

# COUNTRY REPORT

## FIJI

VISITING RESEARCHER PROGRAM  
FISCAL YEAR 2024



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## Executive Summary

Fiji, an island nation in the South Pacific, faces significant challenges from natural hazards and climate change impacts. The population of over 800,000 people is concentrated in coastal and urban areas, making the nation highly vulnerable to cyclones, floods, droughts, and rising sea levels. Key findings from this report highlight the relevant policies and frameworks in place for disaster risk reduction and national plans.

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# 1.0 General Description

## 1.1 Country Context and background

Fiji, located in the Oceania region of the South Pacific is a tropical island country that consists of 332 islands, spread across 1.3 km<sup>2</sup> of ocean, which has been designated as its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). There are two large islands, namely Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, which make up 87% of the land mass and house the major towns and cities. These two islands have a volcanic origin and consist of steep mountainous areas. The estimate population of Fiji is around 884,887, with approximately 59% living in urban areas.

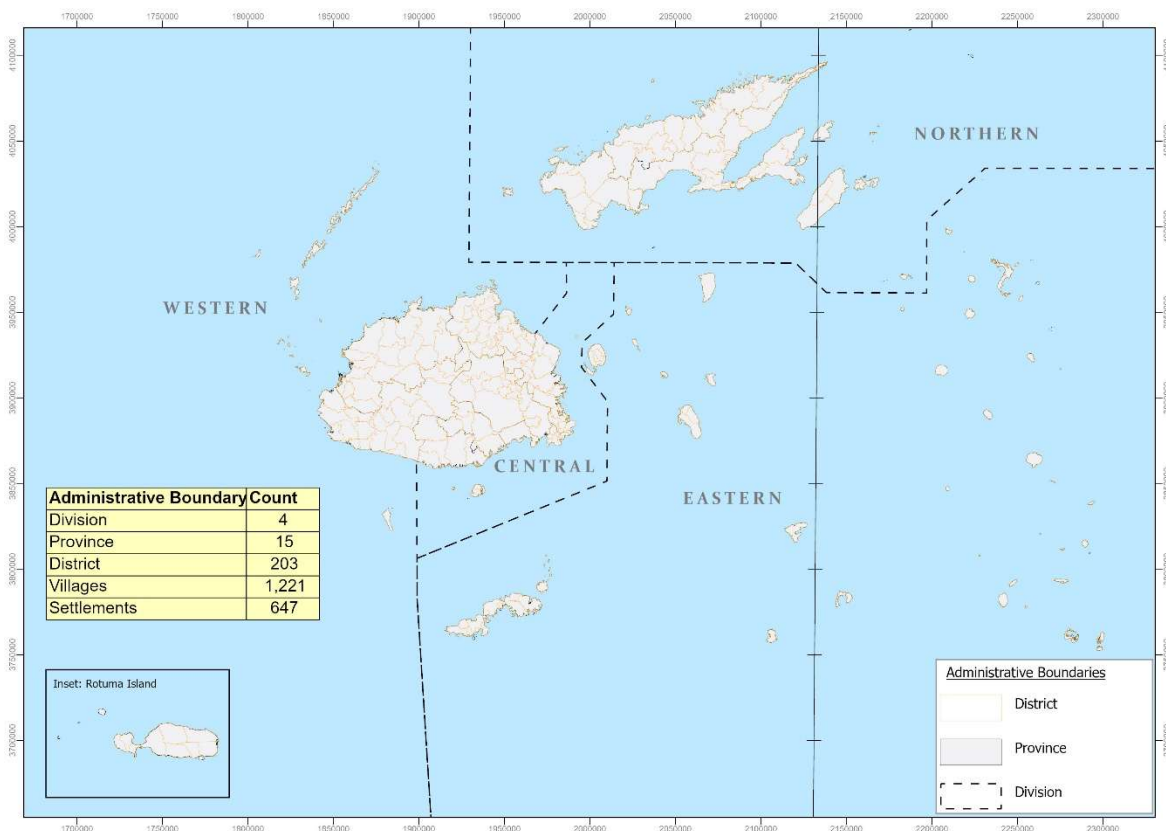


Figure 1: A map of Fiji with its administrative boundaries

### 1.1.2 Political System

Fiji has a unicameral parliament with proportional representation, an executive comprising a President and cabinet, an independent judiciary, the public service and the disciplined forces (military, police, prisons). Elections are held every four years and there are currently 55 elected members of parliament. The Prime Minister is the head of government and holds office as the

leader of the winning political party. The President is the head of state and is appointed by a vote in parliament. The President can hold office for up to two terms of three years each.

There are 15 provinces and one dependency (Rotuma, a group of islands about 500 kilometers north of the main Fiji Islands, about halfway between Fiji and Tuvalu) as well as 13 municipal councils. Provincial and local governments are appointed, not elected.

### **1.1.3 Demography**

With a population of approximately 884,887 compared to 837,271 in the 2007 census, Fiji is the largest of the Pacific Island States. The median age of population is 27.5 years, indicating that half of Fiji's population is below the age of 27.5 years. On the other hand, 69% of Fiji's population is below the age of 40, with men making up 50.7% of the population. Three quarters of the population live on Viti Levu, the largest island in the Fiji Archipelago. 55.9 % of Fiji's population reside in urban areas, an increase from 50.7% reported in the 2007 census. The urban population stands at 494,252, an increase of 69,406 (16.3%) from 2007. This is largely due to extension of town boundaries and due to movement of people from rural to urban areas.

