), hunger (28), and forced relocations (10). The Northern region had the second-highest impacts, while the Central region was comparatively less impacted but still faced significant challenges.

The respondents experienced widespread water shortages (103), food shortages (96), agricultural losses (94 incidents of destroyed crops, 72 cases of crop disease), hunger (58 reports), and displacement (10 relocations).

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted adaptation measures to build resilience, particularly for those vulnerable to Water and Food Shortages.

Table 16: Climate Change Impacts by Division

Division	Water Shortages	Food Shortages	Destroyed Crops	Damaged/Destroyed Homes	Disease Outbreak	Hunger	Relocation
Central	32	30	29	22	19	0	2
Northern	18	15	14	17	11	0	0
Western	53	51	51	33	28	10	0
Total	103	96	94	72	58	10	2

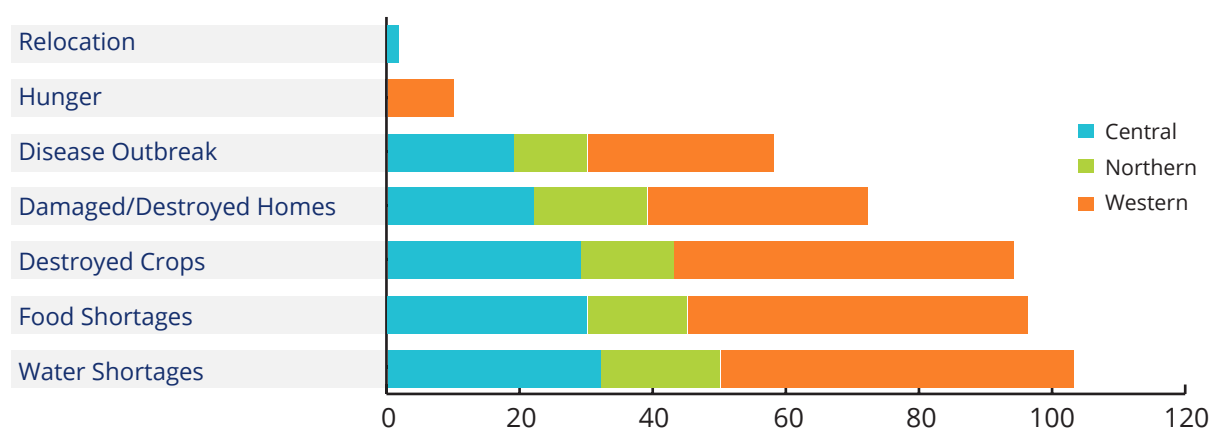


Figure 10: Challenges Faced During Disaster

3.4 Water Accessibility and Cooking Methods

The data on year-round water accessibility for respondents reveals a mixed picture. While many respondents (82 out of 115) reported having access to water for consumption throughout the year, a significant minority (30 respondents) indicated they do not have consistent access. This suggests that while most of the respondents have their basic drinking water needs met, nearly a quarter face ongoing challenges in securing a stable water supply.

Access to water for agriculture and livestock appears more limited, with only 85 and 86 respondents, respectively, reporting year-round access. The high number of “Don’t Know” responses for these categories (13 for agriculture and 18 for livestock) points to a lack of clear information or uncertainty about agricultural water access among some respondents. Ensuring reliable, disability-inclusive water access across all domains - consumption, agriculture, and livestock - will be critical for the health, food security, and livelihoods of PWDs, especially in the face of increasing climate variability.

Table 17: Water Use

Water Use	Yes	No	Don't Know	% Yes	% No	% Don't Know	Gap Assessment
Consumption	82	30	3	71.30%	26.09%	2.61%	26% No Access
Agriculture	85	17	13	73.91%	14.78%	11.30%	74% No Access
Livestock	86	11	18	74.78%	9.57%	15.65%	75% Access

The data on cooking methods used by respondents shows a heavy reliance on traditional biomass fuels.

Kerosene stoves emerge as the most common method, used by 87 out of 115 respondents (75.7%). This is closely followed by open fire, reported by 79 respondents (68.7%). Gas stoves are used by just over half of the respondents (54 out of 115, or 47%). In contrast, electric stoves and rocket stoves are rarely used, with only 4 (3.5%) and 2 (1.7%) respondents, respectively, reporting their use.

This high dependence on kerosene and open fire for cooking raises concerns about indoor air pollution, respiratory health risks, and the environmental sustainability of fuel wood harvesting. The low adoption of cleaner, more efficient alternatives like gas and electric stoves suggests potential barriers such as affordability, accessibility, and awareness among the respondents. Promoting a transition to cleaner cooking technologies, while ensuring their affordability and accessibility for PWDs, could yield significant health, time-saving, and environmental benefits.

Table 18: Cooking Method

Method	Count	%
Kerosene Stove	87	75.7%
Open Fire	79	68.7%
Gas Stove	54	47.0%
Electric Stove	4	3.5%
Rocket Stove	2	1.7%

