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Abstract

Floods are the most common form of natural disasters globally, disproportionately impacting lower income countries and in many cases the poorest citizens therein. The increasing frequency and intensity of floods present civil society, policymakers, and development practitioners the challenge of reducing disaster risk, and populations’ vulnerability to extreme weather events.

This thesis explores the roles of affected communities in Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) responses to disaster in Solomon Islands, based on the experience of the 2014 flash floods. It investigates the extent to which communities were consulted and participated in NGO responses, and the factors which inform community-NGO relationships. It explores ways that communities interpret and respond to disasters, identifying factors that assist and constrain stakeholders in disaster response and recovery.

The research is a qualitative case study, employing interviews, focus groups and document analysis. It is guided by a reflexive discourse analysis and narrative inquiry approach, which places the focus of the study on the experiences of participants.

It finds that communities played very limited roles in NGO responses, especially non-dominant or marginalised sectors of society, such as youth, women, and people with disabilities. It indicates that failure to respond appropriately to the differentiated needs of affected populations can exacerbate their risk of experiencing secondary disaster.

This thesis argues that there is a need to improve the inclusiveness of responses to disaster, engaging women, youth, and people with disabilities in decision-making in order to respond more appropriately to their needs. Secondly, it identifies that the channelling of funds through Members of Parliament (MPs) in disaster response is undermining the National Disaster Management Office and contributing to increasing dependency and opportunism among affected populations. It also highlights improving policy making and planning as having the potential to improve responses to future disasters.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis must be credited in large part to the many people whose direction, advice, support, and contributions have proved invaluable along the way.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Andreas Neef, for all your advice and guidance over the past year. You encouraged me to consistently aim higher and commit to achieving my goals. I am forever indebted to my family, who deserve a Nobel Prize in tolerance. You supported my aspirations and encouraged me even when the road ahead was unfamiliar. I stand on the shoulders of giants, to whom credit for this achievement belongs.

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I would like to express my gratitude to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for financially supporting my fieldwork through provision of the New Zealand Aid Programme Field Research Award.

Lastly, bikfala tagio lo ufala oketa partisipants wea help lo disfala research. This work would not have been possible without your involvement. You have shaped this research and will continue to shape my work going forward. I hope that this study may in some small way contribute to improving future disaster responses.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures .................................................................................................................................................. VI
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................................................... VI
List of Abbreviations ......................................................................................................................................... VII

Chapter 1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1. Disaster in the ‘Hapi Isles’: Floods hit Solomon Islands ........................................................................... 2
  1.2. Research objective and research questions ............................................................................................. 3
  1.3. Stakeholders and relationships ............................................................................................................... 4
  1.4. Chapter overview ..................................................................................................................................... 6

Part I: SITUATING THE STUDY .......................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter 2. Establishing place and space ............................................................................................................ 8
  2.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 8
  2.2. People and place ...................................................................................................................................... 8
  2.3. Colonialism to independence .................................................................................................................. 9
  2.4. ‘Tensions’: Conflict and regional intervention ....................................................................................... 11
  2.5. Extractive and subsistence economy ..................................................................................................... 13
  2.6. Foreign aid dependence .......................................................................................................................... 14
  2.7. Salience of a politics of patronage ........................................................................................................... 16
  2.8. Disasters experienced by case study communities .................................................................................... 17

Chapter 3. Situating disaster in Solomon Islands: A review of relevant literature ............................................. 20
  3.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 20
  3.2. Towards a hopeful post-development .................................................................................................... 20
  3.3. Oceanic experiences ............................................................................................................................... 23
  3.4. Kastom: a guiding epistemology ............................................................................................................. 25
  3.5. Legacies of colonialism ........................................................................................................................... 26
  3.6. Understanding how disasters are experienced ......................................................................................... 29
  3.7. Post-Disaster Response ........................................................................................................................... 30
  3.8. Gendered discourses and practice .......................................................................................................... 32
  3.9. Communities in Disaster Response ........................................................................................................ 34

Chapter 4. Research Methods and Approaches .................................................................................................. 36
  4.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 36
  4.2. Research epistemology ............................................................................................................................ 36
  4.3. Methodological framework: Narrative Inquiry and Discourse Analysis ................................................. 37
  4.4. Fieldwork .................................................................................................................................................. 40
4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews ................................................................. 40
4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions ................................................................. 42
4.4.3 Context of the case study communities ........................................... 44
4.4.4 Entry to the field .............................................................................. 45
4.5. Data analysis and reliability ............................................................. 46
4.6. Ethical considerations and positionality ......................................... 47

Part II: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION ........................................ 51

Chapter 5. Communities in disaster response ........................................ 51
5.1. Introduction ....................................................................................... 51
5.2. Views in communities about responding agencies ........................ 51
5.2.1 Conducting assessments: an implied obligation to assist? ........... 51
5.2.2 Breadth of NGO consultation ....................................................... 53
5.2.3 Homogenous notions of heterogeneous communities .................. 54
5.2.4 NGOs and their volunteers: relationships of reciprocity? ............. 55
5.3. Community Participation in NGO responses to disaster ................. 56
5.4. Community responses to the disaster ............................................. 59

Chapter 6. Factors that enhance or constrain agencies in disaster response .... 62
6.1. Introduction ....................................................................................... 62
6.2. Expatriates: Not ‘whites in shining armour’ .................................... 62
6.2.1 Insufficient context experience .................................................... 62
6.2.2 Roles and responsibilities .............................................................. 63
6.2.3 ‘This is Solomon Islands’: Touting experience is not appreciated... 65
6.3. Flag Raising and avoiding exposure to further harm ....................... 66
6.4. Dependency and opportunism: two sides of the same coin .......... 68
6.5. From community development to disaster response ..................... 69
6.6. ‘Go back to your village’: policy responses to disaster ................. 71
6.7. National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) ............................... 73

Chapter 7. Targeting and inclusiveness of NGO responses ..................... 76
7.1. Introduction ....................................................................................... 76
7.2. Youth: A silenced majority .............................................................. 76
7.3. On the margins: disaster for people with disabilities ...................... 77
7.4. Gender: structural and practical issues .......................................... 79
7.5. Increased violence following the disaster ...................................... 81
7.5.1 Tensions and Riots ...................................................................... 81
7.5.2 Physical and sexual violence ......................................................... 83
7.6. Psychosocial trauma: out of sight, out of mind? ............................. 85
Chapter 8. Members of Parliament as humanitarian responders: the salience of political patronage networks

8.1. Introduction
8.2. Members of Parliament and the case study communities
8.3. Members of Parliament in stakeholder interviews
  8.3.1 Inequality of distributions
  8.3.2 Insufficient disaster response experience
  8.3.3 Lack of transparency and accountability
  8.3.4 Undermining Ministries and blurring of legislative and executive functions of Government
8.4. Impacts on communities and institutions responding to disaster
  8.4.1 Unaccounted funds and political motivations
  8.4.2 Undermining the National Disaster Council
  8.4.3 Members of Parliament as legislators and project implementers
8.5. Political patronage: fostering dependence and undermining resilience

Part III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1. The significance of inclusion in disaster response
  9.1.1 The multidimensionality of exclusion: avoiding secondary disaster
  9.1.2 (In)visible agents: communities in disaster response
9.2. MPs as patrons of disaster
  9.2.1 Overt clientelism
  9.2.2 Power to decide
  9.2.3 Patronage versus policy: fostering a patchwork of dependency and opportunism

Chapter 10. Conclusions

10.1. Limitations
10.2. Further research
10.3. Final reflections

References

Appendix 1: Maps of study area
Appendix 2: Interview and Focus Group Discussion coding key
Appendix 3: Solomon Islands Research Permit
List of Figures

Figure 1: Solomon Islands stakeholder conceptual framework .................................................. 5  
Figure 2: Community relationships and networks diagram .......................................................... 5  
Figure 3: Map of Guadalcanal showing case study communities ............................................. 129  
Figure 4: Lord Howe Settlement ............................................................................................... 130  
Figure 5: Lunga Settlement ...................................................................................................... 130  
Figure 6: Aruligo ...................................................................................................................... 130

List of Tables

Table 1: Interview participants and agencies ............................................................................. 41  
Table 2: Gender of interview participants ............................................................................... 41  
Table 3: Profile of case study communities .............................................................................. 44  
Table 4: Interview key ............................................................................................................. 131
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUD</td>
<td>Australian Dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Aid Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Constituency Development Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSII</td>
<td>Forum Solomon Islands International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFM</td>
<td>Isatabu Freedom Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDPAC</td>
<td>Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEF</td>
<td>Malaita Eagle Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFAT</td>
<td>New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRD</td>
<td>Ministry of Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWYCF</td>
<td>Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Disaster Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDMO</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFI</td>
<td>Non-Food Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAG</td>
<td>Office of the Auditor General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMSI</td>
<td>Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCC</td>
<td>Recovery Coordination Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCDF</td>
<td>Rural Constituency Development Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>Republic of China (Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBD</td>
<td>Solomon Island Dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIG</td>
<td>Solomon Island Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNISDR</td>
<td>United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Floods are the number one cause of natural disasters globally, affecting greater numbers of people than all other types of natural disasters combined. Over the period 1994-2013, floods accounted for 43 per cent of all disaster events, making them a leading cause of life and property loss (CRED, 2015; Yila, Weber and Neef, 2014). Population growth and urbanisation have been credited with increasing flood run-off; and construction in high-risk areas has compounded the risk of natural events leading to disasters. The frequency of floods has been on an unprecedented upward trend, with flash floods, as well as acute coastal and riverine flooding on a rise (CRED, 2015). Compounding this, scientific predictions indicate that climate change will continue to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events (ibid).

The impacts of natural disasters are disproportionately experienced by lower-income countries - those with the least resources to adapt and respond (CRED, 2015). More particularly, it is usually the poorest who reside on marginal lands in informal settlements which are prone to natural disasters. The increasing frequency and severity of disasters affect the lives of these people, risks exacerbating their impoverishment, reversing development gains, and exposing them to greater vulnerability. Groups who are marginalised according to their gender, age, ethnicity or other distinguishing features can experience the greatest vulnerability owing in part to their lack of representation in decision-making processes (Pirotte et al., 1999).

Natural disasters are created when natural hazards cause the loss, damage or destruction of human lives and livelihoods (CRED, 2015). Accordingly, flooding becomes a disaster through the exposure of people who have a vulnerability to a hazard. At the intersection of hazard, exposure, and vulnerability is disaster risk, which varies in size, depending on the contributing factors (Reece and Schmidt, 2008).

International attention has recently focused on better understanding and managing disaster risk, with the adoption of the ‘Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030’ which will guide international action in four priority areas:

- Understanding disaster risk
- Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
- Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience
- Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘Build Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction (UNISDR, 2015, p.14).
The framework recognises the central role of the State but posits that a broader ‘people-centred’ approach is needed. It advises Governments to engage with relevant stakeholders, including ‘women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards’ (UNISDR, 2015, p.10).

Succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and officially coming into force on 1 January 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will inform the international development agenda for the next 15 years. SDG Goal 11 aims to ‘Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’; with the following targets specifically relating to disasters:

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels (Transforming our world, 2015, p.22).

Managing and mitigating disasters are central to both the Sendai Framework and SDGs, which will inform the focus of global development efforts towards disaster preparedness and response. It is in this context that the following study was conducted.

1.1. Disaster in the ‘Hapi Isles’: Floods hit Solomon Islands

The events of April 2014 will remain in the consciousness of Solomon Islanders for many years to come. After days of heavy rain, Solomon Islands was struck with the worst flooding in its history, culminating in the loss of 22 lives and the destruction or damage of the livelihoods of over 52,000 people (Reliefweb, 2014; UNOCHA, 2014). The worst loss of life was in the capital Honiara after the Mataniko River burst its banks and washed away people, houses and infrastructure. The flooding claimed casualties, caused significant infrastructure damage, crop destruction, psycho-social trauma, as well as health and shelter issues. During the crisis, evacuation centres housed around 10,000 people, and upwards of 75 per cent of Guadalcanal Province’s food gardens were destroyed. In the two months following the floods, an outbreak
of Rotavirus spread across Solomon Islands, causing the deaths of at least 18 children and infecting in excess of 1,000 people (Reliefweb, 2014b).

Government and non-government agencies predominantly focused on responding to populations who were displaced within the immediate Honiara vicinity. Rural communities were difficult to access in the days and weeks following the flooding but were where at least 40,000 of the estimated 52,000 affected population resided. Given these challenges, it is no easy task for agencies to assess needs and consult with communities post-disaster. However, without community input into responses which affect them, the relevance and appropriateness of the assistance communities receive may be called into question.

This research aims to investigate community perspectives of NGOs which responded to the April 2014 flash floods. It also seeks to establish the extent to which communities were consulted and involved in the disaster response and recovery activities which concerned them. Locating disaster response in the nuanced context of Solomon Islands, the research investigates ways in which disaster response informs and is informed by the experiences of people on the ground – specifically, affected communities and NGOs.

1.2. Research objective and research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate community participation and NGO responses to the April 2014 floods in Solomon Islands. To support this objective, the study is guided by the following questions:

- What do flood-impact communities think of how NGOs responded to the April 2014 floods and to what extent were they consulted or participated in these responses?
- In what ways did affected communities respond to the disaster?
- What factors enhanced or constrained organisations in their disaster responses, and why?

The study approaches these questions with a reflexive discourse analysis and narrative inquiry approach, which places the focus on the experiences of participants, giving franchise to their realities and the meaning which they attribute to their lived experiences. This approach was selected for its practical and epistemological relevance for both Solomon Islands context, and the research objectives. Since colonial times, Solomon Islanders have been spoken for and about by others, but rarely have their own understandings and experiences been shared in their own voices in the literature (Narokobi, 1983; Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). Chapters three and
four reflect on this ‘hegemony of knowledge’ which excludes many ordinary Solomon Islanders from sharing their knowledge in their own ways.

As an outside researcher, I am acutely aware of my positionality within systems of power and privilege, and the influence that my cultural and epistemological roots have in influencing this study. As an attempt to preserve the integrity of participants’ views, I have undertaken to include full direct quotes of participants where plausible. It is through these views, I believe, that we can begin to understand disaster response from the perspectives of affected communities, toward an end of ensuring that assistance is empowering and congruous with their varied needs and aspirations.

The hopeful post-development theoretical lens that informs the research places high importance on reflexivity, recognising and giving credit to the heterogeneity of development experiences (Sidaway, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 2005). As a critical approach to development, it is committed to challenging and deconstructing empirical understandings of knowledge and the assumptions of development discourses (Campbell, 2007; Sidaway, 2007). The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study are presented and discussed in detail in chapters three and four.

1.3. Stakeholders and relationships

For this study, I interviewed stakeholders from 17 different governmental, multilateral, NGO, civil society organisations and foreign governments; along with 12 focus groups conducted in three case study communities. Figure 1: Solomon Islands stakeholder conceptual framework (below) depicts the linkages between various stakeholders involved in the response to the disaster; in relation to flows of funds, information and coordination, and support. Subsequently, Figure 2: Community relationships and networks diagram outlines the range of relationships and networks of support following the disaster in the three case study communities, a focus of chapter five.
Figure 1: Solomon Islands stakeholder conceptual framework

Figure 2: Community relationships and networks diagram
1.4. Chapter overview

*Chapter 1: Introduction*

Provides a background overview of the research, outlining the research objectives and significance of the study.

**PART I: SITUATING THE STUDY**

*Chapter 2: Establishing place and space*

Describes the contextual setting of the research, outlining key features of Solomon Islands which have informed the nature and impact of the disaster central to this study, and the subsequent findings.

*Chapter 3: Situating disaster in Solomon Islands: A review of relevant literature*

Discusses literature relating to community participation and disaster response, positioning the research in a hopeful post-development practice. The chapter seeks to ground international discourses in the epistemological and contextual realities of Solomon Islands.

*Chapter 4: Research method and process*

Focuses on the theoretical constructs and study design. The chapter begins with outlining the narrative inquiry and discourse analysis methodological framework which underpins the research and links these back to the hopeful post-development approach outlined in chapter three. The chapter then describes the application of these methods in the study design, through fieldwork processes, data collection, analysis and ethical considerations. Lastly, it outlines my positionalities, emphasising the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process.

**PART II: RESEARCH RESULTS AND REFLECTIONS**

The findings of the primary research are presented over four chapters.

*Chapter 5: Communities in disaster response*

Examines the views of participants from three case study communities about agencies which responded to the April 2014 flash floods. It then presents the extent to which communities participated in NGO responses to the disaster. Lastly, it investigates more broadly the ways which case study communities were involved in disaster response and recovery.
Chapter 6: Factors that enhance or constrain agencies in disaster response

Seeks to understand why NGOs responded to the disaster in the ways they did, by presenting findings from interviews with stakeholders from NGO, governmental, multilateral and civil society stakeholders. It reflects common challenges encountered by responding agencies and outlines ways which these were manifested amongst affected populations.

Chapter 7: Targeting and inclusiveness of NGO responses

Examines the ways which marginalised sectors of society were exposed to heightened risk and vulnerability following the disaster, and their exclusion from NGO responses is presented in this chapter.

Chapter 8: Members of Parliament as humanitarian workers: The salience of political patronage networks

Examines the direct involvement of Members of Parliament in disaster response and the implications this has on both responding agencies and affected communities. It raises key concerns that are reflected in chapters five, six and seven.

PART III: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 9: Discussion

Further explains findings from the study and discusses their implications and applications. It makes two concluding arguments. Firstly, the need to greater consider and include marginalised groups in NGO responses to disaster to avoid secondary disaster. Secondly, that national disaster response institutions are being undermined to a significant extent by the involvement of the Executive branch of Government in disaster response, which has significant implications for affected communities.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Summarises key findings and identifies their implications. The chapter also reflects on the limitations of the study, providing suggestions of potential areas for further investigation.
Part I: SITUATING THE STUDY

Chapter 2. Establishing place and space

2.1. Introduction

It is important to interpret the findings of this study in light of the specific historical, social, economic, political and environmental context of Solomon Islands. This chapter provides an overview of context as it relates to the research findings, presented in Section II of this thesis. It begins by situating Solomon Islands in its temporal and social context. It then traces the period from colonialism to independence, recognising the importance of history in informing the present. The chapter makes particular note of the recent conflict period, known locally as the ‘tensions’ as an aid to better understanding present-day Solomon Islands. Next, the chapter gives a brief economic and political overview, thereafter concluding with a historical overview of disasters experienced by communities who were involved in this study.

2.2. People and place

Situated in the South-West Pacific Ocean, bordering Papua New Guinea to the West, Vanuatu to the South-East and Australia to the South, Solomon Islands is an archipelago, comprised of over 900 islands. It was named by Spanish explorer Alvaro Mendaña in the 16th Century, who believed the isles to be the source of King Solomon’s wealth (Bennett, 2002). Solomon Islands is often noted for its diversity – of cultures, languages, polities and geography. It is home to a population of 515,870 at last census¹, and over 90 indigenous languages and dialects are spoken within its borders (SIG 2011, p.1; Bennett 1987).

Contemporary Solomon Islands is divided into nine provinces, comprising a predominantly Melanesian population, with a minority of Polynesian and Micronesian groups. McDonald (2003) describes ‘each island in the Solomons is effectively its own world with its own unique tribal groundings and fabric of languages, customs and beliefs’ (pp.59-60). Appreciating this diversity, national-level generalisations or characterisations predictably negate the multiplicity of histories and identities therein.

¹ The census report acknowledged an 8.3 per cent undercount, placing the more likely population at 558,000 at time of census (SIG, 2011, p.6).
The country has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.491, which alongside Papua New Guinea, is the lowest ranked in the Pacific region, affording Solomon Islands a rank of 157 out of 187 of countries published. It also positions Solomon Islands well below the average for Small Island Developing States of 0.665, and marginally above the average for Least Developed Countries of 0.487 (UNDP, 2013). Provincially, Guadalcanal maintains the highest HDI, when including the only major urban centre in the country, Honiara. Conversely, neighbouring Malaita Province has the lowest HDI in the country (UNDP, 2002; DFAT, 2004).

Demographically, Solomon Islands has a relatively young population, with almost 60 per cent under 24 years of age (SIG, 2011, p.22). With an urban population comprising just under 20 per cent of the total, subsistence agriculture on communal land remains the primary economic activity for the majority of the population (DFAT, 2004). The vast majority of Solomon Islanders engage to greater or lesser extents in the cash economy to pay for medical and transport costs, school fees and manufactured products. However, the importance of the formal economy for daily sustenance is most obvious in urban settings, most notably the capital Honiara. The importance and reach of the State in provincial communities is limited, where services are often provided by communal networks, churches, or NGOs (Brown 2007; Cox 2009).

2.3. Colonialism to independence

Foreign traders and missionaries arrived in Solomon Islands from the mid-19th century. At the time, Britain was nonchalant about annexing the isles. The fledgeling blackbirding and arms trades, combined with German annexation of neighbouring New Guinea and Northern Solomons in 1884-5 led Britain to declare a Protectorate over Southern Solomon Islands in 1893. The Protectorate soon expanded to include Northern Solomons in 1899 (Kabutaulaka 1998; Bennett 1987).

The legacy of Christian missionaries endures today, with over 90 per cent of the population identifying as Christian. The churches’ impacts on the fabric of Solomon Islands society have been profound, extending to the provision of public services the state has not had the capacity to deliver, such as healthcare and education (Joseph and Browne-Beu, 2008). Braithwaite et al. (2010) and Moore (2007) have acknowledged the role of churches during the tensions in delivering key services and their efforts to broker peace (such as by the Melanesian Brotherhood).
During the British Administration, the Colonial Government failed to be self-sustaining and owing to its limited presence throughout the country, the Government was not well integrated at the local level (Turnbull, 2002; Larmour, 1990). A result of this was that there was little identification with the ‘nation’ following independence. For all intents and purposes, the ‘nation’ was a colonial construct which grouped people with diverse identities into a singular entity (Larmour, 1990; Bennett 2002). In Ladley and Gill (2008), Urwin (2007) describes the Government upon independence:

‘In rough terms, it was the bolting on of a Westminster constitutional variant to an existing colonial model, which almost by definition meant big government and which only partly related to politics as actually practiced. To be judgmental about all of that is very much a hindsight view, in all the practical circumstances it is a bit difficult to see how else it might have been done, but it is I think, useful to think about if we are to reach much understanding about what is happening now’ (p.34).

Independence was achieved in 1978, following two years of self-government. The independent Solomon Islands entered the British Commonwealth as a constitutional monarchy, with the British sovereign remaining the *de jure* head of state; with *de facto* powers residing with the Governor General. Hameiri (2007) suggests that prior to their departure, the British lacked interest in state-building; an oversight to which many have attributed the political instability that subsequently beset Solomon Islands. He notes that the British exited leaving institutions which were both inappropriate, under-prepared and under-resourced to overcome the impending challenges. The legacies of colonialism are further discussed with reference to the literature, in chapter three.

Government machinery was ill-prepared for the pressures of personal and commercial interests which have led to many of the contemporary governance issues the country is experiencing, remarked then-Governor of the Central Bank of Solomon Islands Rick Houenipwela in 2004. Sir Baddley Devesi² (1992) has elaborated on this point, observing that Britain did not adequately prepare Solomon Islands for independence. He cited that only in 1971 did Britain begin to meaningfully train Solomon Islanders for the public service, through ‘crash courses in senior Public Administration…to prepare them for independence’ (p.5). Following training, many of these officers’ assumed high public offices and responsibilities previously performed by expatriate officers with decades of experience (p.5). Devesi (1992) argued that the British administration considered it expedient to grant Solomon Islands independence quickly, as Britain derived little economic benefits from the colony. The tumultuous post-independence period experienced by Solomon Islands is hardly surprising given the lack of administrative

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² Sir Baddley Devesi was the first Governor General of Solomon Islands, following independence in 1978.
attention to building effective civil service and developing a sense of national identity prior to the British departure.

2.4. ‘Tensions’: Conflict and regional intervention

A notable feature of Solomon Islands is its troubled recent history. The country is a post-conflict state, recovering from the ‘tensions’ - a period of civil conflict which peaked between 1998 and 2003. The tensions still remain large in the national consciousness; and whilst peace now prevails, many have expressed concern that the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed (Aqorau, 2008; Moore, 2004). The tensions undermined the state’s ability to perform its key functions and enforce law and order, resulting in the designation ‘failed state’ (Bennett, 2008).

Many international actors and media reports portrayed the conflict as ‘ethnic tension’, caused by cultural differences between the people of Guadalcanal and Malaita (Bennett, 2002). Ethnic identities did play a role, insofar as the two militarised factions the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) were comprised of militants indigenous to Guadalcanal, and Malaita respectively. However, accounts by Kenilorea (2008), Moore (2004), Fraenkel (2004) and Hemeiri (2007) among others, have described the root causes as complex and numerous; relating to distribution and control of land and resources (human, capital and natural), criminal opportunism, and changing identities. The conflict was articulately described by Dinnen (2008) as:

‘A progressively debilitating internal crisis that manifested itself in serious lawlessness in some areas, the breakdown of essential services, closure of major commercial enterprises and impending national bankruptcy (Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004). What began as tensions between the indigenous inhabitants of Guadalcanal and settlers from the adjacent island of Malaita, developed into a low level armed conflict between opposing ethnic militias and, in its later stages, into a process of ‘instrumentalism of disorder’ whereby criminality became a key political instrument (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). The latter culminated in the effective capture and ransacking of the state by a relatively small cohort of corrupt leaders, ex–militants and renegade police officers’ (p.11).

The conflict peaked in June 2000 with the kidnapping of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu by MEF militants who considered that as a Malaitan he was not sufficiently advancing Malaitan interests (Kenilorea 2008; Moore 2004). His subsequent resignation led to a de-facto coup d’état. The ensuing negotiations led to the brokering of the Townsville Peace Agreement which calmed
the situation; but did not result in the restoration of largely disintegrated state institutions
(Kenilorea, 2008; Braithwaite et al., 2010).

At the behest of Solomon Islands’ Governor General, an international intervention under the
name Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was established. Commencing
with the deployment of an international security contingent of police and military to Solomon
Islands, tasked with addressing the security situation, the goal of the RAMSI mission was:

‘A peaceful Solomon Islands where key national institutions and functions of law and justice,
public administration and economic management are effective, affordable and have the
capacity to be sustained without RAMSI’s further assistance (Solomon Islands Government
and RAMSI 2009, p.6).

RAMSI was predominantly funded by Australia, which contributed AUD$2.6 billion over the
10-years 2003-2013; its focus was primarily law and justice, which accounted for 83 per cent of
all expenditure (Hayward-Jones, 2014, p.4).

Some have argued that the designation ‘failed state’ which was employed to justify the
subsequent foreign intervention was a misnomer, as Solomon Islands was not a functioning state
to begin with (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Hameiri, 2007). The concept of ‘state failure’ infers ‘a
disintegration of already-established state institutions and a breakdown of social order that is
assumed to rely directly or indirectly on these institutions’ (Brown, 2007, p.11). Brown (2007)
argues that social order in Solomon Islands is not contingent on state institutions and that state
institutions cannot be packaged and delivered a priori like a product. Rather they are constructed
through a complex interplay of political processes and society which determine their legitimacy.

During the time of the tensions, Honiara City essentially became blockaded from the
surrounding Guadalcanal Province by checkpoints armed by militiamen. This impacted the flow
of food into the capital, and the flow of manufactured products such as fuel, soap and medicine
into Guadalcanal. Only some civil society organisations and churches (such as Red Cross,
Melanesian Brotherhood) were able to continue delivering health and education services, along
with basic goods during the crisis (Moore, 2007; Braithwaite et al., 2010). Lived experiences of
the tensions inevitably influence the present-day environment in Solomon Islands, as Aqorau
(2008) explains:

‘The social, political and economic factors that led to the ethnic tension and quasi-civil war
have not been addressed. There should not be any pretence that all is well in Solomon Islands
now law and order has been restored...There are serious undercurrents simmering and
feelings of mistrust that still exist among the former warring parties. If these undercurrents
are not addressed, they could easily reignite the tension’ (p.257).
Following the election of Snyder Rini as Prime Minister in 2006, allegations of vote-buying and election-rigging were levelled against Asian businessmen which culminated in rioters burning and looting Chinese businesses (Brown, 2007; Moore, 2008). Some Chinese have lived in Solomon Islands for generations, many having fled China due to their political associations with Kuomintang during the Chinese Civil War. However, recent influxes of migrants from mainland China have created resentment among Solomon Islanders who take issue with their social and economic practices (Spiller, 2006).

The riots were both pre-meditated, and spontaneous opportunism, argued Allen (2008). Assistance from RAMSI was unable to quell the riots, and reinforcements were flown in from Australia the following day, by which time the riots had dissipated (Moore, 2008). Tensions between Chinese and indigenous Solomon Islanders persist but have not resulted in large-scale disorder since 2006. Following the April 2014 flash flooding, a Chinese-owned shop was looted and burned to the ground on 16-17 May, in riots that followed the Solomon Islands Government’s decision to close remaining evacuation centres. Similar to the 2006 riots, observers determined the riot to be both spontaneous opportunism and pre-meditated by a few key individuals (Radio NZ, 2014). Findings concerning rioting and other manifestations of conflict are reflected in chapter seven of this study. Election time continues to be a time of uncertainty, with civil society leaders calling for respect for law and order prior to the 2014 vote, whilst Asian businesses welded iron doors onto their stores and engaged the services of local security firms (Solomon Star, 2014).