About 44.1% of Fiji's population reside in rural areas, down from 49.3% in 2007. Rural population stands at 390, 635, a decline of 27,790 (5.3%) from 2007. On the other hand, the population is composed of two main ethnic groups, indigenous Fijians (55%) and Indo-Fijians, primarily the descendants of Indian indentured labourers brought to Fiji by the British colonisers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (41%). Fiji is relatively urbanised, with approximately 46% of the population living in urban areas. A little less than a quarter of the total population live in the suburbs around the capital Suva.

## Demographic Indicators from Previous Population Censuses

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics

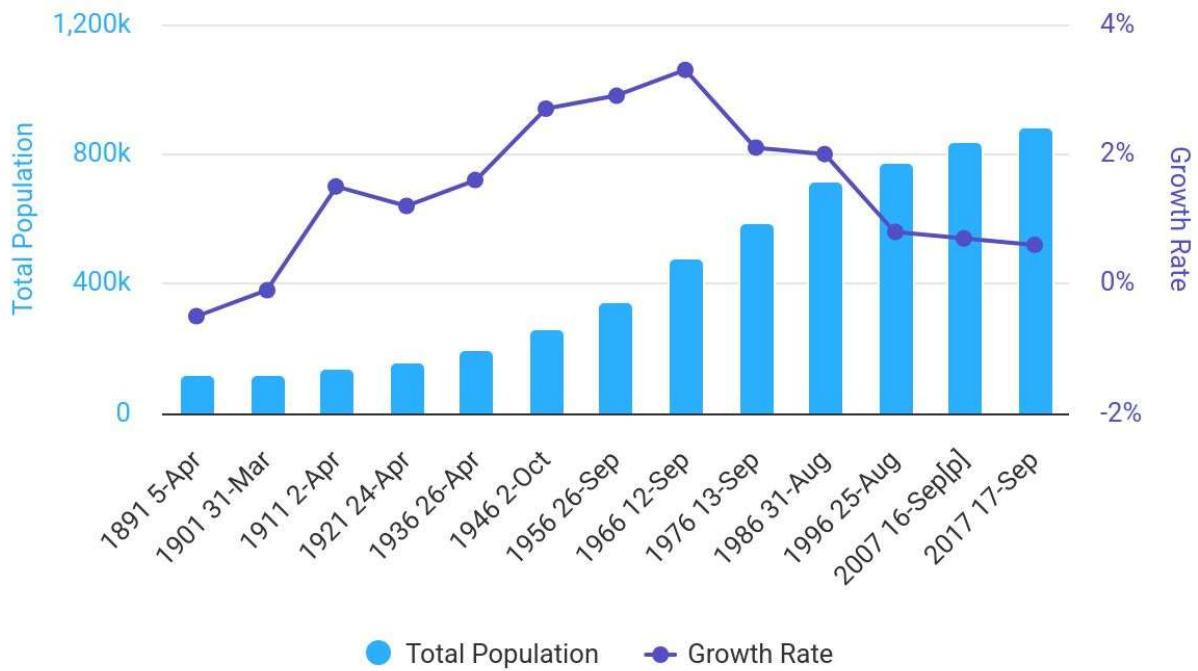


Figure 2: The above graph shows the demographic growth of Fiji's population compared to previous population censuses. The 2017 census, saw a growth 0.6% in population

The total fertility rate in Fiji can be considered high when compared to previous population censuses. As illustrated in the graph below, Fiji's population shows a growing young population (between the ages of 15- 64 years).

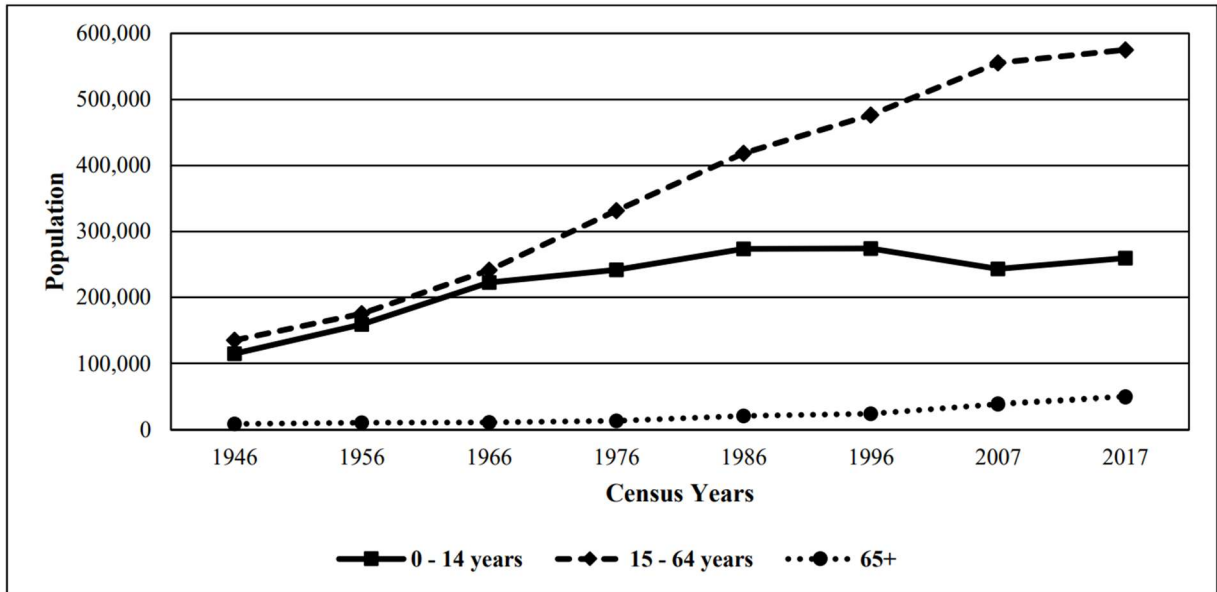


Figure 3: The graph illustrates the distribution of population by broad age category.