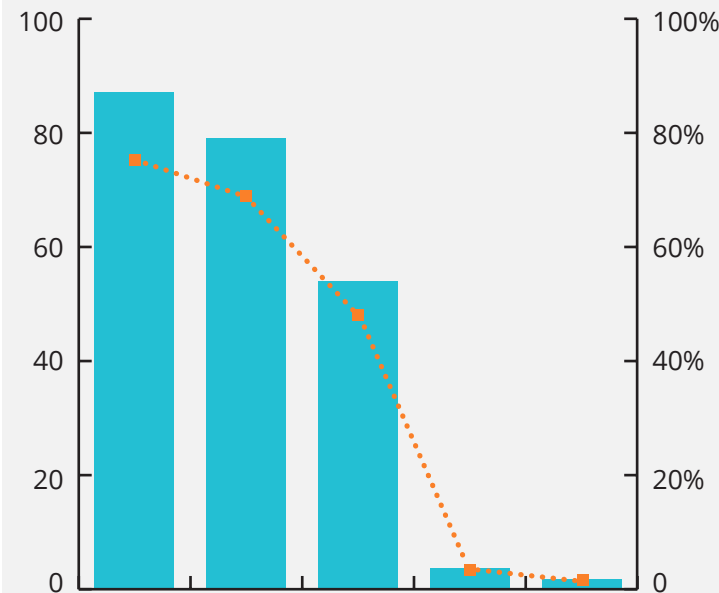


Figure 11: Cooking Method

3.5 Accessibility of Evacuation Centres

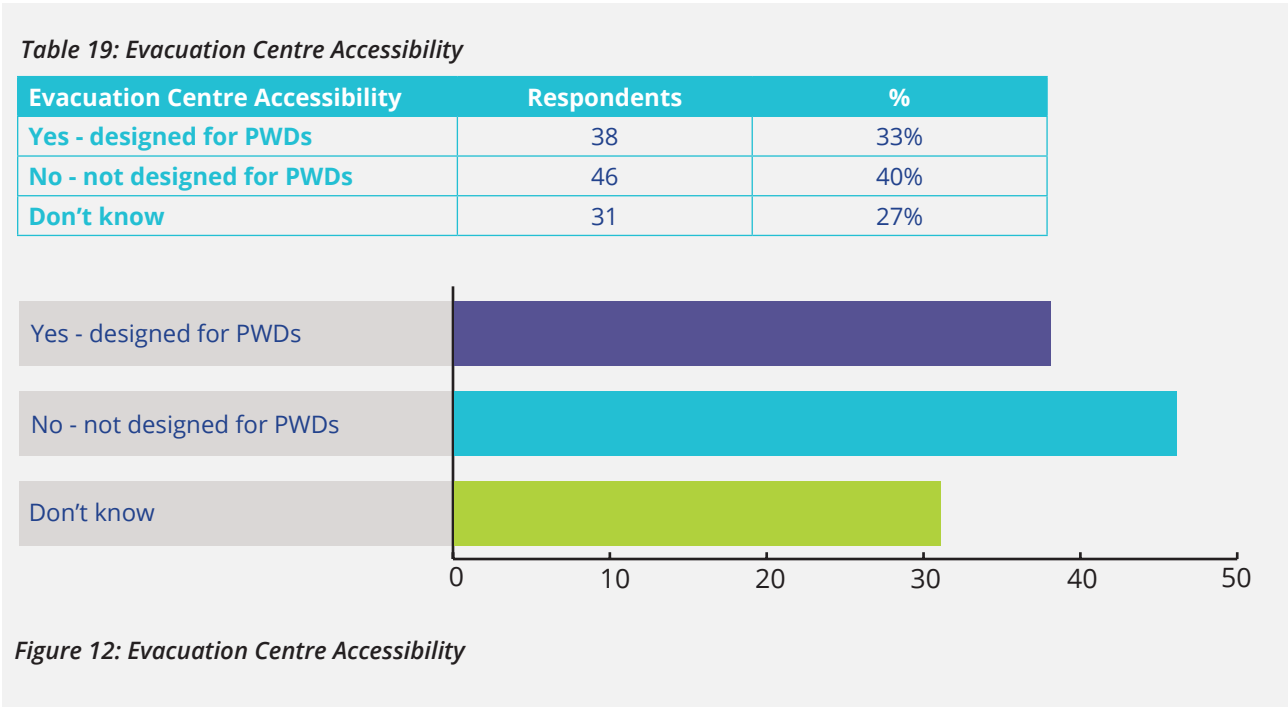
3.5.1 Overview

The findings indicate that 40 percent (46 respondents) believed that evacuation centres are not designed to accommodate persons with disabilities, making this the most common response. In comparison, only 33

percent (38 respondents) reported that evacuation centres were designed with accessibility considerations for PWDs.

Additionally, more than one-quarter of respondents (27 percent or 31 respondents) were unsure whether evacuation centres were accessible. This relatively high level of uncertainty may suggest limited awareness of accessibility features, insufficient communication regarding evacuation centre facilities, or a lack of direct experience using these centres.

Overall, the results point to potential gaps in the accessibility and inclusiveness of evacuation centres. The fact that a greater proportion of respondents perceived centres as not being designed for PWDs than those who considered them accessible highlights the need for further assessment of evacuation infrastructure. Improvements may be required to ensure evacuation centres adequately cater to the needs of persons with different impairments, including mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive disabilities. Increased public awareness of available accessibility features may also help reduce uncertainty among community members regarding the suitability of evacuation centres for PWDs.



3.5.2 Community-Level Evacuation Centre Assessment

The graph highlights variations in the accessibility of evacuation centres across surveyed communities in the Western and Northern Divisions. Of the four communities assessed, only Nailaga Village (Ba) reported having an evacuation centre that was considered accessible for persons with disabilities. The community hall in Nailaga is equipped with ramps and gender-separate toilet facilities, demonstrating a higher level of preparedness and inclusiveness.

In contrast, Vuya Village was assessed as having only partial accessibility. While ramps were available at the community hall, the absence of disability-friendly features in the toilet facilities, such as support railings, limits full access for persons with mobility impairments.

More significant accessibility challenges were reported in Korovou Village (Tavua) and Tukavesi Village. In Korovou, the community hall lacks accessible toilets and bathroom facilities, leading some persons with disabilities to prefer remaining at home rather than evacuating during emergencies. Similarly, residents of Tukavesi rely on Kama Primary School as a shelter; however, the facility is not disability-accessible and is not officially designated as an approved evacuation centre.

Overall, the findings suggest that while some progress has been made in incorporating accessibility features into evacuation centres, substantial gaps remain. The lack of accessible sanitation facilities and fully inclusive infrastructure continues to present barriers for persons with disabilities, potentially increasing their vulnerability during disasters and emergency situations.

Table 20: Communities By Accessibility

Community	Division	Evacuation Centre	Accessibility	Key Issues
Nailaga Village	Western (Ba)	Community Hall	Accessible	Ramps, gender-separate toilets
Vuya Village	Northern	Community Hall	Partial	Ramps exist but toilets lack disability railings
Korovou Village	Western (Tavua)	Community Hall	Not Accessible	No accessible toilets/bathrooms; PWDs prefer staying home
Tukavesi Village	Northern	Kama Primary School	Not Accessible	Not disability accessible; not an approved evacuation centre

3.6

Institutional Footprint Findings

The field assessment found no evidence of government Climate Change Division programmes operating at community level in any of the three divisions – no resilience initiatives, no mitigation programmes, and no awareness/knowledge training delivered locally.

By contrast, NGOs are actively delivering community-based disaster resilience training in partnership with NDMO and provincial councils, but face structural and financial constraints including unregistered businesses, poor record keeping, low financial literacy, stolen assets, poor cash flow, and internal disputes.

Policy Advocacy Analysis

This section presents the findings from formal stakeholder consultations with four key institutions, examining the alignment between policy commitments and operational reality for disability-inclusive climate action.

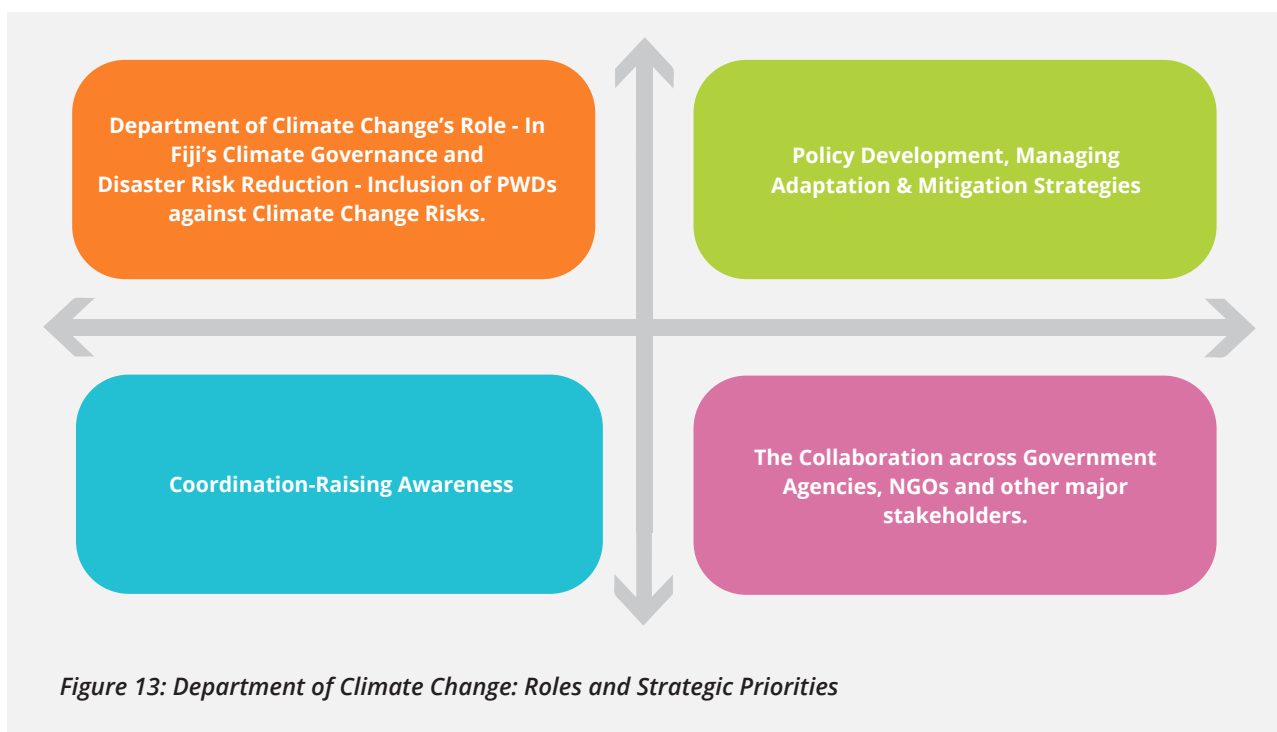
4.1 Department of Climate Change (DCC)

4.1.1 Scope and Mandate

The Department of Climate Change is the government authority responsible for coordinating and leading Fiji's national response to climate change, including mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building initiatives. Its mandate encompasses the development and implementation of climate policies, strategies, and action plans, alignment with international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, and coordination across government ministries, development partners, and communities. In relation to disability inclusion, the DCC plays a critical role in promoting climate-resilient and disaster-responsive systems that address the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of persons with disabilities.

