PROTECTING PEOPLE IN LOCALLY LED DISASTER RESPONSE

MARCH 2019

the power of humanity

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS

HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP

HPG Humanitarian Policy Group

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About Humanitarian Advisory Group

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

About Australian Red Cross

Australian Red Cross is part of the world's largest humanitarian organisation – an inclusive, diverse and active movement built on voluntary service - which aims to save lives, build resilient communities and support people in disasters, as well as improve the wellbeing of those experiencing vulnerability both in Australia and internationally.

About Humanitarian Policy Group

Humanitarian Policy Group is one of the world's leading teams of independent researchers and information professionals working on humanitarian issues. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARC	Australian Red Cross
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Aid Office
FGDs	focus group discussions
G&P	Gender and protection
GBV	Gender-based violence
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning
MAFFF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Forests and Fisheries, Tonga
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MJSS	Ministry of Justice and Social Service, Vanuatu
MoFNP	Ministry of Finance & National Planning, Tonga
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
NATA	Naunau ‘o e ‘Alamaite Tonga Association, Tonga
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
SIRCS	Solomon Islands Red Cross Society
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TC	Tropical cyclone
TWB	Translators Without Borders
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WVI	World Vision International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The known

Implementing more locally led humanitarian action raises challenges and opportunities for protection. We know that within the international humanitarian system international actors still dominate protection discourse, implementation and funding. Yet, at the same time, the role of national and local actors in protecting communities before and after international actor presence is increasingly documented and supported. What we don't know is how the shift to increased national and local leadership in humanitarian response will influence protection outcomes for affected communities. Will it reinforce negative gender and cultural biases and leave marginalised groups without adequate protection? Or, will it strengthen protection outcomes as local, national and international actors better recognise and strengthen each other's complementary protection roles and responsibilities? Both negative and positive consequences have been outlined in previous research, including 'Going local', which identified the need to further understand the impact of locally led humanitarian action on gender equality, and the preceding paper in this series 'Protection in local response to disasters: challenges and insights from the Pacific Region'.

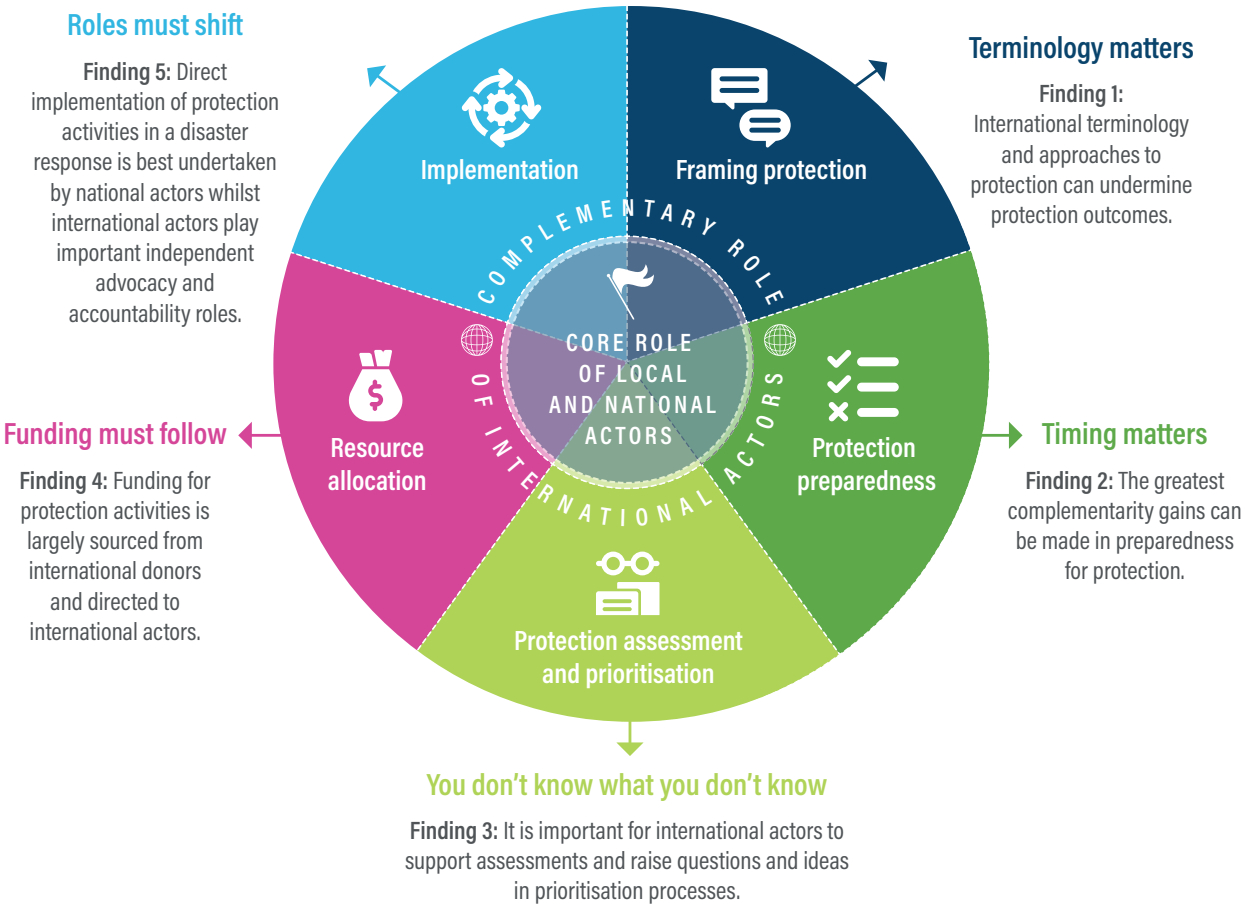
The new

This research affirms that there are distinct and important continued protection roles for national, local and international actors in the Pacific. National and local actor roles are identified in the research as "core", recognising their ongoing, mandated and indigenous engagement with protection issues in context. International roles are identified in the research as "complementary", recognising their potential to support on particular technical and capacity issues. However, this research finds that in current protection programming actors are not consistently recognising and respecting each other's roles, which is undermining complementarity and protection outcomes for communities. This paper unpacks this overarching finding into key thematic areas, as presented in Figure 1 below.

A note on methodology

Primary data collection was undertaken in three Pacific case study countries: Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga. National researchers led the research process and analysis of data. The research was qualitative; data was drawn from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a range of protection actors in country including national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, international NGOs, government actors and regional actors. The findings are based on the experience of protection programming to respond to recent emergencies in context: Cyclone Gita in Tonga; Cyclone Pam and the Ambae volcano in Vanuatu; and both the 2014 flooding in Solomon Islands and Category 1 out-of-season cyclone Liua in 2018. The findings may resonate with other Pacific stakeholders, but cannot be directly extrapolated or assumed to apply across all Pacific countries.

