

PREFACE

In the South Pacific, an area prone to disasters of many kinds, tropical cyclones are predicted to increase in strength, track length and lifespan due to climate change. Small island developing states are going to need to adapt their disaster response accordingly. This is particularly the case for those communities on outer islands of these states, the remote islands within remote countries, where vulnerability is already especially high. These communities are out of reach of many aid organisations, and are required to be more self-reliant and resilient than most.

This book investigates how the responses to disasters on remote islands need to change and the factors affecting the capacity for this to happen. The research focuses on remote islands in Fiji and Tonga, from the perspectives of the communities, aid organisations and governments. It examines issues of the growth of aid, the expectations it creates, the governance of the aid system, and how remoteness impacts on disaster planning and response.

The research involved fieldwork in Fiji and Tonga, with stays on one remote island in each country. Both of these islands have a history of cyclones, including recent experience. This was followed by time in the regional and national capitals interviewing representatives of aid organisations and government. Included in the book is a reflection on the experience of doing cross-cultural research and the importance of giving voice to communities that are often left out of this kind of research.

The research found that a number of variables – such as remoteness, the highly gendered structures of decision-making, differential use of traditional knowledge, and contradictory aid expectations – directly and indirectly affect the preparedness and adequacy of remote island responses to natural disasters such as cyclones. This has a number of significant ramifications in the light of predicted transformations associated with climate change.

My sincere thanks and gratitude go to the people in both Fiji and Tonga, without whom this book would not be possible. Your warmth, generosity, enthusiasm and understanding, and the way you welcomed our family into yours, will not be forgotten. I hope this book helps your voices to reach the world.

INTRODUCTION

This book looks at the experiences of outer island communities in Fiji and Tonga in response to climate change adaptation. It asks how the main islands, and the disaster response, and aims to investigate how disaster response in Fiji and Tonga need to and are able to change. Research questions are to identify what has responded to in Fiji and Tonga; how government and aid organisations and government and; how response to climate change intensifies the effects of climate change impacts such as rising sea levels.

Climate change is bringing more frequent and severe disasters, particularly affecting small island developing states (McLean, Agard et al., 2014; IPCC, 2012; Deo, Ganer and McLean et al., 2007). This introduces questions about the effectiveness of responses to disasters by governments, aid organisations and the public. Debates around the causes of disasters and the role of scientific evidence (IPCC, 2012) and the final verdict from the political arena are still being debated here, and we must deal with the consequences.

The costs of extreme weather events are increasing in terms of lives lost, and economic damage. There exists that allows us to be able to cope with the intensity and perhaps in frequency of climate change effects such as warmer temperatures (Mimura et al., 2007). Ten of the most severe disasters occurred in the last 15 years, and the most intense (Bettencourt, Croad, and others, 2007). The observation that natural disasters are changing location and magnitude (IPCC, 2007; International, 2007).

While the concrete scientific evidence of individual disaster events is