This includes supporting inclusive adaptation planning, integrating disability considerations into climate and disaster risk management policies, and strengthening community preparedness and early warning mechanisms. Through policy leadership, technical coordination, and stakeholder engagement, the DCC works to ensure that climate action in Fiji is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities and other at-risk groups.

The DCC is leading national efforts in Climate Action and developing policies such as the Climate Change Act 2021), managing adaptation & mitigation strategies, coordinating international climate finance (especially via the GCF), and raising awareness, working across other government bodies, NGOs, and other major stakeholders to build resilience.



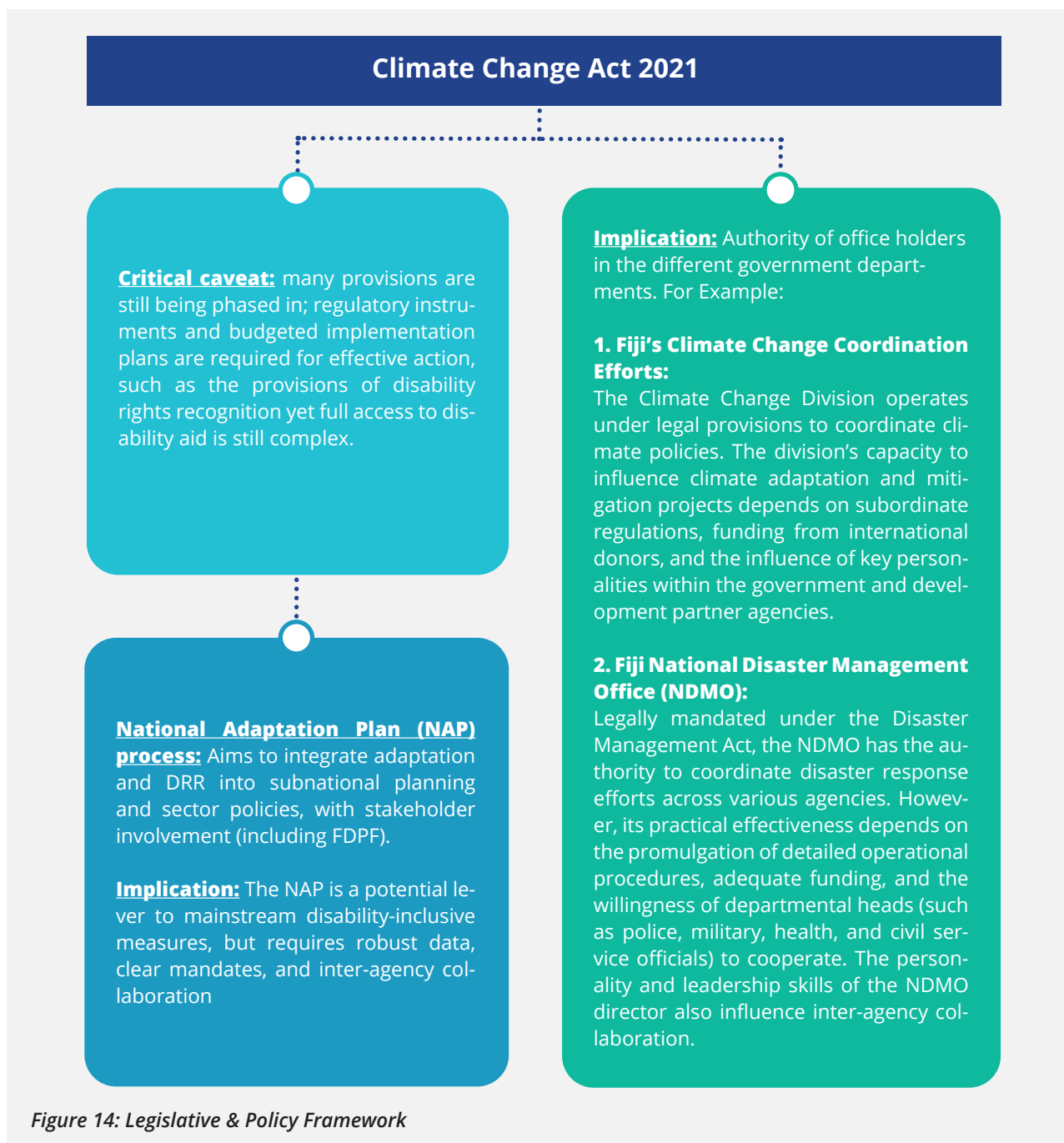
4.1.2 Key Findings

1. Fiji's Climate Change Act (2021) provides a solid legal foundation, but full implementation is still being rolled out. Cross-agency coordination, especially with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), is constrained provided that NDMO is housed under a different ministerial portfolio. However, in comparison with the NDMO ACT 2024, the NDMO has totally assumed coordination authority during disaster management as provided under section 4 and section 7 of the Act.¹
2. Moreover, DCC highlighted the Lack of disability-disaggregated data, limited operational authority over DRR, and insufficient targeted preparedness for PWD². Through this, the department has:
 - Strong legal foundation but lagging implementation due to missing regulations and capacity.
 - Weak cross-agency operational coordination (NDMO outside DCC's operational remit).
 - Data and monitoring gaps specifically related to disability.
 - Resource and capacity constraints at subnational levels hinder inclusive adaptations.
 - The onus of preparedness currently tends to fall on PWD, signalling equity and resilience concerns.

¹ Section 4 and section 7 of the NDRMO ACT 2024

² (Reference: Stakeholders consultation with DCC at Level 2 Bali Tower, 318 Toorak road Suva.29/10/25. (format)

4.1.3 Legislative and Policy Framework Analysis



4.1.4 Institutional Arrangements and Constraints

The challenges of stakeholder collaboration for persons with disabilities are compounded by the common issue of government departments working in silos and the lack of executive authority in coordinating bodies like disability committees.

1. Coordination Bottlenecks

- NDMO sits outside DCC's direct control; DCC mainly issues recommendations rather than executing directives.

- **Implication:** Fragmented ministerial portfolios impede timely decisions; formal coordination mechanisms (MoUs, joint task forces, shared budgets) are needed.

2. Operational limitations for PWD inclusion

- Without cross-agency mandates and budgets, inclusive preparedness (accessible shelters, evacuation transport, and continuity of assistive devices) remains ad hoc.
- **Implication:** International guidance favors embedding disability inclusion into DRR legal/regulatory frameworks and budget lines.

