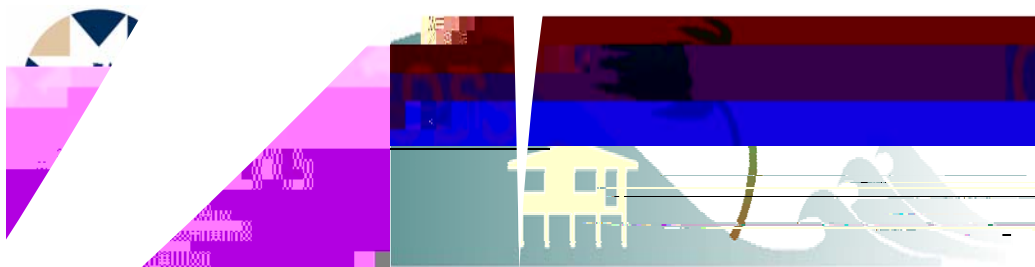
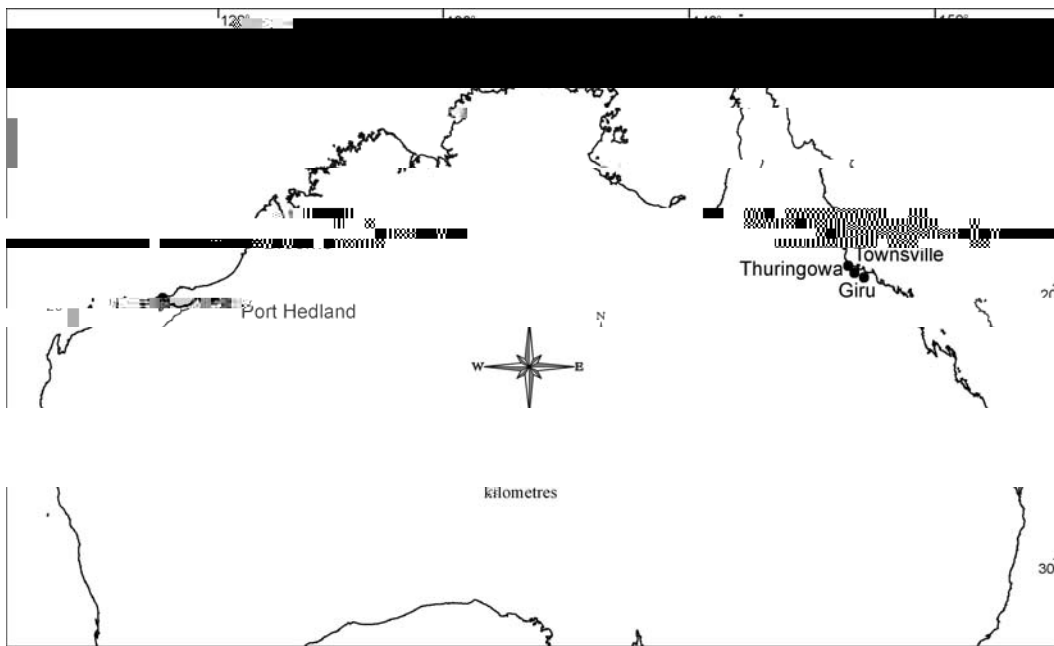




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Map of Locations Surveyed

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

Women and the Wet Season on Northern Australia - An extension of everyday lives: identification of the strategies undertaken by women as household managers to reduce the impact of the hazards of the Northern Australian wet season on their families.

Introduction

This project focuses on preparedness, response and recovery strategies used by women as community members to mitigate against the natural hazard of regular seasonal flooding and cyclones in Northern Australia.

Support systems of extended family and friends were an important part of women's feelings of security about preparing for the wet season. For a group of physically handicapped women who were interviewed, family and other support networks were of vital importance.

In the medium sized centres of Broome and Port Hedland, where the local

Strategies Identified by the Women

Stocking up

- Regular, organised turnover of long-life items in pantry, and around November or December ensure there is enough of key items such as batteries, milk, medicines, drinking water/containers, gas containers for at least three

Women and the Wet Season in Northern Australia

Final Report

Introduction

This project focuses on preparedness, response and recovery strategies used by women as community members to mitigate against the natural hazard of regular seasonal flooding and cyclones in Northern Australia. The aim is to contribute to a reduction in community vulnerability to natural hazards by identifying strategies that women identify as useful for mitigation. The strategies identified can assist in designing more focussed education campaigns.

Gender and Natural Hazards: Why women and the wet season.

Throughout the world women bear disproportionate responsibility for raising children, caring for the ill, disabled and elderly, and meeting the family's daily needs (Morrow and Phillips, 1999:7).

We know from previous research by the Centre for Disaster Studies at James Cook University that presenting information to communities without identifying their needs is ineffectual. Contemporary research in disaster studies indicates that emergency re sponsisrsureTj]

Methodology

A grounded theory approach was taken to the research, using qualitative research methods (Berg, 2001; Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory uses an inductive approach to research, developing concepts and themes from the research as it progresses rather than presupposing outcomes which might inhibit new findings.