Figure 1: Overview of research findings



The implications

A sound understanding of the core national actor roles and the potential complementary international actor roles enables actors to support each other and protect affected communities more effectively. The research provides a guiding framework of core and complementary roles (see Table 1 below). The framework is not intended to be concrete but provides a basis for conversation and agreements about protection actor complementarity in the Pacific. The research also recognises that context, capability and capacity will determine who is best placed to take on core and complementary protection roles. There are times when a core protection role will require specific inputs and support from international actors. With this understanding, the final section of the paper asks the question 'when is it okay...?' This explores when it is okay for international actors to shift into core protection roles, and outlines some of the scenarios and guiding questions which should inform this decision.

Table 1: Guiding framework of core and complementary protection roles for disaster response in the Pacific

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
Framing protection	
▪ Develop terminology and concepts that are fit for purpose ▪ Be the primary interlocuter for protection conversations, especially with local civil society groups and communities ▪ Conduct protection coordination and planning meetings in local languages ▪ Translate local definitions and concepts of protection for international partners	▪ Share international protection concepts and ideas with national partners in clear, plain language with a focus on comprehension of outcomes rather than the precision of definitions ▪ Work with local actors to adapt definitions to context and find appropriate terms and examples in the national context ▪ Resource national organisations to develop localised protection tools and guidelines, including any translations
Protection preparedness	
▪ Identify gaps in knowledge and skills and reach out to potential partners to strengthen capacity ▪ Identify tools and approaches that will work in the country context and ensure that these are shared and socialised in advance of disaster response ▪ Establish a strong and inclusive protection coordination mechanism that focuses as much on preparedness as response ▪ Identify roles and responsibilities and likely actions in response, including mapping resources ▪ Foster strong relationships with international actors that can provide identified types of support ▪ Ensure representation from vulnerable groups on the response and assessment teams	▪ Establish protection partnerships with national and local actors prior to a response and identify potential complementary roles in a response ▪ Provide capacity strengthening in areas identified by local actors ▪ Fund and support protection preparedness, including in coordination

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
Protection assessment and prioritisation	
▪ Lead on needs assessments and identification of protection issues ▪ Lead on prioritising protection issues for action	▪ Advocate for gender, inclusion and protection questions to be covered in sector assessments ▪ Identify opportunities to raise questions and assist in identification of protection issues in a response without taking ownership over the final decision-making ▪ Support identification of vulnerability of affected populations
Resource allocation	
▪ Advocate for protection funding mechanisms that local actors can use ▪ Strengthen institutional capacity to receive funding, including proposal and report writing, and monitoring and evaluation ▪ Identify resources required to effectively participate in preparedness and coordination processes	▪ Advocate for protection funding mechanisms that local actors can use ▪ Continue to provide a bridge to international donors for local actors ▪ Support the institutional capacity of local actors to receive funding and be able to participate in preparedness and coordination processes ▪ Develop strategies to shift resources to local actors and track progress
Implementation	
▪ Implement protection programs across priority areas ▪ Draw on expertise of international actors to support best practice ▪ Provide information and advice to international actors to support their advocacy and accountability roles ▪ Advocate for the inclusion and protection of marginalised groups	▪ Provide resources and expertise to support local actor implementation as requested ▪ Support national and local advocacy on inclusion and protection of marginalised groups ▪ Support mechanisms for accountability to affected populations

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian organisations operating in the Pacific are increasingly recognising the need for locally led action.[1] Major donors in the region, such as Australia and New Zealand, have made supporting localisation a strategic objective in their humanitarian strategies and their monitoring and evaluation frameworks.[2]

The national and international humanitarian community is investing time and resources to track the progress and understand the impact of localisation. One question that has arisen from recent research relates to the impact of more locally led disaster response on protection of disaster-affected people. Some evidence suggests that locally led responses further embed cultural and gender biases that undermine the protection of vulnerable groups, as well as reduce prioritisation of and funding to protection as a sector.[3] On the other hand, plenty of research suggests that national and local actors are much better placed to identify and respond to protection concerns in disaster response and need to be better resourced and supported to do so.[4]

This research paper outlines the findings from field research undertaken in Vanuatu, Tonga and Solomon Islands to explore the interface between localisation and protection in the Pacific. It seeks to better understand the combination of local, national and international roles that can provide the best possible protection outcomes for affected people in disasters. It is the second stage of a joint research initiative of the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), and the Australian Red Cross (ARC).

ABOUT THE REPORT

The first section outlines the localisation and protection landscape in the three case study countries.

The second section outlines research findings in relation to key thematic areas that emerged in the research. The report offers suggestions about ways to improve the core national and local protection roles and the complementary international protection roles, based on the research findings.

The concluding section provides an overarching framework as a basis for discussion between in-country protection actors that are keen to explore their different areas of added value and to identify the best ways to provide protection in a locally led response. It also explores the question of when it is okay for international actors to shift into core protection roles, which this research suggests should be occupied by national and local actors whenever possible.

RESEARCH SCOPE AND PURPOSE

This research explores the impact of locally led responses on protection outcomes for disaster-affected people in the Pacific through case study examples collected in Vanuatu, Tonga and Solomon Islands. It seeks to provide an evidence base for what complementary roles might look like in a locally led response for international, national and local actors in these three countries. The findings and elements of the guiding framework may resonate with stakeholders in other Pacific contexts but cannot be directly extrapolated or assumed to apply across all Pacific countries without adaptation.

The research intentionally focuses on disaster contexts in the Pacific. Disasters are increasing in prevalence and severity in the region. However, whilst humanitarian needs are significant, the additional complexities associated with conflict are largely absent. The research considers sudden or rapid-onset disasters such as cyclones and flooding, geo-hazards such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, as well as slow-onset and climate change-induced disasters, including droughts and sea level rise.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Disaster This paper uses the Sendai Framework definition of disaster as "A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with the conditions of exposure interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts"[5]. This definition is consistent with the definition utilised in the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific[6] in that both distinguish between hazards and their social consequences. National and international responses are usually only required once a hazard has become a disaster, such as when a natural hazard overwhelms people's ability to cope.