4.1.5 GESI Initiatives and Data Gaps

While the Department of Climate Change (DCC) has GESI initiatives in place, their effectiveness is constrained by the absence of reliable disability-disaggregated data. Without disability-specific data, targeted planning, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms remain weak. Disability-specific data is essential for identifying vulnerability patterns, targeting interventions, and measuring impact, particularly in early warning systems, transport access, and evacuation infrastructure. Global evidence (e.g., UNDRR and Prevention Web) consistently underscores the need for inclusive data systems and active involvement of Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) in planning and implementation.

4.1.6 Recommendations for DCC

The table below outlines a phased approach to strengthening disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction and climate governance. Priority A (0–12 months) focuses on immediate actions, including establishing coordination between DCC and NDMO, conducting rapid disability-inclusive assessments in high-risk communities, and issuing guidance on accessible early warning systems and evacuation shelters. Priority B (12–36 months) focuses on longer-term reforms, such as integrating disability indicators into national planning and monitoring frameworks, scaling up inclusive community resilience programmes, and strengthening procurement and budgeting rules to support accessibility. Together, these priorities aim to deliver both short-term improvements and sustained institutional change.

Table 21: Evidence-based Recommendations

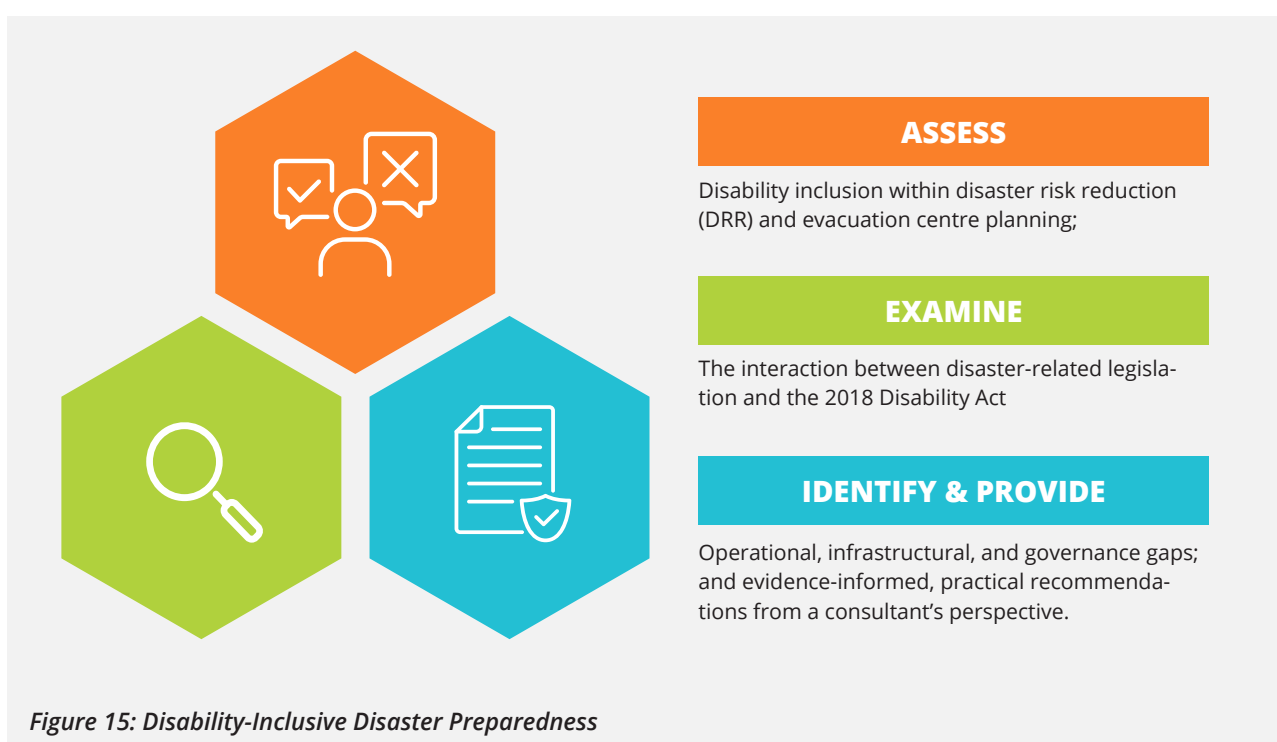
Priority	Time-Frame	Recommendations
Priority A	Immediate (0–12 months)	• Establish formal DCC–NDMO inclusive coordination mechanism. • Implement rapid disability-inclusive assessments in 2–3 high-risk communities with FDPF. • Issue operational guidance for inclusive early warning and accessible shelters. • Indicators: MoU signed, joint meetings, budget line, mapping dataset, number of communities assessed, shelters meeting accessibility standards.
Priority B	Medium-term (12–36 months)	• Institutionalise disability indicators in NAP and M&E frameworks. • Scale community-based inclusive resilience programmes. • Strengthen procurement and budget rules for accessibility.

4.2 Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP)

4.2.1 Scope and Mandate

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP) is the lead government agency in Fiji responsible for advancing social inclusion, equity, and protection for vulnerable and marginalised populations, including persons with disabilities. Its core mandate is to design, implement, and coordinate policies, programmes, and services that promote the rights, welfare, and empowerment of women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, in line with national development priorities and international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In the area of disability, the Ministry plays a central role in coordinating disability-inclusive social protection systems, administering welfare and care programmes, supporting community-based rehabilitation initiatives, and strengthening partnerships with Disabled Persons' Organisations and civil society stakeholders. Through policy leadership, service delivery, and inter-agency coordination, the MWCSP works to reduce social exclusion, enhance access to essential services, and promote the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic, and public life in Fiji.



4.2.2 Key Findings

Achieving genuine disability inclusion in Fiji's disaster resilience efforts will require addressing gaps between legislative intent and local implementation, critically evaluating preparedness and response protocols to ensure equality, enhancing evacuation centre accessibility standards, and using economic evidence strategically to strengthen the case for policy change and investment in inclusion. Below are the key findings from the consultation with MWCSP.

1. Legislative Recognition vs. Enforcement

The challenge does not lie in the absence of inclusive language within existing legislation, but rather in the weak enforcement, limited compliance, and insufficient operationalisation of these provisions. In particular, there is inadequate alignment and reconciliation between earlier legislative frameworks and subsequent Acts, as well as with the standards established under the 2018 Disability Act. As a result, inclusive policy commitments are not consistently translated into effective practice.

2. Accessibility of Evacuation Centres

Many evacuation centres that are officially designated as accessible are, in practice, functionally unusable for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, a focus on structural accessibility alone, without adequate consideration of sanitation facilities and other essential support infrastructure, is insufficient to ensure safe, dignified, and inclusive access during emergencies. As a case example, the Vusuya Evacuation Centre illustrates that where sanitation facilities are located in a separate building and become inaccessible during flooding, the centre is effectively underutilised during disasters; in such circumstances, evacuation centres should not be classified as fully accessible unless essential facilities are co-located and functionally usable.

3. Risk of Regressing to Charity Model

Some current approaches to disaster preparedness, including expectations that persons with disabilities should be largely self-reliant during emergencies, reflect a concerning shift back toward a charity-based model of disability. Such approaches place disproportionate responsibility on individuals rather than on institutions and systems to ensure accessibility and protection. This trend undermines progress toward a rights-based and inclusive framework, weakens preparedness efforts, and risks reinforcing patterns of exclusion rather than promoting equitable and resilient disaster response.