Initially the proposed research was to use only focus group discussions as the means of obtaining data. This proved somewhat difficult for a couple of reasons, lack of interest being the main issue. In itself, this would seem to confirm widely held views that people tend to be complacent about the wet season in the region.

The final data collection methods included focus group discussions, telephone surveys and individual interviews.

Broome & Port Hedland

A very successful focus group discussion was conducted in Port Hedland with the co-operation and assistance of Ms Michelle McKenzie of the Port Hedland Shire office. In Broome, despite the support of the Deputy CEO of the Broome Shire, Ms Nik Weavers, it was not possible to organise focus group sessions. At the time that we were there, it was around NAIDOC week and just after the Broome Festival, and there was a big football match being televised at the weekend and people were busy organising parties with relatives coming in from out of town. In Broome two key informants were interviewed at length, providing very useful information. A focus group discussion had been organised with the Aboriginal community at Bidyagdanga, which lies between Broome and Port Hedland. However a death occurred the day before the scheduled meeting and we could not proceed. Subsequently, 22 telephone interviews were conducted to the point of redundancy of information. It needs to be noted that in 2001, two journalists (Anne Coombs and Susan Varga) stayed in Broome and without the consent of the participants, conducted research through personal interviews for a book. The incident was reported in *The Australian* newspaper (03.04.01 p1, p13) and the *Weekend Australian*. (24.03.01 p1; 31.03.01 p18; 26.05.01 p27). There was also a PhD student from Edith Cowen University conducting research on vulnerability to natural hazards in the area.

Kurumba, Normanton & Giru

At Normanton two focus group discussions were held, and one in Kurumba. The work in Normanton and Kurumba was possible and successful because of the assistance of the Deputy CEO of the shire, Ms Sue Unsworth.

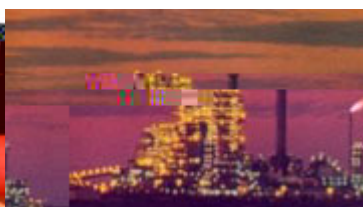
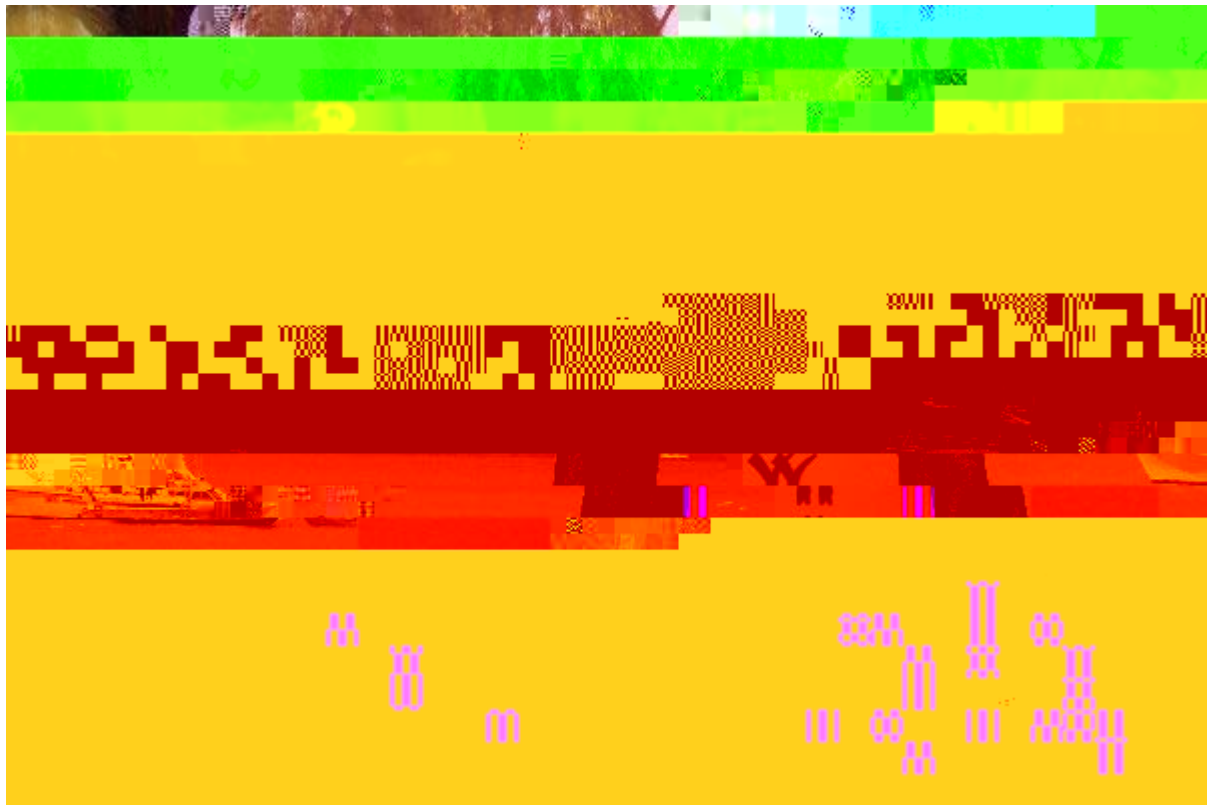
One focus group session was held at Giru, a small town south of Townsville. It is more appropriate to consider Giru along with Normanton in the context of this research project. Even though Giru is only one hour's drive from Townsville the nature of the wet season hazard there makes it more like a remoter township.