### 1.1.3.1 Nationality and ethnicities

Fiji is a traditionally male-dominated society and traditional gender roles are well entrenched. The two main ethnic groups are the iTaukei and Indo-Fijians, descendants of colonial sugar cane workers. Whereas Indo-Fijians were once a slight majority, their population in Fiji has since reduced with large-scale emigration.

While most Indo-Fijians are descendants from indentured sugar workers there were also free migrants who came later. Although most have traced their origins to Northern India, a distinct Indo-Fijian culture has developed over generations that has continued to evolve through more recent waves of immigration and emigration. Indo-Fijians are mostly Hindus, but Sikh, Christian and Muslim communities also exist. They are diverse in their economic activity and social interests.

Indigenous Fijians descend from Melanesian groups arriving in Western Fiji, and from Tonga in the Eastern parts. Fijian culture is diverse and varied across the country. Fijian culture is traditionally hierarchical and patrilineal, and structured into a complex system of families, tribes, clans, and confederations of those groups.

### 1.1.4 Land Rights and Property Law

About 90% of land is owned by traditional owners, with 6% government owned and 3% freehold land. iTaukei owners often lease land to others through a government coordinated leasing system. There are restrictions on the use of land; for example, agricultural land must be used for agricultural purposes, preventing land banking or alternative uses of the land. Leases are for a period of at least two years, but land is usually leased for 30 years. Residential leases are longer and leases can be bought and sold.



Both indigenous and Indo-Fijians lease land from traditional owners but it cannot be bought or sold, only leased. A tenant can be removed from land if it is not maintained or used for its intended purposes (for example, if an agricultural lease does not commence farming activity within a certain time). This involves a breach of lease and a court process that can lead to eviction.

Informal land use ('squatting') is common. Most squatting is done with the permission of the landowner; for example, extended family using the land without a formal lease agreement. Informal land users have few legal rights and may be asked to leave at any time. Internal migration from rural areas to cities has increased the number and size of informal settlements in recent years.

### **1.1.5 Economy**

The economy of Fiji is predominantly service-oriented, with services contributing 71.5% of the GDP as of 2017. Strong economic growth has been largely driven by the following sectors, tourism, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, information and communication, transport, and finance. Tourism plays a significant role in providing employment opportunities and foreign exchange earnings. Additionally, remittances from Fijian workers abroad are also considered to be a vital source of income, in helping support households and domestic consumption. Despite these contributions, Fiji struggles with poverty, with nearly 30% of the population living below the national poverty line in 2019. Fiji's GDP is estimated to be US\$4.98 billion as of 2022, with a per capita GDP of US\$5,356. The combination of economic vulnerabilities and heavy dependence on external sources of income highlights the need for resilient economic priorities.

According to the Census Report of 2017, Fiji had an overall high number of imports as opposed to exports in the international trade market.

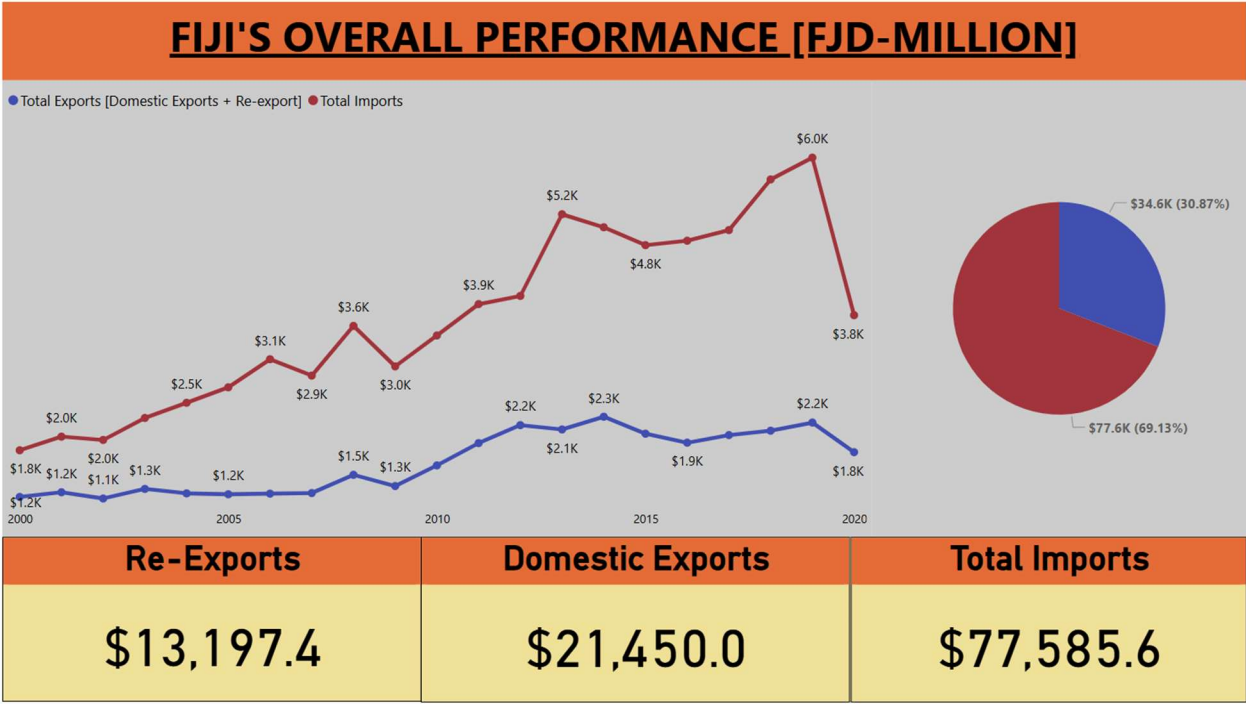


Figure 4: The graph shows a comparison between Fiji's imports and exports in the international market.