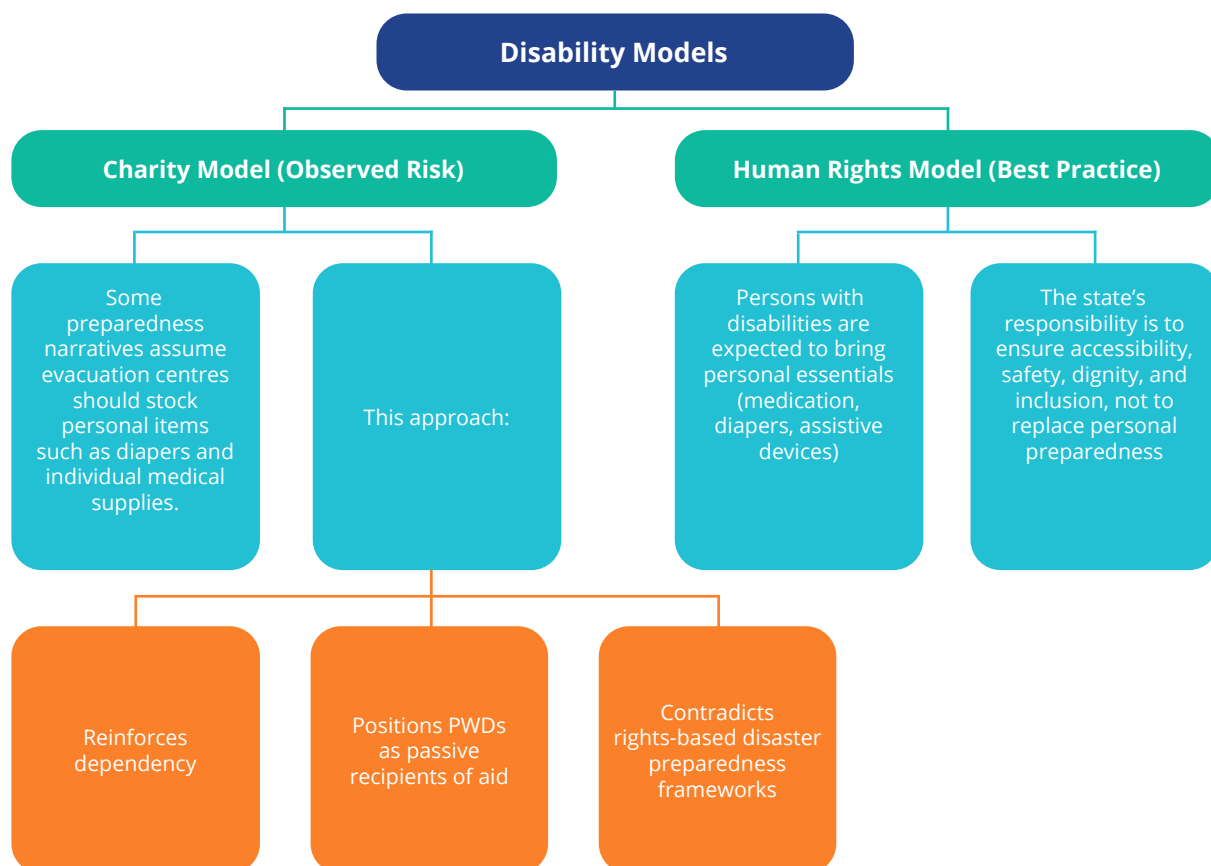


Figure 16: Disability Models

4. Operational Constraints

A critical operational factor influencing disaster preparedness is the application of the 72-hour rule, under which government warehouses cannot be accessed until a disaster is officially declared and evacuation centres do not receive external government supplies during the initial response period. As a result, for the first 72 hours, evacuees are largely dependent on their own personal and household resources to meet basic needs. This arrangement places particular strain on persons with disabilities, who may face additional barriers to self-preparedness, and highlights the need for more inclusive contingency planning and pre-positioned support mechanisms.

5. Cost as a Policy Influence

Government decision-making is strongly influenced by the availability of clear, well-costed proposals, making financial considerations a key factor in the adoption of accessibility and inclusion measures. For example, the indicative cost of installing a basic accessibility ramp is relatively modest, estimated at approximately FJD 200–300 per unit, demonstrating that many reasonable accommodation measures are financially feasible. In this context, all accessibility-related findings and recommendations should be accompanied by clear cost estimates, an assessment of the social and economic impacts of exclusion, and a comparative cost–benefit analysis. Presenting evidence in this manner can strengthen the case for inclusive investments and support more informed, accountable, and sustainable policy decisions.

4.2.3 Policy and Legislative Framework

While Fiji's legislative framework recognizes inclusiveness, significant gaps remain in implementation, accessibility, and accountability. Many evacuation centres classified as “partly accessible” are functionally unusable. There is also a concerning drift from a human rights-based approach back toward a charity model of disability, undermining preparedness and autonomy.



Figure 17: Legislative framework

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) Act was enacted prior to the 2018 Disability Act and the Climate Change Act 2021, reflecting earlier foundations for disaster governance in Fiji. Both the NDMO Act and

the Climate Change Act explicitly reference the principle of inclusiveness, demonstrating a policy commitment to ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, are considered in disaster risk management and climate responses. In recent years, this commitment has been strengthened through the development of Standard Operating Procedures for evacuation centres, particularly over the past two years, following strong advocacy from the disability sector. These developments reflect growing recognition of the need to institutionalise disability-inclusive practices within emergency preparedness and response systems.

4.2.4 Recommendations for MWCS

1. Reclassify evacuation centres based on functional accessibility criteria.
2. Mandate accessible, co-located sanitation facilities in all designated centres.
3. Integrate persons with disabilities into CBDRM using fully accessible venues.
4. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms linking older Acts to the 2018 Disability Act.
5. Require costing of accessibility upgrades in all DRR and climate adaptation planning.
6. Conduct an effectiveness review of disability and DRR toolkits in practice.

4.3 National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)

4.3.1 Scope and Mandate

The Fiji National Disaster Management Office is the government agency responsible for coordinating disaster risk management in Fiji under the Natural Disaster Management Act (1998) and related national policies. Its mandate spans the full disaster management cycle, including risk reduction, preparedness, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation. The NDMO leads the development and implementation of national and subnational disaster management plans, coordinates early warning dissemination and contingency planning, and supports training and capacity building at divisional, provincial, district, and community levels.

During emergencies, it activates and manages Emergency Operations Centres, coordinates evacuations and relief operations, mobilises line ministries, security forces, humanitarian partners, and donors, and oversees rapid damage and needs assessments and situation reporting. In the recovery phase, it facilitates post-disaster needs assessments, reconstruction planning, and resource mobilisation, while promoting “build back better” principles.