Townsville/Thuringowa

Four focus group meetings were conducted in the Townsville/Thuringowa region. Preliminary analysis of earlier focus groups suggested a predominance of

from the middle income range, and it was felt important to ensure that other income groups were not omitted. The range of groups interviewed in Townsville did vary from lower income to the middle-income ranges. Several times attempts were made to meet with wives of Army personnel in Townsville, but because of the service needs in the Middle East, meetings that had been organised had to be cancelled. Several in-depth interviews were also conducted in Townsville in order to follow up on more detail.

In general, the focus group sessions, group sessions and individual interviews flowed easily. The topic was one that women found relatively easy to discuss. However, it must be acknowledged that the issue was not one that many women prioritised. We are left with the impression that women with dependents have very busy lives and natural hazards, like other small and large emergencies get prioritised as the need arises.



Results

Broome

For Broome, there were three in-depth interviews, and 22 telephone surveys.

Broome Telephone interviews

There were 22 responses to telephone interviews. The women ranged in age from 30 to 52 years. All had at least one child or a dependent relative. Half had one child, two had three children and the remainder 2 children.

In response to the question: what does the wet season mean to you?" cyclones were not immediately mentioned by most respondents to the telephone interviews. Only about one quarter of respondents mentioned cyclones at this point. The remaining responses referred to heat and humidity, the possibility of rain, and a couple mentioned the pleasantness of fewer tourist numbers.

What does the wet season mean to you?

Beautiful. Thunderstorms & lightening, fresh rain, excitement.

Nothi ng really, it is just hot .

I lookfrfy

What do you do to get ready for the

dried food, and one fifth mentioned torches. UHT milk, a radio, filling the car with fuel, candles, gas bottles, photos were all mentioned by only a couple of people. It seem

Has anyone in particular helped you sort out what to do?

23 years in the north, Broom 18 years. Don't

What is it that starts you to think about getting ready?

When I hear a cyclone is coming.

Start now before Christmas getting rid of junk and tying down formwork.

When it starts to get hot and humid. Last few years very dry. When I hear of a low (pressure system) being around.

Other comments

For someone new get the pamphlets. Lots of people don't worry about it. Always get warnings but nev

Key Informants in Broome

There were three key-informant interviews in Broome, one spoke from a personal perspective while the other two tended to speak of their observations of what happens to others as well.

Anne

Anne, an Aboriginal woman who is a mother of 4 children, 2 primary aged and, 2 adult sons. She worked as a Research Officer. Anne was born in Broome and aside from living in Cairns for a few years, had always lived in Broome. Her family is in Broome – parents and siblings. Her belief is that the community is complacent about the wet season, and includes herself in that assessment. She does not prepare for the wet season.

Anne remembers during her childhood her father tying down the roof of their house at the beginning of the cyclone season, but there is no need for her to do that now. She has plenty of camping gear which is also suitable for the cyclone season – gas lamps, torches, gas cooker, candles and so on.

The wet season, she felt, does not need any particular preparation – no risk of flooding or being isolated – only problem is likely to be cyclones – she had grown up with cyclones so was not worried – a bit exciting – peninsular communities may have a problem with roads cut by flood water, but not where she lives.

Anne had a clear understanding of the colour coded cyclone warnings she becomes wary at a blue alert and starts to clean up the yard and does some shopping, but only buys food that will be eaten by the children. She fills the car with petrol and gets cash out (power off means that petrol pumps are out and so are teller machines). She tracks the cyclones, and feels confident that she will know days before whether a cyclone is likely to hit.

Kim

Kim manages a women's refuge. She is a single parent with a young adult son and a teenage daughter. Kim has informal household plans in the event of a cyclone. Her son helps prepare the house while she organises at her workplace. The clients need to be moved to safe shelter and the refuge is closed so that workers

Kim's memories of Cyclone Rosita were mainly about radio coverage. Her view was that the worst thing about power going off was the loss of local ABC transmission. George Manning went off air and Perth reporters that did not know anything about Broome were the only reporters heard on air.

*'We lost the safe voice (of George Manning),
lost the feeling of protection.'*

Kim also commented that she often heard residents say that they had met neighbours for the first time in the aftermath of Rosita and was surprised to hear of that in Broome. She had expected it might be the case in bigger cities, but not in Broome.

Graeme

Graeme was an emergency services worker with considerable experience in the region. Graeme felt that the remote communities were those most at risk.

On Bidyadanga Community – warnings and messages with defensive action statements had been faxed to community council offices, to the administrative staff, but do not get out into the community. There is also a problem with the office not being staffed after 4pm and during the weekend. The community receives warnings via FESA, SES, ABC, fax, radio, the Aboriginal radio service, and the internet. However, he had a major concern about how to get warnings into Indigenous communities – how to raise community awareness there. Graeme felt that the women must be involved. In his view, Aboriginal women are better educated than the men generally, and make most of the household decisions because they have res

We can make recommendations after recommendations to DMAC, CMAC, ATSIIC and the other government organisations, sometimes it works, sometimes it's too hard.