### 1.1.6 Climatic conditions and disaster history

Temperatures in Fiji are consistent throughout the year, with the dry season spanning from the month of May-October, with an average temperature of 25°C, while the wet season also known locally as the cyclone season spans from November to April. Rainfall in Fiji does vary throughout the year and with rainfall amounting from 80-150mm per month.

The El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is one of the main climate drivers for Fiji which can influence the intensity and location of tropical cyclones, as well as the rainfall patterns. Also, the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ) can be a major cause of the seasonal variation in Fiji.

Fiji is vulnerable to climate induced events such as drought and extreme rainfall. Such events have been seen to have increased in both frequency as well as severity, posing a major threat to the livelihoods of people, critical infrastructure and the overall quality of life. In addition, Fiji also experiences various meteorological and geophysical hazards, making it prone to disaster such as landslides, washaways and flooding incidents.

In 2016, Fiji was hit with Cyclone Winston, the strongest storm recorded thus far in the Southern Hemisphere, which caused an estimated \$0.9 billion in damages. Such damages included US\$0.6 billion in damage to infrastructure and US\$0.3 billion in economic losses, which is equivalent to one third of the country's total GDP.

Furthermore, Fiji is also faced with other severe climate impacts, such as floods, droughts, coastal erosion, storm surges and coral bleaching. Such hazards have the potential to impact

Fijian communities, the economy and infrastructure, which could lead to loss of life, displacement, damage to assets, and disruption of the livelihoods of people.



Figure 5: Flooding Event at a residential area during the March 2024 floods (source: NDRMO Fiji)



Figure 6: Flooded access road during the August Floods 2024 (source: NDRMO Fiji)



*Figure 7: Cyclone Winston 2016 devastated Vuna Village on Taveuni*



*Figure 8: Damage to roadway in Cakaudrove Province on Vanua Levu post Cyclone Winston 2016*

## 1.2 Disaster Management and Administrative structure

In terms of government structure, Fiji operates under a parliamentary system, with members being elected after each term of service. Under the National Disaster Risk Management Act of 2024, it introduces new institutions and mandates to ensure that there is effective disaster risk governance across national and subnational levels. The Act clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of committees such as the National Disaster Risk Management Council, Disaster Risk Reduction Committee, and Emergency Committee.

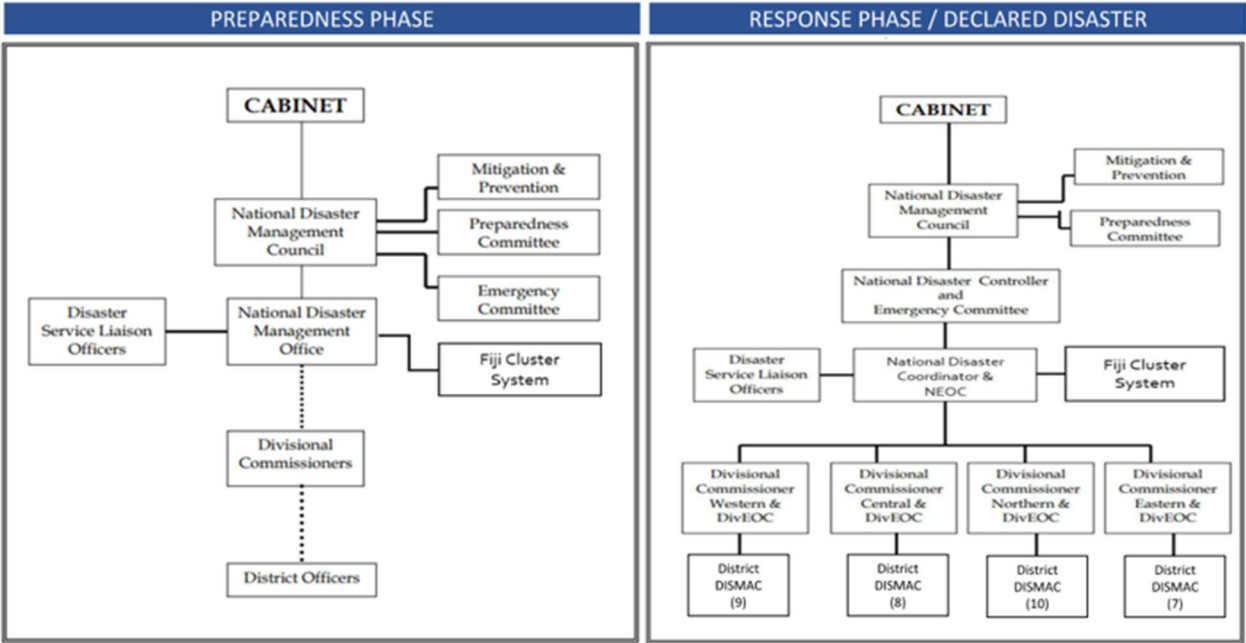


Figure 9: The flow charts above show the current structure of Fiji's DRM

### 1.2.1 National Disaster Risk Management Council

The National Disaster Risk Management Council is responsible for disaster risk management, disaster risk reduction, and disaster management, supporting a coordinated approach to multiple hazards and early warning systems. The Council is responsible for approving strategies and policies for disaster risk reduction, mitigation, preparedness, and emergency operations, as submitted by the Disaster Risk Reduction Committee or the Emergency Committee. Additionally, the Council is responsible for recommending disaster risk management policies and strategies to Cabinet and monitors the implementation of disaster risk management strategies and related policies.