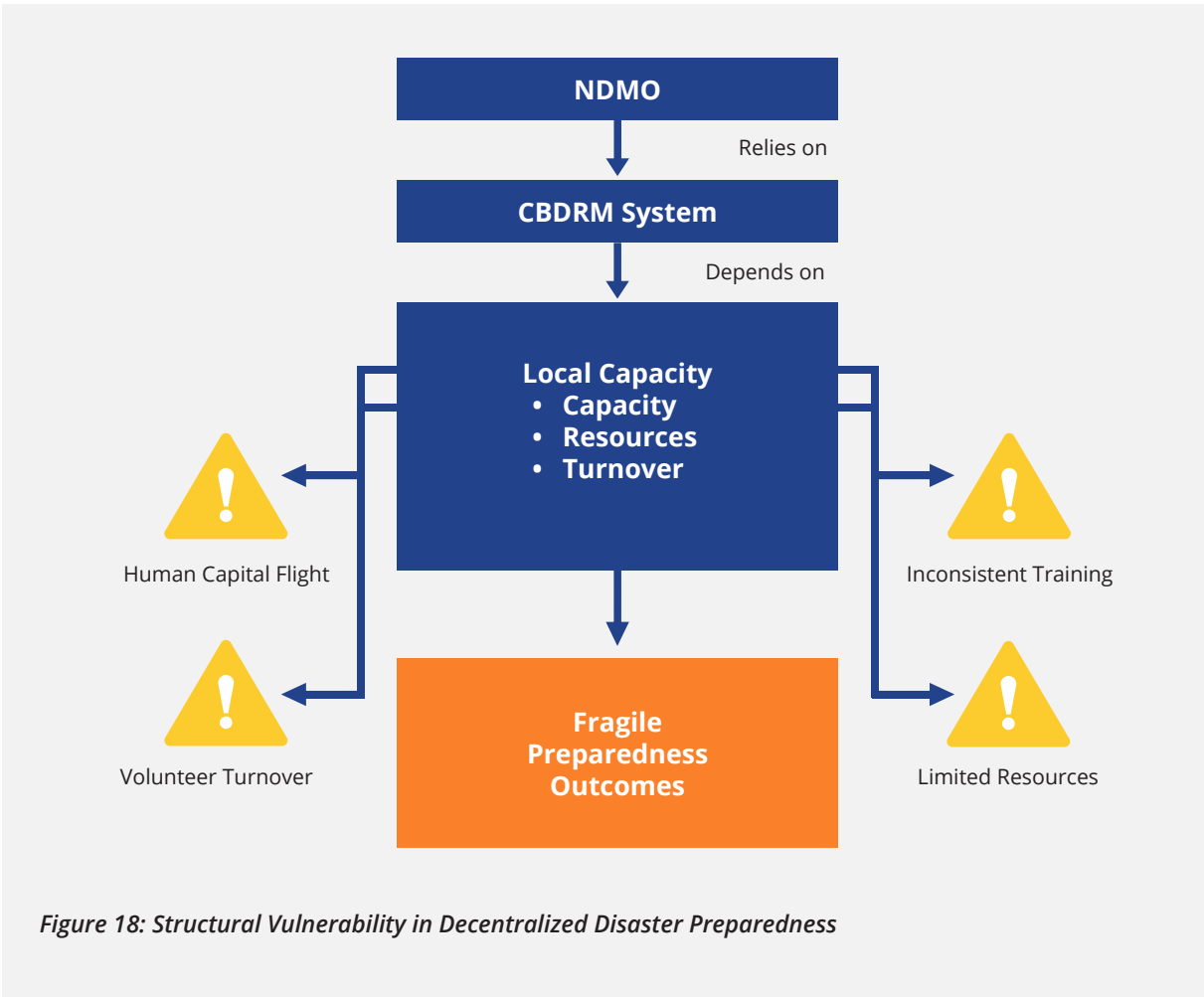
4.3.2 Key Findings

1. Structural Weakness of CBDRM model

The NDMO relies heavily on the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) model to decentralise disaster preparedness and strengthen community-level resilience. Through this approach,

responsibility for preparedness, early warning, and initial response is largely transferred to local structures, with the NDMO providing coordination and technical support. While this model promotes local ownership and responsiveness, analysis indicates that it is affected by fundamental weaknesses, particularly in relation to uneven capacity, limited resources, and high turnover of trained volunteers and community leaders.

These challenges are compounded by the outmigration of skilled individuals and limited opportunities for continuous training, resulting in the erosion of institutional memory and reduced preparedness at the local level. Consequently, the effectiveness of decentralised preparedness is often inconsistent, increasing reliance on national-level intervention during major emergencies and undermining the sustainability of community-based disaster risk management systems.



At the community level, disaster response effectiveness is further undermined by governance and capacity-related challenges that affect the functioning of local disaster committees. A key weakness is the conflict of interest that arises during emergencies, where committee members often prioritise the safety and security of their own households before fulfilling collective responsibilities. This “household-first” response pattern can delay the dissemination of early warnings, evacuation support, and targeted assistance to vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, older persons, and female-headed households. In addition, local response capacity is weakened by sustained outmigration of trained community members, particularly through participation in seasonal labour mobility schemes such as PALM and RSE.

This “brain drain” effect results in the continuous loss of experienced volunteers and trained responders, eroding institutional memory and requiring repeated retraining efforts. Together, these factors reduce



the reliability and timeliness of community-level disaster response and limit the overall effectiveness of decentralised preparedness systems.

2. Policy vs. Operational Reality

Fiji's National Development Plan 2025–2029 commits to the establishment of resilient, multipurpose evacuation centres that are accessible to persons with disabilities; however, current disaster response protocols continue to place a disproportionate burden of risk on this group. In practice, the prevailing “72-hour rule” requires persons with disabilities to independently secure essential items, including medication, hygiene supplies, and assistive devices, during the initial phase of a disaster, implicitly assuming levels of financial and logistical capacity that many do not possess.

This requirement is particularly exclusionary given the higher incidence of poverty and social vulnerability among persons with disabilities. At the same time, significant communication gaps persist, as standard early warning systems, such as sirens and public announcements, often lack visual, tactile, or alternative accessible formats, rendering them ineffective for individuals with hearing or sensory impairments. Together, these systemic shortcomings undermine the intent of national policy commitments and contribute to the continued marginalisation of persons with disabilities within disaster preparedness and response frameworks.

3. Budget Constraints & Sustainability

Stakeholder consultations identify funding as the primary constraint to strategy execution.

- **Infrastructure Gaps and Project-Based Vulnerability:** Fiji's path to sustainable development is fundamentally challenged by a F\$9.3 billion infrastructure gap required over ten years to build climate resilience, a figure that highlights the severe cost of protecting a nation where climate-related disasters have already caused over F\$3.2 billion in losses. This financial strain is compounded by the “fragmented” and “donor-led” nature of international aid, which often prioritizes the specific agendas of external contributors over a unified national strategy, leaving the Fijian government struggling to align these various projects with its own long-term priorities. Furthermore, because approximately 50% of this funding is “off budget”, meaning it does not appear in the official national accounts, the government lacks direct control and oversight, creating an “invisible” pool of money that makes it difficult to coordinate essential services³.
- This lack of central coordination and sustained core funding directly impacts the most vulnerable, revealing a stark gap between Fiji's strong policy goals, such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 and the National Development Plan 2025-2029, and its operational reality. For people with disabilities, this systemic failure manifests in several high-risk ways:
- **The Risk of “One-Size-Fits-All” Solutions:** Since projects are often designed by donors based on external standards, infrastructure like evacuation centres may lack the specific Universal Design features such as ramps, wide doorways, or accessible toilets required by the local disabled community.
- The infrastructure gap represents missing sea walls and raised roads that are critical for those with mobility impairments; when these fail, these individuals are often the most impacted and the least able to escape.
- Inclusive services, such as accessible early warning systems, are frequently treated as temporary “projects.” Once donor funding ends, these systems often fall into disrepair because they were never integrated into the core national budget.

3 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25011Fiji_VNR_2019_final.pdf.

- **Institutional Silos:** A lack of coordination between the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Department of Climate Change leads to reactive responses rather than long-term, climate-resilient planning.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** With disasters pushing an average of 25,700 Fijians into poverty annually, people with disabilities who already face higher poverty rates, are at the greatest risk of losing their livelihoods without massive, coordinated investment⁴.

4. Institutional Gap

The Department of Climate Change is legislatively limited to making “recommendations” to the NDMO rather than issuing operational directives. This is expected to remain a constraint until the Climate Change Act 2021 is fully enforced, which aims to bridge this institutional divide.

5. Strategic Priorities

- **Legal:** There is a lack of binding inter-agency mandates between the Disaster Coordinating Committee (DCC) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), resulting in unclear accountability and weak coordination in disaster preparedness and response.
- **Data:** The absence of accurate, real-time, and disaggregated data on persons with disabilities limits the development of reliable emergency registries and undermines targeted planning and service delivery.
- **Social:** Persistent patriarchal norms continue to restrict women’s meaningful participation in disaster-related decision-making processes, reducing the inclusiveness and effectiveness of community preparedness and leadership structures.
- **Logistics:** Although many evacuation centres meet basic structural standards, they lack pre-positioned disability-specific supplies, constraining their capacity to provide timely and appropriate support to persons with disabilities during emergencies.