Localisation This paper uses the definition of localisation developed by Pacific actors. "Localisation is a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision-making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations."[7]

National, local and international actors In defining national and local actors, this report uses the definitions as outlined in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Financing Team's

localisation definitions paper. The paper categorises national and local actors as "organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO." This includes two types of actors: national and local non-state actors, including NGOs or civil society organisations, Red Cross/Red Crescent national societies, and national and local private sector organisations; and national and sub-national state actors, being "state authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level," which includes national and local governments.[8]

International actors As outlined in the IASC paper, the above definitions of national and local actors excludes internationally affiliated organisations; international NGOs; multilateral organisations; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (as distinct from Red Cross national societies), and international private sector organisations.[9] In this paper, these actors are classified as international actors.

Protection This paper uses the IASC definition of protection as "all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. International Human Rights Law (IHRL), International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and International Refugee Law (IRL)"[10] . In referencing this definition, however, this paper also poses that contextual nuance in defining protection is an important step in enhancing protection outcomes through the localisation process, which will be discussed in the research findings section. This paper also acknowledges the contribution of the Nansen Initiative Pacific consultation outcomes in building consensus on a protection agenda addressing the needs of people displaced across international borders by environmental degradation and climate change.[11]

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed to address two main objectives:

1. understand the impact of localised humanitarian action on protection in natural disaster preparedness and response; and
2. identify ways in which international and local practitioners can enhance protection, including by strengthening the positive impact of localisation on response and mitigating any negative impact.

Figure 2 depicts the methodology employed to achieve these objectives.

Figure 2: Research methodology

National researchers led the research process in each of the case study countries. This was particularly important for broaching sensitive issues, as well as bringing contextual knowledge and nuance. A diverse range of actors was consulted as part of the research process, including representatives from government, civil society, national, local and international NGOs and agencies, community members and academics. Focus group discussions were held with representatives from four communities across the three countries from the areas of 'Eua and Ha'apai in Tonga, Guadalcanal Plains in the Solomon Islands, and North Efate in Vanuatu. Interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders at the regional and global levels (Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of interviewees

	Tonga	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	Other (global/regional)
National	13	10	6	
International	3	6	4	6

SECTION 1 – PROTECTION AND LOCALISATION IN THREE PACIFIC CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

The three countries that were the focus of this research have experienced a range of different protection risks in recent disasters and have different protection systems and architectures in place (see Table 3). At a regional level, the Pacific Regional Protection Cluster is chaired by UN Women, and coordinates protection activities to reduce gaps and overlaps in preparedness and humanitarian response.[12] Each case study country also has an established protection coordination mechanism led by its national government. Community protection mechanisms, such as chiefs, custom, churches, and women's and youth networks, which sit outside the formal disaster response system, also play a key role in each country.

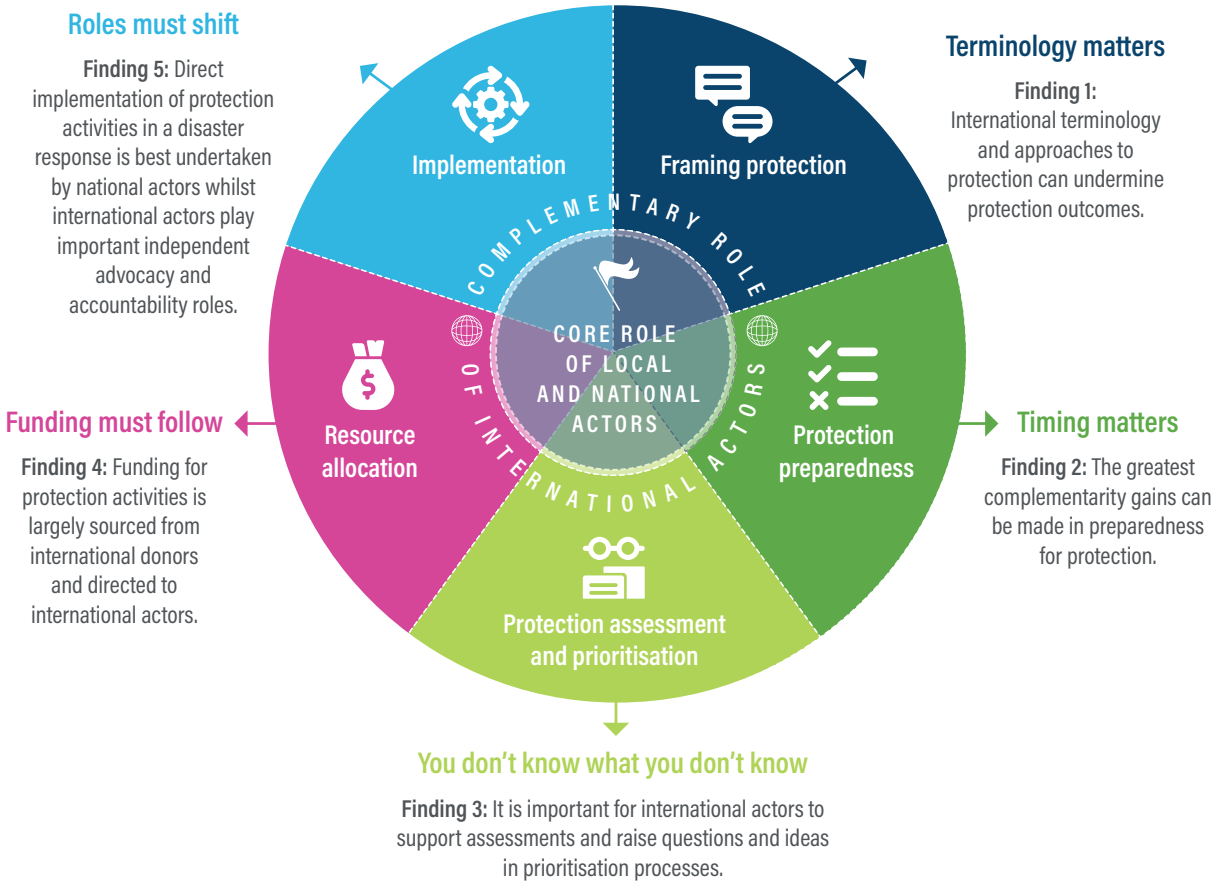
Table 3: Protection cluster coordination mechanisms in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga[12]