2.5. Extractive and subsistence economy

Solomon Islands’ formal economy is dominated by extractive industries (mining, logging and fishing), and the country depends significantly on foreign overseas development assistance (ODA). Whilst the extractive industries remain the primary revenue generators, the country has been unable to substantially capitalise on its economic potential due to limited in-country value add and porous regulatory enforcement (Moore, 2004). In recent years, logging and mining have reached unsustainable levels, destroying the natural environment and exacerbating land disputes (Moore, 2004; Braithwaite et al. 2010). Freehold land sales to foreigners are prohibited by law, and most land is held under customary communal title; meaning that foreign commercial enterprises must operate on leasehold land (Bennett, 2002). This has been a hedge against large-

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3 The Kuomintang are the current ruling political party in Taiwan (Republic of China). Following defeat to the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, loyalists retreated to Taiwan or assumed exile in third-party countries.
scale land alienation, which is particularly important to Solomon Islanders for whom land and identity are inextricably tied. Disputes between several land-owners of communally-held land in the face of mining or logging operations are common; and community members have been successful in expelling unwelcome operations (Bennett, 2002; Braithwaite et al., 2010).

Demographic data for Solomon Islands outlines the growing youth population which, combined with limited paid employment prospects outside of the few main centres, is leading to increased urbanisation (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Informal (squatter) settlements have been expanding around Honiara, many lacking in basic services, and occupying marginal land. Urban migration and a growing youth population currently exceed the job creation rate, which is manifested in high levels of unemployment throughout Honiara, but especially in settlement areas. Further, Honiara is a melting-pot consisting of people from all over the country. This results in a diversity of cultural practices (and the creation of hybrid identities), but also presents challenges resulting from dislocation from the customs, traditions and village structure of their home community (Pollard, 2000).

A 2010 report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimated that 23 per cent of Solomon Islanders have difficulty meeting basic needs (p.6). The report suggests that while economic disparities exist between urban and rural, urban livelihoods may be less secure when compared to rural livelihoods. Feinberg (2002) explained that urban residents often encounter additional burdens of resource sharing and support to wantoks living back in provincial areas, and accommodating visiting wantoks. He argued that ‘requests from home by people with little concept of the cost of living in town are often exorbitant’, yet to deny assistance violates wantok obligations (Feinberg, 2002, p.54). The high cost of living in Honiara, combined with demand for jobs which far outstrips supply poses financial challenges for urban residents.

2.6. Foreign aid dependence

Foreign aid is a mainstay of the Solomon Islands economy, with ‘reported aid flows…among the highest in the world; both as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) and in terms of ODA per capita’ (World Bank, 2010, p.63). In excess of 30 per cent of total education expenditure and 40 per cent of total health expenditure is funded by donors; and considered essential for maintaining current levels of service delivery (ibid, p.63). On the other hand,
critiques have been raised about a lack of sustainable impact of ODA, citing the negative impacts on governance and the economy it is having and the dependency it is fostering (e.g. Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 2013; Hayward-Jones 2014)

Criticism of aid in Solomon Islands largely echoes the critiques present in development literature more broadly. Gegeo and Watson Gegeo (2002) have suggested that aid to Solomon Islands has been top-down, project-based, donor-driven, mal-aligned to local priorities, insufficiently coordinated, and neoliberal in orientation (p.378). Many of these critiques of aided development are not new, nor unique; however, contextualised to Solomon Islands they can provide valuable insights. Findings chapters’ five to eight provide some insight into some of the practical application of these critiques, through the lens of the April 2014 flash flood disaster.

Most visibly unique about this context is the presence of RAMSI, which must be accounted for, yet is not a traditional donor/recipient relationship. Specifically, RAMSI has been criticised for having an overemphasis on law and order, and lack of attention on building the base of the economy or basic infrastructure. The influx of highly-paid foreign consultants has been another criticism, citing that many have lacked appreciation for the local culture and context. A report by the Lowy Institute entitled ‘Australia’s costly investment in Solomon Islands: The lessons of RAMSI’ established that Australia’s contribution to the operation between 2003-2013 amounted to one-third of Solomon Islands’ GDP, and exceeded SIG expenditure over the decade (Hayward-Jones, J., and Lowy Institute for International Policy 2014). For donor spending to exceed that of a host government over a 10-year period is unprecedented. Kabutaulaka (2013) has suggested that as RAMSI scales down, it is important to consider whether the Government can afford the institutions created by the intervention and whether the economy can maintain them. He considered that while RAMSI has been successful in some areas, they may have also created dependency and institutions that may collapse when the intervention phases out.

Overall, RAMSI has benefitted from widespread support, with a 90 per cent confidence rating in 2007, and 89 per cent in 2008 (Braithwaite et al, 2010, p.135). Moore (2004) expressed surprise at the high level of support that the operation has commanded, particularly given the higher levels of criticism from locals than the Truth and Peace Monitoring Groups in Bougainville. Braithwaite et al (2010) attributed this to the segregated living situations whereby RAMSI forces stayed in a compound outside town or in white residential enclaves; leading to fewer day-to-day interactions between locals and expatriates (p.136). Their reputation was not helped by transgressions of local cultural codes by RAMSI personnel, such as involvement with local women and prostitutes (Moore, 2004, p.178). In his field-notes, Braithwaite (2010) describes:
‘RAMSI from Australia are an embarrassment when they holiday in Gizo, Skinny-dipping in front of the main street. Lewd behaviour with girls in the swimming pool. They stick together and do not mix with local people. They don’t go around and introduce themselves to businesses. So how would they find out where homebrew is sold? They suffer from ‘Lime Lounge Syndrome’ (Interview with Western Province businessman, 2006) (p.136).

The comparatively small size of Honiara has often been described by expatriates as like ‘living in a fishbowl’. The few air-conditioned cafes or restaurants (Lime Lounge, Breakwater Café; along with Mendana, Heritage Park and King Solomon Hotels) are almost exclusively frequented by expatriates and characterised by a sense of detachment from Solomon Islands life. The size of Honiara also means that there is considerable social contact between staff within the public service, development organisations, and RAMSI. This is manifested in institutions which are rather personalised and has an impact on shaping relationships among various agencies.

2.7. Salience of a politics of patronage

Solomon Islands inherited its political system from the model imposed under British colonial rule, which was based on the Westminster system. Whilst historically introduced, Fraenkel (2004) has argued that juxtaposing ‘introduced’ and ‘indigenous’ institutions bypasses critical features such as the extent to which historically introduced institutions have become indigenised. He suggested that imported institutions ‘even if they were at first forced inwards, were internally negotiated and the indigenous cultures remoulded’ (p.185). Turnbull (2002) has argued that although Solomon Islands ‘ostensibly has the structure of a Western-style liberal democratic state, it does not operate in this manner’ (p.199).

The contemporary bureaucracy is heavily influenced by the salience of personalised patronage networks (see Fraenkel, 2004; Turnbull, 2002; Cox, 2009; Bennett, 2002; Kabutaulaka, 2008). The notions of political neutrality and impersonal state institutions are not strong in Solomon Islands, and the civil service is prone to partiality and preferential treatment. Kabutaulaka (1998) explained that civil service culture ‘is greatly influenced by client/patron relationship, not unexpected in a society where family, clan, wantok, and regional affiliations form the basis of social existence’ (p.39).

The designation ‘bigman’ is earned through demonstrations of power; via accumulation and redistribution of wealth and resources, principally among wantoks (Moore, 2004). These networks of obligation and reciprocity extend to elections, where campaigning focuses on the ability of ‘bigmen’ to distribute resources to supporters (Moore, 2004). Political parties and
ideology are largely absent in Solomon Islands and coalitions tend to be weak and unstable (Kabutaulaka, 2008; Fraenkel, 2008). Cox (2009) explained that politicians commonly use their discretionary funds to provide benefits to their supporter base, who in turn vote them into office at election time. This was a key finding in the context of the disaster at the centre of this study, and is reflected in chapter five, and is the central theme of chapter eight.

The presence of state institutions throughout most of Solomon Islands is limited, and they represent but one actor in the ‘patchwork of semi-autonomous indigenous micro-polities they strive to encompass’ (Hegarty, et al, 2004, p.5). The institutional design of the modern nation state continues to bear little resemblance to the indigenous political cultures at the community level which have developed and operated over millennia (ibid). Reliance on client/patron relationships for the delivery of government services is apparent in communities making demands for basic government services directly to elected constituency members, rather than the responsible government line-ministry (Stokes, et al., 2013). Hegarty et al. (2004) have suggested that the lack of state presence and basic service delivery are key factors in the very weak social contract that exists between SIG and the country’s citizenry.

2.8. Disasters experienced by case study communities

Solomon Islands has experienced a number of disasters which remain large on the national consciousness due to their scale and devastation. People’s lived experience of past disasters can have a profound impact on the way that they perceive and respond to future disasters. This study focused on the April 2014 flash flooding, which the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) (2014) termed the ‘worst flooding in the history of the Solomon Islands’. Three large-scale past disasters had impacted on communities who participated in this study, prior to the April 2014 flash floods; namely, an earthquake, a cyclone, and flooding. Radford and Blong (1991) conducted a survey of 200 natural disasters in Solomon Islands, finding that damage from tropical cyclones exceeded that of earthquakes by a factor of five. Their research showed that Guadalcanal, Makira, and Malaita provinces have suffered the most damage historically; and also projected that tropical cyclones, earthquakes and volcanoes would be the most significant hazards going forward.

On 21 April 1977, a magnitude 8.1 earthquake struck the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, causing landslides which buried entire villages and resulted in the loss of life and property (Mauli, 1977). Participants in this study were originally from the Weathercoast and were evacuated following
the earthquake and relocated to their current residence at Aruligo, in West Guadalcanal. Several members of the community had perished in the earthquake or subsequent landslides. In a culture which places high value on place-based identities, residents at Aruligo continue to refer to ‘home’ as their original village on the Weathercoast.

Cyclone Namu is widely considered to be the worst tropical cyclone to ever hit Solomon Islands; striking the isles from 16-19 May 1986 (Radford and Blong, 1992). In its wake, it left a confirmed death toll of 102, with some reports suggesting in excess of 150 deaths (ibid). The impact of the disaster was felt nationwide, with one-third of the entire population left homeless. Guadalcanal was most heavily impacted, with the province accounting for three-quarters of total fatalities, and reporting 90 per cent of the population adversely affected (Radford and Blong, 1992).

Earthquakes and resultant tsunami in Western Province in 2007, and in Temotu in 2013 were major national disasters which both claimed lives and left a wake of damage and destruction (Solomon Islands tsunami deaths confirmed, 2013). Participants from the three communities participating in this study were not from Western or Temotu Provinces. However, such large and recent disasters are both part of Solomon Islanders’ disaster recall and were situations which government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) responded to, and have informed their experience of disaster response.

For residents of communities in West and East Guadalcanal who participated in the study, flooding is a recurring event with levels of damage varying; however no loss of life has occurred as a result. Flooding in 2009 in West Guadalcanal caused loss of life and one of the deceased was found by members participating in the study in Aruligo, having drowned and been washed downstream by the swollen river (ReliefWeb, 2009).

The disaster central to this study struck Solomon Islands on 3rd April 2014 after prolonged heavy rain caused flash flooding. The flash floods were the worst that the country had ever experienced, claiming 22 lives and impacting over 50,000 people (Reliefweb, 2014). The worst loss of life occurred in the capital Honiara, after the Mataniko River burst its banks, washing away houses and damaging infrastructure. During the crisis, evacuation centres housed around 10,000 people, and upwards of 75 per cent of Guadalcanal’s food gardens were destroyed (Reliefweb, 2014). The flooding caused significant infrastructure damage, crop destruction, psycho-social trauma and water, health and sanitation issues.

The experiences of people and organisations are not formed by events in isolation. Both community and organisational stakeholders who participated in this study referenced their
experiences of previous disasters to compare or contrast to that of the flash flooding. Thus, an overview of some of the key events that have influenced the lives of research participants can provide valuable insight into how and why they responded to the disaster being studied.
Chapter 3. Situating disaster in Solomon Islands: A review of relevant literature

3.1. Introduction

This chapter sets forth by reviewing and discussing literature related to the theoretical background for the study, outlining key terms and concepts pertinent to communities and disaster response in an Oceania context. Section 3.1 introduces the theoretical framework which underpins this research. Hopeful post-development approaches to development form the basis for investigating how communities conceptualise and interact with disasters and the non-governmental agencies which respond to them. Sections 3.2-3.4 of the chapter introduce some of the indigenous epistemologies - ways of perceiving, understanding, and doing, which underpin the approach to development theory which informs this research. Sections 3.5-3.9 then focus on how disasters are experienced by communities, and how they are responded to by NGOs, with a core focus on NGO-community interactions, the primary focus of this thesis. The theoretical framework used seeks to acknowledge and appreciate communities’ agency and understand the relationship between agency and exogenous influences.

3.2. Towards a hopeful post-development

Development has always been a hotly contested term; one which is used by a plethora of actors to describe and rationalise a broad range of ideas, actions and structures. Many theories have sought to construct meta-narratives of development, outlining processes of change and the factors which influence change. Theories have built on one another in a process of both critiquing and constructing. Following earlier structuralist and dependency schools of thought, post-development developed as a radical critique of mainstream and Western-derived models of development (Sidaway, 2008, p.17). Post-development can broadly be divided into two schools: early writings which may better be termed ‘anti-development’ which call for the abandonment of development; and later writings which suggest that development can be reformed and criticisms addressed (Pieterse, 2001, pp.107,111).

Litonjua (2012) situated post-development as a critique of the westernisation, neoliberal orientation and homogenising effect of current development, and the unequal power relationships inherent within development discourse (p.42). Key post-development theorists such as Pieterse (2001), Esteva (1992) and Sidaway (2007) have all made similar statements –
that ‘the metaphor of development gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history’; that development discourse is similar to the ‘Orientalism’ portrayed and analysed by Edward Said; and that Western assumptions and notions of expertise and superiority often accompany development interventions and aid (Esteva 1992, p.9, in Munck 2000, p.77; Pieterse 2001; Sidaway 2007). Rapley (2004) argued that development produces a meta-narrative which is a reflection of the interests of its practitioners; one which Sidaway (2007) argues ‘is not necessarily empowering or rewarding for many of those on the receiving end’ (p.248).

Post-development did not arise from an epistemological vacuum; rather, it represents reformulations of development critiques which have previously been articulated through the schools of poststructural, feminist and postcolonial thought (Sidaway, 2007). It also reflects the reflexive critique of mainstream development which arose from the 1970s through alternative theories of development which emphasised sustainability, bottom-up and ‘basic needs’ as approaches to development (ibid).

In recent years, hopeful post-development has challenged early post-development assumptions that development ought to be abandoned, positing that positive gains have been made through development processes, and suggesting that development can be reformed. It critiques the binaries of pro- or anti-development employed by earlier post-development, suggesting that reality is more diverse and complex. Hopeful post-development critiques epistemological classifications, and assumptions of development discourses (Sidaway, 2007). It also departs from earlier post-development by arguing that without suggesting viable alternatives, early post-development is but ‘criticisms of current development theory, policy, and practice’ (Litonjua, 2012, p.42). Clausen (2009) considered the need for critique to achieve better development results and undermine the ideologies which prioritise the voices of economists and other specialists over those of local communities.

The challenge confronting post-development is whether it can move beyond resistance to propose alternative models of development which are both realistic and practical (Rapley, 2004). Notably, Sidaway (2007) remarks that some hopeful post-development theorists, in appreciating the heterogeneity of development narratives and local diversity, have gravitated towards alternative development as a more useful conceptualisation. Gibson-Graham’s (2005) work ‘Surplus Possibilities: Post-development and Community Economies’ is considered a key text in the re-positioning to a more hopeful post-development:

‘The challenge of post-development is not to give up on development, nor to see all development practice – past, present and future, in wealthy and poor countries – as tainted, failed, retrograde; as though there were something necessarily problematic and destructive
about deliberate attempts to increase social well-being through economic intervention...The challenge is to imagine and practice development differently’ (p.6).

Criticism of post-development has largely focused on earlier works, such as those of Escobar (1992, 1997) and Esteva (1985), which could equally be situated as anti-development. Early post-development has been criticised for its deconstruction of meta-narratives of development, whilst concurrently developing its own meta-narrative through the binaries of pro- and anti-development, creating its own epistemological generalisations and assumptions (Litonjua, 2012; Sidaway, 2007). By contrast, post-development theorists, such as Gibson-Graham (2005) have repositioned post-development as an attempt to undermine singular meta-narratives of change, de-centring and de-essentialising development. Post-development has also been criticised for its emphasis on the development of endogenous discourses – adopting a ‘foreign bad, local good position’ (Pieterse, 2001, p.101). Pieterse suggests that post-development can risk romanticising the grassroots, local, and indigenous.

Post-development has roots in a number of schools of thought, alternative development being one of these (Sidaway, 2007). A key precept of many alternative approaches is the attribution of agency to the poor – such as in conscientisation (Freire, 1996), human-scale development (Max-Neef, 1991), and participatory action research (Chambers, 1983, 1997). However, the expression of agency depends on the capability of an agent to exercise some sort of power in the face of structures (power). Giddens’ (1984) ‘Elements of the Theory of Structuration’ describes:

‘To be an agent is to be able to deploy a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others...an agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to ‘make a difference’, that is, to exercise some sort of power’ (p.14).

Giddens’ (1984) theory of the duality of structure suggests that structure and agency are a duality, both constitutive and recursive – that individuals both create structures and are directed by them – and thus the two cannot be considered separately from one another.

I would like to suggest an approach to post-development which is both critical and hopeful. An approach which both challenges ‘the universalism and reductionism of Western-derived models of development’, and also ‘gives credit to the diversity and multiplicity of social practices’ (Curry and Koczberski, 2012, p.379; Gibson-Graham, 2005, p.5). Thus, an approach which is both cognisant of structural power, and also recognises agency. The current study seeks to acknowledge and highlight the voices of diverse community members and NGO staff and understand the ways in which each interpret, respond to, and recover from disasters; whilst acknowledging the structures that both assist and restrict them.
3.3. Oceanic experiences

An understanding and appreciation of the heterogeneity of Pacific contexts and epistemological differences have been largely misunderstood by outsiders, including NGOs involved in Disaster Response in the region. Epeli Hau’ofa (1993) articulated this well in his seminal work ‘Our Sea of Islands’, where he described how outsiders often hold a perspective which emphasises the smallness and isolation of the Pacific Islands; failing to recognise that if Exclusive Economic Zones of Pacific Island nations are accounted for, these are some of the largest countries in the world. Hau’ofa contended that Melanesia has been considered by outsiders to be fragmented, with ‘tiny communities isolated by terrain and, at least, one thousand languages’ (p.9). Whereas, in fact, cultural and economic trading systems have been and are extensive and facilitated by the multilingualism of Melanesians and development of lingua-francas to communicate across the region (ibid).

Many countries in the Oceania region are considered to be ‘fragile states’, ‘weak states’, or ‘failed states’. Brown (2007) has argued that classification can be misleading insofar as it overlooks the strengths of Pacific life - foremost of which is a high level of social cohesion and resilience, including customary life. It implies greater vulnerability than is present, and the failure of institutions that were never entirely developed in the first instance (ibid). Nelson (2006) suggested that such terminology may be appropriate at times, but has proposed alternative labels which may present a more accurate picture of the dynamic and varied situation in the Melanesian region. He puts forth 12 alternative labels: ‘the optional State’, ‘the incomplete State’, ‘the alternate State’, ‘the State with diminished traditional base’, ‘the State without clerks’, ‘the State and the fallible ballot’, ‘the State as target of the predatory citizens’, ‘Governments of opportunity for the plausible rogues and idealists’, ‘the State and the myth of neutral intervention’, ‘the State with volatile cities’, and ‘the State with patches of peace and progress’ (Nelson, 2006, 1-17). Writing in the context of Melanesia, the descriptions of States that Nelson (2006) outlines help to show some of the challenges facing governance of government in Solomon Islands with greater clarity than binaries of good governance/failed state.

Understanding that Solomon Islands has only relatively recently achieved national independence (in 1978), with a colonial experience, and recent conflict; is important to contextualise the challenges of nationhood (or lack-thereof) and governance instability. The second Prime-Minister of Solomon Islands is widely remembered for describing Solomon
Islands as ‘a nation conceived but never born’ (Mamaloni, 1992, p.12). He went on to argue that Solomon Islands ‘has never been a nation, will never be a nation, and will never become one’ (p.10). The creation of Solomon Islands was a colonial construct, and national identity is usually secondary to clan or provincial identities.

Even in periods of serious violence, such as the tension experienced from 1999, through the period of RAMSI intervention in Solomon Islands, local-level peace and order was almost entirely the result of local justice and norms in practice (Brown, 2007). References to ‘fragile states’ can assist understanding of vulnerabilities and problems, but must be balanced against recognition of ‘a fair degree of communal success’ - observable in the strength of family, kin and clan networks, churches and voluntary organisations (ibid, pp.298-9). Brown (2007) proposes that what has failed is the introduction of modern centralised governance, not the lives of Solomon Islanders – a majority of whom rely little on the state, dependent on subsistence agriculture for sustenance. The strength of customary life in the face of a fragmented state, as was the case in Solomon Islands during and following the tensions, has led donor agencies to consider alternative delivery mechanisms for bilateral aid. AusAID has become more engaged with churches in Melanesia, partnering with faith-based NGOs, recognising the advantages that religious organisations have, in terms of having a natural constituency at the grassroots level, in circumstances where the state has limited capacity (McDougall, 2008). Strong local networks and norms were found to be important elements in enabling communities to respond and recover from disaster. The ways which communities responded to the April 2014 floods are detailed in section 5.4, and the psycho-social support provided by community and kin are elaborated in section 7.6.

Community and custom dominate social relations in Solomon Islands, and subsistence agriculture remains the prevailing form of both sustenance and livelihood (Brown, 2007). Broadly, kin and village networks support food, economic and physical security, whereby the urban poor remain the most vulnerable due to their separation from these networks and lack of productive land (ibid). Ordinary Solomon Islanders interaction with the State may be limited as social service delivery beyond the main towns is limited. Further, the imposition of Westminster-style institutions during the colonial era bears little resemblance to historical and contemporary notions of governance in Solomon Islands. Ladley and Gill (2008) argued that ‘on independence: In rough terms, it was the bolting on of a Westminster constitutional variant to an existing colonial model, which almost by definition meant big government and which only partly related to politics as actually practised’ (p.34). There exists a ‘disjunction between state and society that creates the conditions from which other critical problems emerge or intensify’
– at the governance level, this may be characterised by self-interest, structural instability and localism (Brown, 2007, p.12).

3.4. Kastom: a guiding epistemology

If ‘every Pacific society has a framework of knowledge that is systematically gathered and formulated within a paradigm of general truths and principles’, then kastom is this framework in Solomon Islands (HRC, 2004, p.11, in Fraenkel, 2004). Encompassing both traditions and customs, kastom also has more epistemological connotations – determining the ways in which societies ‘create meaning, structure, and construct reality’ (Taufe’ulungaki, 2000, p.11, in Fraenkel, 2004). It is, therefore, unsurprising that kastom is a central feature of identity politics in Solomon Islands. Cultural knowledge, values and practices are transmitted through stories and everyday living, forming what Subramani (1993) described as ‘Oceania’s library’ of oral cultures (p.5 in Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014, p.109). Kastom has been connected with representing and protecting the interests and independence of indigenous communities; bringing people together in new ways (like the self-government Maasina Rule movement), and emphasising local solutions and knowledges (Timmer, 2008; Frankel, 2004). Appeal to kastom has also been a prominent force in opposing logging and mining ventures, emphasising the connection between peoples’ land and identity. Braithwaite et al. (2010) described wantok as having:

‘...many layers of meaning for Solomon Islanders. In a context in which one’s family or clan members are present, family or clan identities will be salient; in other contexts, in which speakers of the same dialect are present, language could be defining, and island or nationality in other contexts’ (p.103).

For many outsiders, wantokism is a term that is often used negatively to describe favouritism, personalised and relationship-based decision-making in the public and private sectors; as compared to objective, merit-based decisions (Kabutaulaka, 1998). In this sense, wantokism is seen as an impediment to good governance practices of accountability and transparency, as argued by Fukuyama (2008). However, an alternative view of wantokism posits that it is an important social safety net, given limitations in the delivery of government services (Brigg, 2009). By this view, membership of a particular family, village, or clan, bears social obligations and responsibilities to assist other members of the group.

The juxtaposing of ‘indigenous’ and ‘introduced’ institutions neglects the indigenisation of introduced systems of government that has taken place. For example, within the formal
continuity of introduced institutions, personalised patronage systems have arisen which exist to allocate resources and distribute benefits along kinship (wantok) allegiances, in the spirit of bigman patronage and notions of reciprocity (Fraenkel, 2004; Narokobi, 1983). Imported institutions have been ‘internally negotiated and the indigenous cultures remoulded’, indicating that kastom is both flexible and malleable (Fraenkel, 2004). A proponent of ‘The Melanesian Way’, Bernard Narokobi (1983) argued in a similar vein that ‘Melanesians are not and have never been slaves to their cultural practices if they believed these were obstructing them’ (p.7). Nevertheless, challenges still exist in ‘grafting together…formerly village-based, highly personalised styles of leadership….in the new, inevitably more impersonalised setting of the post-colonial nation-state’ (Ladley and Gill, 2008, p.38).

Culture and norms frame social interactions, meaning that research is essentially a ‘localised and cultural endeavour’ where ‘truths…are socially constructed’ (Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014, p.109). Individuals or groups may usurp kastom when it is in their interest to justify a particular state of affairs; therefore, the notion of kastom it is not inviolate and should not go unchallenged. Similarly, the assumptions underpinning Western structures and institutions must also be open to question (Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). That being said, structures and institutions are heterogeneous and diverse, should be interpreted and represented accordingly.

Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon (2014) reflected on the importance of ‘understanding and reflecting on the values and beliefs underpinning Pacific knowledge systems and the ways these influence the framing, implementation, interpretation and application of research findings’ (p.17). The research methodology and approaches elaborated in chapter four emphasise researching in a way that is contextually relevant and appropriate, employing methods that are familiar and acceptable to participants.

3.5. Legacies of colonialism

Consideration and discussion of postcolonial dynamics in disaster response is important in the case of Solomon Islands. Krause (2014) outlined that forms of direct domination exist in disaster relief, where aid workers and agencies have power over communities; and act ‘reminiscent of colonial practices that aim to standardise, control, and order the fields from which they were generated’ (p.62).

Following on from an era of direct colonial administration, which officially concluded with national independence in 1978, Solomon Islands has experienced significant involvement from
the Global North – through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), aid flows, seasonal labour programmes, and commercial involvement in the extractive sector. There is a gap in the literature addressing post-colonialism as it relates specifically to disaster in the context of Solomon Islands. At a broader level, insight can be gained from literature addressing post-colonialism more generally in Solomon Islands and Melanesia. For the case of this research, a degree of caution must be exercised to avoid conflating humanitarian NGOs simply ‘as agents of donor governments, of traditionalism or new imperialism, in the form of governmentality, or of apolitical discourse’ (Krause, 2014, p.62).

Most cultural research in Solomon Islands prior to independence was conducted by Western anthropologists, whose research often embraced theories of Social Darwinism to describe social, cultural, political and economic traits and parallel them to Western experience. Marshall D. Sahlins’ (1963) work ‘Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief’ is among the most widely cited of these, where he contrasts Melanesians to Polynesians in the following way:

‘...In anthropological annals the Polynesians were to become famous for elaborate forms of rank and citizenship, whereas most Melanesian societies broke off advance on this front at more rudimentary levels’ (p.286).

Sahlins’ (1963) work is a discussion on the differences in social organisation between Polynesia and Melanesia, in which he derides Melanesia as more primitive and less advanced of the two. He depicts Polynesian societies more favourably, describing Polynesian chiefs’ presence as ‘...almost regel...noblesse oblige, of true pedigree and an incontestable right of rule’ (p.289).

Similarly, world traveller Jack London remarked in a Pacific travel book published in 1911,

‘If I were King, the worst punishment I could ever inflict on my enemies would be to banish them to the Solomons. On second thought, King or no King, I don’t think I’d have the heart to do it’ (p.247).

Dr Kabutaulaka (2015) has detailed how the European mapping of Oceania that divided the region into Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, was ‘fraught with essentialist, racist, and social-evolutionary elements’, under which Melanesians were considered ‘Oceanic Negroes’ (pp.113,134). He argued that Melanesians were represented in derogatory ways in popular and scholarly discourses and that these perspectives have been internalised to some extent by Pacific Islanders and informed contemporary representations.

Frantz Fanon’s (1961) work ‘Wretched of the Earth’ describes the dehumanising impacts of colonialism, which he argues have planted ‘deep in the minds of the native population the idea that before the advent of colonialism their history was one which was dominated by barbarism’ (p.213). Epeli Hau’ofa’s (1993) work ‘Our Sea of Islands’ described Melanesians’ attempts
upon independence to ‘rehabilitate their cultural identity…cleansing it of its colonial taint and denigration’, as a direct response to colonial practices that denigrated Melanesian peoples and cultures as barbaric and primitive (p.2). He pointed to the leadership of Walter Lini of Vanuatu and Bernard Narokobi of Papua New Guinea as examples of the reassertion of Melanesian identity and cultural values (p.2). Narokobi (1983) described the colonial legacy where ‘Melanesians have come to see themselves as they are understood and written up by foreigners….Melanesians are walking in the shadows of their Western analysts, living under dreams and visions dreamt and seen by Westerners’ (p.9). Narokobi’s (1983) book also contains letters from readers who criticise it as an idealising and romanticising of traditional culture and customs which disregards negative aspects of the past. Fanon (1961) considers this a characteristic of postcolonial authors who set ‘a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of [their] people’ and in doing so exotify customs which they consider the source of truth and value (p.221).