### 1.2.2 Disaster Risk Reduction Committee

The Disaster Risk Reduction Committee is responsible for disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management training activities and awareness. In addition, the committee is responsible for

initiating, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of disaster risk reduction policies and activities. The committee is also responsible for the formulation, review and submission of policies and information papers related to disaster risk management and preparedness to the National Disaster Risk Management Council.

### **1.2.3 Emergency Committee**

The Emergency Committee assumes central control during emergency operations guiding overall response efforts. The committee is responsible for ensuring that personnel at national and subnational Emergency Operations Centers are well equipped with training to perform their duties effectively during emergency situations. In addition, the committee is responsible for maintaining and ensuring that the operation readiness of equipment in Emergency operating centers is conducted along with developing and reviewing standard operating procedures for the Emergency Operations Centers while supporting the Disaster Risk Reduction Committee. The Emergency Committee may in most cases perform or act as other functions upon directive by the National Risk Management Council.

### **1.2.4 National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO)**

The NDRMO is responsible for the daily operations related to disaster risk management, risk reduction, and coordination of multiple hazards approaches and early warning systems. Additionally, the NDRMO oversees implementing disaster risk management policies and programs introduced by the National Disaster Risk Management Council and approved by Cabinet. Furthermore, the NDRMO advises the National Controller, the National Disaster Management Council and relevant bodies on disaster risk management topics and initiatives. The NDRMO also facilitates the development of policies to strengthen disaster management efforts while providing secretariat support to the National Disaster Risk Management Council.

Additionally, the NDRMO is responsible for overseeing the activities and functions of the National Emergency Response Team (NERT). The NERT is a mechanism for the government to provide humanitarian assistance overseas. The NERT is also responsible for providing surge capacity to the NEOC and Sub-National Government in managing and conducting response operations. Overall, the NDRMO coordinates assessments and relief efforts during and after disasters and prepares rehabilitation plans as needed.

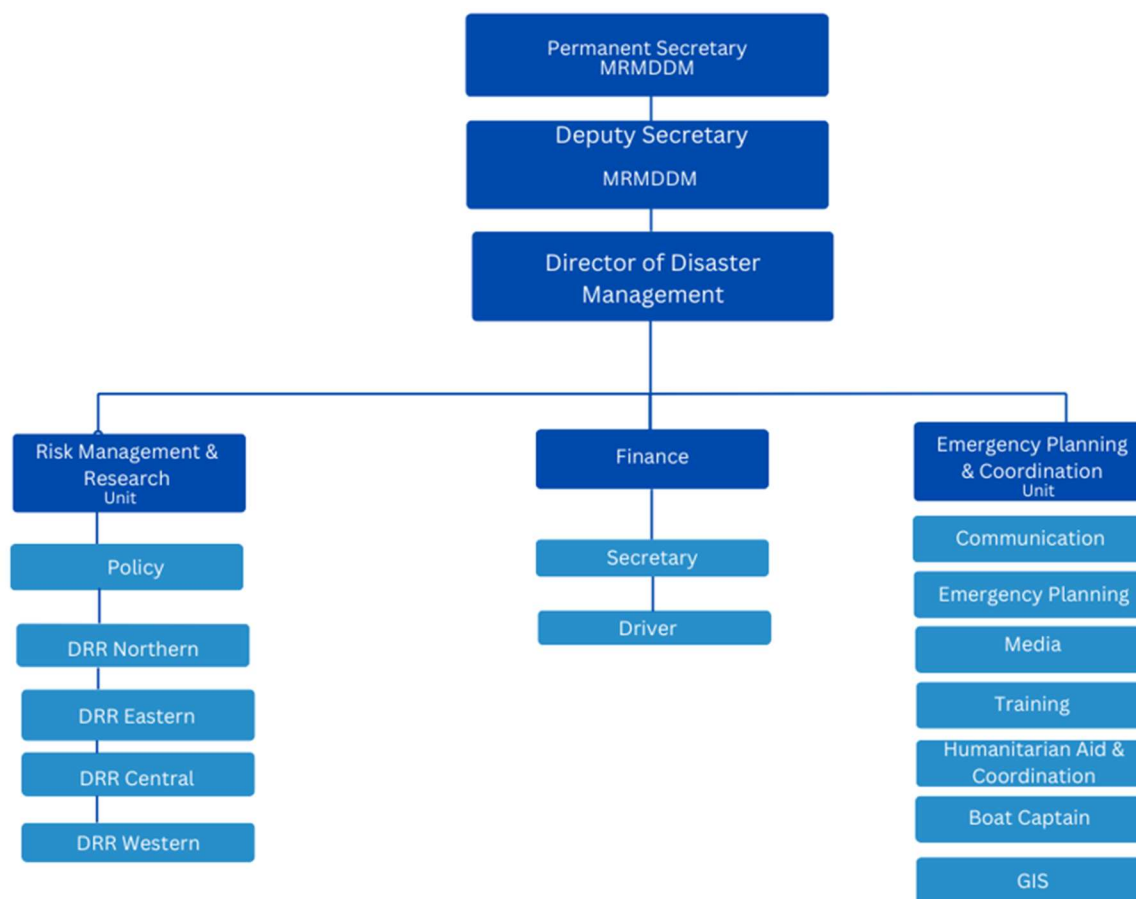


Figure 10: The organizational structure of the National Disaster Risk Management Office (previously National Disaster Management Office)