The community comes out with "why weren't we told" we send out information but bottom line is that the community doesn't know. It doesn't get past the community office for some reason.'

Port Hedland

At Port Hedland a focus group session was organised through the council and held at the Council Offices. There were seven participants with 18 children between them.

For this group of women in Port Hedland, cyclones are the wet season. If there is heavy rain, or a cyclone there is flooding in South Hedland where some of them work and they can be cut off from their homes and where their children go to school. This means that their personal networks are important so that they have somewhere to stay if necessary, and their children have someone to be with if they become separated. The need to have activities to occupy the children was also mentioned.

It is interesting to note that response to particular issues posed by the facilitator was not always direct. What appeared to happen was that participants mentioned the first thing that came to their mind. Eventually it was possible to piece together a coherent view of the issues for the women concerned, and they do vary.

Q – What sorts of things do you do to get ready for the wet season?

First Aid Kit is in an esky.

Problems of getting stores that will be kept (children get into them).

Shelter next to the school and PCYC in Port Hedland

No shutters

Family issues

Weather comes in – cockroaches, ants, can pick it up before the cyclone warnings

Wait for yellow alert to prepare

Prepare beforehand

Coverage is good hourly warnings

Everyone talks about it.

Great cyclone clean-up by council

Lot of newcomers.

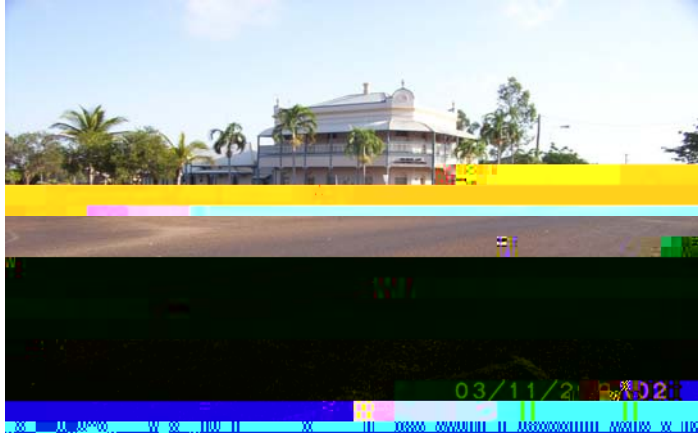
'Welcome to Port Hedland' kit

Read cyclone information thoroughly the first time around. Plenty of information around.

Q – How do you prepare children.

Overview of Broome and Port Hedland

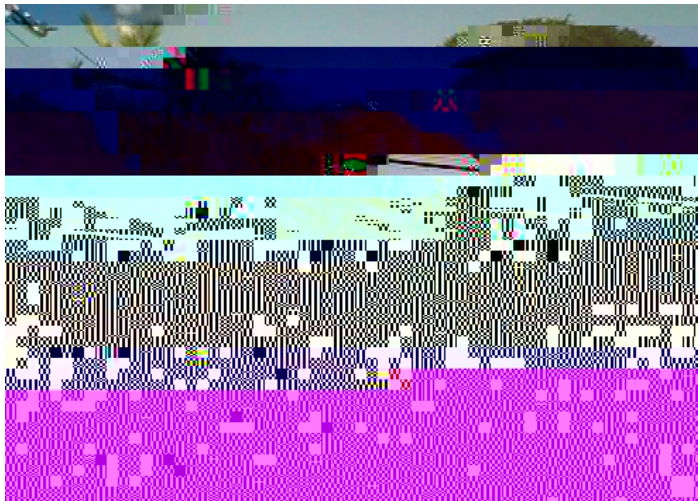
Overall, the view we have from Broome and Port Hedland, is that women are busy living their daily lives, with or without the help of partners. Women who are financially able to, in the main, prepare on a regular basis. There are some women who are very organised most of the time, turning over goods in their pantries on a regular basis and for the wet season and cyclones only checking to make sure everything is in place. For other women, the clean-uper womr



Carpentaria Shire Office, Normanton



Kurumba Advertising



Giru State School

Normanton, Kurumba and Giru

Normanton

Two focus group sessions were held at Normanton, organised by the Deputy CEO of the Shire, Ms Sue Unsworth. The sessions were held on Saturday, November 02, 2002 at the Normanton Town Hall / Library Hall and the other at the Normanton Hospital Visitors Room.

Town Hall Session

For the first session, there were 9 participants. Mary was a Child Care Centre co-ordinator with 2 children, and a long term resident in remote areas (Pomporaw), and had lived in Normanton for 2 years. Sue was a Bank manager with 1 child (1 yo) and pregnant, had lived for 6.5 years in Normanton and had experience on stations in rr)425.14955 672

Problems for people with disabilities were identified by a participant who is deaf. She needs batteries that can be sent in by mail with her supplies but if her hearing aid breaks down she has real problems.

The dentist is always an issue, the visiting dentist is always heavily booked which is always an issue, not just in the wet season.