Where the literature most closely discusses humanitarian interventionism, a key theme is depiction – the way in which communities, countries and regions are framed, and the way in which this influences the Global North’s involvement. Hau’ofa (1993) argued that Melanesia is depicted as the most fragmented region of the world, which is in marked contradiction to the reality to the existence of complex cultural and trading exchange networks, lingua-francas and multilingualism. He argues that this misconception is promoted in the interest of neocolonialism by those who are involved in Pacific geopolitics or aided development, where it is ‘necessary to portray our huge world in tiny, needy bits’ (pp.9,14). Depiction was also a key theme in Beristain’s (2006) book ‘Humanitarian Aid Work: A Critical Approach’. He suggested that humanitarian workers exhibit an attitude of superiority and idealise people and aid in ways which can advance paternalistic attitudes and dependency mentality through the ways in which aid is managed and the abilities of the population are underestimated. These ideas have been extensively discussed in post-development and post-colonial literature – Escobar has argued that the discourses of development resemble the Orientalism presented by Edward Said, insofar as depiction has been a tool used for the construction and management of ‘Third World’ identities (Pieterse, 2001, p.103).

Research on Solomon Islands has seldom been written by Solomon Islanders themselves (Wassmann, 1997). Wassmann (1997) suggested that cultural research is ‘always susceptible to accusations of exploitation or paternalism, and likely to be regarded as parasitic on the oral tradition which supplies so much of its data’ (p.97). In addition to valid questions of who research is written by, it is essential to recognise the environment in which research is framed
and the implications that this may have on its findings. The procedures, policies and rules of academic research, emanating from Western institutions are often non-negotiable and founded in Western thought and notions of individualism which may not be shared with those participating in the research (Beristain, 2006; Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon (2014) argued that ‘if considered at all, indigenous (and Pacific) pedagogy was viewed as unscientific story-telling, lacking rigour, in many cases, a romanticising of the past’ (p.17). They also stress the importance of using approaches centred on Pacific epistemologies when conducting cultural research. Western understandings of Solomon Islands and the intervention logic that follows are founded in significant part on research which follows methods culturally alien to participants. Therefore, it is important that research findings be interpreted as contingent on the way in which the research was framed.

3.6. Understanding how disasters are experienced

Disasters do not happen in a socio-cultural vacuum. Therefore, it is important to understand the ‘behaviour, emotions and thoughts of individuals who survive a disaster, without isolating them from the social and cultural context in which they occur’ (Beristain, 2006, p.1). Beristain (2006) argued that humanitarian organisations should seek first to understand the way which affected populations ‘experience, interpret and react to disasters’ (ibid, p.4). The experience and identity of affected communities all need to be understood, and both the disaster survivors and those who provide assistance are influenced by their own history and culture (ibid).

Ideally, understanding what underpins the diverse and varied realities of survivors of disaster, should presuppose emergency response. Beristain (2006) proposed that the Western notion of individualism, for example, is not shared by indigenous cultures which are not centred on the individual. He argues that while the disaster situation helps determine the importance of certain basic needs relief workers may have different priorities compared to people in affected communities – for example, informing the families of fatalities may be of greater priority than ration card provision. It is important to acknowledge that peoples’ needs are not uniform and that failing to acknowledge the resources and connections within a society is likely to weaken, rather than mobilise the community (Benoist, Piquard and Voitur, 1997). These are issues which are discussed in the context of the study focus in chapter seven.

While it is important that disaster experiences are not over-generalised, there are common effects observable following natural disasters which are useful to discuss in order to better understand the prevalence of specific behaviours. Immediately after a disaster, an emergency
phase follows, which usually lasts two or three weeks (Beristain 2006). During this time, people may ‘experience high levels of anxiety, intense social activity, and repetitive thoughts about the event’ (ibid, p.29). A stage of inhibition often follows, lasting three to eight weeks, whereby people tend to repress their emotions in an attempt to overcome their experience of disaster, and is also a result of difficulty finding others with whom to converse, as many others feel ‘burnt out’ (ibid). From the perspective of aid agencies conducting assessments, Krause (2014) discusses the challenge of finding informants due to ‘assessment fatigue’, whereby affected populations may be unwilling or not ready to cooperate with aid agencies. This can reflect past experience of unfulfilled promises or expectations and ‘can be quite accurate – namely that perhaps informants have nothing to gain from participating in an assessment’ (ibid, p.64). This may present an uneasy tension between understanding the varied priorities of affected populations, and management of expectations; which both aid agencies and communities inevitably have to encounter. Cooperation in relief efforts ‘is not to transport ideas or to export models’, suggested Beristain (2006, p.1). He also suggested that local needs and events should be the basis for any project or action, and should be an exchange, as opposed to a one-way effort.

3.7. Post-Disaster Response

Literature relating to the ways which humanitarian organisations approach disaster response tends to focus on three thematic areas – conceptualisation of disaster response, organisational structure, and broader issues of power, which include interpersonal relations and gender (Ariyabandu, 2005; Krause, 2014; Pirotte, Husson and Grunewald, 1999). Gender intersects throughout the relevant literature and relates to several sections, and has therefore been discussed separately in section 3.8. Foremost in the literature on approaching disaster response has been the ways in which organisations interpret disasters.

Pirotte et al. (1999) argued that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) interprets disasters as ‘temporary interruptions in the development process’, conceptualising an ‘emergency-to-development’ continuum (p.20). They suggested that this view is damaging as it seeks not to understand crises, but is reactionary from an organisation justifying the diversion of resources from development to emergency response purposes. This can be damaging insofar as the response that follows may weaken the adaptive capacity of the affected population and foster long-term dependence (Pirotte et al., 1999). Beristain (2006) recognised that material aid is considered first in the aftermath of disaster and psychosocial matters are considered later, if at all. He suggested that by addressing psychosocial issues from the outset, humanitarian
workers can ‘better understand the population, develop plans for action and prevention, understand the mutual support of people in emergency situations, and gain a comprehensive understanding of humanitarian aid’ (pp.1-2). Frequently, NGOs, governments and other agencies fail to understand humanitarian aid in a complete and holistic way, and the April 2014 floods were no exception (see section 7.6). Addressing the psychosocial does not necessarily mean the provision of support, but rather adopting ‘a model of understanding and acting that is more complete’, argued Beristain (2006, p.2).

The structure of organisations involved in disaster response is a key determinant of how they interpret and respond to disasters. Responses to disasters are usually characterised by being unsystematic and coming from ‘highly centralised, top-down, inflexible bureaucracies’, where communities are rarely involved with the making of decisions which affect them (Ariyabandu, 2005, p.35). This view may be applicable to a generalised experience; however, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of agents responding in times of disaster – from individual and kinship networks, religious institutions, NGO, governmental, and multilateral agencies. Whilst there may exist some common characteristics of organisations involved in disaster response, it is important to understand and appreciate the differences within and among organisations.

Krause (2014) discussed the dual effect of the ‘project’ as a unit of helping people and fundraising for NGOs – ‘agencies raise funds to do projects, but they can also do projects to raise funds’ (p.47). Only by raising funds can an organisation survive, to serve its purpose of providing humanitarian or development support. There are obviously strategic imperatives which determine the course of action NGOs take in disaster response. Beristain (2006) proposed that this may cause a disjuncture between NGO management who are likely to be more aware of organisational strategy when providing resources; as opposed to aid workers on the ground, who are more attuned and sensitive to the priorities and needs of affected populations.

In the event of a disaster, there is often a dichotomy of power and resources between affected communities and responding organisations, including NGOs. Aid workers have power over affected populations insofar as agencies control access to resources and services, and aid workers make decisions pertaining to the distribution of those resources (Krause, 2014). Beristain (2006) argued that the ‘implicit presumptions’ of those who have knowledge or power while communities are in a dependent state ‘suggest an attitude of superiority’ (p.85). More broadly, the idealisation of the affected population and aid can create attitudes of paternalism and belittle the agency and abilities of the population. This can also be seen through the representation and articulation of disaster survivors through patronising or disparaging terms such as passive, victim, helpless, or words to that effect (Beristain, 2006, p.112). NGOs often
identify populations ‘by what they lack: their needs are emphasised, and their political aspirations or conflicts are de-emphasised’ (ibid, p.50). While this is patronising, it also reflects the de-politicisation of development – an issue that has been widely discussed and acknowledged in NGO circles, popularly articulated in James Ferguson’s (1990) work ‘The Antipolitics Machine’, and in Kapucu and Ozerdem’s (2013) ‘Managing Emergencies and Crises’. The representation of disasters by NGOs to their respective supporter bases is often over-simplified, treating disaster as a stand-alone event, disengaged from the contexts which inevitably determined the extent of the impact of a disaster and the response that follows.

3.8. Gendered discourses and practice

Disaster is gendered in the discourse that is employed to articulate, study, and theorise disasters - who receives what training, the work that is funded and published, and ‘who is the ‘we’ in disaster practice’ (Enarson and Marrow, 2000, p.13). It has been widely discussed in the literature that women face greater risks and are disadvantaged in times of disaster. There has also been discussion of how organisations respond (or do not respond), to gendered needs, an important theme of chapter seven. There is less literature about women’s agency and a lack of recognition that ‘women are active throughout the disaster management cycle: in mitigation, prevention, preparedness, emergency response and recovery’ (Ariyabandu, 2005, p.11). Women are, and always have been engaged in varied and diverse ways in disaster response, which is clearly evident in the findings detailed in chapter five. Furthermore, when disasters strike, community members, including women, generally respond as emergency workers, rendering assistance well before the arrival of relief agencies, government and the media (Yila et al., 2014).

While some NGOs are addressing the needs of women, there is little evidence of discussion about the agency of women, aside from a privileged few who staff aid agencies and the public service. In the literature discussed, ‘women’ are generally situated to constitute a cohesive and homogenous oppressed group, devoid of power, and often posited as ‘victims’ of socio-economic and cultural systems (Mohanty, 1988). Mohanty (1988) described this use of ‘women’ as a ‘stable category of analysis’ as problematic, as it ‘assumes an ahistorical, universal unity among women, based on a generalised notion of their subordination’ (p.72). She outlined that women are constituted through a complex web of interplay between factors including class, religion and culture – and categorisation as a singular group ‘women’ is reductive and negates diversity which different groups of women represent (p.72). She argued that analysis which
overlooks the pluralities of experience and reality of different groups of women ultimately ‘robs them of their historical and political agency’ (ibid, p.79). Enarson and Marrow (2005) suggested that we can learn from, challenge and build on the existing literature by asking the right questions in order to understand how recovery from disaster is informed by gender relations. Being cognisant of gendered power dynamics and tailoring questions appropriately when consulting with communities can help provide more nuanced and disaggregated findings.

Women often face a double-impact of disasters due to the compounding effect of their subordinate position in gender relations. In times of disaster, women’s subordination often deprives them of decision-making and influence. Enarson and Marrow (2000) illustrate that women are often dismissed as ‘hysterical’ by officials, are denied leadership positions in emergency management, face increases in domestic violence following disaster, and their work is devalued. Where gender is discussed, it is often limited to contrasting ‘the behaviour of men and women in terms of risk perception or warning response with little concern given to explaining the differences within and between genders or why such differences might exist at all’ (ibid, p.31). Responding organisations’ interactions with gender have the ability to challenge or reinforce, either explicitly or implicitly, gendered patterns of domination and subordination.

Responding to the differing needs of men, women and children impacted by disaster is an important aspect of NGO-community relations. Throughout much of the literature, the designation ‘women’ tends to be conflated with the term ‘gender’. While these are two distinct categorisations which should not be conflated, it is well established that women are often distinctly disadvantaged, economically, socially and politically (Pirotte et al., 1999, p.97). Accordingly, while it is appropriate that discussion surrounding gender focuses primarily women’s subjugation and marginalisation, it is important to avoid homogenising experiences through categorisation of ‘women’ as an always pre-constituted group, as discussed by Mohanty (1988). It is necessary to take stock of the current literature pertaining to gender and disasters, in order to most appropriately situate current NGO practice vis-à-vis communities in a holistic and complete way.

NGO responses to disaster often ‘neglect the particular needs of women, and sometimes even contribute to diminishing their status’; furthermore, tension periods, such as those following disaster, ‘occasionally contribute to reinforcing the inferior status of women within their own communities’ (Pirotte et al., 1999 p.97-8). Following a disaster, established identities may be perceived to be threatened or in flux, particularly as men struggle to reassert the control and dominant position that they had before – which may manifest itself in a rise in domestic violence, restrictions placed on women, and other socially harmful negative coping mechanisms (ibid).
Men often control access to resources and make decisions regarding how they are distributed and used, both at the household and community level. Women often do not have land tenure or other assets and have poor access to education and training (ibid). Women-headed households and women from racial or ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to poverty, and face greater exposure to the risks presented by disasters (Enarson and Marrow, 2000). They are often underrepresented in positions of influence in decision-making at the local and national levels, which places them at a disadvantage when the nature of aid is decided and distributed (Pirotte et al., 1999).

3.9. Communities in Disaster Response

Community participation is widely discussed in disaster response, but the nature and extent of participation are contentious. Masaki (2007) contends that people tend to be constrained to act as ‘users and choosers’ of externally devised programmes; and instead calls for them to become ‘makers and shakers’, of projects and policy decisions which affect them (p.125). The role that populations affected by disaster play in disaster relief is usually under analysed, and observers often posit them as ‘populations in need’, or that NGOs are neutral and indistinct from affected populations (Krause, 2014, p.39). In light of this, it is important to delineate the term ‘participation’, to determine how NGOs and communities see the extent of their engagement with one another. In the past, discourse on ‘participation’ has largely concerned itself with the processes of disaster response – through design, implementation and evaluation phases of a project (Masaki, 2007). In its crudest form, participation has been reduced to ‘an instrument to ensure people’s acceptance of [NGO] projects, and to solicit their labour contributions’ (ibid, p.118).

While methods are flexible and tools are many in Participatory Poverty Assessments and Participatory Rural Appraisal; both follow a linear ‘step-by-step sequence of agenda-setting through field research [and] broad-based consultations’ (Masaki, 2007, p.127). Rapid Assessments which are conducted in a disaster context can be paralleled to these. The presumption of linear processes and orderly structures, conditions which participatory methods are predicated upon often do not exist. Therefore, the conclusions determined from participatory tools, when compounded by lag-time in decision making, may lead policymakers to ‘impose policies incongruent with local circumstances’ (ibid, p.127). This can also be true of organisations responding to disasters. The situation on the ground is often fluid and constantly evolving, posing an interesting predicament for responding NGOs. Participation (or even
consultation) can be time consuming; and by the time conclusions are derived from data, the situation on the ground has likely evolved, challenging the relevance of data collected from affected communities. Because of this, participation may not necessarily correlate with the appropriateness of response.

Disaster-affected populations are ‘not naturally beneficiaries’, although they ‘appear as such through the eyes of the relief agency’ (Krause, 2014, p.64). Krause (2014) discussed the concept of eigensinn, referring to how people interpret their situation, their needs, the way which they make decisions and act. Analyses of agency have usually focused on a binary of compliance or resistance, without consideration for spaces in-between these extremities; or overlooked altogether.

Masaki (2007) also discussed structure and agency in a similar vein to Krause’s (2014) discussion on eigensinn and expressions of agency, explaining that a ‘power as domination’ view insufficiently explains power struggles. Masaki (2007) advocated a ‘structuration’ view that ‘regards power to be immanent in the daily flow of social interactions’, providing opportunities to both reinforce, challenge and renegotiate power relations (p.116). There is ample Foucauldian analysis and discussion of governmentality in the literature relating to the structure and role of NGOs, and particularly with regard to foreign aid. For the purposes of this research, it is important to acknowledge the body of literature that exists in this area, and engage with the literature as it relates more specifically to disaster response. In line with the scope of this research, it is also important to balance Foucauldian analyses against practical realities encountered by NGOs and communities in a disaster environment. The experience and realities of both affected population and responding NGOs may be highly localised, and not subject to the generalisability presented in the literature on governmentality.

This chapter has provided an overview of the published literature, relating it to key aspects of this research. Reflecting broadly on contemporary issues and debates in international development theory, it sought to ground these in the contextual realities of Solomon Islands which were outlined in chapter two. The hopeful post-development approach which informs this thesis acknowledges that ways of knowing and doing are diverse and not necessarily compatible with the dominant meta-narratives of change espoused by mainstream development theories. Chapter four discusses the application of theory in the research methods and approaches underlying this study.
Chapter 4. Research Methods and Approaches

4.1. Introduction

Building on the previous chapters which discuss the context of Solomon Islands and the theoretical underpinnings of the research, this chapter outlines and discusses the methodology used in the study. The methodological approach taken is inevitably informed by the background and decisions of the researcher. My disciplinary background in Political Science, History and Development Studies oriented me toward the combined narrative inquiry and discourse analysis approach I have undertaken in this study. This chapter describes these approaches, providing rationale for their use. It then outlines the design, limitations and ethical considerations in the research; and concludes with an overview of the researcher’s positionality, emphasising the importance of researching reflexively.

4.2. Research epistemology

‘It is customary…to say something about what is somewhat pretentiously called ‘methodology’. My field method could be summed up as meeting people’. (Willis 1981, in Brockington and Sullivan, 2003, p.57)

The quote above articulates well my experience of field research for this study – as a process that was not about abstract methods, but fundamentally one that is about people. Accordingly, the approaches to this study seek to ‘recognise, respect and understand the impacts of the relationships surrounding research’ (Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon. 2014, p.107).

A hopeful post-development approach, as detailed in chapter three, has emerged over the past 20 years as a critical response to the dominance of entrenched worldviews. Based on Foucauldian discourse analysis, it is not a singular theory but rather a critical approach to development which seeks to challenge the pre-eminence of empirical understandings of knowledge (Campbell, 2007). Developing out of earlier post-structural schools of thought, post-development theorists consider all knowledge to be historically and culturally contingent and are concerned with the deconstruction and analysis of hegemonic discourses.

In the context of this research, a post-development approach explores marginalised or alternative ways of perceiving and doing, with an appreciation for Solomon Islands context and background which informs the findings of the research. Thus, it is about investigating conceptions of disaster response and recovery, and also examining them critically and analytically.
Whilst all research involves a certain degree of reflexivity, Davis (1999) explains that the extent and scope of reflexivity can vary. Reflexivity seeks to explore and make explicit the ways in which the researcher was involved in and influenced the production of the research (Escobar, 1993). Reed-Danahay (2009) describes the approach as one which the researcher:

‘critically examines [their] own position within the field of academic production...examin[ing] their own institutional and professional contexts with an eye not only towards better understanding of ourselves...but also a more vigorous reflection on the institutional practices and fields in which we operate’ (pp.30-1).

Post-development concern with deconstructing hegemonic discourses aligns well with interpretivist and constructivist notions of acknowledging diverse conceptions of knowing and being and appreciating the pre-eminence of context. Both interpretivist writers, Angen (2000) and Simons (2009) argue that understanding cannot be detached from context. Both suggest that research should be conducted in its real-life context, and researchers should seek to understand more comprehensively how people experience their world through the context (language, experience, relational) in which they live. A constructivist approach fits well with interpretivism, as it considers knowledge to be ‘negotiated as a product of history and social structure’, and that meaning is subjective, inferred by context and experience (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996, p.2).

Featuring prominently in post-development literature, deconstruction defies straightforward classification. It is not a methodology, a tool, or singular approach to reading a text, although many interpret it as such (Derrida, 2004). Deconstruction involves reading a text for what is included and what is excluded, whilst being consistent with the intentions and context of the text (Mohan, 1997; Derrida, 2004). This study seeks to analyse hegemonic discourses and constructions of knowledge and give franchise to the multiplicity of knowledges. Personal background shapes the subjectivity of both researcher and participants, informing and influencing the messages they express, and how they are interpreted by one another.

4.3. Methodological framework: Narrative Inquiry and Discourse Analysis

This research engages both narrative inquiry and discourse analysis as the methodological framework underpinning the study. Narrative analyses premise that narrative is the dominant method by which people construct knowledge and create meaning. It places the focus on the experiences of participants, giving franchise to their realities and the meaning which they attribute to their myriad of lived experiences (Trahar, 2006). Recognising that narrative is a
universal form of knowledge construction and communication, narrative approaches have particularly been relevant as a method of comparing the ways which different groups or individuals present, represent and interpret their realities (ibid). Narrative analysis has played an important role in feminist and indigenous movements as it gives franchise to the voices of marginalised groups who are under-represented or excluded from dominant discourses, allowing them to tell their story in their own voice (Trahar 2006; Fox 2006). In the context of this research, a narrative approach would posit that reforms to organisational responses to disasters are unlikely to be successful if the perceptions, experiences and subjectivities of all stakeholders are not understood (Cortazzi, 1993).

The combination of discursive analysis and narrative inquiry in this framework places focus on research participants’ own stories, situated within their broader material and discursive context. Fittingly, both discursive and narrative approaches recognise that narrative significantly differs across political, social, cultural and temporal contexts; with variations including place, time, the position of participant(s) and researcher and the topic of discussion (Cortazzi, 2006). This variability influences and informs the research and thus strong reflexivity is important to situate the findings of the research. Chase (2005) characterises narratives as ‘situated interactive performances’, which are subject to change based on the circumstances of the researcher (p.657).

The insider/outsider dichotomy has been discussed at length in social science literature and often situated as a critique of the role of ‘outsiders’ (Hau’ofa 1993; Smith 2003; O’Leary 2009). Critical discussions have focused on the potential for foreign researchers to overlook or misinterpret the realities of their participants because they ‘do not fit with prevailing views about the nature of society and its development’ (Hau’ofa, 1993, p.2). As an outsider researcher, it is important to remain reflexive and cognisant of my position in this regard. Bert (1997) reflected on some of these criticisms:

‘The history and culture of the Pacific Islands is seldom written by the people it most concerns, the islanders themselves...[However,] disputes over who Pacific history is written by can obscure some equally difficult questions about who Pacific history is written for. How far does this sometimes acrimonious debate echo the historical concerns of most ordinary islanders, when so many are disqualified by their lack of Western education even from hearing the echoes of their own voices in the published literature?’ (Bert, 1997, p.97).

Cultural research by Western researchers in a developing country context such as Solomon Islands risks allegations of paternalism or exploitation. Furthermore, many Western research methods and academic conventions are ‘likely to be regarded as parasitic on the oral tradition which supplies so much of its data’ (Smith 2003; Bert 1997, p.97). This is not assisted by the
largely academic rhetoric employed in research which makes it generally indecipherable to most community participants (Bert, 1997). Narrative inquiry was selected for its focus on respecting and acknowledging participants’ ways of knowing and being (Trahar, 2006). It allows their stories to unfold as they construct them, rather than how the researcher views them, thus helping to address the perceived power and subjectivities of the researcher (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Thomas and O’Kane 1998).

This research seeks to ground narrative and discursive approaches in Pacific epistemologies, with the aim of supporting and validating participants’ expression. Vaioleti (2006) has suggested that ‘if researching ethically is about respecting human dignity, then it is critical that the process is culturally appropriate for the participants’ (p.29). Pacific countries have a myriad of cultures whose ways of being and knowledges are diverse, both in lived experiences and epistemologies. Thus, research methods developed in a Western context may not be appropriate for Solomon Islands (which in itself is extremely diverse), and risk asserting hegemonic control over participants (Vaioleti, 2006). Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon (2014) stressed the importance of understanding Pacific knowledge systems and their influence on the ‘framing, implementation and application of research findings’ (p.17).

In Solomon Islands, as elsewhere in the Pacific, oral cultures are highly significant, with knowledge, values and cultural practices shared through stories and practical learning. There is a wealth of knowledge in what Subramani (1993) terms ‘Oceania’s library’ of oral cultures (p.3, in Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014, p.109). Unsurprisingly, knowledge sharing is generally an informal and relational process, often articulated as ‘stori’, referring to both an object and a process. Stori is a narrative inquiry method which places participants in a knowledge-sharing setting with which they are familiar.

The concept of talanoa is found in many Pacific languages and closely resembles stori in nature and function (Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). Vaioleti (2006) and Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon (2014) have respectively described talanoa as ‘conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking’ and as chatting, yarning and telling stories (Vaioleti, 2006, p.23). Talanoa is purposive dialogue, which begins with presenting a topic and broad themes to open discussion, without specifying an end point. It is led by participants who explore and discuss topics and issues they identify with (Fairburn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). The combining of relational and narrative approaches with the use of Solomon Island Pidgin (pijin) language helped to demonstrate an informal research practice which was positively received by participants; as it allowed sharing, as opposed to an interrogation of experiences.
4.4. **Fieldwork**

4.4.1 **Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 individuals, representing 17 NGO, Governmental, Multilateral and Civil Society Organisations. Interviews varied in length depending on the availability and input by the participant but generally lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Participants were selected purposefully, having a managerial role in their organisation’s response to the disaster, and participation in interviews was voluntary. It is notable that of 23 participants, 15 were Solomon Island nationals, and 8 were expatriates; additionally, a total of four women were interviewed, as compared to 19 men. Participants were offered either confidentiality for their personal identity and that of their respective organisations, or to have their details published. Likewise, interviews were audio-recorded only with the consent of the interviewee. This resulted in a mixed response, with participants opting for confidentiality citing employment or political considerations, or that they felt they could give more honest and frank answers if they were made anonymously. Some participants opted to be identified but requested that any explicitly political or critical statements be made anonymous. Several interviewees expressed that they felt it was an opportunity to make critical remarks that they could not make openly, for fear of repercussions on their employment status. This was particularly noted in government interviewees who considered their employment to be politicised. Others felt that making critical remarks directly may compromise working relationships in the relatively compact government and the NGO community in Honiara.

Semi-structured Interviews were guided by a brief list of open-ended questions to foster discussion, but were predominantly steered by the interviewee who focused on topics they considered most pertinent or were within their area of experience (O’Leary, 2009). Kumar (1996) considered semi-structured interviews useful at eliciting ideas and opinions; during which the researcher plays a role in asking spontaneous follow-up questions and probing. For this interview method, it is important that the researcher creates a relaxed, flexible, and non-threatening environment for conversation and avoids asking leading questions and steering the conversation to particular ends (Kumar, 1996). Semi-structured interviews are like ‘conversations with a purpose’, which discuss several topics and themes and respect the way which interviewees structure their responses. Taking this open approach has been noted by Holloway and Jefferson (2000) to reveal information which the interviewee may not have discussed had questions been more structured and narrowed the scope of discussion.
Interviewees tended to be more comfortable and candid in their responses where interviews focused around themes and they were open to elaborate in directions of their choosing.

Semi-structured interviewing has been criticised for its constructivist approach, which invalidates positivist criteria for validity and reliability. However, the methodological framework underpinning this study is not oriented toward determining statistically significant patterns or consistencies; rather, it is to understand and analyse the diverse ways that individuals and communities perceive and interpret their realities (Davies, 1999).

The tables below outline the number, agency type and demographic of interview participants:

### Table 1: Interview participants and agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder agency type</th>
<th>Number of participating agencies</th>
<th>Number of participants interviewed</th>
<th>Interview code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Commissions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agencies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateral Agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Gender of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Interviewee</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>National (Solomon Islands)</th>
<th>Expatriate (Foreign)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups were conducted in three distinct communities, to understand the perspectives of communities impacted by the floods. In each community, four focus groups were held – one for women, one for men, one for male youth, and one for female youth. Experiences of NGO response were likely to vary according to gender and age, and separate focus groups provided a space for participants to speak more openly about their experiences, in gender and age-disaggregated environments. Audio recordings were taken in each focus group, with two exceptions, as participants did not unanimously agree to use the voice recorder. In these cases, detailed notes were taken by the researcher and research assistants both during and after the focus group.

Two female and one male research assistants, aged between 25 and 35, were engaged to assist with facilitating focus groups. Female research assistants were particularly important for facilitating the women’s focus groups, as it allowed for discussion concerning gendered issues which would not typically be addressed in the presence of a male. All three research assistants are youth workers and have prior experience in conducting focus groups following Pacific methodological approaches of talanoa and stori. They were valuable cultural interpreters, and effective at observing and recording what was said and what was not said, including focus group dynamics and non-verbal communication within the groups.

Focus group discussions have been described as an effective way helping participants feel at ease by placing them in a group of peers and reducing the perceived power of the researcher (an outsider), by outnumbering (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). For this reason, and convenience, focus group discussions took place within the precinct of the community; which also meant that the researcher was a guest and could be held accountable to the norms and rules of the community.

There have also been critiques of focus group discussions, which argue that the method is normative and constructs a master-narrative based on the consensus of the group (Brockington and Sullivan, 2003). This risks negating the heterogeneity of experiences or disagreements within a group, which invariably impacts on the findings. This limitation partially arises from the limited (six weeks) period of field work undertaken for this study, which restricted other forms of data collection. Le De, Gaillard and Friesen (2015) have argued that ‘community’ is frequently presented in policy documents as a uniform entity ‘sharing the same values, culture, experience and social interests’, overlooking the wide-ranging diversity within (p.7). I have mitigated these limitations to some degree by conducting age and gender disaggregated focus
group discussions and the participation of four different ethnic groups across the three case study communities.