### 1.2.5 Provincial Administrative Office/ Provincial Administrator

Under the National Disaster Management Act 2024, the Provincial Administrator is responsible for preparing the Provincial Disaster Risk Management Plan in consultation with District Officers and the Provincial Disaster Risk Management Committee. Additionally, the Administrator submits the plan to the Divisional Commissioner for review and inclusion in the Divisional Disaster Risk Management Plan. Provincial Administrators also oversee the immediate relief assistance to individuals affected by disasters within their jurisdiction.

### 1.2.6 Divisional Commissioners' Office

Guided by the National Disaster Management Act 2024, the Divisional Commissioners' Office is responsible for overseeing the operations of the Divisional Disaster Risk Management Office, which includes several key functions. These include policy implementation, by which, the divisional commissioners in consultation with the National Coordinator, are responsible for implementing the National Disaster Risk Management Council's risk management policies at the divisional level. Additionally, the divisional commissioners are in charge of coordinating with various stakeholders, including local government agencies and non- governmental organizations, to ensure effective

response during disasters as well as provide support to community-based disaster risk management initiatives.

Also, the Divisional Commissioner support the training and capacity building efforts for subnational Disaster Risk Management Committees, ensuring preparedness at the community level. Furthermore, the divisional commissioners' office ensures that adequate personnel, materials, and services are available for effective disaster risk management and response. The Office advises on the preparation and revision of both national and subnational Disaster Risk Management Plans to integrate risk reduction strategies effectively.

Most importantly, the divisional commissioners' office is tasked with managing the divisional emergency operations center, which coordinates immediate disaster response and reporting to the national emergency operations center for further dissemination to the Disaster Coordinator and Disaster Controller.

### **1.2.7 District Office**

Guided by the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024, the District Office under the charge of the District Officer is responsible for preparing District Disaster Risk Management Plan in consultation with the Provincial Administrator and the District Disaster Risk Management Committee. The District Officer then consults with the Provincial Administrator for inclusion in the Provincial Disaster Risk Management Plan. Relevant agencies represented in the District, including Municipal and Community Disaster Risk Management committees, are required to prepare their respective DRM plans for submission to the District Office. Foremost, the district office plays a vital role in coordinating immediate relief assistance and organizing damage assessments after disasters, which are then reported to the Provincial Office, Divisional Commissioners Office and finally the National Emergency Operations Center.

### **1.2.8 Community Disaster Risk Management Committee**

Under the National Disaster Risk Management Act (2024), a village/community disaster risk management committee is established with members consisting of the village headman, Advisory Councillor, Community Health Worker, representative of women, representative of youth; and representatives from vulnerable groups (disabled community and children). The committee is responsible for organising and mobilising the community for actions to take before, during, and after a disaster. Additionally, the committee plans and implements disaster risk reduction and resilience measures, organizes drills, and acts on early warnings received through radios or from relevant government institutions, such as the Provincial Administrator (PA) or the office of the Roko under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. The communities are guided by the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Training Manual to minimise vulnerabilities by enhancing the capacity to cope with hazards and improve resilience.

### **1.2.9 Non-Government Organisations**

The Fiji Red Cross Society has been designated by the government of Fiji as the primary response agency for emergencies in the country. Early warnings received at the National Red Cross



headquarters are shared with branches nationwide, equipping them with the information needed to act according to Standard Operating Procedures. There are numerous non-government organisations, that provide disaster relief and response services, when necessary.