4.3.3 Policy and Legislative Framework

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) of Fiji is navigating a critical transition from the 1998 legislative framework to the National Disaster Risk Management (NDRM) Act 2024. While this shift modernizes Fiji’s approach to “all-hazards” management, operational reality is heavily constrained by significant budget deficits and structural weaknesses in community-level implementation. This report highlights the “institutional silo” between the NDMO and the Department of Climate Change (DCC), severe funding limitations, and critical flaws in the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) model, particularly regarding responder reliability during crisis.

The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 expands the NDMO’s mandate to include biological and technological hazards alongside natural disasters, aligning with Target E of the Sendai Framework. Strategic operations are guided by the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (NDRRP) 2019, which prioritizes mainstreaming disaster risk reduction (DRR) across all sectors.

⁴ Government of Fiji, Climate Vulnerability Assessment: Making Fiji Climate Resilient, World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), 2017, p. [21], accessed at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/163081509454340771/pdf/Climate-Vulnerability-Assessment-Making-Fiji-Climate-Resilient.pdf#:~:text=average%20of%2025%2C700%20people%20being,cyclone%20would%20force%20almost%2050%2C000.>

4.3.4 Recommendations

1. **Restructure CBDRM Roles:** Implement a “buddy system” or designated non-household responders to assist vulnerable residents first.
2. **Dedicated DRR Budget Line:** Move from project-based funding to a dedicated, climate-responsive budget line for disability-inclusive disaster operations.
3. **Mandatory Data Integration:** Require mandatory disability and gender fields in all disaster program registrations to ensure “Leave No One Behind” is data driven.

4.4 Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF)

4.4.1 Scope and Mandate

The Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF) is the national representative body for employers in Fiji, mandated to promote, protect, and advance the interests of the private sector and the business community. It serves as the principal voice of employers in social dialogue, labour relations, and national policy processes, including engagement with government, trade unions, and international partners such as the International Labour Organization. FCEF provides advocacy on employment legislation, workplace standards, productivity, and economic reforms, while supporting members through advisory services, training, and capacity-building programmes. Its mandate also includes strengthening compliance with labour laws, promoting decent work principles, and fostering constructive industrial relations. Through research, policy engagement, and business development initiatives, FCEF contributes to private sector growth, workforce development, and national economic resilience in Fiji.

4.4.2 Key Findings

1. Attitudinal Barriers

- Employers and co-workers often hold misconceptions regarding the productivity, reliability, and cost implications of employing persons with disabilities (PWDs).
- These perceptions contribute to discriminatory hiring practices, limited career progression opportunities, and reluctance to provide reasonable accommodation.
- Stigma and low expectations further reinforce exclusion, reducing workforce diversity and limiting the economic participation of PWDs.

2. Communication Barriers

- Recruitment processes, workplace information, and internal communications frequently lack accessible formats such as sign language interpretation, captioning, Braille, or easy-to-read materials.
- Limited awareness and use of assistive technologies restrict equal access to job advertisements, interviews, training, and workplace instructions.
- The absence of inclusive communication systems undermines both recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.

3. Physical Barriers

- Many workplaces, commercial buildings, and public transport systems remain physically inaccessible, lacking ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, and appropriate signage.
- Inadequate infrastructure prevents independent mobility and restricts participation in employment, training, and business activities.
- Accessibility compliance is often limited to minimum standards, without considering functional usability.

4. Policy and Institutional Barriers

- Reasonable accommodation policies are frequently unclear, inconsistently applied, or poorly monitored.
- Employers may lack guidance on legal obligations and practical implementation measures.
- Weak enforcement mechanisms and limited awareness of rights contribute to gaps between policy commitments and actual practice.

4.4.3 Recommendations

The report identifies strategic roles for FCEF, including:

- Translate policy into practical action through guidelines, toolkits, and model workplace policies.
- Support MSMEs via incentives, grants, or tax offsets to enable accessible workplaces.
- Promote accessible, market-relevant training aligned with labour market needs.
- Strengthen partnerships with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs), government agencies, and unions for effective employer engagement.
- Advocate for cross-sector coordination linking employment initiatives with education, transport, health, and social protection systems.

4.5 Policy Advocacy Analysis Key Findings and Gaps Identified

The field research and consultation analysis reveals that there may be critical policy-to-implementation gap across Fiji, where participants were identified as highly exposed to climate-related hazards, yet there very less to no tangible evidence of national government Climate Change Division programmes, resilience initiatives, mitigation projects, or climate awareness training were observed at community level. This signals that national climate commitments and policy frameworks are not translating into disability-inclusive community delivery, particularly in rural and coastal settings. While some evacuation centres in the Western division show structural accessibility (e.g., ramps and gender-separate toilets), most surveyed sites in the Central and Northern divisions lack disability-adapted sanitation, railings, privacy spaces, assistive device support, and trained responders. Therefore, policy must now prioritize: (1) mandatory disability-access standards for all designated and informal evacuation centres, including accessible WASH facilities; (2) disability-sensitization and handling protocols for first responders; (3) sustained climate awareness and capacity training for PWDs and caregivers at sub-national level; (4) community-level climate programmes that intentionally resource disability inclusion beyond planning; and (5) strengthened monitoring, budgeting, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that the principle of “leaving no one behind” is operational, not aspirational. Without these measures, PWDs will remain disproportionately vulnerable, reluctant or unable to evacuate, and excluded from the climate resilience cycle despite policy recognition.

Table 22: Policy Advocacy Analysis

Report	Main Initiative	Key Gaps Identified	Strategic Implication
DCC - Climate & Institutional Analysis	Lead climate governance, adaptation, mitigation, and climate finance coordination.	Limited DRR authority, weak inter-agency coordination, no disability-disaggregated data, equity burden on PWDs.	Needs formal coordination mechanisms + inclusive data systems.
MWCSP - Disability - Inclusive Preparedness Consultation	Promote disability rights in DRR and evacuation centre management.	Functional inaccessibility, misclassified shelters, regression to charity model, poor enforcement of Disability Act standards.	Requires honest accessibility classification + rights-based compliance.
NDMO - National Disaster Policy Analysis	Modernize disaster operations under NDRM Act 2024 using CBDRM model.	Severe budget deficit, unreliable community responder model, human capital loss from migration schemes, inaccessible early warnings, 72-hour self-supply burden.	Must shift from project funding → core budgeted inclusive DRR systems.
FCEF	To promote and strengthen disability-inclusive employment across the country, employers operate within the national labour laws and understand the importance of creating inclusive workplaces that are free from discrimination.	Negative attitudes and stereotypes in workplaces, inaccessible physical environments and transportation, weak or poorly enforced policies on reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination, and communication barriers such as inaccessible job application systems and lack of information in accessible formats.	Translate disability inclusion from policy into practical action, particularly in employment. Supporting MSMEs through incentives and grants to enable workplace adjustments, providing accessible and market-relevant training for people with disabilities, strengthening partnerships with DPOs, government, and unions, and driving systemic, whole-of-government coordination across sectors such as education, health, and transport to sustain inclusive outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrates that climate change acts as a powerful threat multiplier for persons with disabilities in Fiji, intensifying existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, accessibility barriers, and exclusion from disaster preparedness and response systems. Field data across the divisions reveal frequent and recent exposure of persons with disabilities to cyclones (105 of 115 respondents), flooding (92 respondents), and drought (47 respondents). These hazards are compounded by poverty, reliance on social welfare support (receiving only \$139-\$150 per month), inaccessible evacuation centres, inadequate early warning systems, and limited access to water, health services, and essential support during disaster events.