Community gatekeepers were approached in advance and the purpose and nature of the research were explained and permission was obtained. Research assistants helped to recruit and build rapport with participants so that they were clear about their expectations and rights in the research. Participation was voluntary and reciprocity shown in the sharing of food following the discussion. This followed how Nabobo-Baba (2008) described entry and consent – as not a one-time event, but a continuous process both prior to and during the discussion.

Mindful that research should not be a purely extractive (and potentially exploitative) process as elaborated by Kapoor (2004), I was concerned with clearly communicating the reasons for my research, and what participants could expect from it. Scheyvens et al. (2003) suggested that findings from any research have the potential to contribute to future changes. However, with a concern for managing participant expectations, I clearly explained my position as a student who was present to learn, and could not promise to bring any changes in the community, either personally or as a result of the research.

As the de facto lingua franca for most Solomon Islanders, pisin was the language used in focus group discussions. Siegel (1997) described English-based pidgin languages as lacking in descriptive capacity; so there was a risk that participants may not have perfect transferability of terms and expressions between their local language and pisin to fully express their experiences. Derrida (1978) has thoroughly reflected on the subjectivity of language and as a researcher. I was aware that language inevitably influences participants’ responses. In one instance, a focus group discussion was conducted in a local language (Rennellese) due to the proficiency of the research assistant in that language. Field notes included observations about non-verbal communication in discussions such as body language, who dominated the conversation or did not speak, and interruptions. I was also aware that development lexicon can be complex and abstract. Hence, it was important that the language used in conversations was understandable to all participants and would be clear in its meaning. It often meant that a term such as ‘consultation’ was presented as ‘who came to talk to you?’ enabling more complete exploration of the term.
4.4.3 Context of the case study communities

Table 3: Profile of case study communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Geographic features</th>
<th>Land Title</th>
<th>Physical Impacts</th>
<th>Cited Assistance</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lord Howe Settlement</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Located on Riverbank, Beach</td>
<td>- Customary Squatter /Informal</td>
<td>Houses damaged/ destroyed, possessions lost</td>
<td>Elected representative NGOs Red Cross</td>
<td>Malaita (Melanesian) Renbel (Polynesian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunga Settlement</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Located on Flood Plain</td>
<td>- Squatter/ Informal</td>
<td>Houses and food gardens destroyed</td>
<td>Church Family</td>
<td>Gilbertese / I-Kiribati (Micronesian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aruligo</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Limited land parcel and water access</td>
<td>- Government concession</td>
<td>Food gardens destroyed</td>
<td>Elected representative NGOs</td>
<td>Guale/ Guadalcanal (Melanesian)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lord Howe Settlement** (Figure 4)

Lord Howe is a settlement in central Honiara on the banks of the Mataniko River. This study focused on the community on the western side of the river. The settlement is comprised of residents from Malaita and Renbel Provinces, the former residing on the western side of the settlement, and the latter on the eastern side, closest to the Mataniko River.

**Lunga Settlement** (Figure 5)

The settlement at Lunga lays just beyond the Honiara town council boundary. It is officially demarcated as part of North-East Guadalcanal constituency, but due to the large Malaitan population living in the neighbouring settlement area of Burns creek and the recent history of tensions, unofficially the area also associates with East Honiara constituency.

**Aruligo** (Figure 6)

Participants at Aruligo were relocated to the area in 1977, following an earthquake and landslides which destroyed their villages on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal Province. They were allocated land by the Government, however, this land is limited in size and land disputes with neighbouring customary landowners restrict communities’ access to water and traditional foraging resources beyond their land allocation.
4.4.4 Entry to the field

Fieldwork for this research was conducted over a period of six weeks during June – August 2015. Accordingly, time for data collection was limited. The geographic focus of the research was Honiara and communities in East and West Guadalcanal. As the capital city of Solomon Islands, Honiara is home to the headquarters of all major NGOs, civil society groups, High Commissions, Government Ministries and multilateral organisations which participated in this study. The research was assisted by funding from a New Zealand Aid Programme Field Research scholarship. Undertaking fieldwork for this research was a decision to highlight the voices of communities who were impacted by the April 2014 flash flooding and their interactions with responding NGOs.

My initial action when I arrived in Solomon Islands was to follow up on emails which I had sent to NGOs, Government Ministries, High Commissions and Multilateral Organisations which I planned to interview. I began visiting the relevant offices and making enquiries of who the most relevant person to contact would be. I visited each office in person, to introduce my research and invite them to participate. In some cases, I was able to coordinate a time to meet with the assistance of the receptionists of the respective agencies. Participants were identified and selected in a number of ways – in some cases, I asked the agency who would be the most suitable person to speak with; in other cases I had already identified this individual. In a few cases, further participant selection was conducted by snowball sampling – where I asked interview participants for recommendations of individuals who would be beneficial to approach.

While awaiting responses and meeting times, I visited the National Archives to research historical disasters in the research area (Guadalcanal Province). During this time, Solomon Islands was experiencing Cyclone Raquel, which limited transportation and was the primary concern of many of the institutional stakeholders who I was working to establish meeting times with. I also used this time to recruit and brief research assistants, who were helpful in guiding me to the relevant offices and following-up on meeting invitations.

Aware of the six biases\(^5\) that Chambers (1983) so memorably presented, I was cautious to schedule a maximum of two interviews per day; or one community in the case of focus group discussions. This avoided meetings being cut short and allowed participants to determine the length of discussion. It also built-in contingency for flexibility in start time for participants.

\(^5\) Chambers (1983) outlined six biases which inform researchers’ contact with and perceptions of poverty. These are: spatial biases (urban, tarmac and roadside), project biases, person biases, dry season biases, diplomatic biases: politeness and timidity and professional biases (pp.13-25). He suggested that these biases render some groups as unseen and unknown in development research.
placed great value on meeting and having conversations with people, which was enjoyable and helped to broaden and deepen my understanding of the context where I was researching. My efforts to speak in * pijin* and learn from people about their culture and history were well received and people kindly assisted me in the process of my research - through advice, introductions, directions, support and friendship. Chambers (1983) advises that in research:

‘Sitting, asking and listening are as much an attitude as a method. Sitting implies lack of hurry, patience, and humility; asking implies that an outsider is a student, listening implies respect and learning. Many of the best insights come this way’ (p.202).

Upon reflection, these conversations were invaluable in enhancing my own understanding - they assisted me to better communicate, relate and understand those who participated in my research. I consider the following quote to be a fitting reflection on my fieldwork experience:

‘Knowledge of the local language helps the researcher to gain an understanding of different viewpoints, enabling richer and more textured data to be collected and facilitating sensitive and appropriate fieldwork, while generating greater opportunities to interact and enjoy the company of others in the researched community’  (Devereux, 1992, 44; Watson, 2004, p.61 in Scheyvens et al., 2014, p.156).

### 4.5. Data analysis and reliability

The principal data for this research came from 23 interviews conducted with managers at stakeholder organisations, and focus group discussions in three case study communities. In a number of instances, participants referred to reports, which were included in the analysis. There is a dearth of research relating specifically to the April 2014 Flash Flooding; thus internal evaluations, reports, feedback consultation minutes are highly relevant. This study also reviewed newspaper articles as a representation of the values and concerns of people who experienced the disaster. This all contributes to providing a more complete answer to the question Riessman (2002) poses ‘why was the story told that way?’ (p.5).

Triangulation is a feature of academic analysis that uses multiple sources of data to validate the authenticity of the sources (O’Leary, 2009, p.115). This was an essential part of the design of this research, evidenced by the breadth of participants in both interviews and focus groups. Interviews were conducted with four government agencies, three foreign governments, six NGOs, two multi-lateral organisations and two civil society organisations. Data can be compared both within and between categories, as well as evidenced by reports and articles obtained. In the case of focus groups, participants were divided into four groups in each community – male youth, female youth, men, and women, due to age and gendered hierarchies.
Additionally, the case study of three distinct communities adds another dimension with the result that data can be triangulated both within and between communities.

Translation of interviews and focus groups which had been conducted in Solomon Islands Pijin was undertaken, and my research assistants clarified any terms or words which were unclear or ambiguous and assisted with translating words or concepts which did not have an English equivalent. This ensured that the English translation adhered in intent and meaning to the interview or focus group discussion. After transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, I undertook data analysis in two stages. Firstly, by coding data from the interviews thematically into key ideas and concepts that appeared repeatedly using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. Secondly, I combined this data with personal notes and reflections during field research, reports alluded to by participants, newspaper articles and my literature review. Thereafter, I identified themes, relationships and connections in the information; pinpointing correlations and differences and triangulating these occurrences against other data sources.

The relatively small number of communities participating in focus group discussions limits the representational value of the research findings. Further, interview participants were in line-management or senior management positions within their respective organisations; thus, the research cannot be seen to be representative of all affected communities, nor whole organisations. However, it was not the aim of this research to make generalisations; rather, the aim was to explore the complexities, subjectivities and relationships between communities and NGOs. Where generalisations may be construed, they must be interpreted in light of the limitations inherent in this research.

4.6. Ethical considerations and positionalities

Before commencing fieldwork, ethics approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) was obtained on 27 June 2015. This required detailing how foreseeable ethical issues would be managed. Participants in the research all gave informed consent – both signed or verbal as required by University Ethics procedures (termed ‘Whiteman Way’ by participants); and in the more culturally meaningful manner of seeking permission from gatekeepers, explaining the research and acquainting myself with each community. This approach was premised on what Nabobo-Baba (2008) described as the continuous process of consent, and what Vaioleti (2006) reflects:
‘If researching ethically is about respecting human dignity, then it is critical that the process is culturally appropriate for the participants. It is imperative that Pacific research ethics (protocols) emerge from Pacific world views in order to keep synergy with the methodology and to protect the integrity of participants as Pacific cultural beings’ (p.29).

All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet, which outlined the purpose of the research, their rights as participants, whom they can contact regarding ethical issues, and how the research will be used. Participants were given the information sheet in advance of the interview or focus group. Prior to participants giving verbal or signed consent and commencing discussion, I went through the information again to ensure it was clear, answer any questions and address any concerns.

Solomon Islands law requires foreign researchers to attain a research permit. This permit required endorsement letters from in-country stakeholders and University research supervisor, University Ethics approval, approval from relevant Government Ministries, an explanation of benefits of the research to Solomon Islands, and lastly assent by the Minister of Education, currently Dr Derek Sikua. This process, whilst rigorous, was a positive indication that (at least ostensibly), Solomon Islands is taking a firm stance against extractive research which does not benefit the country (or may even harm the country).

Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were of central concern in this research. The relatively small number of managers involved in the flood response means that some readers may be able to attribute comments to different organisations or individuals based on content. The findings and discussion elaborated in this research have been presented as much as feasibly possible in a way that protects the confidentiality of the sources. Some participants did not opt for confidentiality of their name or organisation, so have been identified. Interview transcripts and notes were available to participants on request, and copies of the final thesis will be available to participants, including an informal summary of findings. Data will be securely stored for six years following the research, in the research supervisor’s office at the University of Auckland.

The motivation for this research resulted from conversations in October 2014 with Solomon Islanders who were impacted by the April 2014 flash flooding, prior to beginning master’s research. A common sentiment expressed then was that people felt that their ideas, experiences and aspirations were not acknowledged or valued and that this informed the ways in which NGOs did and did not respond to the disaster. My intention in this research was to highlight the voices of people impacted by the floods, and the managers of NGOs who implemented disaster response programmes. My aim was to better understand how and why communities and NGOs
responded the way that they did to the disaster, and what lessons can be learned to inform future disaster responses.

A commitment to reflexivity features prominently in this research. It is important to acknowledge the influence of gender, age and other social or cultural categories in informing the attitudes, behaviour and narratives of both participants and the researcher. Researchers are not neutral and apolitical observers, but rather are aware and involved interacting people who must be responsible for their actions (Scheyvens, Noway, and Scheyvens, 2003). England (2006) frames this as a responsibility to be accountable to those who participated in the research:

‘We must be accountable for our research, for our intrusions into people’s lives, and for our representations of those lives in our final papers. We still need to acknowledge our own positionality and our locations in systems of privilege and oppression, and be sure that we write this into our papers’ (p.289).

Recognising my own subjectivities as a researcher, I have attempted to interpret and represent the voices of participants in the manner in which they were intended, and clarify uncertainties and ambiguities with participants where I perceive them. Ultimately, if errors of judgement have been made, I will hear and be held to account for them when I present my research back to participants in person in early-mid 2016.

My positionality as a ‘Whiteman’ and New Zealander inevitably influenced the relationships I had with my participants. Research participants could associate my identity with New Zealand or Australian expatriates working for the RAMSI intervention, and the connotations associated with that. Alternatively, I could be linked to expatriate staff who occupy managerial or advisory roles at international NGOs. Some participants expressed negative sentiments toward expatriates, laying charges against excessive salaries and attitudes of superiority vis-à-vis the local population. Postcolonial identities continue to be navigated in Solomon Islands, and my actions during fieldwork sought to counter, rather than perpetuate negative associations.

The influence of my gender would have been problematic in focus group discussions with women, however, my use of female research assistants to facilitate these groups, and my own physical absence during these discussions helped to mitigate this. In interviews with managers, the majority of interviewees were male, with a minority of female managers (half-expatriate, half-national staff). As a University-educated male, I held a certain degree of authority when compared to female Solomon Islander colleagues. I observed this in my ease of gaining interviews with people whom local colleagues associated with very inaccessible offices of power. Albert Memmi (2003) reflected on the ways which racism inflicted under colonialism has been internalised by those who were colonised, and promoted an inferiority complex. He
suggested that this created admiration for the coloniser, and in some cases a self-loathing of one’s identity (pp.164-166). A colonial mindset which venerated Europeans appears to have been present in my fieldwork; through my own appearance as a ‘whiteman’ aiding access to high-level offices during my fieldwork.

Although I have some understanding of pisin, I am not entirely fluent, which may have limited the depth of meaning or nuances of language. The use of research assistants who accompanied me in all focus group discussions helped to ameliorate this, and also provided a second pair of eyes and ears to observe different verbal and non-verbal communication, beyond what is possible to observe individually in a group context.

For the last three years, I have worked in the International Programmes Department at Tearfund New Zealand, a faith-based NGO which works in community development, disaster response and recovery. Tearfund works through partnerships with locally-run organisations, one of which is ‘Ola Fou’ in Solomon Islands. Ola Fou responded to the April 2014 flash flooding with an agricultural recovery project in four communities, totalling 320 households in rural Guadalcanal. Staff from Ola Fou participated in an interview for this research as an NGO which responded to the disaster and is one of the six NGOs that participated in this study. In October and November 2014 I travelled to Solomon Islands, during which I was involved in conducting the evaluation of Ola Fou’s response, and subsequently completed the acquittal report for funding partners Tearfund and New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Reflections on the flood response by communities assisted by Ola Fou, conversations with staff members, and personal observations and interest contributed to the identification and selection of this research topic. During the period of this research, I was not directly involved in Tearfund’s partnership with Ola Fou.
Chapter 5. Communities in disaster response

5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the perspectives of members of three case study communities which were impacted by the April 2014 floods, with a view to better understand the roles they played in the disaster response and recovery. It also presents findings concerning the effectiveness of the disaster response from organisational stakeholders who were interviewed in this study. This chapter looks at how NGOs interacted with communities and responded to their varied needs, from the perspectives of organisations and community members. Thereafter, the ways which communities responded to the disaster independently of NGOs are presented and discussed.

5.2. Views in communities about responding agencies

5.2.1 Conducting assessments: an implied obligation to assist?

Following the flash flooding, NGOs, Red Cross, and National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) mobilised to undertake impact and rapid needs assessments of affected areas. All three case study communities were determined to be affected areas, but were not impacted severely and were prioritised accordingly. Focus group participants discussed the organisations which conducted assessments in their community, sharing disapproval of organisations who conducted assessments but did not follow with providing assistance. Participants inferred that assessments built expectations that assistance will follow, and created distrust when their expectations were not realised. Where communities did not receive assistance from an agency following an assessment, participants determined that agencies used that information for their own fundraising purposes and they gained nothing in return. A village elder from the Aruligo men’s focus group discussion shared:

“For the agencies that came and did assessments but did not assist us, we do not want them to return in time of disaster and do the same again, otherwise, we will refuse to cooperate with their survey in our community”… “They made us feel better with their promises and then left and made money with our names”.
Distrust is created when agencies conduct assessments but do not follow by responding to communities, and this is compounded by the conducting of rapid needs assessments at the household level. On one hand, household level assessments facilitate broader engagement between agencies and affected communities; on the other, they were widely identified as too time-consuming and micro-level for the purpose of making broad assessments concerning impact and deciding the locations, scale and nature of assistance to provide (Flash flooding lessons learned workshop, 2014, 6-8 October). Lunga settlement received assistance only from church and family members following the floods. A participant in the women’s focus group discussion shared similar views to the village elder in Aruligo, stating:

“A group that may have been from the NDMO did damage assessments and submitted their reports but we do not know what happened afterwards. We joked about that, saying ‘you came and wrote for your own benefit’”.

Distrust of responding agencies (both NGO and governmental) was expressed in the two excerpts from community focus group discussions. Participants in all groups held views that NGOs gathered information which they then used to raise or access funds and resources. Participants disapproved of this when they did not receive assistance from the agency. This reflects an expectation that assistance should follow assessment, which may have roots in norms of reciprocity, past experiences, and understandings of disaster response. In Lord Howe settlement, one woman shared what she considered were unfilled promises:

“[NGO name] came took some photos of the affected areas around our settlement and left, they promised to help us but they never showed up again”.

All three case study communities held the idea of agencies making a ‘promise’ to return, or community members believing that agencies would return to their community with assistance. It is unclear whether these commitments were explicit or implicit. As an outsider, I do not purport to understand the intricacies and considerations which underpin the beliefs that these communities hold. Nevertheless, two rationales may at least partially explain this dynamic: firstly, communities might have perceived an implicit promise, based on norms of reciprocity which participation in surveys should be reciprocated with assistance. Secondly, field staff conducting assessments may have advanced ideas of assistance based on their own assumption that assistance would follow, or to appease community members during a stressful and unsettling time.

In Aruligo, both the men’s and women’s focus groups shared that there is a need for responding agencies to come and visit the community themselves in order to better understand the impacts of the disaster. A woman explained:
“…if we do the assessment, we only share our own thoughts. We think they should come and witness the real situation”.

Separately to the women’s discussion, the men in Aruligo shared the same concern, advising that agency staff made inaccurate assumptions that they were unaffected and still had food. One participant explained:

“When the NDMO officers saw that people from our village went to the market to sell our crops, they thought we were not affected by the floods. They thought we still had food, not realising that those were our last remaining crops which we were trying to convert into cash in order to sustain ourselves”.

In Aruligo, food gardens were flooded and inundated with silt. Community members salvaged remaining root crops from the silt before they rotted and sold these at the Honiara Central Market immediately following the floods. They used the cash earned from selling this produce to purchase food for the following three months before they could begin to harvest some fast-yielding crops, such as lettuce (termed cabbage) and bok choy for sustenance. The outward appearance of food security due to selling crops in the market masked the food insecurity that was experienced in the three months following the floods. Some community members could not salvage any crops to sell for cash, and relied on others in the community for assistance. The misconceptions held by agencies involved in the response would have been challenged had decision makers visited the community, as explained above by a woman in the community.

5.2.2 Breadth of NGO consultation

In Lord Howe settlement, all four focus groups (men, women and youth men and women) shared a common view that responding agencies insufficiently consulted with the communities. This is unique compared to Lunga settlement and Aruligo, where youth discussed not being consulted, but men and women did not raise the issue to the same extent as in Lord Howe. The participation of youth is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven. The women and male youth focus groups expressed aspirations to be consulted, involved and contribute to the response. Both groups remarked that only the male elders were consulted:

“Agencies should identify our needs as youth, and also the children. The response catered only for the elders and we were not part of it... they seem to rush and have no time to talk; collecting unreliable information as a result...They were not friendly nor comforting in time of disaster” (Lord Howe Settlement male youth FGD).

“We want our voice to be heard when it comes to decision making in our settlement. When people came to talk with us, they only met with our leaders and elders. We also want to contribute to decisions concerning our settlement” (Lord Howe Settlement female youth FGD).
The exclusion of women and youth from decision making in disasters was consistently raised by participants who considered that it reinforced their subordinate social and economic status within their communities. It is notable that in both focus groups, community elders and leaders were described as the decision makers, not men more broadly. The men’s focus group in Lord Howe settlement also pointed to their lack of inclusion in decision-making:

“We would like them to come and talk to us about anything during the disaster and allow us to be part of the team which distributes assistance”.

A commonality across all four focus groups was the desire to be included and listened to when agencies consult the community following a disaster. Men from Lord Howe settlement collaboratively shared their story of the assessments in their community. They took issue with the attitudes of agency staff or volunteers who conducted assessments, identifying it as an impediment to wider consultation and collecting of accurate information:

“We had heard only the names of most agencies that visited, but never saw or talked to them. Some agencies came here but could not take the smell of the dead and debris so left, and we do not know what report they took with them. They were unfriendly and were selective about who they chose to talk to. Furthermore, they were very cheeky in the way they look and walk about our settlement, which was disrespectful toward us”.

Evidence from stakeholder interviews suggests that many of those conducting assessments in communities were volunteers who lacked experience in disaster response, leading to poor quality of assessments in many cases (Interviews B2 and C2). In some cases, inexperienced volunteers conducting assessments could cause offence which may be especially pronounced following a stressful and traumatic disaster event.

5.2.3 Homogenous notions of heterogeneous communities

During a visit for focus group discussions in Aruligo, I inquired about an uninstalled water tank, supplied by a responding NGO. Participants in the men’s focus group discussion explained that it has not been installed because they could not agree on whose roof the tank will harvest water from. The position of the tank was of concern, as only residents living close to the tank would benefit, commented one participant. Therefore, nobody in the community had installed the tank, as it would create unequal access to water. Another participant suggested that it would be more suitable if assistance catered for individual families, as the community is structured around households.
While visiting food gardens in Aruligo which had been impacted by the disaster, village Chief Medley elaborated on earlier comments in the focus group about the water tank. He argued that many outsiders, and to an extent locals as well see Guales (people from Guadalcanal) as a singular, homogenous group, which negates the diversity and differences therein. He described his community as different to others in the area, having been relocated to the area in 1977 from the Weathercoast (on the other side of Guadalcanal). Chief Medley’s critique mirrors concerns raised by Litonjua (2012) in the literature, who observed the homogenising of groups in development practice. Also, Gibson-Graham (2005) have widely elaborated on this subject and advocated the need to de-essentialise development, recognise local diversity and respond appropriately.

Lunga settlement received the least external assistance out of the three case study communities. The April 2014 flash floods were the fourth flooding event that the community had experienced since 2009, and residents described it as the worst. The settlement is a small and close-knit Gilbertese (I-Kiribati) community comprised of eight households, with each containing three or four families. A participant in the men’s focus group described outside assistance:

“We have faced four flood disasters and have never received assistance from any NGOs. We depend only on our relatives living in town and each other for recovery. We do not depend on assistance from others because we do not trust them”.

Participants in the female youth focus group discussion attributed their recovery to the settlement’s small size and same culture shared by residents, which fostered a strong sense of camaraderie. The settlement was moderately impacted by the floods, with residents losing food gardens, kitchens, fruit trees, church, meeting house, and a few houses. Participants in all focus groups in Lunga settlement attributed their recovery to their kinship networks, past experience, and culture – which they felt made them resilient and resolute people.

5.2.4 NGOs and their volunteers: relationships of reciprocity?

The women’s focus group in Lord Howe settlement discussed their volunteer work for NGOs and argued that these NGOs should assist the community in return following a disaster. The presence of client/patron relationships in politics is discussed in chapter eight, where Morgan (2005) compared Members of Parliament (MPs) to distant bigmen who were considered to be the most bankable avenues for the provision of services and resources. Client/patron relationships also appear to exist between NGOs and communities, as volunteering is seen to increase the likelihood of an NGO providing assistance to their community (Cox, 2009).
Organisational stakeholders interviewed shared that NGOs prioritise responding to communities which they have existing linkages and relationships with, such as current/past projects, or staff/volunteers residing (e.g. Interviews D4 and B3). When an NGO does not respond to communities where its volunteers reside they may be seen to have violated social obligations of reciprocity.

The women’s focus group in Lord Howe settlement problematised NGOs’ non-provision of assistance to communities where their volunteers and staff reside and discussed a number of implications that would arise as a result. Focus group participants argued that NGOs should have prioritised responding to the home communities of their volunteers. They indicated that volunteer efforts should be reciprocated by the provision of assistance when the community was impacted by disaster.

Several women from the community who volunteered for a responding NGO collaboratively discussed their interactions with the NGO and their expectations:

“One woman from the Lord Howe settlement who works for [responding NGO] went to their office and asked for water tanks, that is how we got one here. We asked for water tanks prior to the floods because we were volunteers with the agency, but none was ever given to us. They promised to give us 9 taps after the flood and until now we have not received any taps - so we no longer put our hopes and trust in [the responding NGO].”

Evidently, volunteers expected tangible assistance from the NGO in exchange for their volunteer work and were disappointed when their expectations were not fulfilled. In this case, they asked for assistance prior to the floods, stating that they were volunteers. Following the floods, when expectations were unfulfilled, the NGO lost its clients’ confidence.

5.3. Community Participation in NGO responses to disaster

The role that communities have in disaster response from the perspectives of NGOs is three-fold: provision of labour, good assessments, and sharing of local knowledge. In a participant interview, Sophie Boucaut, Pacific Programmes Manager with Save the Children described community members’ role in her agency’s response:

“In a lot of the work we do, like building and cleaning out wells - there’s an element of community engagement required. To support not just physically cleaning out of wells, but also if you want that well to be maintained in the future, there needs to be community buy-in from the beginning... Mobilising communities in the first few weeks of a response can be challenging if you haven’t worked there before because there may be limited pre-existing relationships... It is also important to engage groups whose voices may be heard less, for
example, people with disabilities - to make sure that wells are within reach and they’re not up a cobbled staircase”.

In this case, labour contributions by community members were located as an important part of ensuring community buy-in and sufficient training for maintenance of the wells. Boucaut’s reference to seeking out the voices of marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities is significant, given that less than one-third of organisational stakeholders discussed the position of people with disabilities in interviews. She suggested that participation can take varied forms, one of which is household assessments, through which:

“All you are really seeking programmatic recommendations from the communities themselves. But also triangulating that data with data from other sources, from the NDMO, from other agencies as well who are doing their assessments or joint assessments with us. So that’s what informs higher, overarching programme decisions”.

Genuine participation through household assessments was described as a challenge by Ola Fou Solomon Islands Director Elisha Pitanoe. He argued that while communities should be thoroughly consulted in the designing of a proposal, the process needs to be conducted quickly due to deadlines of donor stakeholders. On the other hand, Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands made the point that “Solomon Islanders want to see material things – they don’t like assessments”. There is a notable distinction between the term ‘assessment’ and ‘consultation’ in interview and focus group responses. Consultation was held almost unanimously to be positive and generative; whereas ‘assessment’ was commonly considered bureaucratic and extractive. Peter Weston, Programme Quality Manager at World Vision contemplated the importance of community participation through consultation:

“As NGOs, we pride ourselves on being community-based and responsive. In the early days, we manifest that with focus groups, key informant interviews and follow up. For me, it’s an area that I’ve gone from being an idealist, to having big doubts about the way we go about it. The more I see the results of, and community responses to, highly consultative development approaches (action learning kind of approaches); the more I see actions by communities of losing interest, building frustration. We NGOs can get into the mindset of ‘we want to make sure we’re fulfilling their aspirations, we need to keep going back and having reflections together about the progress, and then more reflections about the progress’. I think sometimes we are guilty of taking it too far to the extreme. I guess it’s our ideological bend that we need to keep asking questions and checking in”.

This response was distinct from all but one other interviewee. Most agency stakeholders interviewed reflected an implicit presumption that consultation and good disaster response are closely correlated. The only other interviewee who expressed somewhat comparable views was a High Commission staff member (Interview A1), who explained how the Transport Division of the Ministry of Infrastructure received criticism for lack of participation in cluster meetings.
The interviewee commended the Transport Division for their conduct – their efforts were focused on securing the Mataniko Bridge, the last remaining bridge connecting the airport and industrial area with the port and commercial district of Honiara. If the bridge had washed out, as the Chinatown Bridge upstream did, the implications would have been extreme. Thus, consultation should not precede astute decision making.

Interviewees from several NGOs acknowledged that community members’ participation in NGO responses to disaster is limited, and pointed to their work in recovery and community development as being more participatory. As the focus of this study is on responses to the disaster, participation was viewed in the context of the six-month response phase following the disaster. One NGO involved in livelihoods response engaged older people in the communities where they responded to share their traditional knowledge about resilient cropping (Interview D7). Several other agencies provided implements such as tools which rural communities could use to recover their food gardens, through their own labour.