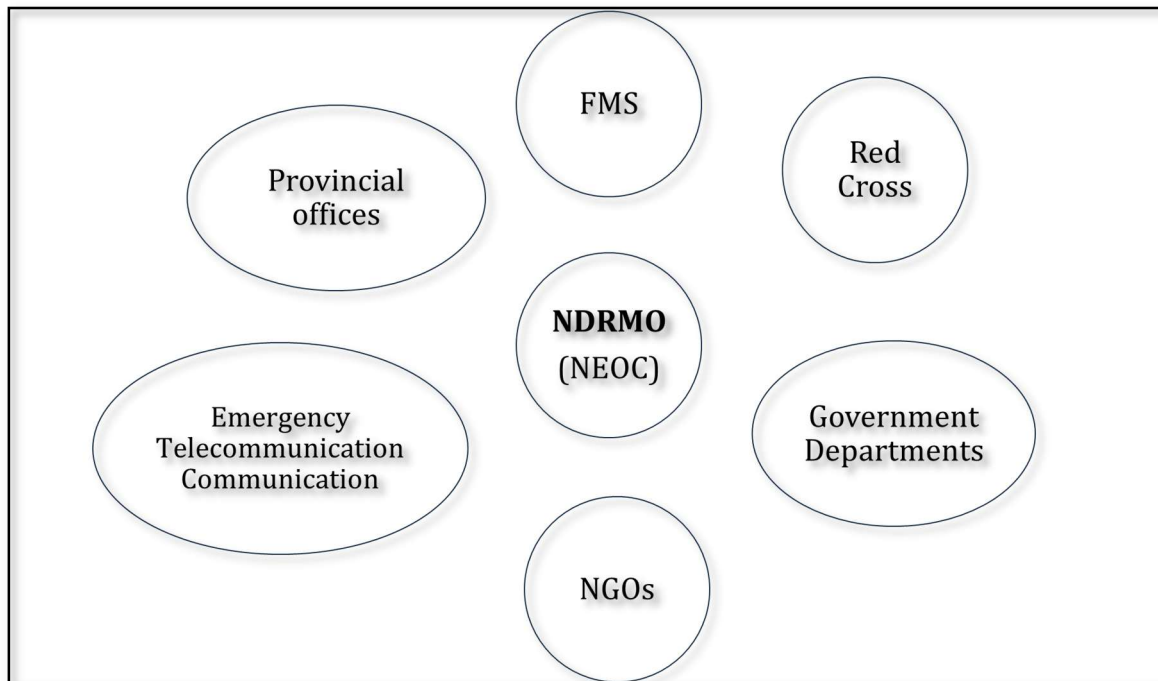


Figure 11: Illustrated above are the agencies and NGOs that aid the NDRMO in providing disaster relief

### 1.3 Climate Risks and Trends

Fiji faces several key climate risks, primarily due to its geographic location and socioeconomic conditions. The most significant risk include:

- Tropical Cyclones: Fiji experience frequent and severe tropical cyclones, especially from November to April. Cyclone Winston in 2016 exemplified this risk, causing damages estimated at \$0.9 billion, which was about one-third of Fiji's GDP.
- Flooding and Storm Surges: with many communities located near the coast, flooding poses a significant threat from both storm surges and rising sea levels. Historical events showed that intense storms can lead to severe flooding and landslides.
- Droughts and Extreme Rainfall: Fiji is vulnerable to both droughts and heavy rainfall, which threaten agricultural productivity and water security
- Sea- level rise: Coastal communities face the ongoing challenge of rising sea levels, further exacerbating the risk of flooding and erosion.

- Earthquake and Tsunami: The country is also exposed to earthquake risks and potential tsunamis, adding to the overall hazard profile.

In terms of climate trends, Fiji has experienced a warming trend overall, with average temperatures having increased significantly since the pre-industrial era. Projections indicate that 2°C of global warming could correspond to an increase of 1.2 to 1.9°C in Fiji, with the strongest increases occurring during the warm/wet season. Additionally, the variability in rainfall has shown no significant trend, although historical data indicated large fluctuations. These climatic changes pose severe implications for both the environment and the livelihood of Fijians, particularly in sensitive sectors like agriculture and tourism.

### **1.3.1 Vulnerabilities**

Sea-level rise and storm surges threaten infrastructure, livelihoods, and safety. Within the agriculture sector, the reliance on rain-fed farming activities makes the sector susceptible to droughts, floods, and extreme weather

1. Vulnerabilities
  - i. Coastal Communities: Rising sea level and storm surges threaten infrastructure, livelihoods, and safety
  - ii. Agriculture: Reliance on rain-fed farming makes the sector highly vulnerable to droughts, floods, and extreme weather
  - iii. Health: Climate-sensitive diseases such as dengue fever, typhoid, and diarrheal diseases increase after floods and cyclones
  - iv. Poverty: Annually, natural disasters push approximately 25,700 people into poverty

## **2.0 National Policy Frameworks and Strategies**

Fiji has implemented several national policies and strategies, that are aimed at enhancing disaster risk management and early warning systems. These include:

- i. National Development Plan (NDP) 2025-2029: This framework aligns with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and emphasizes economic resilience and disaster risk finance (DRF) to enhance climate and disaster resilience efforts as well as outlines the strategies for disaster risk reduction and response, emphasizing the role of early warning systems in providing timely information to guide actions during emergencies.
- ii. National Climate Change Policy: This policy addresses the need to improve early warning systems to help anticipate and respond to climate-related risks.
- iii. National Climate Finance Strategy (2022-2029): This strategy sets investment priorities for a climate-resilient economy outlining improved disaster management preparation and expands on Disaster Risk Financing arrangements.

## **2.1 Disaster Management Strategy, Policy, and Plan**

Fiji's Disaster Management Strategy, Policy and Plan are integral frameworks designed to strengthen the country's resilience to natural and human-induced hazards. Guided by the National Disaster Management Act 2024 and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, Fiji highlights emphasize the need for efforts that are inclusive and responsive to the unique challenges faced by its people.

### ***2.1.1 National Disaster Risk Management Act (2024)***

The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024, repeals the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998, establishing a comprehensive framework for disaster risk governance, reduction, and management in Fiji. This framework operates at both national and subnational levels and includes provisions for financial arrangements and international assistance.

The Act introduces new institutions and mandates to ensure effective disaster risk governance and management across national and subnational levels. It clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of various committees, such as the National Disaster Risk Management Council, Disaster Risk Reduction Committee, and Emergency Committee.

Additionally, a Disaster Risk Management Fund is established to finance disaster risk management initiatives. Procedures for disaster risk reduction are detailed, including the development of warning systems, evacuation centres, and disaster management plans at multiple levels. The Act also addresses the need for international assistance through the establishment of a Single Window International Facilitation Team (SWIFT). There are also provisions for relief and early recovery efforts, as well as special powers during the event of a declared National State of Disaster.

