Volcanic Eruption & Tsunami + COVID-19 outbreak

Panel Discussion - ‘After Disasters’
Kingdom of Tonga
Snapshot

- World Risk Index Report 2021 - 3rd most at risk of disasters 30.51 WRI
- "Ring of Fire"
  - Earthquakes
    - Tsunami
  - Volcanic eruptions
- Climate Change
  - more frequent and severe Tropical Cyclones
  - acidification of the oceans, biodiversity loss
  - sea level rising - coastal erosion and sinking islands
  - droughts
Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano on Jan. 15, 2022
GOES-17 satellite captured the series of images
3 females
1 male

Official Death Toll

84%
Total population directly affected

100%
Telecommunication disruption

299
Damaged Homes

167
Homes Destroyed

USD 182m
Initial estimates of damages

36.4%
Loss in GDP

IMPACTS
COVID-19 Border Closure
30.54% of displaced from Ha’apai

15.05% of displaced from Eua

54.41% of displaced from Tongatapu

Total people displaced

2,390

Displaced households

465

PTSD

Men, Women & Children

IMPACTS
Contaminated Water

damaged crops

Leaking septic tanks

sea damaged graveyards

Urgent shelter

depleted fuel stocks

destroyed/damaged fishing boats

unsafe fish stocks
Government response
Sequence of events

- 18 November 2021 - General Elections
- 15 January 2022 - Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha’apai erupted causing a thick blanket of ashfall to cover the entire island group and a devastating tsunami.
- 18 January 2022 - Government activates “cluster” system
- 19 January 2022 - Prime Minister declares national State of Emergency
  - search and rescue sent to outer islands
- No school
- 1 February First recorded COVID-19 community transmission
- NEF fully drawn down to fund urgent repairs
- $565 million recovery plan for Housing, Food, Livelihood & Tourism
Undersea Submarine Cable
74km of Repairs

- International cable repaired 22 February
- Domestic cable due in June/July 2023
Government response

Sequence of events

- 19 March - Relief measures...
  - social protection payments to poor and vulnerable households.
  - temporary electricity fees, grants for education and health.
  - temporary customs & import duty exemptions for construction materials, foods and essential goods.

Budget initiatives FY 2022/23:

- 150% deduction allowed for expenses (websites and setting up online services and payments).
- 150% tax deduction on capital expenses on recovery from volcano and tsunami.
- 100% tax deduction on fixed asset purchases up to $5,000 per business within 6 months.
Parliament response

Sequence of events

• Speaker of Parliament stuck in Auckland, New Zealand
• Standing Committee on Environment & Climate Change
• Standing Committee on Social Services
  • COVID-19 Outbreak hampered Parliament’s work due to restrictions and hard lockdown.
  • Difficult to call remote meetings due to standing orders and rules
  • All 17 electoral constituencies affected = all MPs joined recovery efforts
    • basic needs, water, food and shelter
Humanitarian Relief Efforts
HADR and International Community

• Humanitarian relief supplies:
  • Australia, New Zealand, China, USA, France, Fiji, Japan, UK (HMS Spey).
  • Fuel, Water, Food, Tents, Desalination, Gensets, Halo support…

• Local and International NGOs:
  • TNYC, Red Cross, Caritas, MORDI, Women Shelter…
Lessons Learnt
Concurrent Multiple Disasters

- COVID-19 vs Relief Efforts
- Heavy traffic, congested ports, closed airport runway, broken cable
- Ukraine invasion - driving 13% inflation and cost of goods
- “Tonga was completely unprepared, no one in the world knew what was coming”
Lessons Learnt

Accountability

- Tonga’s well developed DRM framework allowed disaster response to mobilise without the need for parliament to sit.
- Members wanted the House to sit despite government not seeing a need to.
- NEWS was yet to be commissioned.
- Public awareness and education
- Weak redundancy systems & plans for key infrastructures
  - At least 3 days delay in responses by Navy to outer islands (food & water)
- No displacement policy
- Public awareness
- Parliament to scrutinise national commitments to Sendai Framework
- Government PR and MPs involvement to ensure inclusive participation
- Legislations:
  - Emergency Management Act 2007
  - Emergency Fund Act
  - Tonga Climate Change Fund Act
  - Public Procurement (Amendment) Regulations
Safe Water
Soil is extra fertile
replenished stocks (expensive)
Graveyards repaired
Mental Health healing ongoing
Fish are safe
repaired or replaced
30/238 complete
127 under construction
81 yet to break ground
PROGRESS
Ha’apai Island Group
Ha’apai Island Group

MP lead seawall construction

Obstacles to adaptation and disaster preparedness:

Politics
Procurement process
Lack of data

MP lead seawall construction with Parliamentary Constituency Funds