Responses to the floods by NGOs as experienced at the community level were influenced to a large extent by the relations between communities and NGOs, as well as the context and conditions in which the response took place. A majority of non-NGO interviewees described NGOs as having good relations with the communities where they responded. However, Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands International recognised that “some individuals from organisations were not liked so would not be welcome back in communities”. This was noticed during the community selection for this study – one settlement community in White River, on Honiara’s western boundary, was identified for focus group discussions. However, its inclusion was decided against on advice from one research assistant who detected hostility in the community after assistance intended by an NGO fell through. This experience is indicative of the extent to which previous negative experiences with NGOs influences subsequent interactions with NGOs and other ‘outsiders’. Similarly, in their response, Ola Fou field officers observed that community members resisted providing their names for the response, as previously “people have come in and said ‘we will help you’ and then left” (Ola Fou Interview).

The disorder and confusion which characterised the first week following the floods have been noted by most stakeholder organisation interviewees. Many interviewees recalled that it took time for operations to ramp up and there was a limited amount that could be done due to heavy rain continuing until 6th April (the Mataniko River burst its banks on 3rd April) (e.g. Interviews A1, A2, D6). Following this, the coordination of the response had visible challenges in the first few weeks:
“I think because Solomons hasn’t necessarily dealt with responses like this year after year, the coordination aspect of that was sometimes very confusing in the first few weeks. I think cluster meetings were being scheduled at the same time and the clusters weren’t necessarily communicating information like ‘are you going to use this room, or are we going to use this room’” (Sophie Boucaut, Save the Children).

Honiara had not experienced a large-scale disaster since Cyclone Namu in 1986, so for many NGO staff it was the first disaster they had both experienced and responded to. This poses an interesting dynamic, where staff were responding as both insiders to the disaster experience, and outsiders of the communities with which they were working. Community participation in NGO responses to the flooding was characterised by participation in household surveys, provision of labour in projects, some sharing of knowledge, and the use of assistance provided by NGOs to recover livelihoods. The extent of participation in NGO responses as described by stakeholders interviewed suggests that community members were little involved in the design process, beyond inputting through household assessments. Ultimately, however, permission for NGOs to carry out activities in communities must be obtained from community gatekeepers, who have the power to decide which activities an NGO can and cannot do in the community.

5.4. Community responses to the disaster

The three case study communities in this study were engaged in disaster response far beyond the scope of their participation in NGO responses. Their roles in response were extensive and wide-ranging. Focus group participants described partaking in rescue and emergency response, evacuation, clean-up and repair, early crop harvesting, prevention and mitigation. Communities’ networks for disaster response and recovery extended far beyond responding NGOs, as shown by the range of responding stakeholders in Figure 2. This section presents the roles that community members undertook in response to the disaster, from the perspective of focus group participants in the three case study communities.

Located at the mouth of the Mataniko River on its western bank, the settlement at Lord Howe witnessed some of the most dramatic events of the disaster. During torrential rain on 3 April 2014 the Mataniko River burst its banks, washing away the bridge at Chinatown and sweeping houses, buildings and people downstream. In the flood 22 people lost their lives and further lives were claimed as a result of post-disaster conditions. Residents from Lord Howe settlement were among the first responders who attempted to rescue people from the swollen river. Some youth also tried precariously to retrieve goods from shipping containers which had been swept down the river. The impact of the flood on community members has been elaborated in chapter five.
The male youth focus group in Lord Howe settlement reflected on the combined efforts of attempting to rescue people from the river, and evacuating their own community which was at risk from the flood waters:

“During the flood we helped by carrying and shifting belongings from people living under the houses to the upper floor; and also trying to rescue men, women and children who were floating down the river”.

Equally, the settlement at Lunga is low-lying and flood-prone. The female youth focus group in the community described one of the men from their community rescuing a woman from a neighbouring settlement who had been left behind in the rush to evacuate:

“One man from this community helped to save a woman from another settlement near the river (Omex). They were in a rush to escape from the place and they forgot the woman so the man from here went and rescued her”.

Similarly, the women’s focus group in Lord Howe settlement reflected on evacuation; but also highlighted longer-term options of returning to their home province, or accessing land which is less marginal and vulnerable to the impacts of disasters:

“If a disaster happens again we know what to do - find a safe place to evacuate to or go back home (laugh). If not, we will go further inland to higher ground of Guadalcanal Province (laughter). Or marry someone from Guadalcanal so that we own land (all laughed)”.

While the women responded jovially, they highlighted the issue of access to land in Honiara, which was identified as a key challenge by many stakeholder agencies. Land in Guadalcanal Province is held under customary ownership. The vast majority of freehold land in Solomon Islands is concentrated in Honiara. However, the Honiara town boundaries are very limited and this has resulted in high demand and high prices for land. This has pushed land ownership out of reach for many from other provinces (such as those residing in Lord Howe settlement), who in many cases have informally settled on marginal land around Honiara.

Given its location at the mouth of the Mataniko River, Lord Howe settlement was littered with debris following the flooding. Youth men from the community described the clean-up and repair efforts of their community, acknowledging the roles of different sectors of the community:

“After the flood, men, women and all youth helped in clearing the logs and the debris from the flood and the cleaning up the community. We helped the mothers set up their homes and brought their belongings back from the evacuation centre”.

The efforts of community members in Aruligo to recover and sell root crops from their silted food gardens was detailed in section 5.2.1. It is an example of the role of affected communities
in safeguarding their livelihoods and planning for the following months until a new harvest. The men’s focus group explained the rationale behind their actions:

“We harvested all the crops in our gardens and sold them for cheaper prices so we had money to sustain our living while we waited for the disaster to finish before we started planting again. In some cases, the gardens were not ready for harvest but we had to harvest them because if we left the crops they would rot”.

The women and male youth focus groups in Lord Howe settlement reflected on preparation and mitigation measures that the community has taken or is planning to take. Notably, each group outlined a different solution to the same issue of protecting the community from flooding. One woman in the women’s focus group explained the importance of the sago palms along the river bank in protecting the settlement:

“We are planting more of the sago palm trees along the river bank to protect us because I witnessed how those sago palms protected us from the waves and the flood. I planted a lot beside my house and also along the river bank. [Interjection] ‘This is a sign of not going back home eh?’ (All laughed). I see the importance of that tree, so when someone came and asked to cut one down I told them the story of the flood - no one is allowed to cut them down. I told other families within our settlement to also plant this tree beside their houses and beside the river so that if there is another flood we will all hang on to it (all laughed)” (Lord Howe Settlement women’s FGD).

The male youth focus group cited a brick wall alongside the river as contributing to reducing the strength of the flood. The wall was completed a month before the floods and extends partially along the river bank where the community is situated. They suggested that this wall should be extended to the mouth of the river to protect the settlement:

“Our community should request the business building near our settlement to extend the brick wall that protected us during the flood. We will be much safer if it extended. Our settlement should also build concrete houses so that they can withstand any disaster”.

The women’s focus group noted that some households have rebuilt their houses higher above the ground than previously. They discussed that if there is persistent rain, they begin to prepare their belongings in case of evacuation, and some go and stay with relatives.

The three communities in this study responded to the flooding in different ways; determined in part by the impact of the disaster, the context of their community and past experiences of disaster. Relating to this, the differential roles and position experienced by many women and youth in relation to disaster response is examined in chapter seven.
Chapter 6. Factors that enhance or constrain agencies in disaster response

6.1. Introduction

The timeliness and effectiveness with which agencies can respond to disaster have direct implications for affected communities. The previous chapter discussed the response to the April 2014 flash floods from the perspectives of affected communities. This chapter outlines and reflects on the key factors which assisted and constrained agencies in their responses to the disaster. It identifies difficulties concerning newly-arrived expatriate staff, the prominence of flag-raising by some NGOs, encounters with community dependency and opportunism and the challenge of organisational re-gearing from community development work to disaster response. The chapter observes problems with policy responses to the disaster and issues which undermined the efficacy of the NDMO, the national body for managing disasters. Finally, stakeholder perspectives that planning and policy responses need to be improved for future disasters are presented.

6.2. Expatriates: Not ‘whites in shining armour’

6.2.1 Insufficient context experience

The influx of expatriate staff following a disaster, many of whom have little or no experience or familiarity with the context and institutional arrangements in Solomon Islands was raised as problematic by a range of agency stakeholders. Interviewees drew distinctions between expatriate staff already in-country at the time of the disaster, and those who arrived subsequently. A staff member of a High Commission in Honiara described the presence of newly arrived expatriate staff:

“The cluster system is very different in Solomon Islands. Expatriate staff came in without Melanesian experience. I saw instances, such as in the nutrition cluster where one expat stood up and said "how can you only be distributing rice and tuna. That’s not a balanced diet", without paying regard to the fact that those are staple foods in Solomon Islands. Also, the National Disaster Committee was wary of undermining people’s self-sufficiency by providing all food items that families required” (Interview A1).

Interviewees from a multilateral agency and NGOs shared this concern; and suggested that it takes time for expatriates to adapt to the context and understand the institutional arrangements already in place. They suggested that with time expatriates have an improved understanding of
the context; however, during the response, it was largely the newly-arrived expatriates who were involved in the cluster meetings:

“It takes a little bit of time for expatriates to understand the context and the arrangements which are already in place. But for those who already understand, having experienced cluster systems elsewhere – they quickly adapted, and tried their best to understand our system works. They then worked very well supporting those cluster systems in their work” (Interview C1).

“I think with the time in the country, expatriates became better versed with the situation in Solomon Islands. Existing expatriates were better than those who were coming in. However, it was the new arrivals who were attending the meetings...they would just discuss, discuss, discuss - they threw their ideas and then left, without always reaching a conclusion. The ones who were already here in-country were back at the offices” (Ola Fou Interview).

Interviewees from a range of sectors emphasised the importance of expatriates understanding and respecting existing arrangements and valuing the context experience of in-country staff of respective agencies. Loti Yates, NDMO Director argued that incoming staff often talked about themselves as ‘experts’, and referred to their experiences elsewhere, discrediting existing arrangements and trying to dominate in the meetings. This is a familiar issue which has been widely elaborated in development literature – specifically, that Western assumptions of expertise and superiority frequently accompany aid and development interventions (e.g. Pieterse, 2001; Sidaway, 2007). The basis for discrediting existing arrangements by newly-arrived expatriates appears tenuous, or pre-emptive at best; reflecting expatriates’ preconceptions of what disaster response should look like.

6.2.2 Roles and responsibilities

Concern was highlighted by five interviewees over a need to clearly define the roles of incoming expatriates. The key areas of concern were with expatriate staff becoming implementers, and asserting themselves or dominating in coordination meetings. These concerns were described by NDMO Director Loti Yates, and a multilateral agency staff member:

“We need to understand the role of supporting staff - whether they are coming in as technical support, additional resource, or whatever their role may be. Because we saw many expat staff conducting the assessments...” (Loti Yates, NDMO).

“Who do they report to, are they here to advise, to provide support? They come in as technical support, and then you see them as implementers as well. In my view, they should be providing advice, or working on high-level issues – not working on the ground as actual responders” (Interview C2).
The perceived dominance of incoming expatriate staff was identified as an issue by several participants. There was a perception that with little or no experience in Solomon Islands, some expatriates were inappropriate or unsuitable for responding to the disaster. On the other hand, two organisations explained that they only recruit expatriates for sectors in which they lack expertise. In both cases, their organisation’s structures and processes are standardised throughout the world so it is relatively straightforward for someone from overseas to arrive and fit in; with the addition of understanding the context. A multilateral agency manager described their experience:

“[NGO name] have been challenging to work with. I think one issue is that they brought in palagis (white people) who came in and took over a lot of work from the local staff. If they had just left it to the local staff, the local staff would understand the context. However, they came in and try and take to charge, and sort of ruined it for everyone else. They tend to be more reactive than proactive...If they have a shortage they just access the resources to purchase those items, without thinking about the repercussions on the ground” (C2 Interview).

Interestingly, the role of expatriates was not limited to individual staff, but also, what participants considered ‘expatriate organisations’, or organisations which were not present in Solomon Islands prior to the disaster. Anna Reid, Development Officer with the New Zealand High Commission in Honiara suggested that it was understandable if existing organisations bring in additional staff to support the effort. However she argued, outside organisations should use existing established agencies instead of arriving and setting up operations in-country following the disaster. The role of UNOCHA was discussed by most interviewees reflecting on the cluster system and disaster response coordination. Most acknowledged that coordination of the response improved following UNOCHAs arrival, yet their entry and dominance was also questioned. Elisha Pitanoe, Director of Ola Fou Solomon Islands described the arrival of UNOCHA:

“[UNOCHA] came and set up and ran their own meetings, and also called for organisations that were part of the National Emergency Operations Centre meetings to attend their meetings – that’s what happened. It didn't go down very well with NDMO management. A lot of organisations were saying 'Why is UNOCHA coming in and trying to do their own thing when already there is a body established in the country'. I remember one meeting, at the Mendana Hotel where the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Environment and Climate Change did opening remarks, and then the NDMO head Loti (Loti Yates) spoke for about five minutes. After that, they took their things and walked out. He was not happy – you could tell by the way that they presented themselves that they were both not happy. Meanwhile, we were all sitting there trying to discuss how to respond to the disaster, and the national body was not present (Elisha Pitanoe, Ola Fou).
Interviewees from all stakeholder categories referred to these notable exits from the event and observed tension between the in-country institutions responding to the disaster and the UNOCHA system’s arrival. Interviewees who discussed their concerns with expatriates all established that expatriate individuals or organisations need to respect existing arrangements and have clearly defined roles and can be implied as a response to concerns about expatriates dominating. Likewise, the need for clearly defined roles can be inferred as a response to concern over expatriates impinging upon the roles of local staff.

The perceived seniority of expatriates and their relationships with others inform the ways that they are seen to dominate in meetings and impinge on the roles of local staff. Where expatriates dominate the discussion in meetings or seek to be involved in all areas of a response, this may be viewed by national staff as asserting neo-colonial control. It may also suggest attitudes of superiority, whereby expatriates consider themselves to be bearers of relevant knowledge, and that what they have to say is of greater importance than what others in attendance do. Supposed patronising attitudes were unsurprisingly not well received by local disaster relief staff.

6.2.3 ‘This is Solomon Islands’: Touting experience is not appreciated

One of the most frequently cited characteristics of incoming expatriates following the disaster was their tendency to refer to their experiences in disaster response elsewhere. It should firstly be noted that ‘expatriates’ do not constitute a singular, indistinct category; whilst also acknowledging that interviewees often discussed ‘expatriates’ as a category, unless they provided specific details. This may reflect expatriates’ common identity as ‘outsiders’ or ‘recently arrived’; or it could reflect the prevalence of certain behaviours among expatriates which has led them to be labelled as a singular group. There was one expatriate who was referred to by a number of participants, as discussed by interviewees below:

“One man came along from [NGO name], an expat. He described himself as a camp management expert. He was sitting in the wrong cluster, and criticising, rather than using his so-called ‘expertise’ constructively” (Interview B2).

“This man from [NGO name], was a specialist in evacuation camps. He came to every meeting and talked about his experience in Pakistan, his experience in wherever. I was already stressed out, so I said: "you say Pakistan one more time, and I am going to throw you out of the chair"... He was like "In Pakistan we do...” I got so pissed, like “Pakistan is totally different from us”. In Pakistan you may be dealing with millions of people, here you are dealing with thousands of people, but the needs and context are totally different. That’s what a lot of these expats do when they come in. Every time there is a meeting, I get very sick of it – they refer
back to their experiences ‘in my experience in Africa, in my experience in Asia’ – this is Solomons, it’s different” (Interview C2).

The situation of the disaster helps to determine certain basic needs; however, disasters occur in a social and cultural context which must be taken into account. Beristain (2006) argued the importance of the context of a disaster for determining a response, emphasising that relief cooperation is not about transporting ideas or exporting models. However, as well-intentioned as it may have been, expatriates’ references to disasters in dissimilar contexts was not well received. The raising of these experiences appears to be seen by local staff as pretentious, bearing little relevance to the current disaster, and an attempt to boast credentials. A participant from a Government Ministry shared that he sometimes wished the airport had remained closed for longer after the floods, then they would not have “all of these bloody so-called ‘experts’ coming in here and telling us how to do our jobs” (Interview B2). In an interview with staff from Ola Fou, the need for expatriates to listen first, then share their knowledge and experiences as appropriate to the situation was emphasised:

“Many of them had been in Haiti and always talked about their time in Haiti after the earthquake. One of the locals stood up and said ‘this is a different situation to what you are saying, we appreciate your experience – listen first, then get the information you need’. We respect organisations that came into the country, with the vast experiences that they have. However, what they don’t understand is that what works in Southeast Asia might not work in Solomon Islands. That is why they need to listen to local organisations who are here in the country, and then they can come and use their experience to better the response” (Ola Fou Interview).

In the literature on participatory development, Chambers (1983) has described ‘sitting, asking and listening’ as an attitude as well as a method, and one which many insights emanate from (p.202). These excerpts suggest that there is a time and place for expatriates to share their experiences from other contexts, but that they should listen first to see how their expertise and experience can be best applied to the situation at hand.

6.3. Flag Raising and avoiding exposure to further harm

Stakeholders across all groups identified self-promotion by NGOs as an issue that negatively impacted on the response to disaster. Interestingly, no question about flag-raising was asked directly to participants. Rather, they were prompted to discuss it by questions relating to coordination of the response, or the effectiveness of respective responding NGOs. Flag raising was included in the World Humanitarian Summit National Consultations report as a weakness where ‘organisations want to promote their priorities’ (National Disaster Management Office,
Stakeholder consultations for the report were held on 6 May 2015, and 35 participants from SIG, Donor Government, multilateral and NGO agencies attended. It is expected that a majority of interviewees for this study were among those attending the consultations. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the issue of flag-raising was discussed in many interviews for this study.

Flag raising was described by participants as serving two somewhat interrelated purposes – for publicity to fundraise, and to promote the work of an agency. Four interviewee’s responses closely resembled one another, stating frankly that disasters are an opportunity for NGOs to fundraise. Their reflections on flag raising are summed up by a manager at a multilateral agency:

“Some organisations try to get the most out of the disaster – it's an opportunity to get a lot of funds and get noticed. Flag-raising kind of stuff…to show that they are doing more than the next guy. [NGO name], sure it’s not their intention, but that’s a perception I get” (C2 Interview).

Staff members interviewed from a High Commission (Interview A1) and an NGO (Interview D1) identified one particular NGO as being the most prominent flag raiser or self-promoter. A High Commission Interviewee (A1) identified this as an issue as it raised people’s expectations for assistance when they read in the newspaper about the funds that the agency reported raising and what it was doing. Acknowledging the varied capacity of NGOs in Solomon Islands, the extent of flag raising has not been analysed relative to the varying sizes of responding organisations.

A member of the Recovery Coordination Committee took a pragmatic approach to the issue of flag raising, remarking “Of course, everyone wants to be seen – is that a surprise?” Field staff and volunteers of responding agencies try to promote their organisations on the ground by saying their agency is doing more than others, described one multilateral agency manager (Interview C2). They replicate what they see happening at the higher levels of their organisation – it needs to be worked on at the management level, considered the interviewee.

Aside from receiving funds from institutional donors, NGOs raise significant funds from their respective supporter bases, predominantly in Australia and New Zealand. Flag raising is a dilemma that NGOs face – to raise funds, they often need to raise their public profile, with both evidence of a disaster’s impact, and what they are contributing in response. However, this must be balanced against the impacts that flag raising actions can have on the response, and pertinently on those affected by the disaster.
6.4. Dependency and opportunism: two sides of the same coin

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who sheltered in temporary evacuation centres following the floods were discussed by all except two interviewees. The presence of proportionately large numbers of people seeking shelter exceeded public areas available to be used for evacuation centres; and as a result, schools were used to shelter those displaced. All interviewees who commented on the evacuation centres added that the number of people who had lost all their possessions was far fewer than the number of people in the evacuation centres. Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands International observed:

“There were genuine victims and opportunists – how do you qualify someone for the evacuation centre? In the evacuation centres, people were getting three meals a day”

(Benjamin Afuga, FSII).

Disasters in an urban settling such as Honiara are dynamic and complex in nature due to the diversity of residents. A multilateral stakeholder (Interview C1) argued that the levels of expectations in urban settings were higher as working class people tend to think they deserve more than rural people. An interviewee from a High Commission noted that donor governments and NGOs were publically reporting on the amounts they had raised or contributed (Interview A1). However, donor governments channelled funds through NGOs and both reported on the amounts – effectively reporting the same funds twice. People affected by the disaster quantified the amount of aid they believed they should be receiving by adding up the amounts reported by various stakeholders, and then essentially dividing by the number of people in evacuation centres and other affected populations. This was problematic insofar as when the Government moved to close the evacuation centres, people were refusing to leave until they received the assistance which they believed they were entitled to (their share).

In discussing increasing levels of dependency, interviewees often referred to the evacuation centres as an example. NDMO Director Loti Yates alluded to both dependency in the evacuation centres, and the wider challenge of access to land which informed the NDMOs response:

“With all of these people staying in the evacuation centres, it was reinforcing dependency. Many were squatters on government land, so we couldn’t give materials and authorise building in these marginal areas. It would also be unfair to give land to squatters over public servants. The land issue is a big one in Honiara” (Loti Yates, NDMO Interview).

While there is a diversity of experiences and circumstances among people in evacuation centres, an alternative conceptualisation could suggest that while people appear in a state of dependency to agencies responding; rather, they may be exercising their agency and taking advantage of the
resources available to them. Elisha Pitanoe of Ola Fou Solomon Islands described opportunism and the Government’s response:

“Initially, the evacuation centres were only for the people who had been victimised by the flash floods... People were using this as an opportunity to serve their own interests – and I know that this is something that we will continue to struggle with, because it is people’s own attitude, their mindset. The Government knows that many who were there were not victims of the flash floods. Those who were truly victimised by the flash floods did not get what they were supposed to, they were pushed back - that's another big challenge” (Ola Fou Interview).

People and groups in evacuation centres were able to exert some influence on the decisions and powers of responding agencies and government, as Giddens’ (1984) definition of agency proposes. Giddens (1984) situated structure and agency as a duality – where individuals both create and are directed by structures. In this case, people in evacuation centres exercised agency by remaining in the evacuation centres, forming activist groups, and protesting the Government’s decision to close the centres. They were also directed by structure; namely the Government’s follow-through on its decision to close evacuation centres. Findings suggest that communities experienced both structure and agency simultaneously, with a range of factors influencing the level of autonomy they could exert in view of their circumstances.

Evacuation centres can be described as locations of both dependency and opportunism. The ways in which disasters are experienced, along with the resources, skills and social position of those affected are highly contingent on the contexts in which they occur. Accordingly, material distributions in evacuation centres may have differing undesirable consequences on different groups of people – such as fostering increased dependency, leading to opportunism, or undermining resilience.

6.5. From community development to disaster response

Distinct differences exist between the nature and practices of community development and disaster response. NGOs who participated in this study predominantly worked in various sectors of community development, and responded to disasters as the need and opportunity presented itself. In this study, participating NGOs suspended their community development work in Honiara and Guadalcanal and diverted resources into disaster response purposes; with an understanding that community development work would be picked up and continued after the response.
A multilateral stakeholder and NDMO Director Loti Yates elaborated on the challenges many NGOs were faced with re-gearing their organisations for disaster response, and the implications that had:

“A lot of NGOs are not emergency response oriented or disaster response oriented. They are more focused on programmes that support communities. But when a disaster happened everyone had to chip in, and some had no experience with working in disaster situations. They have good intentions, but they were very much taking a reactive approach, rather than a proactive approach” (Interview C2).

“While many NGOs are large in size, they have perhaps only one or two staff working in the humanitarian space on an ongoing basis. They re-divert their resources from ongoing community development projects, into disaster response and recovery. Because many of them do not specialise in disaster response, the quality of the response and assessments were often quite bad. Many NGOs did not understand the language of the standard operating procedures (SOPs)” (Loti Yates, NDMO).

A manager from a Government Ministry involved in the response made similar observations but acknowledged that NGOs were the fastest to respond, ahead of the SIG response (Interview B2). Another multilateral stakeholder elaborated that the SIG is often the third partner to respond, following NGOs and donor governments (Interview C1). Red Cross had large responsibilities in the response for assessments and displaced people, yet were limited in their capacity immediately following the floods as their own offices had been flooded (Anna Reid, NZ High Commission). Peter Weston, Programme Quality Manager at World Vision described the challenges he witnessed in transitioning into disaster response:

“Initially, it was chaotic. For the first week. No matter how organised you are, no matter where in the world, it’s always chaotic… For an organisation like World Vision, we’re 90 per cent community development, but at the same time, we’re also the country’s largest emergency responder”.

Due to the fluid situation on the ground, the time available for NGO staff to make key decisions, and the level of information on which those decisions are based is often substantially less than in community development work. Most stakeholders have characterised the first one to two weeks following the disaster as unsystematic, disorderly and messy; which was reflected in almost every discussion on coordination. It was a period of NGOs re-gearing for disaster response, but also one of assessing the scale of the disaster and trying to fill information gaps. As the disaster impacted Honiara, there was an additional factor that staff of stakeholder agencies were themselves impacted, and understandably had concerns for the welfare of their own kin and livelihoods.
6.6. ‘Go back to your village’: policy responses to disaster

Policy responses by the Solomon Island Government and its respective ministries following the disaster were a focus of discussion by interviewees. Decisions that were made following the disaster had a direct impact on those who were and were not affected by the disaster. One of these decisions was to repatriate people from evacuation centres back to their village of origin, with in-kind assistance (Solomon Star, 2014, 12 August). Proponents of the policy argued that evacuation centres were housed in schools which had been forced to close, and it was costly and unsustainable for the Government to continue providing relief supplies to those in evacuation centres. Opponents of the policy pointed to the policy’s ineffectiveness, protection issues, and existing competition for resources in communities where people were relocated (Namosuaia, 2014, 25 July).

In this study, a minority of the stakeholders who were interviewed supported the policy; and all of these were staff of Government Ministries or High Commissions. A strong majority of stakeholders from all categories opposed the policy citing issues with its design, or its ineffectiveness at achieving its intended outcomes. A key implementer of the policy, Loti Yates from NDMO explained:

“Our idea was that people should leave the evacuation centres and return to their home province. Even if they’ve been in Honiara for a long time, most people return to their villages each year – so they have a place to stay and the support of their communities. We give them supplies to help rebuild – 20 sheets of roofing iron, food, nails, and family kits. Back home they can have their rights and dignity. After a few months, when they started to recover, a father, for example, can return to Honiara for work. After a while, he may be able to bring his family back to Honiara. This can be done in agreement with employers” (Loti Yates, NDMO Interview).

A manager at a Government Ministry involved in the response outlined the challenge confronting the Government, recalling that it was the Government who was feeding people, not NGOs. The Government has limited resources, and after three months people needed to start standing on their own two feet again. Some people tried to present themselves as victims to a greater extent than they were, he added (Interview B5). Development Officer at the New Zealand High Commission, Anna Reid took a pragmatic approach, suggesting:

“...everyone gets worried about different things and human rights, and I don’t want to belittle that, but the Solomon Islands Government knows their people and they knew what they were going to do. Everybody was worried about kicking people out of evacuation centres because it breached norms of human rights and IDPs. Donors said we need to provide this and that, the Government said no, but the NGOs insisted that we need to follow these international norms. When the Government put their foot down and said no, everybody went home“.
Some of the opposition to the policy focused on the lack of a comprehensive plan for dealing with many of the central issues that the Government was confronted with. A staff member of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family (MWYCF) expressed concern that durable solutions were not identified prior to the disaster, as issues arising could be a source of conflict; concluding “We are dealing with human beings, not sticks and stones”. The policy response did not consider all of the variables, added a High Commission staff member (Interview A2). An interviewee from a civil society organisation described the policy as symptomatic of policy decisions more broadly, whereby it is commonplace to have:

"Relatively simplistic policy responses to what are actually very complex issues. For example - put on a boat with a bag of rice and a few bits of roofing iron" (Interview F2).

Specifically relating to the ‘repatriation’ programme as it was termed, interviewees raised two issues of ineffectiveness. Firstly, that people accepted the repatriation package, travelled to their province of origin, then sold the items and returned to Honiara (FSII, Ola Fou, and C1 Interviews). Secondly, some of the ships travelling to Malaita as part of the repatriation programme had only a handful of people on board (A2, D1 and FSII Interviews). The primary motivator for the repatriation policy was financial concerns, and the policy was one of ‘relocation’ not ‘repatriation’ as those affected had diverse and complex connections with Honiara, argued an interviewee from MWYCF.

A related issue pertained to the Government allocation of land at what became known as ‘April Hill’ for resettlement of those affected who were to stay in Honiara. The land was tendered, and some land was purchased by people who were not affected by the floods, explained Benjamin Afuga (FSII Interview). He took issue with what he considered a high price for the land, noting that most of those affected were market vendors with no way to compete with those in formal employment or the Chinese business people. Because of this, he said, those affected by the flood need special consideration.