However, there is a good medical service. Really sick patients, particularly children are flown out if necessary. They have a permanent doctor at the hospital and access to the flying doctor. The air-strip stays open and in all weather Medical specialists can fly in.

A view was expressed that people need to think about insurance, to make sure they know what is covered – power surge, flood (and what they mean by flood) storms and storm surge etc.

Preparations

The view was that it is women's work to plan for the wet season,

'The men get it easy- booze comes first'.

'If it wasn't for the women the men would go very hungry'.

There was a recognised need to do a big stock up shop 4 – 5 time

experience where information was not forthcoming. There was a little embarrassment at this suggestion, but not too much, it was a very good natured group of women. It was suggested that the Shire should put out a booklet for people new to Normanton and Karumba to give information and advice. Local knowledge was viewed as important, particularly experience in terms of appropriate safe behaviours and local hazards. A long discussion about driving through flood waters and swimming and/or walking through flood waters and the risk of crocodiles ensued.

Changes

There was some discussion that led to a view that improvements in infrastructure and services had occurred ov

'Everybody relies on the Caribou to get stocks in – then it's the best supplies they ever get – all is fresh and good quality

This group also mentioned the need to unplug freezers in thunderstorms, and take TV aerials out of the socket. The impact of power surges on appliances was also mentioned.

Preparations

One participant who is a long term resident in remote areas finds it easier to live on frozen and dried food all year, because she then always has supplies. She has a cyclone kit made up containing tinned food, pasta, batteries, and powdered milk. Another woman has a cyclone pack, but claims to have never needed it. She 'pilfers stuff out of it', but eventually and replaces it. Another woman had taped windows once, but would never do it again. A woman who had experience of living in Mackay puts documents in a sealable bag once a year.

Most women reported big stock-up from the shops 5-6 times a year. The feeling was that

'everyone goes stupid when a cyclone is coming'.

Changes

Most suggested they do not do any preparation these days, that they did in the past, but these days because there is always enough stuff coming in to the town, they didn't feel the need to prepare. The view was that the shops don't run out any more, that if they can't get supplies by truck they fly them in. That nobody misses out these days.

'Once upon a time they would have stocked up in October, like the households.'

The feeling was that people are more reliant on Emergency Services these days.

'We have all gone a bit soft'.

To some extent these comments seem a little contradictory.

Travel

The need to always have a supply of food and water in cars at all times, especially during the wet season was also raised by this group. The view was that flood conditions can change rapidly: 'it is amazing how quickly and how much water there can be between Normanton and Karumba'. Because they felt that road condition and flood reports were unreliable, there was a perceived need to be self reliant.

"take RACQ reports with a grain of salt, road condition reports are often wrong, this causes problems for tourism, the Cairns tourist industry do not want visitors to come out west so tell them the roads are bad'.

Information and communication

For this group, comm

still ring around but many places don't have workers there during the wet season and new (station) hands don't know.'

However, there was still the perception that cyclone warnings are always sketchy and unreliable because the weather stations are at Weipa and Mornington Island. There was also a comment that people in Sydney do not have to take notice of the weather in Melbourne for their weather information. One woman always tries to listen to the 6:20 am river height readings – the regional run-around – to get an idea of what is happening everywhere.

The Normanton Council rings around stations to get road reports, but if locals want to know road conditions before they travel they contact the service stations because they know where people are moving.

Kurumba

Kurumba Hotel

At the Kurumba Hotel Sue Unsworth (Shire DepETEMC /P A/CID6tel 4EOnoworganised

Changes

Over time there had been some changes. For example, a barge used to come in from Cairns, but that was sunk. On the other hand, road conditions had improved.

Travel

When travelling, water bottles were seen to be of the greatest need. The view was that people always need to be prepared for breakdowns. One woman suggested the need for

'things like water, dried food, and a scrabble set'.

Kurumba was reportedly the only airport in the Gulf with a dirt strip and the feeling was that they need an all-weather airstrip in case they need to be relocated.

Information and communication

Apparently the Queensland Police at Kurumba issue a pamphlet. Information is gained from TV maps and charts, and pamphlets that are considered to be good. There was some debate about whether the information was provided in an envelope. Information is standardised and there was a felt need for more pertinence to Kurumba, such as a safe place to go in a cyclone. Some of the women use the internet. The Bureau of Meteorology website is viewed very positively. However, it is not possible to use it when the power is off, and at that time there is no radio either. In that case they use telephones.

There is clearly a need for more education about cyclonic weather. There were some

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Giru

Giru Child Care Centre

A meeting at the Giru Child Care Centre was organised through one of the staff. There was a Group of 6 women for most of the time, reducing to 5 when someone needed to leave. The women had 14 children between them. This group resulted in a group interview rather than a focus group because it was necessary to provide prompts on a regular basis to keep the discussion flowing. Despite that, discussion did not necessarily keep to the question posed.

In Giru, the wet season had two different elements to it. The first was flooding that came via the Haughton River from rains that fall in the catchments 100km to the west. The second was from cyclonic rains that come from the coastal region. The view was that there had been no bad cyclones for a few years. Floods were considered more common, especially after a cyclone elsewhere. Giru also receives more rain than any of the other locations surveyed.

