



Photo: Murray Garde

# Focal Persons for Shelter Self-Recovery in Vanuatu: A Volunteering Paradigm

Partner Event

Experiences and Challenges of Emergency Management Volunteers



ASIA-PACIFIC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON  
**Disaster Risk Reduction 2022**

**Dr Iftekhar Ahmed**

Associate Professor – Construction  
Management/Disaster Resilience

School of Architecture and Built Environment  
University of Newcastle, Australia

# WHAT IS SHELTER SELF-RECOVERY?

- Process whereby disaster-affected households repair, build or rebuild their homes using their own resources supplemented with assistance from humanitarian organizations.
- Households are able to make their own choices and decisions about the reconstruction process.
- It is an assisted self-help process, where organizations help people to help themselves.
- This support enables a self-recovery process to be delivered to a much wider percentage of the affected population than typical reconstruction programs.



Photo: Murray Garde

# RESEARCH SITES



Source: Mapcruzin.com

Pentecost: TC Harold, 2020



Maéwo: Volcanic activity/  
relocation, 2017-18



Tanna: TC Pam, 2015

## Tanna

- Provision of tarpaulins and shelter tools/fixing kits + training on safe construction following SCV guidelines
- Chainsaws and training of operators
- Demonstration traditional '*kastom*' house
- Initial stage in the application of SR approach

## Maewo

- Provision of shelter tools + training on safe construction following SCV guidelines
- For safety against future cyclones
- For both the relocated settlers and existing community
- Demonstration traditional '*kastom*' house

## Pentecost

- Provision of shelter tools/fixing kits + training on safe construction following SCV guidelines
- **Training of Shelter Focal Points (SFPs) including women.**
- Chainsaws and training of operators
- Most recent stage of application of SR approach



Photo: Jen Bowtell

# SELF-RECOVERY APPROACH

- Initial emergency shelter assistance - tarpaulin sheets, rope, information and education materials.
- Then shelter recovery support to 1602 households across 46 communities, which included shelter kits (fixing kits and toolkits) and training of **SFPs**.
- Additionally, people from the community were trained in chainsaw operation and provided chainsaws and fuel to process timber from trees felled by the cyclone.



Photo: CARE/ Arlene Bax

# SELF-RECOVERY AGREEMENTS

- Project based on agreement between CARE and communities; negotiated through local Chiefs.
- CARE provided the shelter repair & rebuilding equipment; communities obtained building materials other than processed timber provided through the chainsaw operators.
- Agreement that communities support the chainsaw operators beyond CARE's assistance - additional fuel above allocated 7 litres/household; fees and meals to the chainsaw operators.
- Agreement for the **SFPs** and chainsaw operators to prioritise support to vulnerable people (elderly, widows, single women-headed households).



Photo: Jen Bowtell

# SHELTER FOCAL PERSONS

- SFP model evolved after TC Pam, by Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) and French Red Cross.
- Less structured then and relied on local resource persons who could serve as “shelter champions”
- Then grew into the SFP model in Maewo and Pentecost.
- Acknowledged by community that information shared by SFP very helpful, helped in speeding up the recovery process.
- Also acknowledged that the training helped not only the people who were trained, but the whole community.



Photo: Jen Bowtell

“As months went by, we were told to move back to Ambae as now the state of emergency is over. Many of our families that came from Ambae to Maewo are now returning. Myself and my husband checked with our family in Ambae if our house was ok, but we found out it had been completely destroyed. With tears running down my face I had to tell my husband that we must stay in Maewo, as he has a medical problem. My husband talked with one of the **SFPs** here to see if he can give us a piece of land for us to settle on. He agreed, so we built a little house, but it wasn't very strong. The **SFP** then asked us to move in with him so now we are staying with him - he has been so kind to us, giving us food every day.”