	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	Tonga
Name	Protection Committee	Gender and Protection Cluster	Safety and Protection Cluster
Cluster lead	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs	Department of Women's Affairs	Ministry of Internal Affairs
Co-lead	Oxfam	CARE and Save the Children	
Language for cluster reporting	English	English	English
Key partners[13]	UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, WVI, Save the Children, ADRA, SPC, SIRCS, DFAT, MFAT, Ministry of Health and Medical Services *External link to Protection Cluster*	National Ministries, UNICEF, UNFPA, Vanuatu Society for People with Disability, Oxfam, IsraAID, Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, MJSS, Just Play, Disability Desk, Civil Registry, Vanuatu Red Cross, Vanuatu Women's Centre, ADRA	UNOCHA, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, IFAD, MFAT, CARE, MORDI Tonga, Ministry of Policy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Statistics, MAFFF, MoFNP, Ministry of Justice, Civil Society Forum of Tonga, Women and Children Crisis Centre, TMa'a Fafine moe Famili, Talitha Project, Tonga Ladies Association, NATA, Tonga National Visual Impaired Association, Samaletani Lelei, Tonga Red Cross, OTA and Alonga, Mango Tree, Tonga Youth Congress, Act for Peace
Formation	2016, Makira earthquake	March 2014, TC Lusi	2014, TC Ian. Reactivated for TC Gita
Snapshot of protection issues in recent responses	GBV, psychological trauma, child abuse[14]	GBV, access for people living with disabilities, child abuse[15]	Sexual exploitation and abuse; psychological trauma; access for people living with disabilities[16]

SECTION 2 – KEY FINDINGS

Findings are presented in thematic areas that emerged in the research, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Research findings



TERMINOLOGY MATTERS

Finding 1: International terminology and approaches to protection can undermine protection outcomes.

Protection in the disaster response system in the Pacific has been largely based on an internationally defined set of concepts and programming approaches. The research identified two reasons why an internationalised approach to protection may be ineffective. Firstly, terminology and concepts are not always relevant, well explained or translated, and secondly the language itself is often considered divisive and is not accepted by national, local and community stakeholders in context.

Presenting and translating complex international protection terminology is challenging.[17] Recent initiatives have recognised this issue and sought to reframe language and concepts to be more

accessible, flexible and adaptable to local contexts. For example, Oxfam, in partnership with the Global Protection Cluster, developed a series of tools on protection including: 'What is protection anyway?'[18] and 'Protection: you're already part of it'[19]. Translators without Borders (TWB) have translated the IASC Principles on Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation into over 50 languages (against a target of 100), including five Pacific languages. TWB suggests that within the English-dominated aid sector, the benefits of plain language include promoting understanding amongst non-native English speakers and making legal terminology more accessible.[20]

Our inability as a sector to introduce protection in an accessible and appropriate way has had long-term implications. Protection and rights terminology and language has built up negative associations and can create a barrier to talking about protection in the Pacific.[21] Vocabulary such as "child protection", "gender" and "women's rights" has become unhelpful and divisive. For example, in Tonga, international actors were pushing for discussions about women's rights, a topic that is extremely politicised in that country even outside of the disaster context. Local actors wanted to prioritise conversations in terms of "women being taken care of in times of disaster."[22] The suggestion from national and local actors was that international legal frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, should still provide the basis for conversation and advocacy, but the actual words and terminology used should be adjusted to open rather than closed engagement and conversation. Interviewees said:

> Wording and terminologies need to be considered. When you say women's rights, people don't really understand what you are talking about and become defensive – 'are they coming in to push something when we are vulnerable? [23]

> ... the concept of gender is not a term that is culturally well received, nor does it resonate well with men.[24]

Both local and international protection actors argued for a more contextualised and nuanced approach to protection conversations that focuses more on the individual and community needs, rather than using international legal terminology and frameworks as the basis for conversation.[25] Approaches that reduce technical terminology and jargon without dismantling the concepts can be used in a complementary way by international and local actors to meet protection needs in locally led response.

> Educating our community on protection has to be done in a way that people will understand what protection is – words and phrases have to be explained well [for] example, [all that comes under] vulnerability must be listed, and list down how disasters impact these different vulnerable people.[26]

Table 4

Framing protection

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
▪ Develop terminology and concepts that are fit for purpose ▪ Be the primary interlocuter for protection conversations, especially with local civil society groups and communities ▪ Conduct protection coordination and planning meetings in local languages ▪ Translate local definitions and concepts of protection for international partners	▪ Share international protection concepts and ideas with national partners in clear, plain language with a focus on comprehension of outcomes rather than the precision of definitions ▪ Work with local actors to adapt definitions to context and find appropriate terms and examples in the national context ▪ Resource national organisations to develop localised protection tools and guidelines, including any translations

TIMING MATTERS

Finding 2: The greatest complementarity gains can be made in preparedness for protection

In the Pacific, the greatest opportunity for both strengthening protection and promoting locally led disaster response lies in investment in preparedness actions.[27] A focus on preparedness that equips international, national and local actors with the relevant relationships, knowledge, understanding and approaches would address many of the identified challenges for protection in a locally led response.

a. Policy and legislation

International actors have a role in promoting and supporting the adoption of international legal frameworks by national government and national and local NGOs. National governments and civil society lead on the process of aligning national policy and practice with international legal frameworks. However, if the capacity to support changes in legislative frameworks is limited, international actors can, and frequently do, play a complementary role.[28] The research revealed examples from across the Pacific of international actors playing a positive role in promoting a protective policy and legislative environment prior to disaster response.

In Vanuatu, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Justice and Social Service (MJSS) on the development and implementation of child protection legislation. The first national Child Protection Policy was launched in 2016. MJSS and UNICEF are now working with the National Child Protection group to determine priorities for child protection legislation, including child protection in natural disasters, the diversity of children in disasters, children living with disabilities, and children who identify as sexual and gender minorities.[29]

In the Solomon Islands, international actors are supporting the local disabled people's organisation People with Disabilities Solomon Islands in advocating for the government to pass a national disability bill as a way to enhance protection for people with disabilities and to align national policies and practice with the international Convention of Persons with a Disability.[30]

b. Coordination mechanisms

International and national and local actors highlighted the importance of investing in the preparedness of local coordination mechanisms to strengthen protection.[31] International actors were widely recognised as important in supporting these efforts through activities such as established standard operating procedures and communication processes.[32]

In Vanuatu, significant international support has been given to the Gender and Protection (G&P) cluster, with specific investment in strengthening and supporting the localisation of the cluster since 2014. In the recent response to the Ambae volcanic eruption, lessons learned enabled the G&P cluster to inform the government, organisations and actors across clusters of the specific needs of affected populations and how to meet them in response and early recovery programs.[33] In Tonga and in Solomon Islands there has been less investment in establishing and strengthening coordination mechanisms. The Safety and Protection cluster in Tonga and the Protection Committee in the Solomon Islands were recently formed or re-activated in recent disaster responses: TC Ian (2014, Tonga) and the Makira earthquake (2016, Solomon Islands). Local actors in Tonga and Solomon Islands commented on how resource-intensive protection coordination is, and that it is rarely funded adequately or prioritised in preparedness.[34]

> This is the time to do it – before the cyclone season – getting mechanisms [in place].[35]

TEXT BOX 1

There is increasing recognition of the need to support protection preparedness. A recent initiative to engage women's civil society organisations into humanitarian response in the Pacific has led to specific

investment in protection and coordination in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.[36] The Women's Peace Humanitarian Fund has invested in the Protection Committee in Solomon Islands[37] and in a mentoring scheme to support proposal writing on protection and gender in Vanuatu.[38]

c. Relationships

Strong relationships based on trust are vital for organisations working together to facilitate protection. Through the localisation process, greater investment in relationship building during preparedness phases should be prioritised over and above attempting to build relationships in the midst of a disaster.