Preparations

Because Giru is a town based on sugar production, some women wait until the sugar crushing has stopped to clean up their houses. The sugar crushing finishes late November or early December and it's then necessary to clean up to prevent mould developing in the house if the weather becomes humid. One woman left cleaning until the rain stops. There is still mildew after the wet season so some women clean again. Another woman said 'I try to stay on top of the washing with clothes and towels'. And another felt the need to 'make sure I have enough clothes'. The picture here then is to keep up with the washing and drying so that they are not caught short of clean dry clothing and towels if it rain does happen to set in.

The women shop weekly or fortnightly for groceries in either Ayr or Townsville so they are usu

There is a need to close gates to stop animals coming into yard when the yard on higher ground.

Even high set houses can go under if they are on low ground. Some people sandbag doors. The town can be cut off from outside. One person lives 8 km outside town and was stuck once so stocks up first now. The town can get cut in half because when the river peaks it is too strong to cross. The fire truck is used to clean off silt. The School goes under water first so it always needs to be cleaned the day after flood and so there is no school. Staff at the child care centre lose pay if no kids are there. Because they know the local area that feel that if there is flooding they know the limitations. However, one woman said she would prefer her husband or another adult to be with her when driving through floodwater.

Cyclones are different to floods. There is a need to pick up things that may be lying around in the yard. There is a need to listen to the radio and check if the highway is open. One woman listens to the radio when there is a low pressure system in the area. There are 3 hourly reports so there is confidence that one will be heard. She also watches the TV for reports. When a cyclone warning is declared, not a cyclone watch, she starts to listen more. Then she moves things into her houses (from outside) and goes to help her parents.

There is an acceptance of it as part of life. The view was that there had never been a severe cyclone, that in the late 1980's there was a category 3 cyclone.

Information and communication

Communication of information is by word of mouth mostly. One person has access to the Internet, checks on the government warnings, then passes on the information. If people see froth on the river as it comes down then they know that in 12-18 hours the river will flood. The locals that have been residents a long time tell the police. People know how to measure the river now and the rate that it will move so it is easier to be prepared. The State Emergency Services also let people know. The women reported feeling safe in this town because a lot of people know what's going on.

'Everyone knows everyone so will help each other in floods and/or cyclones, especially the older people who can't lift up their washing machines. People know who needs help around town'.

If the school is going to be shut then the out of town parents are rung first so that the kids can get home. If people did not have young children then they might not know. The High School apparently does not give out so much information.

The women thought that the authorities panic too soon. That those people used to the

Health

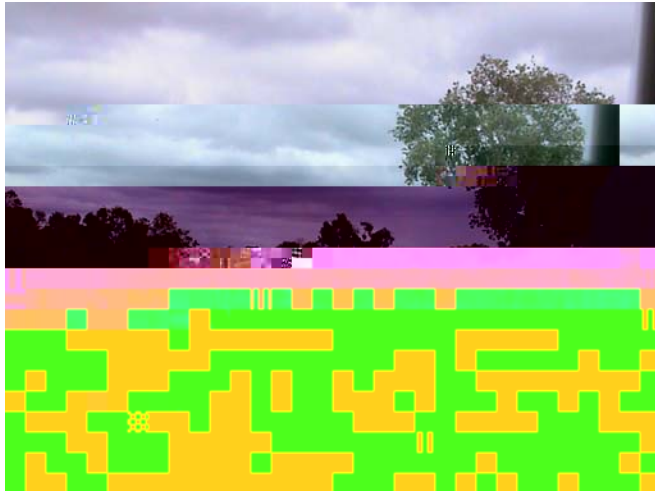
One of group said her husband will not walk in the water because it is so dirty. Kids are made to wear shoes. The mill has cleaned up its act now so drums of oil not floating in the water. None of the women knew about Melioidosis (bacterial infection from the soil in tropical post flood situations). Ear and throat infections seemed to be of more concern. Because the children think the flood is exciting and it's hard to stop them getting in the water there was generally more worry about snakes.

For First Aid they use the Queensland Ambulance Service station that is '*up the road*'. If an emergency arose, the helipad can be used because a helicopter can land at Giru.

Some benefits of flooding at Giru were reported. '*Everyone*' apparently goes fishing after floods near the road that leads to Cape Cleveland to the north. The flood flushes out the big fish. Some people freeze the fish. As well, there was reportedly more socializing in the wet. They go for walks in the rain and kids play in the floods. The children '*get hyped up*'. If it rains all night the children may miss school the next day. It's a social event and residents don't panic about it. People gather to see what's happening.