# ROLE OF WOMEN

- Traditionally, women not directly involved in construction-related work
- Training women as SFPs by CARE was an important social advancement; out of the 118 SFPs, 43% were women.
- Reports of increased self-confidence.
- More awareness in communities about the importance of having women as SFPs.
- People in Pentecost recognise women SFPs playing a crucial role in supporting them in shelter.
- Request made to CARE signed by all the Chiefs in Pentecost to continue the gender-based work.



Photo: Jen Bowtell

# BUILDING BACK BETTER/SAFER

- Traditional shelter design supported by embedding resilient construction techniques and developing building skills - stronger houses without changing local design.
- Reflected in shelter toolkits - straps, nails, wire - backed with training to **SFPs** on supporting households to use traditional materials.
- Promoted use of cyclone straps, cross-bracings and anchoring of footings, among other safety features
- **SFP**: “Now that they have experienced TC Harold, they want to make their houses stronger – ready for a future disaster. Nail posts better; nail on cyclone straps; digging foundations.”

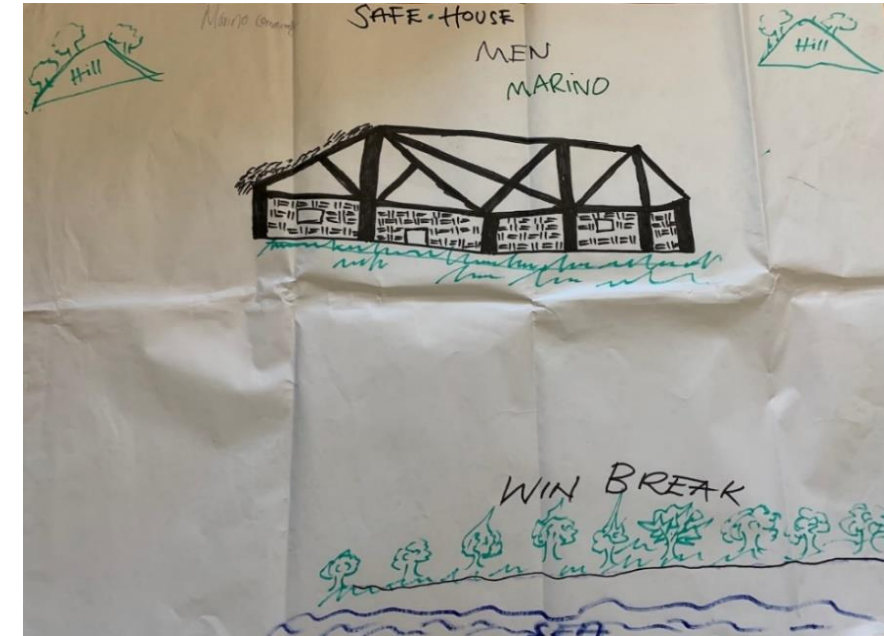


Photo: Jen Bowtell

# CDCCCs

- NDMO trains and manages Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) throughout Vanuatu; widely recognised as valuable.
- Important role in Ambae to Maewo evacuation during 2017-18 volcanic activity.
- Positive community reports: “Though we have never been hit by any cyclone for a very long time, our CDCCC here are well prepared and know what to do if we will be given any disaster warning, particularly a cyclone warning. For example, during Cyclone Pam and Cyclone Harold we were given red alert, our CDCCC met very quickly. They helped those move who didn’t have a safe shelter, including vulnerable groups, to a safe house.”



Photo: CARE

# CHALLENGES

- Culturally assigned gender roles persist; e.g. only 1 woman chainsaw operator out of 40.
- Need for refresher trainings for SFPs.
- The SFP position should be strengthened, perhaps through certification – something that the community would recognise and give the SFPs more credibility.
- Important to provide ongoing support and training to people such as SFPs beyond provision of support after a disaster so that they are prepared for the next disaster.



Photo: CARE/Allan Tari



***Thank You!***

---



▪ [ifte.ahmed@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:ifte.ahmed@newcastle.edu.au)



▪ [Ifte Ahmed](#)



▪ [Ifte Ahmed](#)  
▪ [Disaster and Development  
Research Group](#)