> Good relationships need to be built during peace time – that gives a good picture when there is a problem. Maybe there are some differences between local and international NGOs but maybe you should give us more freedom, guide us and ensure things progress well. So that when it comes to a disaster or something we already had a good relationship that we built on trust.[39]

The scope of partnerships should reflect the strengths of each partner rather than focusing on a top-down service delivery model.[40] One of the risks of localisation is the scramble of international actors to partner with local organisations during a response in demonstrating their commitment to localisation. The inherent risk is a surge in partnerships that are tokenistic, and as a result do not invest in or strengthen local protection capacity. Recent Pacific disasters generated evidence that protection programs have not been based on strong and respectful partnerships that preceded the response.[41] One national actor explained that in a recent response, an international organisation had submitted a funding proposal for protection programming to an international donor that referenced partnerships with local actors without having consulted the partners in advance.[42]

> They are using their names [local organisations] to get the money and that is mis-representation. They [local organisations] are not happy because they were not consulted to include their name in the proposal.[43]

d. Capacity strengthening

The sensitivity of many protection issues makes capacity strengthening in this sector a time and resource-intensive process. The mutual learning and listening that needs to take place between national and international actors to determine the best way to address sensitive issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) in context should take place before a disaster response.[44]

Gaps in technical support are context specific. A range of technical areas was identified as critical but these varied substantially from organisation to organisation.[45] National and local actors in the Pacific identified some specific areas of technical expertise for which that they welcomed international capacity strengthening and support as a basis for preparedness investment. In particular, international actors can bring relevant networks and experience from other contexts in areas such as sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial and mental health, identifying and protecting people with disabilities, sexual and gender minority populations[46] and other vulnerable groups.[47]

> So far we would not do without the international assistance on sexual and reproductive health – technical assistance [is] very much needed and support to the team.[48]

A "twinning" approach to sharing technical expertise was considered best practice. This involves international technical personnel being paired with local counterparts to ensure that skills and capacity were transferred locally.

> What we would like to see is that they [international technical experts] have a partner or local counterpart so that skills are transferred to a local – be it an institution or as a local person/individual who is doing that job – so that they build up the skills of the local counterpart.[49]

This advisory and technical support role of internationals complements national and local actors in their core role as implementers.[50]

In addition to provision of technical support in specific areas of protection, international actors can provide support to establish context-specific protection tools and approaches as part of the preparedness process. This can include protection assessments, vulnerability analyses, referral mechanisms and pathways and data protection processes.

TEXT BOX 2:
Understanding Vulnerability

Pacific actors consistently raised understanding vulnerability as a challenge. International and national and local actors recognise that they often conduct assessments and implement programs to meet the generic needs of the community as a whole without seeing specific vulnerabilities. For example, following TC Gita, people with disabilities who were unable to leave their homes had not been visited following the cyclone, so their specific needs were largely overlooked in the response.[51]

We have to attend trainings before we can go into the area of protection for vulnerable groups during disasters. This will enable us to know the special needs of this group and attend accordingly. For now, we only understand their general needs as any other human beings.[52]

Vulnerability is a concept with which both international and local national actors have struggled, so there is a need to work together to identify the best approaches to understand, identify and respond to it. This should include consideration of data disaggregation to inform a targeted response, planning to reach particular groups and adaptation of programming to different needs (see Table 5).[53]

Table 5

Protection preparedness

Core roles of national and local actors

- Identify gaps in knowledge and skills and reach out to potential partners to strengthen capacity
- Identify tools and approaches that will work in the country context and ensure that these are shared and socialised in advance of disaster response
- Establish a strong and inclusive protection coordination mechanism that focuses as much on preparedness as response
- Identify roles and responsibilities and likely actions in response, including mapping resources
- Foster strong relationships with international actors that can provide identified types of support
- Ensure representation from vulnerable groups on the response and assessment teams

Complementary roles of international actors

- Establish protection partnerships with national and local actors prior to a response and identify potential complementary roles in a response
- Provide capacity strengthening in areas identified by local actors
- Fund and support protection preparedness, including in coordination

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

Finding 3: It is important for international actors to support assessments and raise questions and ideas in prioritisation processes

Timely, high-quality, disaggregated assessment data to support protection programming was identified as a challenge (see text box 3). National and local actors in the three case study countries recognised that assessment processes and datasets are inadequate; nonetheless, the involvement of international actors in multiple assessments was not welcomed.[54] This was especially relevant to staff that are deployed in a short-term capacity.

> International actors don't need to be flying in and going about doing assessments; they can advise and support local actors to do so.[55]

National actors reported that uncoordinated assessment processes caused harm to affected populations, eroding the dignity and wellbeing of communities.[56] One Tonga-based actor reflected that "it becomes harmful if they [internationals] are overwhelming the community – coming in at different times."[57]

Coordinated, locally led assessments that utilise processes and collect information agreed in preparedness stages would mitigate negative impacts of over-assessment on affected populations, optimise available resources, enhance efficiencies and inform needs-based analysis for protection responses. International actors can work with national partners on advocating for gender, inclusion and protection questions to be mainstreamed in other cluster assessment forms, for better sharing of assessment data in inter-agency coordination fora, and for representative assessment teams.

TEXT BOX 3: Not there yet: case study from the Solomon Islands.