Overview of Normanton, Kurumba and Giru

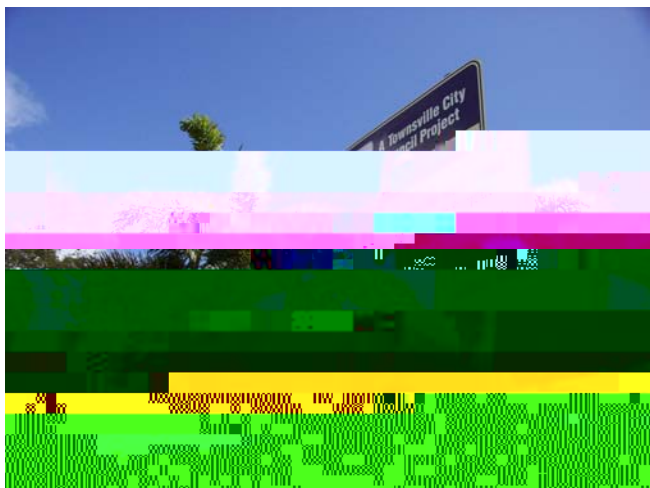
Overall, we are left with a view from these locations that preparing for the wet season is really an extension of necessary daily activities. Because the households tend to be isolated from easy access to goods and services, there is a tendency to plan more to be self-reliant in the context of a wet-season event. Even so, there are still variations in household buying patterns. Some women are prepared all year, while others look to signs of an oncoming wet season to prompt them into action. Poverty also inhibits the capacity of women in this region to be prepared. There was also a low level of concern about helping newcomers to adapt to the wet season.



Proximity to river of some locations in Thuringowa



A community flood mitigation meeting in Townsville



Flood mitigation in Townsville

Townsville and Thuringowa

There were 3 group interview situations and six more in-depth interviews in the Townsville/Thuringowa area.

Personal Residence

The first focus group discussion was held at a home. There were five participants who came from a diversity of backgrounds, and who also had a diversity of length of residence in the area. Most had children and one had an elderly mother who lived nearby. A couple of women had been through Cyclone Althea in 1971 as children or young adults.

Preparations

For this group, personal experience was considered the most important aspect of understanding what was needed to prepare for the wet season, and cyclones in particular. The experience of not having power for three days meant that frozen goods were lost. Now there was recognition for the need to stock up on non-perishables in particular. For example, tinned meat, dried peas and potatoes and other camping style food. But there is a need to check use-by dates. If they do this, then there is no need to panic buy. Other items mentioned included candles, gas lights, and camp stoves. A couple of women mentioned having a generator available for use if necessary. Solar powered radios and lights were also mentioned. Freezing water in large plastic bottles was mentioned as helping to keep goods frozen as well as being a water supply back-up. The range of preparedness was interesting.

Dealing with loose items in the yard and items such as hanging pot plants were also discussed.

It was considered important to know where supplies were in the house because while most people had the necessary stores, they might not be in the one place. They did not think the men of the household know where candles and clothing are.

The need for games to keep children occupied was also raised.

Information and communication

A couple of people mentioned a pamphlet left in the letter box as being very useful, particularly because it explains why you do things. Others seek information from local government, neighbours and friends. A newcomer had friends ring to check on her in a recent cyclone event and found that very reassuring. Defence personnel and their fame

9

5

2

0

Health

For one woman who had a child with asthma the electricity company would ring if the power was likely to go off to check if an alternative was available for the ventilator machine. For another woman, there had been an experience of poor organization on the part of a day surgery unit in terms of not knowing whether surgery was to be undertaken. It was cancelled only after she arrived at the surgery.

Overall, the view was that people just have to cope as it happens. People innovate to get the necessary tasks accomplished. Although most people said they wouldn't travel unless they had to during the wet season, at least one woman headed off with her family to a scout jamboree after having secured the home.

'Wheelies'

A group of five women participated in a focus group discussion that was held at the ParaQuad Centre in Townsville. Their ages ranged from early 20s to late 50s. Two of the group had been through a cyclone when 15-16 years old. Memories were of fun at that time. One of the group had been in Brisbane during the 1974 floods. The discussion began based on usefulness of the Cyclone information issued in Townsville Bulletin around the end November to the beginning of December.

Issues

For these women, the wet season has some real issues. Rain, humidity, mildew, and mud all make their getting about independently much more difficult. Walking sticks n0556 12 T762

If there was a cyclone watch/warning it was then 150ch/warn

'clean up the yard, go to the Bulletin (newspaper office) for the book on cyclones and for tracking information, go to 4TO (radio station)

One woman mentioned that the walk-in-robe was their safe place. Some remembered friends who in the past had been alone and afraid.

Information and communication

Some of the discussion indicated that there was a lack of clarity in people's minds about a number of issues, despite their experience with wet seasons and cyclones. For example, there was a question on the differences between tornados and cyclones, a discussion on storm surge, which sought clarification of what it was. The question was raised of

'Where do we live if the house is destroyed?'

People had already forgotten the year of the floods and cyclones that had happened in Townsville and Thuringowa. They were unsure of what to do with pets, whether to tape windows. The suggestion was that advice provided by the Army included leaving doors open.

There was a feeling that news broadcasts can scare family in other places, that the media can perhaps overdramatise. However, there was also the view that there was not enough local weather information during previous recent cyclones, that updated reports were slow to come, and that this caused anxiety.

Previous ex

'If there is a cyclone watch anywhere I make sure I check that all is organised. The kids are young so I know where they are'.

'Media presentations are dampened down. A long stretch of dry (wet) seasons has meant low impact weather and few cyclones – this has led to complacency'.

'Newcomers are not prepared. There is a mass panic on buying fresh stuff. Each fortnight I add things to the shopping list. Loss of personal things like photos is more important. I don't expect the shops to reopen. I keep fuel stocked up. If there is no power there is no fuel.'

