

SCOPING REMOTE NORTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



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“WHY YOUR MOB ONLY WANT TO TALK ABOUT BIG DISASTERS, US MOB ARE VULNERABLE TO SMALL ONES TOO” - COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ABOUT DISASTER RESILIENCE IN GUNBALANYA IN THE NT

INTRODUCTION

Living in a remote community like Gunbalanya one is vulnerable to a range of natural disasters especially wild fires, floods and cyclones. Though everyone wants to know about big disasters, it is not just big disasters that communities are vulnerable to.

People in remote communities are vulnerable to small events too because the local capacity to adapt, to respond and organise is already weak. Old people who used to hold the knowledge and predict events and give advice about what to do have passed on and even when they are here young people don't listen to them much. The results underline the importance of understanding remote peoples' vulnerability – both the perceived and real vulnerabilities. It is important too that government starts to think about incremental vulnerability – vulnerability on top of already vulnerable people.

Living with natural hazards

Gunbalanya is located alongside East Alligator River catchment. The stories about disasters are also stories about the fluctuations in the river system connected to cyclones and tides. Fire brings lots of smoke to the community and their locations relative to hills and rock outcrops can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. Stories about vulnerability and safety are connected to people's views about displacement from country and of housing quality and poor infrastructure. Most of all they were stories about detachment from culture, ceremony and country.

APPROACH AND METHODS

This part of the project in Gunbalanya was undertaken by a research team comprising 8 Aboriginal community based researchers from The Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network (ARNPNet) who were led by Dean Yibarbuk (in the picture).

Using participatory Action Research tools like key interviews, focused group discussions, and ranking researchers spend time in the community gathering opinions and views about disasters. A simple questionnaire survey was also used. 90 people participated in the survey.



“The big message from this project for us mob is to find a way to get government to recognise that ceremony is important and that it is a big part of how we as a people understand and manage disasters. Government needs to see us as a capable people who can be involved in planning and responding to disasters. They must give us mob that key, it's a matter of trust!” (Dean Yibarbuk, June 2015)

Key messages:

- ▶ There is strong support for government and communities to work together but at the moment the relationship is weak. The current plan is seen as having been developed by government with little involvement of community.
- ▶ Only 36% of the people interviewed know about the emergency plan. The majority haven't seen it or read it. The location of the plan at the police station is seen as a problem with regards to people accessing the plan.
- ▶ At least two thirds of the people in Gunbalanya think they get a little bit of help but not enough.
- ▶ Only 14% of the people feel safe in the community. But safety is a complex term that needs to be understood from the perspective of the community.
- ▶ The idea that there is incremental vulnerability is very important – that there are already vulnerable people experiencing further stress whether from natural hazards or other situations in the community.

Contact us!

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Links of interest

<http://vimeo.com/73684355>

<http://riel.cdu.edu.au/blog/2013/11/arpnet-dilly-bag-in-ngukurr-video-released/>

ARNNet research practitioners are community based Aboriginal researchers who use a variety of PRA tools and questionnaires to conduct research.