Protection Committee members in the Solomon Islands acknowledge there is still a lot of ground to cover in collecting quality assessment data to inform protection responses. In the 2016 Makira earthquake, the National Disaster Management Office's (NDMO) initial damage assessment forms only had three questions about gender and protection issues.[58] In the March 2018 flooding in East Honiara, the initial damage assessment reported on impacts to health, WASH, education and livelihoods sectors, with no mention whatsoever of protection issues or specific vulnerable groups.[59] In the September 2018 out-of-season TC Luia, the joint assessment team identified 3,666 affected individuals, with no disaggregation; Protection Committee actors could therefore make no informed decisions about vulnerable groups, protection priorities or risks to the affected population. This demonstrates prevailing gaps in data collection and a lack of protection mainstreaming in the broader National Disaster Council.[60] Moreover, whilst the National Disaster Management Plan (2018) articulates "that the involvement of women in preparedness and response arrangements at all levels is essential for effective DM (disaster management)" [61] and that "every effort shall be made to include at least two women in each committee, working group or team established under this part",[62] recent assessments have not achieved this target. With minimal participation of women and other groups with specific protection needs, protection issues fail to be identified in assessments.[63]

Protection Committee members in the Solomon Islands acknowledge the need for ongoing advocacy and training to more comprehensively address disaggregation of data and collection of information on protection issues.[64]

Following on from needs assessments, protection issues need to be identified and prioritised for action. There is evidence that national and local actors overlook or de-prioritise aspects of protection or protection as an entire sector. In Tonga, in the first round of government funding allocations to the clusters, every sector received a funding allocation with the exception of the Safety and Protection cluster. This was rectified in the next round of funding after considerable advocacy by the protection cluster lead.[65]

> Regarding special attention to groups, there wasn't any special care for certain people because they were all in one place.[66]

When the protection sector is prioritised by national and local actors, the identified issues for action may reflect societal norms and biases, rather than addressing the safety and dignity needs of the affected population. Gender and cultural norms, understanding of vulnerability, custom and traditional societal structures and religion all influence the process of identification and prioritisation. This impact is most clearly demonstrated in the response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the Pacific. Prevalence of lifetime experience of SGBV and intimate partner violence across the Pacific is significantly higher than the global average of 35%.[67] Of the case study countries, Tonga has the highest prevalence of SGBV, at 79%, followed by Vanuatu at 72% and Solomon Islands at 64%.[68] Both official and anecdotal reports from the Solomon Islands[69] and Tonga[70] showed increases in rates of domestic violence in the wake of recent emergencies. Despite this, many of these cases go unreported due to stigma and are not prioritised for action by national actors, many of whom consider domestic violence a household issue and a cultural norm.[71]

> Domestic violence, child protection issues and violence against women are perceived to be routine family issues, or routine community issues.[72]

National actors recognise that their organisations avoid often sensitive protection issues linked to power and gender inequities or religious doctrine. It can be difficult for national actors to address ingrained inequalities and beliefs, and sometimes the issues are not even recognised by the organisation's staff or in community leadership structures. Blind spots in identification and prioritisation of protection issues are challenges in locally led responses.[73]

> Sometimes international partners bring issues we don't usually think about – I didn't think about GBV issues until I chatted them through with international actors. I think it raised some issues that international partners were concerned about that traditionally we wouldn't have thought about.[74]

The research very clearly indicated that international actors will continue to have an important and welcomed role in the assessment and prioritisation of protection issues in disaster response. This role should respect and support the leadership of national actors, but identify ways to sensitively raise questions and highlight potential blind spots within trusted partnerships and forums, whilst acknowledging that they too will have blind spots.

Table 6

Protection assessment and prioritisation

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
▪ Lead on needs assessments and identification of protection issues ▪ Lead on prioritising protection issues for action	▪ Advocate for gender, inclusion and protection questions to be covered in sector assessments ▪ Identify opportunities to raise questions and assist in identification of protection issues in a response without taking ownership over the final decision-making ▪ Support identification of vulnerability of affected populations

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN PROTECTION

Religion has a significant role in communities around the world and religious institutions are integral stakeholders in protection. In the Pacific, Christianity is overwhelmingly the dominant religion: 95% of communities identify as Christian.[75] Moreover, religious groups, such as churches, are often at the forefront of provision of assistance and protection in times of disaster.[76] Church leaders are influential members of communities, and church buildings are frequently used as evacuation sites. In each of the case study countries, churches are increasingly collaborating together on disaster response, as well as becoming more involved in coordination structures.

Many Pacific actors spoke of the importance of church leadership in influencing community perceptions.[77] Working closely with church leaders to understand protection concepts and to communicate them in a way that resonates is paramount to the promotion of protection outcomes. A focus on working with the church is also important to mitigate negative impacts of localisation that can arise when vulnerable or marginalised groups not traditionally accepted by the church are further marginalised in a response.[78]

As noted earlier, physical church structures play an important role in emergency response, as they are often utilised as evacuation centres. Inappropriate evacuation facilities were a key issue for many actors, who reported a lack of gender-segregated facilities and sufficient space, which raised challenges with regards to traditional family taboos, inaccessibility for people living with disabilities and for the elderly, and spaces not accepting of sexual and gender minorities.[79] There is a need for coordinated approaches to enhance these structures as safe and accessible evacuation sites as part of community-level preparedness planning. A consortium of church partners working in the Pacific has embarked on construction of a geographic information system mapping platform that can provide a visual overview of church-owned assets (such as churches, halls and schools) that are frequently used as evacuation centres during emergencies. 'Safe n Redi' aims to enhance preparedness by mapping locations and facilities (identifying, for example, if they are disability friendly or safe for vulnerable groups) as well as providing up-to-date information to decision-makers and the public about the available buildings and their facilities.[80]

Interesting initiatives are underway in the region to strengthen the role of the church as a protection actor and to minimise the potentially harmful aspects of religious doctrine in relation to issues such as gender. A consortium of churches has worked on a theology of gender equality that is built upon 10 theological principles that support the equal participation and inclusion of men and women in all aspects of life. The initiative addresses gender inequality by supporting churches to empower women, to protect women and children from violence, and to support victims of violence.[81]

FUNDING MUST FOLLOW

Finding 4: Funding for protection activities is largely sourced from international donors and directed to international actors.

The international funding system is inaccessible to many national and local actors and is a barrier to localised protection programming in the Pacific.[82] Across the three case study countries, there are few avenues for national and local actors to directly access funds for protection in humanitarian response, most of which fall outside the traditional humanitarian financing system. For example, in TC Pam, of the funding received for protection via the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), only 13% was implemented by national NGOs, with the remainder being programmed by international NGOs and UN agencies.[83]

Small funding allocations to national and local partners relative to international partners is not unique to the protection sector and the barriers to funding are similar, namely legal and contracting constraints, absorption capacity of local actors and risk management considerations.[84] International actors play an important role in supporting access to funding for national and local actors. In the TC Gita response, international actors supported national actors to access funding for protection activities including protection mainstreaming in shelter assistance programs.[85] National actors described the importance of international NGOs bridging the divide between international donors and local organisations.

