Fire knowledge in northern Australia
Key Topics:
- governance [2]
- Northern Australia [3]

Enhancing remote north Australian community resilience [4]
Remote north Australian communities are susceptible to cyclones, floods and bushfires. Cultural and socio-economic factors combine with the challenges of remote service delivery – including cost, low levels of infrastructure and distance from the urban centres that host key service delivery organisations - to create situations where communities can be highly vulnerable to natural hazards. In this context, it is important to understand how these variables can be navigated to enhance community resilience. This task requires a detailed understanding of current capacities, preparation and response strategies, communication pathways and local governance structures.

Project: detail Notabs

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Remote north Australian communities are susceptible to cyclones, floods and bushfires. Cultural and socio-economic factors combine with the challenges of remote service delivery – including cost, low levels of infrastructure and distance from the urban centres that host key service delivery organisations - to create situations where communities can be highly vulnerable to natural hazards. In this context, it is important to understand how these variables can be navigated to enhance community resilience. This task requires a detailed understanding of current capacities, preparation and response strategies, communication pathways and local governance structures.
A challenge for enhancing community resilience is to develop culturally appropriate, environmentally sustainable economic opportunities. The lack of wealth generation at the local level impedes community capacity to develop infrastructure and build human capital through training and experience of the workplace. The ability of these communities to respond in a coordinated way at an appropriate scale is largely non-existent.

The project comprises two major strands – Scoping resilience issues in remote Indigenous communities, and developing economic resilience through payments for environmental services projects.

The scoping resilience issues in remote Indigenous communities component has three main areas.

- The Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network - Indigenous researchers trained in Participatory Action Research - are working in two Northern Territory communities (Ngukurr and Gunbalanya) documenting community understandings of natural hazards, risks, current response strategies and community capacity.
- At these same study sites, the hard, institutional and cultural assets that underpin local capacity and the delivery of emergency services and which are at risk during a hazard are being mapped.
- Working with community members and end-users to explore the challenges faced by agencies in the delivery of emergency services to remote communities.

The project conducted case studies at Ngukurr and Gunbalanya, and in areas of north east Arnhem Land impacted by Cyclone Lam in 2015.

A report detailing the key findings, and a preliminary set of recommendations and protocols for how remote Indigenous communities can be more effectively engaged in emergency management, is in development. The research highlights the significant gap between the roles and responsibilities of emergency service agencies on the one hand, with the expectations of community members on the other. A critical challenge for government authorities is to effectively engage with Indigenous community governance structures in order to develop mutually respectful partnerships.

The developing economic resilience through payments for environmental services projects component is:

- Articulating key contemporary terrestrial land use management, institutional, and policy challenges facing Indigenous people and local communities in north Australian savanna regions
- Exploring opportunities afforded through emerging economies related to climate change mitigation, carbon trading, and ecosystem services to help address identified challenges.
- Undertaking rigorous valuation of ecosystem services to be derived from savanna landscapes of northern Australia, and associated scenario modelling of payment for environmental service benefits which can be derived from emerging land use options (e.g. savanna burning, carbon sequestration, diversified/mixed pastoral management activities, environmental stewardship arrangements).
- Identifying beneficial culturally appropriate institutional/governance arrangements which can effectively support community development and resilience aspirations, providing authoritative analysis of the above findings to help inform Indigenous community policy development and community resilience outcomes in northern Australia.

The research illustrates that, to better inform regional development policy, significant challenges remain for appropriate valuation of ecosystem services from north Australian savannas, including recognition of socio-cultural services and wellbeing benefits incorporating Indigenous values.

Download: Scoping remote northern Australian community resilience [21]

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