A civil society organisation (Interview F2) and a multilateral stakeholder (C1) both discussed the varied and complex connections that people have with Honiara. One interviewee suggested that solutions were not as simple as telling those affected to “Go back and pick up where you left off”, explaining:

*While people’s true identity is with place of origin, there is whole lot of variety therein...a whole history of urban settlement, how they came to be here, land tenure and contribution to consider. There are still people displaced from the tensions. We have interprovincial marriage - so repatriation is not that simple. People may not have cemented their relationships in the kastom of their home village*” (Interview F2).
Assumptions were made that those who were repatriated had a plot of land to return to, which is not necessarily the reality as their land may be used by family members, argued two interviewees (Interviews C1 and F2). They described the repatriation policy as an easy way for the Government to get rid of the problem of evacuation centres within the first three months. It may seem like an easy fix from a centralised ministry perspective, but NGOs often have officers in communities and understand the reality, explained one interviewee (Interview F2).

No follow-up with those who were repatriated has taken place to evaluate the programme and its level of effectiveness. Three interviewees discussed a study that was conducted by Oxfam during or immediately following repatriation, however it was too early to assess livelihoods recovery (or otherwise) of those concerned. Some resisted repatriation, citing limited employment opportunities and resources in their home villages, and insufficient assistance to recover their livelihoods (Interview F2; Namosuaia, 2014, 25 July).

The repatriation policy presupposes that in their home village, repatriates would have the support of wantoks to assist them in recovery. However, the policy provides no recompense for the attendant burden that may be experienced by communities at the receiving end, considering that denying assistance to wantoks would violate cultural obligations. Resource scarcity, particularly in Malaita, is a primary factor of migration to Honiara; and likely to be exacerbated by significant numbers of repatriates. Social and kastom considerations for those who have lived in Honiara were not adequately dealt with in the policy; nor were the needs of certain groups to access services which are available only in Honiara (for example, medical care).

6.7. National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)

NDMO is an operational branch of the National Disaster Committee (NDC), the Government division legislatively mandated to coordinate responses to disasters in Solomon Islands. Stakeholders who participated in this study all had experience with NDMO, to greater or lesser extents. Whilst beyond the direct scope of this study, many stakeholders provided feedback and recommendations regarding NDMO in the course of their interviews. This is considered relevant insofar as NDMO influences the responses of NGOs, donor governments, and the experience of affected communities; accordingly, recommendations have the potential to improve the ways in which NDMO responds to future disasters. Stakeholders’ comments can be broadly construed in three, somewhat interrelated categories of financial management, planning and leadership.
Stakeholders interviewed described a need for NDMO to improve its financial management and planning to improve its own effectiveness and to safeguard against political interference. A number of stakeholders cited their close working relationship with NDMO, and SIG more broadly, and requested that their identity and category of work remain confidential (for example, whether they are employed by government, NGO or multilateral agencies). They shared concerns about MPs lacking disaster response experience and the undermining NDMO by channelling funds through MPs; issues which are discussed in Chapter Four. It was offered that NDMO’s reliance on contingency warrants places them at the mercy of Cabinet for approval or rejection, with a direct flow-on effect to NDMO’s capacity to fulfil its role, as happened following Cyclone Raquel. One civil society organisation described the need to improve financial management and planning processes:

“Cyclone Pam and Raquel were both out of season. NDMO had not budgeted for it so they sought a contingency warrant. They lack robust planning and budgeting processes and have an over-reliance on contingency warrants. MDPAC (Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination) is working to improve planning cycles” (Interview F2).

The issue of planning was raised by a member of the Recovery Coordination Committee, who explained that NDMO mostly focuses on disasters when they happen, and does not adequately prepare for them in between disasters. The member described outstanding issues relating to land and compensation; and legitimate questions being asked by people who had lost valuable things, such as land titles, passports and drivers licences. These are issues that the national system, of which NDMO is but one part, is not prepared to deal with. Following the disaster came the “realisation that we should have been thinking a lot wider than we were” (Interview B3). Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands International described how some schools that were used as evacuation centres have been left with large water and electricity bills. He recalled that one school’s electricity was disconnected and it now must pre-pay for electricity (cash power).

The leadership and management capacity of cluster leads and NDMO staff was discussed by two stakeholders as having an impact on coordination of the disaster response. An interviewee from MWYCF reflected that technical knowledge about humanitarian response among cluster leads is lacking, as it is not part of their routine jobs. This presents a challenge for senior government managers who are confronted with coordinating cluster meetings of technical experts. In contrast but to the same effect, a multilateral stakeholder described NDMO staff as having technical expertise, but lacking ability to manage and coordinate; which had negative implications for the response:
“For the NDMO, every staff member has received every training – I’m not joking – in disaster management. There is no training they haven’t done. Having the right capacity is good enough, but having the ability to manage and coordinate is a different thing... they can talk to you about disasters, and what to do in disasters, but if you start asking about coordination, what should be done, the roles and responsibilities in response, they can’t answer. For example, their Sit Reps (Situation Reports) are descriptive, instead of putting facts on paper. The description is not what I want, I want the numbers...This would eventually get shared with donors” (Interview C2).

During interviews, several participants requested that the research product could be an outlet through which they could comment and publicise their concerns and recommendations which they felt they could not make publicly. This is illustrative of the relatively small number of people involved in disaster response in Honiara, combined with cultural values of respect and indirect critique, where direct comments may impede working relationships. It may also reflect concerns for employment status as one government interviewee raised; perceiving their personal public service employment to be politicised (Interview B3).

The efficacy of disaster responses is influenced by a diverse range of factors, and in most cases, interviewees reflected critically upon the factors which constrained their responses. This chapter highlighted a number of issues - from relatively straightforward operational challenges to more complex issues concerning governance and identity politics. The diversity of responding agencies meant that stakeholders did not experience constraints evenly or equally. Inevitably, affected communities’ interactions with responding agencies were informed and influenced by these constraints, which are the predominant focus of chapter five.
Chapter 7. Targeting and inclusiveness of NGO responses

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings and explores the inclusiveness of NGO responses with regard to youth, people with disabilities and gender. It seeks to disaggregate the disaster response and identify specific challenges that may have been experienced by groups whose voices are heard to lesser extents in dominant disaster discourses. Whilst this chapter is divided thematically, it is acknowledged that there is much inter-connectedness between each theme. The chapter also seeks to examine violence and psycho-social concerns which were discussed in relation to the disaster by a range of stakeholders.

7.2. Youth: A silenced majority

The absence of youth involvement in NGO responses to disaster was raised by both male and female youth focus groups in Lord Howe settlement and Aruligo – the two communities which received assistance from NGOs following the flooding. These groups expressed discontent overall and considered that their voices were not listened to by responding NGOs. Participants shared that they felt excluded from consultation, implementation, and that assistance provided did not sufficiently address their specific and differentiated needs as youth. This correlates with the response from an interviewee from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family (MWYCF), who argued that there is currently very little targeting of youth, beyond the establishment of Child-Friendly Spaces. The protection cluster was restricted by a lack of funds, and needs assessments did not specifically target youth, the interviewee suggested.

The female youth focus group in Lord Howe settlement shared that agencies conducting needs assessments met only with community leaders and elders. They emphasised that they want their voices to be heard and have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that are made concerning their settlement. The male youth focus group expressed an eagerness to be involved in the team that collects data and distributes assistance; explaining “we want to help with distributing the assistance because we were always left out”. In the male youth focus group at Aruligo, debate on the place of youth and NGO responses was robust, as participants interjected one another, responding:

“We were not happy with the way they approached our community because they only talked to the elders - we too have our needs and want to share”…“they did not care for the youth...because they did nothing for us in the community”...“What is the use of coming and
collecting data only to do nothing with it? It would be better for them not to come at all because we can still survive even if they don’t come and assist us”.

When youth focus groups were asked how NGO responses would be different if they were more involved; they cited improving accountability, equity in distribution and sufficient relief supplies for a full household. There was also a general impression that responding agencies cannot understand all needs and determine an appropriate response while simultaneously excluding everyone except elders and leaders in the community. Community and organisation stakeholders have widely reflected on the politicisation of relief supplies distributions (detailed in chapter eight), which contributed to undermining accountability and equity. Organisational stakeholders considered the size of households at a ‘flash flooding lessons learned workshop’ on 6–8 October 2014, and recognised that households were underreported where more than one nuclear family lived under one roof. As a result, some families, especially female-headed households were essentially invisible. In many cases, youth may have reported these issues as it was their lived experience, they experienced the negative consequence of patterns of inclusion and exclusion following the disaster.

Further issues relating to youth were presented ‘off the record’ by youth participants in focus groups or organisational interviewees - their specific stories and any identifying characteristics have been cautiously omitted from this thesis. However, the issues that they identified and alluded to have been discussed in the following sections on gender, violence and psycho-social trauma, through evidencing ‘on-record’ interviews and secondary data.

7.3. On the margins: disaster for people with disabilities

There were no assessments or particular interest given to people with disabilities, elderly people, or pregnant women in the response; groups that are particularly at risk following a disaster. In many cases, their ability to quickly evacuate, adapt, and survive in inferior living conditions (such as evacuation centres) may be limited. Coupled with this, some may have lost essential medications in the disaster, or not be able to meet dietary or sanitary requirements with the relief supplies distributed. Three key issues emerged from interviews and focus group discussions – the challenges of evacuating people with disabilities, their lack of voice and inclusion in responses, and the absence of supporting infrastructure for people with disabilities.

Lord Howe settlement was one of the two case study communities which were flooded and had to evacuate, and the only one where people with disabilities resided. The two male focus groups discussed evacuating the settlement:
“Everyone was in a state of fear and panic. A few sick people decided to stay even though they knew it was dangerous to stay, they could not move themselves because of the rain and lack of transport” (Lord Howe Settlement male youth FGD).

“During the flood when things get worse, a lot of us especially the women, children, those with disabilities, and the elderly people were evacuated. We helped rescue them to a church where we went and asked for help” (Lord Howe Settlement men’s FGD).

The male youth focus group recognised that the challenges of evacuation were compounded by the heavy rain and lack of transport. The youth focus group was comprised of residents from the side of the settlement closest to the Mataniko River, which had more difficulty evacuating as flood waters encroached on the settlement. The men’s focus group was constituted of residents from the western side of the settlement, less exposed to the river and floodwaters, but more prone to sea storm surges. This highlights the challenges of evacuation for people with impaired mobility – that on one side of the settlement all were evacuated, and on the other side some people remained due to their difficulty evacuating.

The barriers for those with disabilities were addressed by less than one-third of organisational participants interviewed. Those who addressed the subject advocated that the voices of people with disabilities need to be heard and that infrastructure needs to improve to support them. A public servant at the MWYCF noted that disability will be an increasing priority for the ministry in coming years. One NGO stakeholder considered:

“How can you push a wheelchair to evacuate when there are no flat paths. People get left” (Interview DS).

The interviewee identified the issue raised in the Lord Howe settlement men’s focus group of people being left behind in communities during the evacuation. The interviewee chastised dominant social attitudes which hold that people with disabilities belong to the confines of the home. Fiji was alluded to as an example of more disability-friendly infrastructure, such as flat sidewalks which have enabled people with disabilities to be more active, integrated and productive community members. Julian Tung, Programme Manager at Save the Children discussed challenges in building more disability-friendly infrastructure after the disaster:

“The infrastructure was broken to begin with. We were all constrained by budget and tight project timeframes to bring infrastructure to an ideal level, so in many cases, it was about repairing to how it was before. For example, there was no budget to rebuild schools with ramps. There are also social implications, as those with disabilities don't usually go to school, so we were also contending with that” (Julian Tung, Save the Children).
The literature has noted that people with disabilities are often underrepresented in positions of decision making, determining how disasters are responded to (e.g. Pirotte et al., 1999; Enarson and Marrow, 2003). As both a cause and consequence of this, disability rights have yet to enter the mainstream discourses. A civil servant acknowledged the poor condition of urban infrastructure but expressed an even greater concern at the Government’s repatriation programme of sending people to a village environment where infrastructure is even more inadequate (Interview B3). He questioned how people would be able to take care of family members who are elderly or have a disability; suggesting that they would become an additional burden, which they are not supposed to be.

7.4. Gender: structural and practical issues

Most interview stakeholders discussed gender to varied extents, and understandings of what gender means, and its applicability in disaster response varied widely. Gender was often conflated with ‘vulnerable groups’, which encompassed children, people with disabilities, elderly persons, pregnant women, and at times everyone except adult men. The South Pacific Disaster Reduction Programme report (2002) situated the place of gender in disaster management as:

‘...a technical area; technical work is thought of as masculine in many cultures. Disaster management involves dealing with risk and danger, and again this is widely seen as a masculine concern. Disaster management is also often seen as a heroic activity, in which bravery and bold initiative are required; qualities more often seen as masculine than feminine’ (p.18).

Literature on the role of gender in disaster response has largely focused around the marginalisation of women’s voices, and framed ‘women’ as a singular group, negating the diversity therein (Ariyabandu, 2005; Pirotte et al, 1999; Mohanty, 1988). However, interview participants predominantly reflected on the practical implications of gender. They identified the need to consult women in disaster response, acknowledging the presence of women-headed households and widows, and the need for non-food item kits (NFI kits) to better address the needs of women. Participants also identified gender-based violence as an issue, which has been addressed separately in the following section on violence. Two factors are important to acknowledge here; firstly, as a male researcher, female interviewees may not have felt comfortable discussing particular female needs and issues with me. Secondly, 19 out of 23 of interview participants were male. This is significant as it indicates the immense gender imbalance at the decision-making management level of organisations which responded to the
disaster. It also suggests that they too may not be privy to information regarding female needs and issues.

Gender has only entered policy and planning dialogues in the last decade, and people are still trying to make sense of it, advised one civil servant (Interview B3). An interviewee from MWCYF recognised the importance of gender in the response, but also the Government’s need to manage expectations, highlighting one NGO that was very assertive on gender and human rights issues. This particular NGO was described as challenging to work with by several stakeholders. Some took issue with a member of the NGO’s expatriate staff (discussed further in chapter six); and the agency’s rights-based approach was considered counterproductive at times, as people viewed it as an imposing of western values. One multilateral stakeholder elaborated:

“[NGO name] can be quite pushy on protection issues which NDMO is not comfortable with. They have been on the red-hot spot on that one... They need to respect the cultural sensitivities which they mostly bypass. Ministry of Women, Youth and Children have been upset with that – their concern is that it doesn't cause more tension”. (Interview C1).

Considering gender without inflaming tensions was described by Julian Tung of Save the Children, who emphasised respecting cultural hierarchy, but therein finding ways to consult with women. A government interviewee agreed, suggesting that by consulting women, responding agencies can better understand their different needs (Interview B3). He said that the Government was supportive, but conceded that consultation could have been done better. Consulting women in the response was commonly situated as a means to an end – to find out discrete needs women may have. Unsurprisingly, a more holistic view of gender was espoused by two women interviewees, who related protection issues, and access to relief distributions.

One woman interviewed explained that in the evacuation centres, toilets were not gender segregated, and this led to incidents of tension or conflict (Interview D5). This was a safety concern for women but was likely overlooked by the male-dominated disaster response managers who (without the benefit of hindsight) may have differently prioritised such concerns. Another woman interviewed explained that those conducting distributions often bypassed widows, single mothers and people with disabilities in distributions; presuming men were household heads in all cases (Interview C1). Both of these issues expose women to greater levels of risk and contribute to reinforcing their inferior social position.

The distribution of NFI kits insufficiently addressed gendered needs. Far too few sanitary pads were included in dignity kits, in both an underestimation of women’s needs and household size. Further, sanitary pads were distributed through women-friendly spaces in dignity kits and not
part of standard hygiene kits. One interviewee suggested that relief distributions are only purposed for lifesaving emergency relief staples and that people should use their own resources to cover their additional needs (Interview B2). What this view fails to acknowledge, however, is cases where people lost their possessions in the flood, including money. An NGO interviewee identified that household assessments did not count babies or elderly people, which is important in order to tailor NFI kits appropriately (Interview D5). In a similar vein, a public servant at MHWYCF suggested that NFI kits should be reviewed to ensure their appropriateness for women.

7.5. Increased violence following the disaster

Following a disaster, people may fear that their established identities are challenged, which can manifest in increases of negative coping mechanisms, such as (often interrelated) domestic violence, alcoholism and sexual violence. This section presents findings from interviews with organisation staff and draws on the most recent comprehensive study on violence against women and children, the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study6 (SPC, 2009). This section on violence discusses tensions and riots following the disaster, and physical and sexual violence.

7.5.1 Tensions and Riots

On 16-17 May 2014, riots broke out on Kukum Highway, outside Panatina Pavilion Camp and King George VI High School. The riots were described by interview participants as being both politically motivated, and opportunistic. Before the Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), with RAMSI reinforcement quelled the riots, ‘Uncle Alick’s’ shop had been looted and destroyed by fire. Interview participants and the media have widely considered the Government’s decision to close remaining evacuation centres to have ignited the riots (Radio NZ, 2014). However, interview participants also elaborated on the conditions that gave rise to the tension and riots, evidencing recent history of tension between groups and socio-economic factors.

Development Officer at the New Zealand High Commission, Anna Reid represented a view commonly shared by interview participants, suggesting that the disaster created the conditions for rioting to occur, but issues with assistance were not the primary motivation:

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6 ‘Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study’ (2009) was the alias safe-name given to the socio-cultural research on Child Abuse and Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Solomon Islands. The alias name was given to protect respondents and encourage participation.
“I think the floods enabled the rioting to happen, but it was political first and foremost... If you look at those who did it, they were opportunistic. The leaders were known to police as people who might be likely to do something like this. They didn’t like the Government, didn’t like GDL (then-Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo)".

The most obvious precedent for the riots was the 2006 riots which followed the election of Snyder Rini as Prime Minister. Chinese-owned businesses were targeted in response to allegations of vote-buying by Asian businessmen, in riots that were both premeditated and spontaneous opportunism (Moore, 2008; Allen, 2008). The riots in May 2014 appear to have similarities insofar as they were orchestrated by a few key individuals who had political motivations, and were supported by opportunistic rioters.

Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands International was critical of the Police and RAMSI response to the rioting. He noted that it took several hours before police and RAMSI arrived in force, despite the riots taking place a mere five kilometres away from their base. He described how police were pelted with stones on arrival and thus retreated to Ranadi and Lunga (back approximately 1.5 kilometres to the east and west from the riots). Afuga observed that the riots were eventually quelled after a helicopter was dispatched to the site and tear gas used. Many interviewees related the riots to illustrate the need for cautious decisions to be made by both NGOs and government, being aware of the propensity for inflaming conflict. Sophie Boucaut of Save the Children outlined a need to better understand and deal with the causes of tension, relating both to events like the riots, and also tensions within the evacuation centres which were commonplace:

“There were some tensions between people who remained in the evacuation centres. I believe a lot of them were from Malaita who had already been working in Honiara, and it became assumed that it was only Malaitans who remained in the evacuation centres. I think that perhaps played into the narrative of what was happening...There were also the riots afterwards; which again, were based on a whole range of factors, be it ethnic tension, province to province tension, pre-existing socio-economic issues that were exacerbated. I don’t know if any of that has been unpacked from an academic perspective. Everyone has their own take on why that may or may not have happened. But from my understanding, there has been no evaluation, no analysis of that. It’s incredibly worrying phenomenon to see after an emergency, so how do you prevent that in the future, how do agencies support communities to ensure that they are safe after a response if rioting is a possibility. These kinds of things, if there was more research interest in the Solomon Islands, I think that we could certainly benefit as a community” (Sophie Boucaut, Save the Children).

Boucaut alluded to the ‘tensions’ which peaked between 1998 and 2003, but have remained large on the collective memory of Solomon Islanders, and of which the root causes have not yet been addressed (e.g. Aqurau 2008; Moore 2004). Criminal opportunism and the distribution of
land and resources were two central causes of the ‘tensions’, and both were reported reasons for the riots which followed the floods.

7.5.2 Physical and sexual violence

Solomon Islands experiences high rates of physical and sexual violence, with almost two in three women between the ages of 15 and 49 reporting physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, in a 2009 report (SPC, 2009, p.61). This report was the most comprehensive recent study on violence against women and children and indicates that sexual violence is the most prevalent form of intimate partner violence at 55 per cent, followed by physical violence at 46 per cent (p.62). The report states that ‘violence against women arises from the convergence of specific factors within the broad context of power inequalities at the individual, group, national, and global level (p.139). There is a lack of recent literature on the prevalence of domestic violence in Solomon Islands, posing challenges to determining changes in prevalence and attitudes toward physical and sexual violence over time.

Aware of my own positionality as a male and outsider, this section avoids discussion on the influence of specific cultural practices in relation to domestic violence, which a few participants alluded to. Instead, the section presents and discusses findings from interviews with stakeholders who, as I, are influenced by their positionalities; and findings are inevitably influenced accordingly.

Interview participants reported that there was no assessment of domestic violence following the disaster, but many added that rates of violence against women have increased, based on the anecdotal evidence they have. This correlates with what literature on disasters more generally suggests, that increases in gender-based violence often occur following disasters (Pirotte et al., 1999; Beristain, 2006). A civil servant from MWYCF described the situation:

“Anecdotally, domestic violence increased following the floods. There was no referral network in evacuation centres. We need a referral network for normal times, as well as disaster... There has been no study on domestic violence since the 2009 one, but we can see that reporting is increasing, awareness is increasing” (Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family).

The interviewee described the Ministry’s key role in the area of protection, citing that it is the custodian of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A multilateral stakeholder highlighted increased cases of abuse against children and people with disabilities:
“Usually in disaster times, child abuse cases are high, as well as extra-marital affairs – it all creates conflict. Also disabled people targeted at. From reports at meetings, there were a high number of reported cases of abuses after the flash flood” (Interview C1).

Two interviewees alluded to the lack of privacy for people living in evacuation centres. One suggested that there was a ‘disaster for sex’, whereby the lack of privacy for engaging in sexual activities perpetuated social tensions and led to secondary disasters – traumatic events such as physical and sexual violence. The other reflected that tensions were high because there was no ‘happy hour for couples’ (Interviews F1 and D5). Interviewees observed:

“Sex was happening everywhere. People were not sleeping in rooms. There were attempted rapes, and spying on women bathing” (Benjamin Afuga, FSII Interview).

“There was a lot of husband jealousy when people all living in the same place...So they went to the bush for sex or created fights” (Interview D5).

Women-friendly spaces in evacuation centres were well received, according to the ‘flash flooding lessons learned workshop’ on 6-8 October 2014. However, privacy issues throughout the camps remained and posed risks for women. Frustrations and tensions resulting from post-disaster living conditions have the potential to manifest into larger conflicts, especially if abuses occurred between members of identity-based groups within evacuation centres.

In late 2014, acts of domestic violence were specifically criminalised, under the Family Protection Act (2014). The Act has not yet been enforced, as magistrates and the courts are currently being trained and sensitised to domestic violence issues, explained an MWYCF civil servant. A ‘nurturing period’ of three to five years was outlined, with a focus on practical issues for the public, including how to get a protection order.

Increasing reporting of domestic violence and progress toward the implementation of the Family Protection Act (2014) is a positive indication of changing social and political attitudes. Recommendations for safeguarding against domestic violence following disasters were presented by NGOs at the ‘flash flooding lessons learned workshop’ in 2014, which if implemented would contribute to the greater protection of women and children in particular. However, a significant gap often exists between policy and implementation in Solomon Islands (Interview F2). Therefore, commitment, resourcing and robust monitoring are necessary to realise the intended reductions in domestic violence following disaster.
7.6. Psychosocial trauma: out of sight, out of mind?

This section draws on focus group discussions in Lord Howe and Lunga settlements where participants recounted feelings of fear, helplessness, anxiety, and reminiscing of the disaster. It also seeks to reveal the coping mechanisms that participants employed to manage and overcome the trauma of the disaster.

Focus groups reflected on their experiences of the disaster, describing what they witnessed, how they responded to it, and the effect it had on them. The Lord Howe settlement male youth focus group described:

“Dead people and animals just floated down the river with logs and complete houses from some settlements upriver. There were desperate sounds of people floating down the river calling for help, but we could not do much about them. The river was just too dangerous and not safe enough to attempt rescues...Children were cold and sick; women were worried about their home and children, disabled lost their hope and elderly people, can’t say much about them. Everyone was in fear and panic...We thought that the world has come to its end...after the flood, we are fearful that our community is not safe...even now when there is a small rain, we don’t feel safe” (Lord Howe Settlement male youth FGD).

The lasting impact of the floods can be seen in the fear of rain in the settlement. The group had composed a song following the flood, “just to remind us of what was happening”. It is observable that the male youth and men’s focus groups described what happened on the Mataniko River, whereas this was absent from the women’s focus groups. It was discussed earlier in this chapter that women, children, elderly persons and those with disabilities were, for the most part, evacuated from Lord Howe settlement during the flood. As predominantly men remained, some attempting to rescue people from the swollen Mataniko River, they were more exposed to the traumatic events that transpired. The men’s focus group made similar remarks to the youth, describing:

“People and animals floated down the river, we rescued some, but most of them died. Some of them were alive but they were hit by logs and they died. Some of them we could not do much about so they were lost into the dark and high waves. We took those who survived to the hospital. We were unsettled and could not sleep well, we woke up and would listen for anything happening...Some of our community members evacuated during the flood and never returned because of fear” (Lord Howe Settlement men’s FGD).

The inability to sleep well due to anxiety and in some cases not returning to the settlement due to fear are indications of the psychosocial impact of the disaster. A participant noted some disconnect between the trauma experienced by the community and the ways that they were approached by NGOs, stating “they were not friendly and comforting in a time of disaster”. In this case, adopting an approach which was more caring and considerate of the community’s
recent experience, would have been more positively received than a narrower and extractive data-collection.

Recollection of the disaster featured prominently in Lord Howe settlement, with residents in all focus groups reflecting on ways that the disaster continues to inform their lives. Men’s focus groups reflected on fear of rain in the community. This may have been particularly evident as the focus group was conducted three weeks after category-one Tropical Cyclone Raquel, which brought heavy rain across the country. Fear of the tropical cyclone was generalised across Honiara, with people somewhat nervously discussing the cyclone in the market, buses, and on the street; especially after the National Referral Hospital was cleared of all non-critical patients as a precautionary measure. A female youth participant pointed out “people live in fear when it is raining, people were traumatised by what happened”. The recollection of memories was depicted by the men and women’s focus groups in Lord Howe settlement, who shared:

“We might cry if we try to reminisce what happened during the flood (pause)”...“We still keep our clothes [given by Red Cross] and every time we wore them it reminded us of that time” (Lord Howe Settlement women’s FGD).

“The floods reminded us that during the month of April, something must happen, the tsunami in Western Province was in April, the ethnic tension was in April, the riot was in April. So April becomes a month where we are worried that a disaster might happen. When there is heavy rain, and our settlement is splashed with water, we become afraid and panic that bad things might happen. What we normally do is dig drainage out to the sea. Also, we did not sleep well at night when there is rain” (Lord Howe Settlement men’s FGD).

These two responses provide interesting insight into the ways that the disaster continues to impact on those affected. Unfortunately, the comments that wearing clothes distributed by Red Cross reminds the women of the time of the disaster was not further discussed at the time of the focus group. It is plausible that the reminder was a negative one of the difficulties, anxiety and fear experienced following the flooding. It could also be viewed in a positive light, that the clothes are a reminder of the assistance given and the relief of having additional clothes, having fled the settlement during the flood. The men’s focus group drew parallels with past events, superstitious of the month of April, as a series of terrible events had all occurred in April.

Focus group discussions sought to uncover coping mechanisms that case study communities may have employed during and following the disaster to counter the trauma they had experienced. In some cases, such as the Lord Howe settlement men’s focus group, this took the form of digging drainage out to sea, even in slight rain for peace of mind. Practical solutions were also identified by the Lunga settlement female youth focus group, describing a call-sign “water!” which they established following flooding the community experienced in 2009 and use
to prompt evacuation. They described how they faced constant reminders of the disaster, such as not having dry firewood which they use for cooking fires. The Lord Howe settlement male youth focus group told of a song they had composed about the disaster which they sung together following the flood. Similarly, the female youth group discussed the value of coming together with others in the community to share stories and feelings:

“After flood there were mixed feelings and everyone was so quiet; so we usually called everyone and sat together and shared our stories and feelings. Maybe we do this because we are a small community and we all share the same culture... It feels like we lost some love ones because every time disaster happens we lose many things and we have to rebuild and restart” (Lunga Settlement female youth FGD).

Oral traditions in Solomon Islands are highly important, with knowledge and experiences related through the informal sharing of stories, as detailed in chapter three. Acknowledging the cultural variability in ways of sharing knowledge is important in order to better understand how communities cope with and recover from disaster. Recognising diversity in social practices helps to ensure that responding agencies do not impose well-intentioned but misinformed and incongruous models of support. Typically, responses to the disaster conceptualised ‘community’ or ‘affected population’ as singular and constituted by generalised experiences of the disaster. Premised on this, relief assistance largely failed to attend to the differentiated needs of community members whose experiences were anomalous to these generalisations.
Chapter 8. Members of Parliament as humanitarian responders: the salience of political patronage networks

8.1. Introduction

In response to the April 2014 flash floods, and in line with prior and subsequent disasters, MPs were vehicles for providing relief supplies to people within their constituencies. The direct engagement in disaster response by MPs was raised by most stakeholders. Communities expressed a mix of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the assistance MPs provided, and institutional stakeholders identified accountability and governance issues that their involvement raises. The Solomon Islands Government has limited reach outside of Honiara and many residents of provincial areas live much of their lives interacting little with the state. Daily lives are much more governed by the pre-eminence of kastom and the Church, than the laws and services of the central government (Interview F2). One of the mechanisms that the Solomon Islands Government has employed to broaden its reach is the use of MPs to channel resources to constituencies. The most prominent mechanism for this is the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) which is governed by the Constituency Development Funds (CDF) Act 2013. It provisions the transfer of funds into MPs constituency bank accounts (to which the MP is signatory), via the Ministry of Rural Development, for the purpose of vaguely defined ‘development’ within their respective constituencies. However in addition to this, a significant portion of the general budget is available to MPs as discretionary funds. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 visually depicts locates MPs amongst stakeholders engaged in responding to disaster.