> [International organisations] attract people with the money to give. I learned a lot in partnership with [international humanitarian actor] because we dealt with Start [Network] funding, ECHO, CARE, DFAT funding, Rotary NZ funding. In order to get that smoothly is a skill set that is required.[86]

International organisations can also work with local partners to strengthen their ability to seek and receive funding, although this can be difficult when international organisations are also competing for a small amount of funding. In Vanuatu, CARE has supported local protection actors within the Gender and Protection Cluster to strengthen capacity in proposal and report writing to bridge gaps in accessing resources.[87]

At the donor level, increased devolution of decision-making on funding to country (or Post) in humanitarian response and/or increased discretionary spending may improve national and local actors' access to funding. Protection is a thematic priority of Australia's Humanitarian Strategy and localisation is a Grand Bargain commitment, suggesting the justification for shifts in funding exists. Actors suggested Australia could design a funding component for national and local actors working in protection in disaster response,[88] or seek strategies to increase the awareness and visibility of funding available to national actors.[89]

Discussions on funding priorities for protection should be held as a preparedness measure,[90] and donors brought into this discussion to ensure support is earmarked and mobilised for protection priorities in response. There was also a suggestion that funding should only be provided to international actors that can demonstrate an ongoing and equitable relationship with a national or local protection partner.[91] Donor funding earmarked specifically for protection issues and marginalised groups was identified as being of benefit to national and local actors as protection activities for some marginalised groups – such as the LGBTIQ+ community – have not been met under national funding mechanisms in recent disasters.[92]

> We contacted the national because they have the grants for the response, it was focused on the general public, not specific on what groups. We decided to ask for international [help] because of this reason.[93]

Table 7

Resource allocation

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
▪ Advocate for protection funding mechanisms that local actors can use ▪ Strengthen institutional capacity to receive funding, including proposal and report writing, and monitoring and evaluation ▪ Identify resources required to effectively participate in preparedness and coordination processes	▪ Advocate for protection funding mechanisms that local actors can use ▪ Continue to provide a bridge to international donors for local actors ▪ Support the institutional capacity of local actors to receive funding and be able to participate in preparedness and coordination processes ▪ Develop strategies to shift resources to local actors and track progress

ROLES MUST SHIFT

Finding 5: Direct implementation of protection activities in a disaster response is best undertaken by national actors whilst international actors play important independent advocacy and accountability roles

> The role international actors play should change so they do not directly implement.[94]

In the absence of strong national partnerships and preparedness activities, international actors in the Pacific are perceived to be less effective at direct implementation of protection programs.[95] When international actors have implemented programs directly, there is evidence that some investments

have been poorly directed, communities have been offended by inappropriate approaches and national networks and organisations have been undermined.[96]

> International [protection] actors that come in overreach, disrupt systems that are in place, [and] suck up all the funds.[97]

There are examples of international actors arriving in country and discussing sensitive topics such as child protection and sexual violence in the midst of a disaster, when communities are least robust and able to engage in challenging conversations.[98] This approach has reportedly caused offence, stress and tension for communities rather than supporting their safety and dignity.

> It can be a bit of a slap in the face when there is a push for this and this – people don't understand what is going on and people don't understand what child protection is – they have their own ways of protecting children. In times of natural disaster there is even more need for sensitivity because of people's state of being – it is very important to quietly say what is child protection. Use terms that are culturally appropriate.[99]

Inappropriate protection activities have also wasted funds and undermined national actors. Interviewees from Tonga and Vanuatu provided examples of this. In one case, an international organisation provided training on referral mechanisms during a response. The participants attended the training because they were obliged to, tried to point out that a referral mechanism already existed, sat through the establishment of a new process, and returned the next day to the referral process they had been using for several years.[100]

> Nobody knows what has happened to the referral mechanism that came out of the workshop – just something to tick to say that they have developed a referral mechanism.[101]

In Vanuatu, a national organisation with a country-wide protection network reported the establishment of a new network by an international actor that in no way interfaced with theirs.[102] In two other examples, from Tonga and Solomon Islands, dignity kits and non-food item (NFI) distributed by international organisations contained culturally inappropriate items, including condoms and sanitary pads, with which the local population were unfamiliar, or were culturally inappropriate and insensitively distributed in public fora.[103] Again in Vanuatu, a national actor reported an international organisation recently starting domestic violence prevention programming where capacity already existed at the national level that could be augmented: "why do that? We are already doing it."[104] The examples are extensive, and while it is possible that international actors can change the way they program, there is potentially more benefit if international actors support national and local actors to directly implement protection programs instead.[105]

Local and national actors, whilst strongly advocating for international actors to step back from direct implementation, identified two important roles for international actors in the response phase. Firstly, an advocacy role on behalf of marginalised groups to represent their perspectives in policy and coordination forums, and secondly, a role to support accountability mechanisms during a response.

> [There is] room for international intervention because we come from small cultures and a perceived independent group is very helpful in times like this.[106]

The cultural norms and biases that influence the protection assessment and prioritisation processes are also carried into implementation. The result is that in the Pacific, some groups risk being left behind with limited protection and assistance in a locally led response. National actors recognise this reality and consider overcoming this challenge as one of the greatest areas of value-add from international actors.

> As aid becomes more local we need to be more aware of what specific parts of the community are going to be excluded and need to prop that up – we need to be aware of what effect that might have for specific groups as it might increase their vulnerability.[107]

Stakeholders – including representatives from minority or marginalised groups – identified populations that may be particularly vulnerable to protection risks in locally led responses. Firstly, sexual and gender minorities have been excluded and exposed to risks in some recent Pacific disasters. Following TC Pam in Vanuatu, trans-women were not allowed into women's bathrooms in evacuation centres and faced sexual harassment and attempted rape in men's bathrooms.[108] Due to these risks, members of the trans community often choose to stay at home during disasters, which places them at greater risk due to their homes being unsafe.[109] In the Solomon Islands, where homosexuality is illegal, LGBTIQ+ groups are not represented and issues unique to sexual and gender minorities are not addressed in any humanitarian coordination mechanisms.[110] In Tonga, reports suggested that affected people identifying as LGBTIQ+ were not comfortable going into evacuation centres, particularly as many were housed in churches[111] and were not recognised in protection coordination forums.[112] There were also reports that the needs of people living with disabilities had been overlooked in responses, with evacuation centres not catering for specific needs.[113]