These lived experiences strongly align with existing literature, which consistently highlights that without disability-disaggregated data, accessible infrastructure, and the meaningful participation of Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs), climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policies often fail at the implementation stage. Despite Fiji's relatively strong legislative and policy framework; including the Climate Change Act, National Disaster Management Act, Disability Act, National Development Plan (NDP), and National Adaptation Plan (NAP); this study identifies a persistent policy-to-practice gap. National commitments to inclusivity are not translating into consistent, adequately resourced, or enforceable actions at the community level.

Policy advocacy analysis further underscores the impact of institutional silos, limited coordination authority, budget constraints, and an over-reliance on project-based or donor-driven interventions, all of which undermine sustainable disability-inclusive climate resilience. For example, the Department of Climate Change (DCC) is legislatively limited to making "recommendations" to the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) rather than issuing operational directives. Fiji faces severe funding shortfalls, with an estimated \$9.3 billion infrastructure gap over the next decade to build adequate climate resilience.

Collectively, the evidence supports the report's recommendations for urgent and coordinated action. Priority measures include:

- Strengthening coordination between DCC and NDMO.
- Institutionalizing disability-inclusive standards and data systems.
- Upgrading evacuation centres based on functional accessibility requirements.
- Investing in community-based inclusive resilience initiatives.
- Embedding accountability mechanisms and costing into national planning and budgeting processes.

Without these measures, persons with disabilities will remain disproportionately exposed to climate-related risks, with an average of 25,700 Fijians pushed into poverty annually due to disasters. With them, Fiji has a clear and achievable pathway to operationalizing its commitment to "leave no one behind" in climate action and disaster resilience. The Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) also has a pivotal role in advancing disability-inclusive employment by addressing attitudinal, physical, policy, and communication barriers. Through collective leadership and cross-sector coordination, Fiji can create a more equitable, resilient future where persons with disabilities are fully recognized as agents of change.

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8. Stakeholder consultation with DCC, Level 2 Bali Tower, 318 Toorak Road, Suva, 29 October 2025.

Appendices

This appendix presents supporting field documentation: a photo gallery of community consultations and field visits across the three divisions, records of stakeholder policy-advocacy consultations, and detailed case studies of women with disabilities as agents of change.

Appendix A

Photo Gallery

Central Division



Key informants in Rewa



Interview by enumerator
Torika Baleinagigi



Lusiana showcasing her
sewing skills

Western Division



Nailaga FDPF members with
community members



Ms Sala Karuru facilitates
the FGD



Group presentation



The newly built
evacuation centre



Yavusania Multi-Purpose
Evacuation Centre



Group work and discussion,
Nailaga Village

Northern Division



Tukavesi FGD
members



Presentation by Group 1,
led by Jese Morgan



Group 2 discussion,
led by Ulamila

Appendix B

Stakeholder Consultation – Policy Advocacy

Targeted consultations were held with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP), the Department of Climate Change (DCC), and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to assess the policy-to-implementation landscape for disability-inclusive climate action.



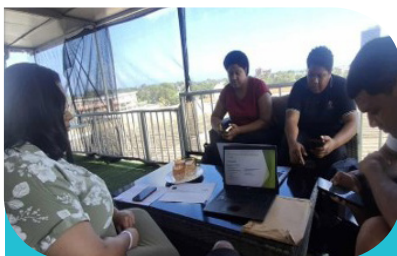
Consultation team with Principal Welfare Officer Madam Salote Biukoto, MWCSP (Toorak, Suva)



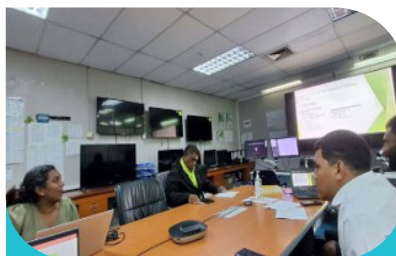
Field consultation session



Presenting ICAF to the Department of Climate Change



With M. Baleikanacea & G. Jiva, Climate Change Division (Bali Tower, Suva)



Meeting NDMO officers S. Malini & J. Waqata (Nasilivata House, Samabula)



NDMO policy consultation

Case Studies

Women with Disabilities as Agents of Change

Litia Naitanui | Rewa · aged 60+ · monthly income \$301–\$500

Litia Naitanui is the former President of the Women with Disabilities Branch and a strong advocate for the human rights of everyone, including persons with disabilities. As head of her household and main breadwinner, she is wheelchair-bound; her sister-in-law, Torika Manafau, is her caregiver and business partner.

Litia trains women, including women with disabilities, to make handicrafts - turning “trash to cash” by recycling unwanted materials into home decorations and jewellery. Repurposing plastics and other waste into useful art and craft products is a profitable way to earn an income while helping to clean up the environment.

She runs several small businesses: making and selling virgin coconut oil (VCO), tie-dye and screen-printing, backyard farming (flowers, mushrooms and cabbages), and a small canteen. She contributes more than half of her monthly income to household expenses, with the remainder going to church and family functions.

Her electric coconut scraper is not a commercial model and frequently malfunctions, affecting VCO production. She also has no electric coconut press, so extracting coconut milk must be done manually.



Lusiana Buli Naimoso | Rewa · welfare assistance \$125/month

Lusiana Buli Naimoso is the younger sister of Litia Naitanui and lives in their village in Rewa, where she crawls around the house. In addition to being a welfare recipient, she generates extra income through her tailoring business - recently sewing graduation gowns for pre-school children at \$10 each (and \$5 per cap). Sewing has always been her hobby, and skills training conducted by ADRA has helped her enhance it. With basic food items and utility bills increasingly expensive, her monthly welfare assistance of \$125 is not sufficient for everyday expenses, so the extra sewing income helps cover household, family, village and church commitments.

At present her sewing machine is not working, and she has borrowed her sister-in-law's machine to continue.



Sainimili | Valelevu (HART housing) · caregiver

Sainimili looks after her elderly husband and her grandson, who has a mental disability. Her husband has medical conditions, and she is living with macular degeneration in both eyes. Over time her vision has worsened, affecting her ability to do daily chores, go shopping, and run her small sewing and canteen business.

She cannot afford the \$900 needed for surgery to improve her vision.

Monthly Budget	
Husband (FNPF pension)	\$100
Welfare assistance	\$230
Total monthly income	\$330
Less: rent	\$50
Less: utility bills	\$35
Total expenses	\$85
Balance for living	\$245

Melaia Marama | Nailaga Village · earns \$80 – \$100/month

Melaia Marama is a single mother with two adult children and a 16-year-old son. In 2010 she lost four fingers from both hands as a victim of domestic violence; her husband was subsequently imprisoned for the offence. She then moved back to her mother’s village, Nailaga, with her three young children.

The family lives on \$90 of welfare money for her son each month. Melaia earns a further \$80–\$100 a month selling roti parcels and pastries, which helps pay for water and electricity bills and basic necessities for her family.



Mere Drau | Lives alone · welfare assistance \$130/month

Mere Drau crawls around the house and lives alone, doing all of the housework, cooking and other chores by herself. She relies solely on \$130 in social welfare assistance, supplemented by small amounts from family members.

For extra income she bakes cookies, which her neighbour sells at her workplace. Recently, however, her oven stopped working and needs repair. Mere also needs a new wheelchair, as her current one is in poor condition.





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INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION FOR FIJI (ICAF)

RESEARCH REPORT

Assessing and Strengthening Disability Inclusion
in Climate Change Action and Disaster Resilience in Fiji

Impact of Climate Change on
Persons with Disabilities

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