8.2. Members of Parliament and the case study communities

In the settlement at Lunga, community members were aware that assistance was being given by the MP for the constituency, but they did not receive any support other than rice which was provided by the National Disaster Committee (NDC). They suggested that MP distributions of relief supplies lacked transparency and their assistance was politicised:

“We heard about assistance from our member as well, but there was an argument about it so we do not know how it was distributed” (Lunga Settlement, female youth FGD).

In Lord Howe settlement, the women’s focus group discussed their interactions with two constituency members – the member for Central Honiara, and the member from Renbel Province
(where the participants were originally from). They described not receiving assistance from their Honiara constituency member, whilst Malaitan members on the other side of the settlement received assistance:

“Our constituency member came and made a list of everyone here and took it to the NDMO office. The NDMO gave him a lot of food to share among the people, but we did not receive any share. He just used it during the campaign period for the election…we did not receive anything from NDMO because when we went there, they informed us that our share was already given to our constituency member” (Lord Howe Settlement women’s FGD).

However, both the Women and Youth focus groups in Lord Howe settlement referred to the MP representing their home province (Renbel) providing assistance which addressed their emergency needs, describing that they received:

“…some food from our provincial member (MP)...also our MP organised one of the motels (Fair Trade) as an evacuation centre for us, especially the old, women, and children. Everyone went there and took one room each, and for most of us it was our first time to sleep in a motel (laughter). We spent about four days there; it was really a good assistance we got from our MP because we got to sleep in good beds and eat good food. Some of us who are strong enough remained in the settlement and cooked some food for the children and old people in the motel” (Lord Howe Settlement women’s FGD).

“With the help of the MP, he gave us food and water to keep us for a few days while waiting for any response from the agencies...he provided rice, noodles, taiyo (tuna), and cash for the people...we were satisfied with his response” (Lord Howe Settlement male youth FGD).

Contrary to the women and young men focus group discussions, which were comprised of participants from Renbel Province, the men’s focus group was dominated by Malaitan participants from the same settlement. This provided interesting insight into the settlement, with two provincial, cultural and ethnic groups (one Polynesian, one Melanesian) living in contiguous communities. The Malaitan men in this group did not receive any assistance from the MP for Renbel Province, but did receive assistance from the Honiara constituency member (who was Malaitan):

“He brought rice, noodles and taiyo (tuna) and sold them to us for $10 each. He said it is to cover for the expense of transport. So we pay for the assistance, some families that did not have money were not given anything...Our member sold the food to his wantoks and most of us were only allowed to buy one” (Lord Howe Settlement men’s FGD).

In the third participating community in Aruligo district, members of the community stated that they received a 10-kilogram bag of rice for each household from their constituency member (Aruligo women’s FGD). This assistance was received positively, but participants considered it the least helpful out of the four organisations which assisted them in some way after the flood.
In the three communities who participated in the study, two received assistance from MPs and one did not. From the community focus group discussions, it was clear that there was little or no understanding of any criteria employed by MPs to determine who receives assistance and how much they receive. The level of assistance was also clearly variable, and at the discretion of the MP - from no assistance, assistance requiring payment, to free provision of food, cash and accommodation. Only participants who received the highest level of assistance from their MP were satisfied, all others considered their response lacking or less satisfactory/helpful than other assistance they received.

In Lord Howe settlement the extent to which wantok kinship ties availed improved assistance from constituency members was revealing. Only Malaitan wantoks received assistance from the Honiara member; whereas Renbel residents did not receive any assistance from this member, but received assistance from the MP of their home province. Lord Howe settlement residents also cited that since it was an election year, MPs were distributing to their supporter base to advance their election prospects.

The number of communities participating in this study (and their respective constituency members) is relatively small (three communities, four MPs), so it is important not to draw overall conclusions based on this limited amount of evidence. However, triangulating these findings against key stakeholder interviews, reports and news articles reveals that similar issues have been identified by others in relation to this disaster, and past disasters.

8.3. **Members of Parliament in stakeholder interviews**

The role that MPs played in the delivery of emergency assistance following the floods was addressed by seven interviewees, all of whom were critical of the MPs. Notably, none of the seven interviewees were staff of NGOs or High Commissions. Rather, they represented three Government Ministries, one multi-lateral agency and two civil society organisations. Criticism focused on a number of concerns – unequal distributions, absence of disaster response experience, lack of transparency and accountability, side-lining of government ministries, and blurring of the line between the legislative and executive functions of government. This section will present these criticisms, and follow by discussing their implications on communities affected by the disaster.
8.3.1 Inequality of distributions

Five interview participants reflected on the distributions of relief supplies made by MPs following the disaster, proposing that they were not driven on the basis of need, but rather by allegiance. Whilst all five noted that distributions were unequal, four out of five described distributions as motivated by a concern for maintaining favour with supporters, or expanding political support. Two separate Government Ministries highlighted unequal distributions by MPs, stating:

“MPs assistance created inequality among IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). I’ve never seen unequal distribution like that elsewhere” (Interview B4).

“MPs were given money, but I don’t know who they assisted – probably supporters. The unequal distributions by MPs caused friction but we were able to settle it” (Interview B5).

A staff member of a multilateral agency shared similar reflections, taking issue with the lack of concern for distributing to those most in need:

“That funds will only go to those who voted for the MP. That’s how dirty this distribution is – it doesn’t go to those in need” (Interview C1).

Both civil society organisations interviewed voiced their concern with the overtly political motivations underlying distributions:

“MPs assistance was highly political. Candidates support who they think will vote for them. Sitting MPs clearly do this – the supplies are only for their own voters. The campaigning candidates use the opportunity to build their profile...It was just before the national election, and MPs were essentially campaigning during the floods by dishing out supplies” (Forum Solomon Islands International).

“Feedback we are receiving is that CDF is channelled to supporters, and I suspect the same for disasters. Supplies are dropped off to a central location – a location which is central to the MPs supporter base” (Interview F2).

The linking of distributions during both non-emergency periods and following disasters to a MPs political interests risks excluding constituents who are in need of assistance.

8.3.2 Insufficient disaster response experience

Interviewees from three stakeholder groups shared concern over the channelling of disaster relief resources directly through MPs, due to their lack of experience and specialisation in disaster response. This concern reflected the absence of processes pertaining to assessing needs and distributing relief supplies that are appropriate for the situation both in nature and quantity. An interviewee representing a multi-lateral agency argued:
“How can you distribute if you don’t know the scale of the disaster and if you have no data? Some of those MPs don’t even understand what response in a disaster is - the kind of actions to take - response phase to rehabilitation...They don’t have any experience doing assessments during disaster. They don’t even have the templates to identify the immediate needs and priorities in their constituency. It just undermines the arrangements in place and undermines the NDC (National Disaster Council) Act” (Interview C1).

Similarly, Benjamin Afuga of Civil Society Organisation ‘Forum Solomon Islands International’ shared his concern that MPs are making decisions where they “do not understand the system and function of NDMO” (Interview F1). A senior member of the civil service noted that he hoped “that in future disasters, funds are not channelled through MPs” (Interview B3). He suggested that as representatives of their constituents, MPs are outside formal coordination mechanisms, such as the cluster system; so the way they provide assistance is not coordinated with other stakeholders.

8.3.3 Lack of transparency and accountability

Interviewees described the discretionary funds expended by MPs in responding to the flash floods as lacking in transparency and accountability. Two interviewees drew historical parallels with the 2007 Western Province tsunami and referred to reports by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), which are alluded to in the discussion that follows. One interviewee from a Government Ministry involved in the response stated that “Funds were channelled through MPs for response. They probably disappeared. It’s difficult to track down what they did with the funds” (Interview B3). Two interviewees elaborated on some of the political machinations that relate to MPs direct involvement in the disaster response:

“There is a limited amount of accountability, if not no accountability at all for these funds. In order for MPs to deliver, they need to know the impact at the sites. Even though MPs have misused funding, the Government has no questions to hold those people accountable. The Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Rural Development had an arrest warrant for not releasing information on RCDF. Her case will determine the outcome of the Auditor General Report (on CDF), if it can be released” (Interview C1).

“A significant chunk of discretionary funds used by MPs are from the Republic of China (Taiwan). In March 2014, due to failure to send the acquittal report, the next tranche was withheld. Then the flood hit, and it was traumatic. Because of the situation, the funds were released. Taiwan is sensitive to any criticism...The funds were not accounted, acquitted or transparent. We were advised that it’s confidential information. We can see from the 2007 Tsunami Auditor General’s report and recommendations that the same mistakes are being made since. The Auditor General is still sitting on the CDF report from 2012/2013. The Ombudsman has attempted to get it released, but his office comes under the Prime Minister’s Office. There are rumours that the reason why Edward Ronia (ex-Auditor General) was removed had less to do with passing the compulsory retirement age (55) and more to do with the fact that he initiated the CDF audit and was on the verge of releasing the report” (Interview F2).
Both interview participants reflected on ways in which lack of transparency and accountability can culminate in politicised abuses of public offices; in refusal to furnish information, and what was speculated to be a politically-motivated removal of the Auditor General from office.

8.3.4 Undermining Ministries and blurring of legislative and executive functions of Government

During the time of field research for this study, category-one Tropical Cyclone Raquel struck Solomon Islands. Raquel and the preceding Tropical Cyclone Pam\(^7\) were both unexpected and unprecedented insofar as they were unseasonal. Cyclone Raquel was raised by a number of interviewees, who related decisions about the Government’s response to the flash flooding 14 months prior. In the wake of Cyclone Raquel, Cabinet rejected a Contingency Warrant for SBD$3,000,000 as requested by the NDMO to respond to affected provinces. Instead, it approved payment of SBD$3,300,000 to 33 MPs whose constituencies were impacted by the cyclone, bypassing the NDMO (Piringi, 2015, 23 August). In response, the NDMO withdrew all of its assessment teams from affected areas. Two interviewees reflected on these decisions to relay their concerns with MPs involvement in disaster response:

“\textit{The current decision to channel funds through MPs for Cyclone Raquel has put the morale of NDMO low. The S$3,000,000 NDMO requested for relief was rejected by Cabinet. The affected areas were only four provinces. This has questioned the credibility of the NDMO. It was brought in by the NDC Act and is supposed to be obeyed by MPs... In this case, Cabinet’s decision has actually breached that Act. NDMO, the rightful body should be carrying out disaster response activities, not MPs. In this case, you also see the cluster systems diminished – they haven’t been activated}” (Interview C1).

“It is sad that NDMO is the lead agency and is relying on Contingency Warrants. Surely they could anticipate their funding need. The addiction to CDF by MPs, and the constituency being the vehicle for development projects is seeping into disaster response... NDMO are running the risk of political interference with MPs wanting to handle money” (Interview F2).

Representing a Civil Society Organisation, the interviewee argued these issues relating to MPs involvement are not limited to disaster response, but also applicable more broadly, and have consequences for governance:

“A survey conducted prior to the election found people’s understandings of MPs as legislators were limited... MPs are compounding community expectations by retaining control over public funds, reinforcing that mindset. Then MPs are complaining about how hard their jobs are

\(^7\) Tropical Cyclone Pam was a highly destructive category five cyclone which formed on 6 March 2015 and dissipated on 22 March 2015, after significantly impacting Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.
because their houses are flocked with constituents’ demands all the time. They are creating that dynamic – if funds were distributed by the relevant line ministry, they would not be there... There has been a big increase in discretionary funds over the last 10 years. Not specifically RCDF from Taiwan, but all streams in the budget...We see it as having a negative effect on democracy and reinforcing a patronage model, rather than shifting to a representative democracy model...” (Interview F2).

The centralisation of State resources into the direct control of MPs serves to undermine ministries’ capacity to deliver, as delegated line ministries are deprived of resources for performing core functions they have been legislatively tasked with. It also risks Cabinet passing decisions from which MPs stand to directly benefit, as is detailed in the following section.

8.4. Impacts on communities and institutions responding to disaster

The issues outlined in community focus group discussions pertaining to MPs involvement in disaster response correlate with the findings of interviews with staff from government and non-government agencies. Organisational stakeholders affirmed what community participants had reported - unequal distributions, motivated by wantok or political considerations. Community focus groups alluded to a lack of transparency and accountability, asserting that they did not know how assistance was distributed (as in the case of Lunga's settlement). This was also evident in Lord Howe's settlement, where residents had to pay SBDS$10 to receive assistance, and where some residents were informed that their share had already been distributed. Interviewees at Government Ministries, multilateral and civil society organisations separately identified these same issues, drawing linkages to the impacts that MPs responding directly to disasters have on government institutions and communities.

8.4.1 Unaccounted funds and political motivations

Concerns have been raised at the national level on a number of occasions in recent years about MPs direct involvement in disaster response. In the aftermath of the 2007 earthquake and tsunami in Western and Choiseul provinces, funds were channelled through MPs for response and recovery purposes. A Special Audit was subsequently undertaken by the OAG, which found that large sums of funds transferred to MPs were unaccounted for. In the first instance, the report outlined a lack of accountability for SBDS$1,650,000 which was transferred to 11 MPs constituency accounts for the vaguely defined purpose of ‘assisting victims in those affected areas in their constituencies’ (OAG, 2008, p.6). The second instance regarded a lack of
accountability for SBD$15,000,000 paid to MPs of 11 constituencies for the implementation of ‘Phase Two’, a ‘shelter and housing programme’. In this case, MPs were ‘not required to report…any details of the use of the allocation of SBD$15,000,000’ (OAG, 2008, p.14).

The audit report also determined that the establishment of a ‘Disaster Relief Special Fund’ by Cabinet, which was held outside of the control of the National Disaster Council was ultra vires, and a breach of the National Disaster Council (NDC) Act 1989. It reasoned that it ‘overrides the statutory role of the NDC in relation to the administration of funds’ and that ‘the mandated role to manage and coordinate Natural Disasters is with NDC’ (p.34). On this matter, the report concluded that the ‘only reason for the establishment of the 2007 Special Fund was maybe for other reasons that may be political or fraudulent’ (p.35).

There is a historical precedent for the lack of accountability and transparency of public funds by MPs, as suggested by the OAG. Specifically in this regard, without acquitted funds, it is impossible to determine the extent of funds misappropriation which may have taken place in the 2014 flash flooding disaster. It is plausible that MPs have used funds available for their discretionary use to support foremost constituents with whom they have kinship ties (to wantoks), and those who support them politically. Recommendations from the audit report have largely not been implemented, and the level of accountability over funds that are channelled through MPs has not materially increased since. It is likely that, as interviewee F2 suggested, “…the same mistakes have been made since”.

Concerns over the misuse of discretionary funds by MPs led to a Constituency Development Funds (CDF) audit being undertaken in relation to 2012 CDF funds by the OAG. This report was referred to by a number of participants as an example of how politicised MPs discretionary funds are. The report is yet to be released, despite its completion in 2013. A number of reasons have been cited for the delay; specifically, the retirement of the Auditor General, and refusal by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) to furnish the Ombudsman with information (Transparency Solomon Islands, 2015; IMF, 2015). Several interviewees speculated that the nature of the report’s findings was such that they would implicate sitting MPs; who have pulled out all the stops the delay the report’s release.

8.4.2 Undermining the National Disaster Council

The provision of funds to MPs to directly respond to their constituencies in the aftermath of the flash flooding appears to breach the provisions of Section 5 of the National Disaster Council Act (1989). Specifically, where the functions of the NDC are:
5(b) to approve and coordinate all activities necessary in regard to preparedness, response, and recovery;

5(c) to assume full and complete control in operations connected with disaster.

Bypassing of the NDC was evident in the granting of SBD$300,000 in CDF funds to each of the 50 MPs (a total of SBD$15,000,000). Prime Minister Lilo reasoned that the release was to “enable Members to meet the needs of their people who are faced with the situation here in town” because “…the NDMO is a very bureaucratic institution and always does things not quite to the satisfaction of the people” (Kabutaulaka, 2014, 8 April). Concerns were raised by Kabutaulaka (2014, 8 April) that the release could politicise the disaster response at a time when people are vulnerable and ‘politicians could use it primarily to entice support for the upcoming elections’. He questioned whether MPs would have responded better than the NDMO, arguing that the decision is a problematic but familiar one, with a series of disastrous precedents.

Little over a year after the flash flooding at the centre of this study, Tropical Cyclone Raquel hit Solomon Islands and was followed by another release of funds to MPs for response in their constituencies. As this event occurred during field research, the decision was alluded to by a number of participants. However, in an unusual departure from past disasters, Cabinet rejected the NDMOs request for a contingency warrant for SBD$3,000,000; instead opting to channel resources through MPs. Each of the 33 MPs whose constituencies were impacted by the cyclone were paid SBD$100,000 to distribute to those affected in their constituency. In the decision, there appears to be no consideration for the varied population size in each constituency, nor the varied impact. Not all 33 constituencies were impacted equally, yet funds were distributed by the same measure to each. Former MP and Speaker of Parliament, Sir Paul Tovua8 pointed out as Kabutaulaka (2014, 8 April) did a year earlier, that ‘NDMO is the legitimate body established by an Act of Parliament to manage and administer disaster relief funds, not MPs’ (Piriingi, 2015, 23 August). Sir Paul continued ‘All disaster relief funds must be channelled through that body. That’s what the Act says…So for Cabinet to take disaster funds away and channel them through MPs is not only wrong, but illegal’.

8.4.3 Members of Parliament as legislators and project implementers

The ongoing, and ostensibly increasing entrenchment of MPs as vehicles for direct disaster response is problematic in that it undermines existing state institutions and blurs the line between

8 Sir Paul Tovua was a founding Member of Parliament following Solomon Islands’ independence in 1978. He has been Speaker of National Parliament, and co-chaired (alongside Sir Peter Kenilorea) peace talks between Isatabu Freedom Movement and Malaita Eagle Force.
MPs as legislators and executors. Kabutaulaka (2014, 8 April) suggested that ‘by taking away trust and resources and allocating them to politicians…successive Solomon Islands governments [have] progressively weakened state institutions legally mandated to administer state affairs’. This concern was apparent in submissions made on the Constituency Development Funds Bill 2013, which was later passed into law. In a submission to the Bills and Legislation Committee, Andrew Radcliffe stated:

‘An MP’s primary function is to be a legislator and represent his or her constituency in the National Parliament. Since the introduction of RCDF (Rural Constituency Development Fund), the MPs role has been devalued and undermined so that voters now looked on their MP as little more than an ATM (Automatic Teller Machine). He is someone to go to when the voter needs money for school fees, funeral expenses and so on. This can make the life of an MP and his family impossible as he has to deal with endless demands for money from his constituents when he should be concentrating on his job as a legislator’ (National Parliament, 2013, p.8).

Radcliffe’s statement strikingly resembles the remarks made by a member of a civil society organisation (Interview F2); noting that MPs are fielding requests from constituents, rather than demands being made to relevant line ministries. Sir Paul Tovua has also reflected similar sentiments, suggesting that the channelling of public funds through MPs reinforces the notion that MPs ‘are more like ATM machines since they handle a large amount of public funds’ (Piringi, 2015, 23 August).

The ‘Report on the Constituency Development Funds Bill 2013’ argued that MPs involvement in direct delivery within their constituencies compels them to jeopardise their role as legislators by taking up an executive role. In the Westminster state system, which Solomon Islands Government is modelled on, this concerns the tenet of ‘Separation of Powers’, as the report discussed:

‘The constitutional role of MPs is not to manage projects, but to act as representatives of the people so as to hold the government accountable in delivering quality services through different means’ (National Parliament, 2013, p.8).

This has been seen throughout recent cases of disaster response, whereby the Solomon Islands Government has acted as legislator and executor, with powers to approve or refuse contingency warrants for disaster response, and decide the funds they (MPs) will personally be given to respond to disasters. In an article aptly titled ‘MPs are legislators, not disaster management experts’, Transparency Solomon Islands posed the question ‘Do MPs have the structure or model in place to distribute these funds effectively and fairly?’ (Transparency Solomon Islands, 2015, July 24). There is a legal issue of clearly delineating legislative and executive powers.
There is also a practical issue of proving MPs capacity to deliver, over and above the government institution mandated, trained and equipped to respond to disaster.

8.5. Political patronage: fostering dependence and undermining resilience

Interview participants from a wide range of backgrounds reflected concerns that material assistance provided to people following the floods has fostered a dependency mentality and served to undermine resilience. Sir Paul Tovua has suggested that a dependency mindset has roots in the way that MPs distribute resources in their constituencies - that when people need money, they go directly to the MP and thus become dependent on the MP for almost everything (Piringi, 2015, 23 August). Solomon Islands academic, Frederick Rohorua (2007) has suggested that funds which are channelled through MPs are used as ‘slush fund for anything and everything’, including school fees, medical prescriptions, boat fares and traditional feasts; which are charity or welfare, rather than development work (p.184). An interviewee from a civil society organisation described MPs direct assistance as “having a negative effect on democracy and reinforcing a patronage model, rather than shifting to a representative democracy model…” (Interview F2). Increasing dependency and undermining resilience can be attributed in part to the role that MPs have played in bigman-style patronage politics.

Material assistance following a disaster was considered to be a key factor that undermines resilience and, in turn, creates dependency. Distributions by MPs both during and outside of disaster times are characterised by the provision of discrete material assistance which is disposed to reinforcing a dependency on charity. However, the notion that people should be resilient came through strongly in interviews with stakeholders from Government Ministries, multilateral agencies and NGOs. A manager from a Government Ministry which responded to the flash floods described an increasing dependence, when compared to the past:

“They should stand on their own two feet, not rely on the government to provide. Assistance given should complement what they have for themselves. If there are too many hand-outs then people become dependent. For example, in Lunga area, when there is a small flood, then people say ‘Oh, flooding happened - you have to give us rice...we have been affected, we are traumatised’. How are you traumatised? The bloody flood didn't happen that side, it happened this side! In the past, people didn't wait, they were proactive and would fix things. Disasters have made us dependent, lazy people, not hardworking Solomon Islanders” (Interview B5).
NDMO Director Loti Yates shared similar thoughts but paralleled the notion of dependence with opportunism. Opportunism implies a certain degree of enterprise and initiative, albeit imbued with negative connotations:

“People are waiting for hand-outs rather than standing on their own two feet...Because of the material assistance given in the response, it’s a real challenge in the recovery to involve people as active participants – so many people play the victim card. There were people who are opportunistic – there were thousands who were in evacuation centres; but there were not thousands who have lost their homes, the number was much smaller” (Loti Yates, NDMO).

A member of the Recovery Coordination Committee also highlighted opportunism, which was widely held to be commonplace at the evacuation centres:

“Honesty at the evacuation centres, with so many different groups visiting - No. They know that to represent an improved situation doesn’t help” (Recovery Coordination Committee Member).

Two NGO interviewees shared this view, suggesting that a shift is happening where people now wait for assistance rather than working to help their community recover. They noted that the additional assistance given in evacuation centres made it difficult to get people to leave (Interviews D2 and D7).

Efforts in building resilience are counteracted when communities receive food distributions, argued an interviewee from a multilateral agency. Many of the affected communities experience frequent disasters, where historically they have recovered without outside assistance:

“Now, when a disaster happens communities come out to the media and say ‘we don’t have any food, we are hungry’. But if you look 10 to 15 years ago when the government didn’t give out food, nobody complains, nobody says shit. My feeling now is that communities are looking at disasters as a way of getting free hand-outs – it creates a lot of dependency on the government, and on us” (Interviewee C2).

Participants in this study, academics, government reports, and politicians have acknowledged fundamental issues concerning MPs directly delivering a number of the Solomon Islands Governments’ core functions. Limited state presence and lack of service delivery are two obvious issues which will be difficult but necessary to address. MPs have stepped into a void of service delivery and this has reinforced constituents’ expectations that MPs act as neo-bigmen (and almost exclusively men - only three women have ever been elected MPs) and distribute state resources to their supporters. There appears to be a lack of coherence and consistency in the way MPs dispense discretionary funds with variations by constituency, affiliations, time, and context. Material assistance was considered by interviewees to be a factor that has undermined resilience in disasters. As the notion of resilience is a highly contested in
development literature, it is noteworthy that interviewees situated resilience in opposition to dependency. In many cases, interviewees interpreted resilience narrowly, associating it with community proactivity in disaster response. It is important to also acknowledge that while MPs are prominent distributors of assistance during peace-time; following disaster they are but one group among many distributing assistance. Churches, wantok networks, NGOs, NDMO, civil society and Red Cross all are involved in supplies and play a role in abetting resilience, or diminishing it.
Part III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 9. Discussion

This chapter further explains findings from the study and discusses their implications and applications. It makes two concluding arguments. Firstly, the need to improve consideration and inclusion of marginalised groups in NGO responses to disaster to avoid secondary disaster. Secondly, that national disaster response institutions are being undermined to a significant extent by the involvement of the Executive branch of Government in disaster response, which has significant implications for affected communities.

9.1. The significance of inclusion in disaster response

Disaster response specialists and academics alike have recognised the importance of ensuring that marginalised sectors of society are included and not exposed to further risk. Enarson and Marrow (2003) have placed importance on discerning ‘who is the ‘we’ in disaster practice’ (p.13). Who are disaster responders, and who are those being assisted? Literature has widely discussed the under-representation of women in positions of influence and decision making, which is affirmed in the findings of this research (Pirotte et al. 1999; Ariyabandu 2005; Enarson and Marrow 2005). However, there is much less literature on the position of other sectors of society, which the findings of this study indicated were often excluded from consultation and implementation, and their voices marginalised.

9.1.1 The multidimensionality of exclusion: avoiding secondary disaster

NGO responses to disaster often neglect the particular needs of marginalised groups, at a time when these groups face increased exposure to risks resulting from disaster (Pirotte et al. 1999). Focus group findings in this study indicated that women, young people, and people with disabilities were not consulted by responding stakeholders following the disaster. Findings suggest that NGO responses did not specifically cater to the differentiated needs of community members.

Much of the literature that elaborates on women’s exclusion in disaster response has broader applicability to other groups which are excluded – people with disabilities and young people,
for example. Men can also be excluded from disaster responses on the basis of social factors. Mohanty (1988) was highly critical of homogenising of women into singular pre-constituted groups, as it conceals the complex interplay of factors that influence lived experiences. Similarly, the conflating of ‘young people’, ‘people with disabilities’, or ‘men’ as singular identities overlooks the high degree of heterogeneity within each. This was abetted in this study by the use of focus group discussions to generate community-level data.

In categorising focus groups by gender and age, there was a risk that a homogenous master-narrative would be created out of the heterogeneous lived experiences of participants. Chapter four identified this as a weakness in the methodology, but on balance considered it to be an appropriate method for the research. It is noteworthy that all research participants utilised social groupings to identify and explain experiences and attributes that were widespread amongst each group. This study employs groupings, such as ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘young people’ and ‘people with disabilities’ for the purpose of discussing trends. However, in doing so, it moves beyond commonplace representations in literature and practice that situate ‘affected communities’ as undifferentiated in their needs and capacities, united in their having been affected by disaster (Krause, 2014).

Focus group discussions in the three case study communities found that no women, youth, or people with disabilities were consulted or represented in decision-making processes. At the stakeholder agency level, of a total 23 people interviewed from management levels within their respective organisations, only four were women. Acknowledging that interviewees represented the decision-making level in disaster response, women were significantly underrepresented. If national and expatriate staff were distinguished, the disparity is even starker, with only two female national staff. It may be the case that women were more highly represented at the operational and field level (the findings do not detail this). Yet it is important to note that most decisions are made at the managerial level of organisations, the level dominated by men.

Marginalised sectors of society frequently encounter increased exposure to risks following disaster (Enarson and Marrow, 2000; Pirotte et al, 1999). Following the April 2014 floods, there were reported increases in physical and sexual abuse against women, children and people with disabilities (ibid). Moreover, it was individuals from these groups who faced the negative implications of responses to the disaster that did not tailor to their differentiated needs. The challenges to this are systemic – if these groups were not well-integrated into dominant discourses in non-emergency times, they are unlikely to be integrated in a high-pressure period following a disaster.
Improving male managers’ understandings of the needs, capabilities and priorities of non-dominant groups may contribute to improved decision making and leadership in these areas. However, it remains an insufficient substitute for increased representation of marginalised groups at decision-making levels within organisations who can more accurately and comprehensively represent the nuances of the groups they identify with. Improved representation of non-dominant groups at levels of influence and decision making would help ensure disaster responses are congruous to the differentiated needs of those affected, as opposed to standardised to the needs of dominant groups (Pirotte, 1999; Masaki, 2007).

Needs which are not addressed in responses to disaster may expose at-risk groups to secondary disaster. Pirotte et al. (1999) discussed how established identities may be perceived to be threatened or in flux following a disaster, which may compound the already high levels of stress and anxiety experienced and manifest in outbursts of violence. Stakeholders interviewed in this study reflected that the design of responses, particularly evacuation centres, did not manage or mitigate these risks well. Women and children were exposed to avoidable risks in evacuation centres and gender-segregated toilets, private bathing areas, sufficient lighting and security would have significantly reduced the incidence of physical and sexual violence. The majority of evacuation centres were established in schools, and all were ad hoc facilities not designed or suitable for housing evacuees.

