



Indigenous Disaster Planning – reflections on recent conferences

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The recent UN conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva continues worldwide efforts to adopt the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) and its strategy of 'Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters'. This year's conference included a side event called 'Engaging Indigenous People in Disaster Risk Reduction'. Organised by John Scott of the Centre for Public Service Communications, I was privileged to be invited onto the panel to discuss how Indigenous communities might contribute to local, national, and global disaster risk reduction practices. We stressed the *necessity* for Indigenous Peoples to have a voice in order to reduce disaster risk and vulnerability: imposing centralised solutions to local problems (many of which have successful solutions originating from Traditional Ecological Knowledge) threaten a community's capacity to initiate risk reduction and save lives. Risks may include some that are unique to Indigenous communities – exacerbated by our histories of colonisation and ongoing marginalisation – but also include those we have in common with other communities worldwide.

I spoke on our research about the Māori response to the earthquakes of 2010-11, emphasising our traditional cultural institutions such as marae and their role in civil defence for all community members, our comfort in clustering as whānau and the continued relevance of cultural practices of manaakitanga (the obligations of hospitality) and whānaungatanga (acknowledging bonds of kinship). I also drew attention to our mobility which saw many Maori leave Christchurch to shelter with whānau around the country as well as some emigrating to Australia.

Recommendations for 'HFA2' – the culmination of the UN programme in 2015 – from our workshop included:

- Recognition and better use of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge by incorporating these in HFA2.
- Support for the creation of regional Indigenous networks to give voice to Indigenous advocates for disaster risk reduction.
- Advocacy, through respective National Platforms, for 'a seat at the table' and for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in national disaster risk reduction planning.
- Provision of opportunities for Indigenous participation in regional and international forums.

I was also lucky enough to chair three sessions on Indigenous experiences of disasters at the International Geographic Union conference in Kyoto. The experiences of Indigenous Taiwanese geographers were of particular interest. Tung Hsiung Kuo, a Paiwan tribal member studying at National Kaohsiung Normal University, Kaohsiung, presented research on the cultural traditions of his people and how the knowledge around surviving in a seismically active region also subject to cyclones are passed down the generations. Government influence has seen villages relocated from historically safe locations to spaces now vulnerable to landslides such as those caused by Typhoon Morakot in August 2009. Australian geography was also well represented and given their proximity to our own shores (okay, that's 1,000 miles of salty water but it's all relative!), perhaps we should know more about the geography of that incredibly diverse land and its ancient occupation than the 'GC'.

Reflecting on these and other conferences (such as the Australia and New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management event in Brisbane which has had minimal Indigenous presence, as in just one presentation on Indigenous experiences of disaster at the last two conferences), I am struck by the need for collective Indigenous tactics and strategies dealing with an overlapping of the four R's of disaster management – reduction, readiness, response and recovery. While still recovering from Cyclone Bola on the East Coast, Ngāti Porou communities will be responding to drought and engaging in reduction and readiness programmes for sea-level rise, all within a context of often extreme economic pressures. The Ōtautahi/Christchurch earthquakes have prompted a huge outpouring of research, much of it related to the geophysical sciences and this is to be applauded as we need to know more about this whenua or land we relate to in more ways than one...

A Masters thesis by Hauauru Rae, University of Otago, provides a powerful comparison of post-disaster planning landscapes for Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan and Ōtautahi/Christchurch. While a more participatory approach has evolved through the Taiwanese recovery to a major earthquake in 1999, Ngāi Tahu is acknowledged as a formal stakeholder in the rebuild through the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act (2011). Ngāi Tahu have, like the rest of the city, acquired considerable experience around the resourcing and skills needed in disaster response. But as Hauauru Rae points out, a formal role for Ngā Maata Waka, those Māori who do *not* trace their lineage through Ngāi Tahu (and who comprise a majority of Māori in the city), is not acknowledged in legislation and does not feature in planning thus far, other than ad hoc community and committee representation open to all.

It is always fair and perhaps fundamental to describe disaster risk reduction as a work-in-progress. I would argue we have the model for a more *insightful* – through its inclusivity – approach to each of the four 'R's by reducing our vulnerability through a more accurate assessment of the risks to Maori and Indigenous communities. This would also enable greater readiness by acknowledging the knowledges

these communities hold; better responses by networking with, for example, Kaupapa Maori delivery services, and faster and stronger recoveries through partnering with all Maori.