### ***2.1.2 Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Act 2024***

The Meteorological and Hydrological Services Act 2024 establishes the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Services, detailing its role, powers, funding and operational procedures to enhance weather forecasting and hazard warning systems.

The Act creates the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Service (referred to as the Service) to deliver comprehensive meteorological and hydrological services. The core functions include data collection, forecasting, issuance of early warning alerts and messages as well as collaborating with local, regional and international organizations.

### ***2.1.3 Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) training manual***

This manual was developed to assist the Government of Fiji, through the National Disaster Risk Management Office (previously National Disaster Management Office), to promote and strengthen community resilience to the impacts of climate change and disasters in Fiji. The manual addresses the rights and needs of both the vulnerable and the affected from the impact of disasters. It offers an integrated approach to social and gender inclusiveness as one of the key components. The manual further highlights the work that the NDRMO conducts with partners at all levels (national, subnational and community), non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSO), and community development partners to deliver training modules.

The training will cover community led climate action/disaster risk reduction planning and implementation as well as strengthen community preparedness, response and recovery efforts using local knowledge and capacity.

#### ***2.1.4 Local Organisations for Disaster Risk Reduction***

Under the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024, organizations intending to work or provide disaster risk management activities are required to register themselves under the Humanitarian Actors Registry and the Volunteer Organisations Registry. Other than that, there are divisional office of the commissioners who also undertake DRR activities as well as the Fiji Business Disaster Risk Council representing the private sector.

The above-mentioned frameworks and documents are aimed at creating a coordinated and effective response to natural disasters, enhancing overall community resilience against climate change impacts.

#### ***2.1.5 Fiji's alignment to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction***

The overarching goal of the Sendai Framework is to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and this strengthen resilience.

The Sendai Framework is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognises the State as having the primary role to DRR. DRR is a priority for Fiji. As such, the Fiji Government, based on this direction, will take rapid and accurate measures to reduce disaster risks to ensure that the indicators of the Sendai Framework are achieved by the year 2030. Fiji reflects the priorities for action of the Sendai Framework in the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018-2030 to show areas of commonalities and where better synergies can be achieved.

#### ***2.1.6 National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018-2030)***

This overall objective of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018-2030 is to enable Fiji to deliver on its priority of preventing new disaster risk and reducing existing disaster risk in line with relevant regional and global frameworks.

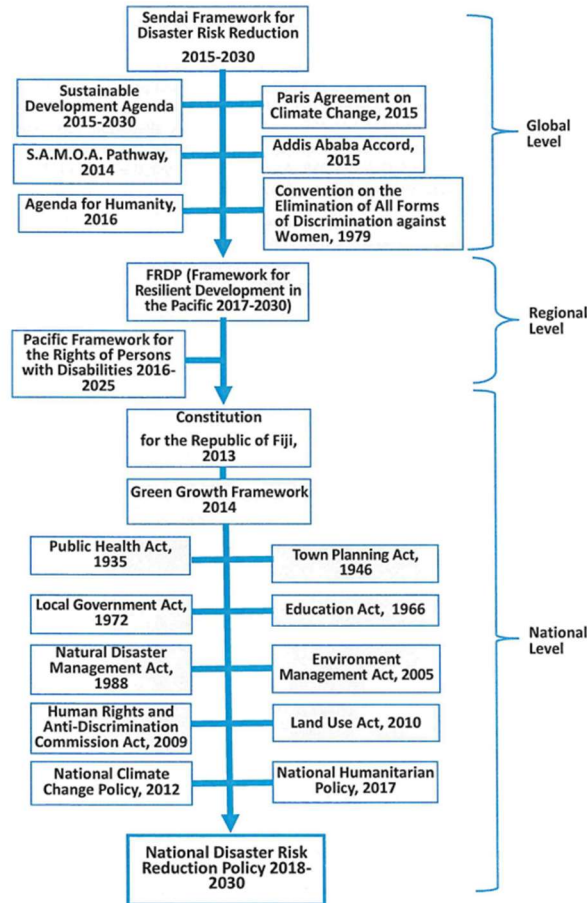


Figure 12: Formation background of National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018-2030

### 3.0 Conclusion

Fiji’s history of natural hazards and vulnerability to climate risks underscore the need for robust disaster management structures and policies. The analysis of Fiji’s disaster management and administrative framework highlighted the critical roles played by institutions such as the National Disaster Risk Management Council, the Disaster Reduction Committee, and the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO). Provincial and divisional offices further extend the disaster management network, ensuring a decentralized and response system to mitigate risks and coordinate emergency responses effectively.

National policy frameworks, including the National Disaster Risk Management Act (2024) and the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Act (2024), showcase Fiji’s commitment to building resilience against disasters. The integration of community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) and alignment with global frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction further illustrates Fiji’s proactive approach in addressing vulnerabilities. These strategies aim to empower local communities, strengthen institutional capacities, and ensure sustainable development in the face of growing climate-related challenges.

In conclusion, Fiji's efforts toward comprehensive disaster risk management reflect a cohesive strategy that combines legislative action, institutional coordination, and community involvement. By leveraging these frameworks and fostering ongoing initiatives, Fiji is well positioned to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters and adapt to future climatic uncertainties. This report reaffirms the importance of sustained investment in disaster risk reduction as a cornerstone for safeguarding lives, livelihoods, and the nation's long-term prosperity.

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**ADRC Counterpart**

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Ministry of Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management  
Republic of Fiji  
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