Chapter seven details the bypassing of widows, single mothers and people with disabilities during distributions - community members who are already at-risk due to their lower social position within their communities. Furthermore, the failure to count babies, elderly people, or accurately assess household size in needs assessments inevitably had negative implications. People with disabilities, elderly, pregnant mothers, and babies often have heightened health risks and diminished capacity to subsist and recover without assistance. Similarly, poorer households were disproportionately comprised of more families living under the same roof, and were counted as a single household and distributed a single allocation of relief supplies. Some items in NFI kits, such as sanitary pads, were already scarce based on assumptions of average household size, and for larger households, scarcity of these items would be even more pronounced.

As a reflexive critique of mainstream development theory and practice, the challenge confronting post-development is in proposing realistic and practical alternatives – essentially ‘to imagine and practice development differently’ (Sidaway, 2007; Rapley, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2005, p.6). Post-development’s roots in post-structural and post-feminist schools of thought are apparent in the critique of unequal power relationships within development. Masaki
(2007) advised that opportunities exist to reinforce, renegotiate and challenge unequal power relationships. Ostensibly, the upheaval following a disaster presents this opportunity, for better or worse. In disaster response, power analyses can prove useful in understanding who is included and excluded in disaster responses and explore ways that humanitarian practice can be more inclusive and avoid perpetuating vulnerabilities.

9.1.2 (In)visible agents: communities in disaster response

This study has sought to present the active and diverse ways in which people affected by disaster reacted and responded to their situation. The findings in chapter five detail the limited involvement of case study communities in NGO responses to the disaster. The participation of communities in NGO responses largely mirrored what Masaki (2014) considered were ‘users and choosers’ of externally devised interventions (p.125). The chapter then proceeded to discuss the diverse and differentiated ways which focus groups participants experienced and responded to the disaster. The research findings indicated that all sectors of the community were actively engaged in responding to the disaster and recovering their communities. However, it was clear that formal inclusion and consultation in NGO responses to the disaster were limited to community leaders – elders, religious leaders or bigmen.

Published literature and findings from stakeholder agency interviews have widely reflected on the exclusion of communities or groups within communities from consultation and participation in formal responses to disaster. The ways in which community members respond to disaster themselves were seldom discussed, underscoring the view that their agency is frequently unrecognised or under-recognised. Ariyabandu (2005) has argued that women are active ‘in mitigation, prevention, preparedness, emergency response and recovery’ (p.11). The findings in chapter five show that young people are also actively involved in disaster response – from assisting in evacuating their communities and attempting rescues from the floodwaters to recovery and rebuilding after the floodwaters receded. Yila et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of social capital and networks in disaster response, describing them as ‘social insurance’ that mobilises response and recovery (p.82). Of the networks and relationships depicted in Figure 2, half are relational and based on social capital. These comprise significant yet under analysed contributions to response and recovery.

Beristain (2006) argued that NGOs need to adopt models of understanding that are more complete. He described how NGOs often idealise affected communities, emphasise their needs, and (perhaps inadvertently) foster patronising and disparaging representations of their agency.
NGOs frequently adopt a deficiency view of disaster-impacted communities, identifying what they lack in order to validate their responses (Krause, 2014; Beristain, 2006). In the disaster studied, this was manifested in flag-raising detailed in chapter six, and also in focus groups in all three case study communities, where participants discussed not being consulted, and their ideas, knowledge and capabilities overlooked. Ultimately, it is responding agencies which determine how resources are distributed. Time constraints restricted thorough consultation and co-design of interventions; and in many cases, community members were limited to providing programmatic recommendations through household assessments.

Amongst NGO staff, it is perhaps field officers who are the most attuned and sensitive to the needs and priorities of affected communities. Beristain (2006) described a disjuncture between NGO management and field staff, the former with decision-making power, and the latter having greater interaction with and understanding of affected communities. The process of communicating the realities on the ground through needs assessments, the data of which is then reviewed by managers and programme decisions decided has the potential to impose inappropriate disaster responses. Equally, the use of meta-data to devise programmatic responses can risk overlooking power dynamics within communities and between communities which may influence distribution – who benefits or is excluded from a response. It also fails to account for kin networks or existing resources which may (or may not) provide economic and social support in the wake of disaster, resulting in varying levels of advantage and disadvantage.

9.2. MPs as patrons of disaster

This section highlights the central role of political actions and processes in undermining community resilience and corroding the capacity of the NDMO to respond to disaster. It relates the experiences of research participants to the published literature and reflects on strengths and weaknesses of existing structures, as identified by research participants.

9.2.1 Overt clientelism

Notions of reciprocity and obligation associated with the wantok system are strong in Solomon Islands, providing an important social ‘glue’ and safety net that supports family, community, clan or kin members (Brigg, 2009). The institutional design of the state bears little resemblance to politics as actually practiced, and the SIG remains but one among many competing authorities in the lives of Solomon Islanders (Fraenkel, 2004; Turnbull, 2002; Hegarty et al., 2004). For many, kastom and the Church play greater roles in local-level governance than do the formal
institutions of State. Kabutaulaka (1998) and Moore (2004) have written extensively on the client/patron relationships that exist within the civil society, extending from elected representatives to the public service. Similarly, Cox (2009) indicated that patronage is the *modus operandi* of governance in Solomon Islands. This section reflects on the prevalence of political patronage networks in disaster response, and explores the ways in which they relate to dependency and opportunism.

CDF and the relief funds channelled through MPs have been funded in significant part by Taiwanese bilateral aid. Solomon Islands is one of the few countries which recognises Taiwan’s statehood, which precipitates a strong bilateral relationship. Whilst Taiwan correctly states that its conditional funding comprises only one-seventh of total CDF funds, much of the remainder is funded through Taiwan’s un-tagged funding (Yu, 2014, 1 December). Through funding CDF, Taiwan is able to maintain a presence throughout Solomon Islands and be associated with an integral part of government service delivery in rural areas. In September 2015, it was revealed that the country’s 50 MPs took charge of nearly SBD$334 million in CDF funds annually (Newter, 2015, 2 September). In section 8.3.3, an interviewee cited SIG’s failure to send an acquittal of CDF to Taiwan by March 2014 as the reason that the next portion of CDF funds was withheld. The interviewee explained that these funds were released in the absence of the acquittal report following the disaster. Taiwan was the only foreign government to expressly contribute funds with the understanding that these would be channelled through MPs. This is shown in Figure 1 as indirect funding flows, as they are allocated to constituency accounts by the Ministry of Rural Development, not directly by Taiwan. Sensitive to criticism, this may have been a contributing factor to Taiwan embassy’s decline of a request to interview as part of this study – the only foreign government (and only stakeholder) to decline an interview request.

Whilst the literature discusses the prominence of client/patron relationships in the context of Solomon Islands governance, the impacts of these have not been addressed in relation to disaster response. There are synergies between the research findings and literature in recognising that state institutions are personalised and frequently partial, and also, that MPs are elected on the basis of the material returns they can provide to their respective supporter-bases. Section 8.4.3 describes MPs as both legislators and project implementers and indicates that when State resources are channelled through MPs to assist their constituencies, their role as legislators is jeopardised, as they are in a position to pass legislation from which they may directly benefit (National Parliament, 2013).

Channelling funds for disaster response through elected representatives has become an apparent trend in Solomon Islands. The findings reference the 2008 Auditor General’s report into the
response to the 2007 earthquake and tsunami in Western Province and Choiseul, which indicates past misuse and lack of accountability of funds by MPs. The motivations of the recent refusal to furnish the Auditor General with information pertinent to the inquiry into 2012 CDF expenditure is indicative of a lack of transparency over public funds (TSI, 2015, 9 October). The findings in chapter eight discuss the provision of funds to MPs to respond to the 2014 flash floods and 2015 Tropical Cyclone Raquel – two further instances which lacked accountability. There is an established pattern of providing funds to MPs to respond to disasters in their constituencies.

This pattern led to the bypassing of the NDMO by Cabinet in response to Tropical Cyclone Raquel, whereby funds earmarked for relief supplies were channelled through MPs, and the NDMOs request for a contingency warrant to respond to the disaster was rejected (Piringi, 2015, 23 August; TSI, 2015, 9 October). However, this study has been unable to establish any formal process of needs assessment, appropriateness of relief supplies, project design, beneficiary selection, management and acquittal by MPs within their constituency; much less, consistency among constituencies. Furthermore, findings revealed that Cabinet decisions to provide funds to MPs for disaster response purposes are in violation of the NDC Act 1989. The circumventing of the National Disaster Council as carried out by Cabinet was violating the provisions of the Act through bypassing the National Disaster Council (OAG, 2008).

The research findings identified the politicisation of disaster relief distributions as a key issue in the response. Case study communities highlighted that they did not receive their share of assistance distributed by constituency members, as supplies were given to supporters and wantoks only. They also raised concerns with payment being requested in return for relief supplies, and that community members were not consulted on their needs and assisted accordingly. Agency stakeholders also raised a number of concerns - namely, that MPs distributed without conducting needs assessments, were outside of formal coordination networks, had little or no accountability, and that distributions were used to advance political objectives. Perhaps the greatest concern that was raised was that there is no evidence to indicate that assistance was targeted towards those with the greatest needs. This indicates the possibility that assistance may perpetuate existing material and power inequalities, and expose marginalised groups to greater vulnerability, also discussed in section 9.1.

Then-Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo explained at the time of the floods that funds were channelled through MPs as the national body for disaster response, the NDMO, did not always meet public expectations (Kabutaulaka, 2014, 8 April). Kabutaulaka (2014, 8 April) raised concerns that MPs would use the release to further political objectives and shore up support for
the looming national election (held in November 2014). He also questioned whether MPs could respond better than the NDMO, which is legislatively mandated and trained to respond to disasters.

Stakeholder interviews and document analysis support conclusions made by Kabutaulaka and Sir Paul Tovua that through allocating State funds to MPs, successive governments have weakened and corroded the capacity of Government Ministries (Kabutaulaka, 2014, 8 April; Piringi, 2015, 23 August). Both have noted that it is the responsibility of respective Ministries to administer State resources, not MPs. It is particularly concerning where the NDMO is unable to fulfil its core functions as its resourcing is diverted toward MPs. The continuation or perpetuation of this trend is particularly problematic for the NDMOs ability to prepare, mitigate and respond to future disasters. It also impacts on other key Ministries, such as the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, the Ministry tasked with leading the disaster recovery. Kapucu and Ozerdem (2013) observed that disasters are political events, which have significant practical and policy implications. They suggested that disasters are a window of opportunity during which Cabinet can act quickly and implement policies which may not be well-considered. Thus, it is important that civil society remains aware and responsive to the political situation following disaster, holding Government accountable for its decisions.

9.2.2 Power to decide

Post-development theory has been highly critical of the unequal power relationships that exist within development and has emphasised the need to deconstruct and interrogate the assumptions underpinning development discourses and practices (Litonjua, 2012; Sidaway, 2007). This section argues that politicised disaster response inevitably contends with questions of power. In instances where funds are channelled through MPs with few apparent rules and regulations, the power to decide who receives relief supplies, what and how much they receive is largely at the discretion of MPs. Given that MPs are elected representatives who responded to disaster during an election year, questioning the extent to which relief supply distribution was used as a tool to garner political support is also pertinent.

Understanding the needs of affected populations and responding appropriately is important to ensure the effectiveness of disaster response. Sectors of society which are underrepresented in dominant discourses (discussed in section 9.1.1) are frequently confronted with the greatest risks and vulnerabilities following disaster and are at a disadvantage when decisions about the nature and distribution of aid are made (Pirotte, 1999). Chapter seven presented findings detailing the
ways in which women, youth, and people with disabilities were excluded from decision making and their needs were insufficiently addressed, placing them at increased risk. There is no formal evidence in this study that MPs conducted assessments of needs or tailored their responses to the specific and differentiated needs of different sectors of their constituencies.

To some extent, the MP for Renbel Province prioritised the needs of women, children and elderly residents from Lord Howe settlement by providing safe and comfortable accommodation from the flood waters impacting their community. However, even in that instance, settlement residents from Renbel were assisted with accommodation, whereas their Malaitan neighbours were not. Therefore, the extent to which vulnerable groups were prioritised is questionable, as ethnic/provincial/constituency distinctions were made in determining the recipients of assistance. There is also no evidence that the nature of this assistance was standard practice by MPs, nor that assistance provided by other MPs was equally or more targeted to specific and differentiated needs.

The question of the appropriateness of assistance provided by MPs is linked to the question Kabutaulaka (2014, 8 April) raised: can MPs respond to disaster better than the NDMO? It is important to consider the capacity of MPs to deliver more effectively than agencies specifically trained and resourced to respond to disasters. There are no apparent standards upon which MPs assess needs in their constituencies, determine and distribute assistance. Further, in the case of the 2014 floods, they were not coordinated with responding stakeholders, through the NDMO and UNOCHA Cluster System (e.g. Interviews F1 and B3). Gegeo and Watson Gegeo (2002) have critiqued aid in Solomon Islands for its lack of coordination, highly centralised and top-down implementation; issues that were characteristic of MPs responses to disaster. Chapter eight locates the primary role of MPs as legislators, as opposed to project implementers, a role which they assumed through overseeing Constituency Development and disaster response funding.

Solomon Islands’ Parliament consists of 50 MPs, whom inevitably have a myriad of skills amongst their number, including greater or lesser levels of humanitarian knowledge and experience. However, generally, MPs are not trained and do not have the tools or capacity to ensure equitable relief assistance and distribution. It may be accurate to suggest that in some instances MPs have a greater depth of contextual knowledge and relationships with their constituencies than outsiders, including responding NGOs and the NDMO. This could be a valuable resource for ensuring that external assistance is appropriate to the kastom, indigenous knowledge and existing human, natural and material resources of the constituency – an aspect of MP-constituency relations explored in the following section 9.2.3.
Research participants from all stakeholder categories observed that the channelling of funds through MPs for disaster response resulted in politically-motivated distributions; an issue that is reflected in the literature on Solomon Islands politics during non-emergency periods (e.g. Cox, 2009; Kabutaulaka, 2008; Moore, 2004; Fraenkel, 2008). It is unsurprising that MPs may have used distributions of relief supplies to augment their respective supporter bases and advance political objectives, in light of their political tenure in office and the impending November 2014 elections. Stokes et al. (2013) indicated that equity in distribution cannot be ensured when rules are hidden or inconsequential and protected from public reason. Accountability and reporting on Constituency Development Funds is required under the CDF Act (2013), significant gaps between policy and implementation are apparent. In times of disaster, even fewer rules govern the use of funds by MPs, and it is unlikely that accountability would improve in a disaster context.

In Lord Howe and Lunga settlements, focus group participants cited that MPs distributed relief supplies to wantoks and supporters, rather than those who were most vulnerable or had the greatest need. This was widely reflected in stakeholder interviews, where interviewees cited inequitable distributions as a source of conflict. Politicians frequently use their discretionary funds to provide benefits to their supporter base, and election campaigning revolves around candidates’ ability to distribute resources to supporters (Cox, 2009; Moore, 2004). The price of not voting for the successful candidate can be heavy – supporters of candidates who lost the election can expect nothing from the MP during their tenure (Piringi, 2015, 23 August). Constituents who did not support the sitting MP, and were unlikely to in future may be denied relief distributions, which practically speaking were discretionary.

9.2.3 Patronage versus policy: fostering a patchwork of dependency and opportunism

Networks of patronage are ostensibly more influential than policy in governing contemporary Solomon Islands. The limited reach and weak state institutions have given rise to a clientelist state, in which government services are delivered to a significant extent directly by Members of Parliament, through Constituency Development Funds. Hegarty et al. (2004) have acknowledged these as significant factors contributing to the weak social contract that exists between the Government and its citizens. Relationships between communities and SIG are heavily influenced by kastom norms of bigman reciprocity and social obligation (Fraenkel, 2004). Therefore, it is important to deconstruct and interrogate development assumptions in
order to better understand how patronage networks inform community expectations of responding agencies and MPs in disaster response (Gibson-Graham, 2005; Sidaway, 2007). The state is often considered to be like a distant bigman, who is one of the most bankable avenues for the provision of services and resources (Morgan, 2005). Kabutaulaka (1998), Cox (2009), Hegarty et al. (2004) and Morgan (2005) have all suggested that the reciprocal client/patron relationship between MPs and constituents is one of the most effective methods of MPs garnering political support. Equally, the previous section examines the implications of the link between political imperatives and disaster response on distributions of relief supplies to affected communities.

Rohorua (2007) provided a compelling assessment of the ways in which constituents expect MPs to act; describing that within their constituencies, MPs are considered to be locals, and were elected based on their credentials as locals. Personality is considered more important than qualifications or work experience in being elected, and the national Government remains influential in remote communities through MPs distributions under CDF. Thus, the relationship between MPs and their constituencies remains highly influenced by kastom.

Far from being exogenous forces, disasters and society are integrally linked, argued Kelman et al. (2011). History, relationships, culture and resources all inform how people respond to and recover from disasters. Government service delivery in many (especially rural areas), has taken the form of material assistance channelled through MPs, which Rohorua (2007) labelled a ‘slush fund for anything and everything’ (p.184). The pre-eminence of material assistance has become normalised and informed constituents’ expectations and demands of the Government. Interview participants widely shared the view that this model of ‘government by hand-out’ had negative implications for disaster response, as it dis-incentivised resilience and proactivity. Many of those affected by the disaster recognised that to present an improved situation would not attract material assistance and it was therefore in their interest to sit and wait for MPs or responding agencies to assist. Interviewees considered this to be indicative of both dependency and opportunism – some people genuinely required emergency assistance, whilst others embraced the opportunity to enhance their material situation.

Distributing material assistance to constituents through MPs has been discussed by Stokes et al. (2013) who indicate that the poor often weigh material considerations more highly in their voting decisions than supporting a candidate on other grounds. They argue that poor constituents are acutely sensitive to risk, and will tend to prioritise a small benefit over uncertain programme and policy promises. This produces an interesting paradox, where candidates may support a
candidate who provides assistance with school fees (an assured benefit), rather than a candidate who campaigns for universal free education (an uncertain policy promise). Stokes et al. (2013) suggest that this has the negative implication for the poor as it inclines them less to communicate their policy preferences or demand accountability of their MPs. Even if they prefer the policies of another candidate, they may vote against them if they prioritise their immediate material wellbeing.

Patronage and clientelism are frequently resorted to when policy promises lack credibility. Stokes et al. (2013) argued that weak government institutions can undermine the predictability and credibility of campaign statements. On the other hand, MPs can build credibility through demonstrating a track record of materially assisting their constituency (or at least, their supporter-base therein). The entrenchment of government through material distribution is evident in the centrality of CDF, particularly in rural areas where the presence of state institutions is minimal. Rohorua (2007) indicated that CDF does not advance constituency development objectives and is scantily more than material hand-outs which constituents have become accustomed to expect. Sir Paul Tovua agreed, noting that little or no development is apparent, in spite of MPs controlling millions of dollars in discretionary funds during their tenure (Piringi, 2015, 23 August). Both Sir Paul, and Andrew Radcliffe have compared the role of MPs to the function of ATMs based on the discretionary funds they have access to, and the nature of demands made by their constituents who are dependent on them (ibid; National Parliament, 2013).

A concern expressed particularly strongly by interview participants was that material distributions fostered dependency and opened avenues for opportunism among constituents. The expectation for material assistance was a difficult precedent to break, and opportunism perhaps signifies a lack of trust that people will get their fair share and experiences of past shortcomings in disaster response. Far from being binary opposites, many interviewees considered dependency and opportunism closely related and in many cases, indistinguishable.

Krause (2014) suggested that analyses of agency frequently focus on a binary, rather than a spectrum of experiences. It is difficult (if not impossible) to assess the varied capacities, resources and agency of everyone affected by disaster as the basis for deciding assistance. Some interviewees reflected that inevitably people may disguise or manipulate their true situation in order to advance their self-interest. In a similar vein to Krause (2014), Giddens (1984) described structure and agency to be inseparable. In this case structure and agency may appear as; the disaster and the ways which people respond; or the need for external assistance and deliberate attempts to improve one’s share. Therefore, past experience and expectations of material
assistance from MPs may have led to increased dependency and opportunism. However, correlation may not necessarily, or entirely, imply causation, and there is no fair comparison to assess difference under alternative governance conditions in the same context.
Chapter 10. Conclusions

This thesis represents an attempt to investigate the April 2014 flash floods in Solomon Islands by drawing on the experiences, roles, perspectives and challenges of affected communities and staff of stakeholder agencies. In concluding the study, this chapter summarises the research findings in relation to the questions which formed the basis for this study. It also outlines limitations and presents opportunities for further research.

The hopeful post-development theoretical lens which underpins this research places high importance on reflexivity and giving credit to the heterogeneity of lived experiences. Accordingly, this study sought to interrogate and deconstruct dominant discourses in order to expose subaltern or marginalised knowledges, perspectives and experiences. By interrogating and then elaborating on these discourses, it is hoped that this research may begin conversations which can both critically and constructively (re)shape theory and practice in ways which are pragmatic and hopeful. As a critical and deconstructive theory of development, hopeful post-development avoids imposing meta-narratives of change; and instead questions who is telling the story, and why they are telling it that way. To this end, the narrative inquiry methodological framework used in this study prioritised the voices of participants. They interpreted and represented their knowledge and experiences in their own voices and through the lens of their own subjectivities, with minimal influence or interference by the researcher.

Just as lived experiences are heterogeneous, so too are responses to disaster. Being both contextual and dynamic, disaster response cannot be understood as a singular or universal process. Responses that may work in one context and point in time, may not be appropriate in a different time or context. Whilst context critically informs disaster impacts and how those impacts are experienced, international discourses also play a key role in informing and shaping disaster response in this globally-connected world. Thus, this study has attempted to ground international theory in Solomon Islands contextual realities and practical applications.

Locating the varied discourses of stakeholders was a key theme throughout this study, through which patterns of inclusion and exclusion in disaster response became evident. In highlighting the voices of participants, the aim was to better understand the perspectives, motivations and subjectivities present in disaster response as the first step toward bridging gaps between stakeholders, and between international theory and practice. This thesis argues for the greater inclusion of those affected by disaster and a focus on progressive and incremental improvements to disaster planning, response and recovery based on reflexive practice.
The majority of the data for the study was derived from semi-structured interviews with 23 stakeholders from 17 responding agencies, along with gender and age disaggregated focus groups in three case study communities. Towards addressing the research aim, three key questions were pursued, which framed and guided the research, and are summarised as follows.

**Question one:** What do flood-impacted communities think of how NGOs responded to the April 2014 floods and to what extent were they consulted or participated in these responses? The findings from the three case study communities reveal mixed and often critical views of NGOs. Community members resented NGOs visiting but not assisting, or not assisting in ways and to extents which they would like. Participants almost unanimously considered themselves sidelined by the limited influence that they had in NGO decision making, they indicated want for more involvement through consultation and actively implementing the response. In most cases, community consultation was limited to household assessments and provision of labour. Beyond this, more in-depth consultation was restricted to the community leaders, where women and young people were not represented.

**Question two:** In what ways did affected communities respond to the disaster? All sectors of case study communities were active in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Communities represented the front lines in disaster response and were involved in rescue, evacuation, repair and rebuilding, recovering livelihoods, providing psychosocial support and preparing for future disasters. From the perspective of community members, NGOs represented but one actor among many with which communities had relationships with and provided assistance following the floods.

**Question three:** What factors enhanced or constrained organisations in their disaster responses, and why? Interview participants from stakeholder agencies observed a wide range of issues that made disaster response more challenging. Expatriate staff’s context inexperience and domination, the negative implications of NGO self-promotion, and weak and inadequate policy responses to the disaster were frequently cited issues that constrained responses. Increasing dependency and opportunism were a concern of the majority of agency stakeholders who considered that it undermined resilience. Government, and to some extent NGO approaches to development based on material distributions were cited as contributing factors which impeded the response as ever increasing numbers of people ostensibly required assistance. Material distributions through politicised channels, namely MPs, were viewed as sources of inequality, characterised by inclusion and exclusion, and regarded as potential sites of conflict.
10.1. Limitations

Several limitations should be kept in mind which may influence the conclusions of this study. Chapter four discussed the small number of communities participating in focus groups, and the impact this may have on the representational value of the findings, and the conclusions derived thereafter. The chapter also outlined that interview participants were managers within their respective organisations, which inevitably informs the data. Broadening the number of communities participating in focus groups, or the scope of stakeholder agencies interviewed would have provided more extensive and representative data to analyse, better validating the themes and conclusions that emerged. Provided a longer fieldwork period for the study, additional interviews with different levels of staff within organisations, and with a broader set of stakeholders would have been beneficial (e.g. government, churches, schools). The inclusion of additional case study communities may reveal new findings, validate existing findings, and affirm the applicability of conclusions for the response more broadly.

Given the diversity of Solomon Islands, vigilance is required in generalising the findings and conclusions of this study to other contexts within Solomon Islands or beyond where experiences could significantly differ. Disaster planning should be firmly rooted in local realities and context, rather than transposed or imposed from outside. Whilst accepting that there will never be a ‘perfect response’, realistic and pragmatic steps in planning and strategy offer avenues to more equitable and appropriate outcomes.

10.2. Further research

Following from this study, four areas for possible future research have been identified. Firstly, government in Solomon Islands is modelled on imported institutions which are limited in geographic reach, authority and service delivery, as discussed in chapters 2, 3, 8 and 9. Research which moves beyond the assumptions of current state design could lead to new ways of conceptualising governance and development. Secondly, investigating ways which stakeholders can improve disaster risk planning and mitigation would be beneficial in light of projected increases of disasters. Thirdly, building on section 5.4, research that explores the roles and impacts of social capital in disaster response and recovery. Research on Pacific Island disasters to date have largely focused on formal institutions, with little analysis of the influence of kinship networks and the church, for example, in disaster response and recovery. Lastly, research that
further examines the manifestations psychosocial trauma following disaster, investigating the ways in which it is conceptualised, managed and ameliorated.

10.3. Final reflections

In undertaking this study one year after the flash floods, the findings were inevitably influenced by the time between the disaster and the field research. During this time, national elections resulted in a change of government, and Tropical Cyclones Pam and Raquel impacted the country. For many still recovering from the floods, the disaster was not an event that occurred on 3 April 2014, but rather a process within which vulnerabilities had been created long before, and impacts persist long after the flood waters recede. Like those who still recall Cyclone Namu in 1986 in such vivid detail, memories of the April 2014 flash floods will remain amongst those impacted for years to come. The hope of this research is that it holds important issues in the spotlight to provoke discussion about policy and practice, towards reducing disaster risks and mitigating future disasters.

In the introduction chapter, it was asserted that the frequency of floods has been on an unprecedented upward trend which is forecasted to continue, with increasing severity (CRED, 2015). The impacts of these will disproportionately be carried by those most vulnerable and marginalised - people who have the least adaptive capacity. It is these people, this thesis argues, who need to be better represented at levels of influence and decision-making in order to advance effective, relevant and appropriate policy and practice. With the inauguration of the SDGs and Sendai Framework, the 2030 Development Agenda raises prospects for fundamentally addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability, disaster risk, and strengthening the institutional capacity to manage future disasters. Communities are, and always have been, at the forefront of responding to disasters and will play vital roles towards realising the 2030 Agenda’s aims of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable communities.
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Appendix 1: Maps of study area

Figure 3: Map of Guadalcanal showing case study communities

Source: Google Maps (2015)
Figure 4: Lord Howe Settlement

Figure 5: Lunga Settlement

Figure 6: Aruligo
Appendix 2: Interview and Focus Group Discussion coding key

Table 4: Interview key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Category</th>
<th>Interview Code</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Commissions</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Ministries</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateral Agencies</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Government Organisations</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Solomon Islands Research Permit

THE RESEARCH ACT 1982
(No. 9 of 1982)

RESEARCH PERMIT

Permission is hereby given to:

1. Name: Carl Adams
2. Country: New Zealand
3. Research subject areas: Investigate local views of the NGO's responses to the April 2014 floods in the Solomon Islands to establish the extent to which local communities had been consulted and participated in the responses.
4. Ward (s): Lord Howe, White River, and Analolo
5. Province: Honiara City and Guadalcanal Province
6. Conditions:
   a. To undertake research only in subject areas specified in 3 above.
   b. To undertake research only in the ward (s) and Province (s) specified in 4 and 5 above.
   c. To observe with respect at all times local customs and the way of life of people in the area in which the research is carried out.
   d. Not to take part at any time in any political or missionary activities or local disputes.
   e. To leave four (4) copies of your final research report in English with the Solomon Islands Government Ministry responsible for research at your own expense.
   f. A research fee of SBD500.00 and deposit sum of SBD200.00 must be paid in full or the Research Permit will be cancelled. (See sec. 3 subject 7 of the Research Act).
   g. This permit is valid until 4 October 2015 provided all conditions are adhered to.
   h. No live species of plants and animals to be taken out of the country without approval from relevant authorities.
   i. A failure to observe the above conditions will result in automatic cancellation of this permit and the forfeit of your deposit.

Signed:.........................................................  Date: 08/04/15
Minister of Education and Human Resources Development