International actors are considered by national, local and community groups as important advocates for excluded groups and individuals in a response. Disaster-affected communities suggested that some local actors tended to support family and friends rather than distribute supplies based on need, and therefore welcomed an advocacy and accountability role for international actors.[114] National and local actors also acknowledged the fact that international actors are perceived as more impartial due to their distance from community dynamics.[115]

> When outsiders come in there is no nepotism because they want to help everyone.[116]

There are examples of divergence in the perspectives of international and national and local actors on what protection activities to prioritise and which groups to target. Again, the illegality of homosexuality in Solomon Islands is a core example of where legislation compromises protection outcomes for marginalised communities. International actors are important in advocating for change in legislation and policy that ensures responses adhere to humanitarian principles.[117] This should be done in support of national and local actor-led advocacy efforts where possible, such as in Tonga, where the Tonga Leitis Association is advocating for legislative reform.[118] Where there is an absence of formal institutions that deal with members of the community, such as in Solomon Islands, where there are no groups that work specifically with LGBTIQ+ communities due to legislative barriers, international actors can take a direct advocacy role.[119]

> International organisations work to international standards of who needs protecting and what that means.[120]

Concepts, structures and degrees of accountability vary across the Pacific. Traditional accountability structures in Tonga, for example, promote upwards accountability, both within the family structure and society at large, based on a strong hierarchy of socially accepted roles and responsibilities. Downwards accountability – accountability to affected populations – is considered to be a gap in locally led response in Tonga, for example.

> Everything goes up. We need to be accountable down, if not we will miss the disability, the single mothers, those things that are important for those we need to provide services.[121]

Local and national actors welcome international actors' support for accountability mechanisms. This could include technical support for improved accountability for affected populations. International actors could also draw on best practice from other contexts, leaving national and local actors with their intimate contextual and cultural knowledge to determine the best application of approaches for a specific context.

Table 8

Implementation

Core roles of national and local actors	Complementary roles of international actors
▪ Implement protection programs across priority areas ▪ Draw on expertise of international actors to support best practice ▪ Provide information and advice to international actors to support their advocacy and accountability roles ▪ Advocate for the inclusion and protection of marginalised groups	▪ Provide resources and expertise to support local actor implementation as requested ▪ Support national and local advocacy on inclusion and protection of marginalised groups ▪ Support mechanisms for accountability to affected populations

SECTION 3 – PROTECTION IN DISASTER RESPONSE: RETHINKING ROLES

There are distinct and important protection roles that both international and national actors can play in the Pacific in order to ensure positive protection outcomes for communities. National and local actors respect and support the complementary roles of international actors but also demand respect and support for their core roles. The following framework (Table 9) outlines an overview of these roles to provide a basis for discussion and agreement about complementary roles for different protection actors. It recognises that these roles will shift depending on context, capacity and capabilities.

WHEN IS IT OKAY?

> There needs to be mutual dialogue between the two to understand the opportunities – what they each want to accomplish.[122]

The paper proposes that national and local actors have core roles in protection preparedness and response. International actors can play complementary roles to support national actors if requested and required. The question is, when is it okay for international actors to shift from a complementary role to a core role? The answer to this question needs to recognise that in the case study countries, international actors currently undertake many of the core roles.

The framework summarised at the start of the paper (pages.6-7) and in each section outlines an overview of these roles to provide four key scenarios in which international actors could consider shifting to or from core roles. It also contains questions to guide conversations and decision-making before shifting into core roles, or indeed to reassess whether an international actor should continue in a core role.

In practice, core and complementary roles need to be considered with some flexibility, ensuring that meeting the protection needs of the affected population remains the goal across all actors.

Table 9: Guiding questions to support decision making on protection interventions

When is it OK?	Guiding questions to consider	Alignment with Core Humanitarian Standards
When the most vulnerable are not being reached or are being intentionally marginalised *The protection needs of the affected population cannot be met by local actors, and a range of protection stakeholders has acknowledged this*	• Does the scope and scale of the gap justify an intervention? *(i.e., geographic scale or the needs of a particularly vulnerable group)* • Has the gap been verified and agreed by other protection stakeholders? • Is there an exit strategy in place? • What are the long-term considerations? How will you and other partners ensure this gap is closed in future? • What is the broader legislative environment surrounding the proposed intervention (e.g., criminalisation of homosexuality)? Is national dialogue taking place in peacetime around legislative reform? Are you already involved in this process, and therefore best placed to continue to engage? • Is your approach consistent with that being applied by national and/or local actors?	**Commitment 2 –** Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time
When it has been pre-agreed *Through preparedness and planning processes, stakeholders have agreed and verified that an international actor will meet a specific need*	• Is there documentary evidence that demonstrates the necessity? For example, cluster meeting minutes, MoUs, contingency/preparedness plans • Has the need been verified by third party stakeholders? • Can a local actor undertake this activity alongside you? • Is an exit strategy in place? • What are the long-term considerations? How will you ensure this gap is closed in future?	**Commitment 6 –** Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance
When national actor capacity or resources are limited *When national actors cannot meet the protection needs of affected populations*	• Have national actors identified capacity gaps in their ability to absorb sufficient resources or to respond at the required scale? • Are there other avenues to bolster resources for national actors to implement programs, such as supporting critical staffing or systems gaps? • Can capacity be supported within regional, national and local organisations rather than shifting roles to international actors? • Has there been a cluster-identified need for international implementation capacity? • Can you identify/broker additional resources to support national actors undertaking these activities alongside you?	**Commitment 9 –** Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically
When it meets the conditions of the Principle of Last Resort	• Do identified gaps meet the conditions of last resort for protection cluster, sub-cluster and Area of Responsibility leaders?[123]	**Commitment 1 –** Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of three case study countries, this paper has analysed the protection landscape for actors operating in the Pacific. The report finds five key areas in which national and local, and international protection actors play core and complementary protection roles in an increasingly localised humanitarian system. Whilst within these five areas sit clearly articulated roles for national, local and international actors, all actors should approach discussions and decisions with an amount of flexibility, adapting as appropriate to context.

This research finds that core protection implementation should primarily be occupied by national and local actors, however acknowledges that this may not always be possible or promote positive protection outcomes for certain groups. Through a guiding framework, this report articulates a series of questions for international actors to consider before shifting from a complementary into a core role. These questions–whilst not exhaustive–should support considered, context-based decision making to support local leadership on protection, whilst promoting the safety, dignity and human rights of individuals in accordance with the letter and spirit of the law.

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