'In the media now it is entertainment to raise donations via the media for people in need, like travelling to Brisbane to hospital, those sorts of things. There is also access to welfare services by those who are less needy. Welfare agencies need records of service provision'.

Jane wonders if we are being taught to be reliant on agencies, government and welfare. Jane feels that she is not really all that well organised a person. She is organised for her work at university, and for the wet season, but is often late to pay bills or organise children's school things, even though they are important. She suggests it is priorities. She thinks she is used to cyclones now and her parents are the ones who taught her to be prepared.

Terry

Terry works as an organiser for a handicapped persons organization. The perspective she brings is one of how to assist those less able to help themselves. Terry also has a child of her own and is a single parent who lives in rental accommodation.

Terry argues that people with handicaps are rarely only physically handicapped. There are many with acquired brain injuries as well. This makes it more difficult to help them, particularly if there is little or no family support as well. Terry feels there needs to be a better organised, more structured way of getting information out to those who assist handicapped people, and to provide it in a format that is easily understood.

Perhaps a letter from Centrelink to prompt them, or information at doctor's surgeries (like other health promotion activities) might be useful strategies. There seems to be a need to help people prioritise what they do need to do.

Terry provided some examples:

'If you keep enough food for a week, you don't need to get extra.

If you keep water in the freezer, you don't need to buy any more.

If you have a chest freezer freeze water in empty drink containers that are clean.'

Terry's view was that money is always an issue for handicapped people. Over time, much of the assistance they receive has been removed, for example, financial help to move house is no longer available. There are co-ordinators in various suburbs that provide assistance to handicapped people who could be the focus of information. She questioned whether there might be an inexpensive kit that could be purchased because handicapped people can't go looking over town for all the bits and pieces that they might need.

Other questions Terry raised included:

*'What is really important to have?
Could packs for the wet season be hired?
What would they do with kits?
Where would they store it so they can easily access it?
Have they got the necessary wherewithal to actually use it?
Have they got the utensils to use the food like a manual can opener, basic
crochery and cutlery.
Carers would need to do a household assessment to help check what they
already have before going out shopping for them.
How safe is my home?
Where is the stuff I need?
Who would come to help determine whether I am prepared?
Is there an evacuation plan.
If I had the flu, what would I need to*

'Two weeks before Christmas I fill up the gas cylinders and Martin makes sure the gas light works. We get batteries for toys and emergencies. Martin watches the weather closely. When there is a potential cyclone he goes into a bit of a panic and checks stuff. We never tape the windows because you can't get it off. I seem to not worry so much. I get the photos and put them in a plastic bag,

Discussion

This research started with the assumption that whilst women may have their vulnerabilities in the context of natural hazards, they also have resilience. This assumption, in combination with information gleaned from previous studies conducted by the Centre for Disaster Studies, led us to investigate the strategies women do have for preparing for the wet season in Northern Australia. The strategies identified appear to vary between women and communities and we need to understand these strategies and the rationale of the women themselves to capture benefits that might be applied more widely in the region. The strategies do seem to be influenced by particular facets of the location, and/or they may be a consequence of women's personalities, socio-economic status, and/or other factors.

In this study we considered the situation of women living in Northern Australia who are regularly confronted with the potential hazard of heavy rainfall, including cyclonic conditions, which may result in their families being isolated from basic services.

There were essentially three different types of locations surveyed. The first were moderately sized regional towns where there was reasonable local government support systems in place (Broome and Port Hedland), the second were quite small townships with accordingly little local government support (Normanton, Kurumba and Giru) and a large regional urban centre (Townsville and Thuringowa).

There is little doubt that in the large urban centre of Townsville/Thuringowa the expectation of women was that services and supplies would be restored within about 3 days after a major weather event that led to cyclones or flooding. In the smaller centres there was the expectation that one could be without supplies for a little longer because they would need to come in from elsewhere. In the very small centres, the expectation was that the individual household needed to be well prepared for the wet season. In general the women prepared for the wet season by starting to stockpile essential items on a gradual basis from November or December.

The capacity for women to organise for the wet season was to some extent a financial issue. Even though there was a low participation rate for low-income women in the survey, from key informants and from other women there was the recognition that women on very low incomes had very little capacity to stockpile supplies. This group of women included Indigenous women in remote communities. The women surveyed have provided a view of preparation for the wet season as clearly being another task they need to add to already busy lives.

Support systems of extended family and friends were an important part of women's feelings of security about preparing for the wet season. For a group of physically handicapped women who were interviewed, family and other support networks were of vital importance.

In the medium sized centres of Broome and Port Hedland, where the local governments have very obvious preparation campaigns in place, the clarity of procedures to people was obvious. In the smaller centres there was a greater tendency to be self-reliant and in the large centres of Townsville and Thuringowa, there was a

level of confusion over interpretation of information and the procedures that might be in place.

In the remoter towns where weather reports on radio and television were not detailed enough for local conditions, the Bureau of the Bureau of

- Go beyond the generic and be tailored to suit different communities and different sub-sections of communities.
- Emphasise reference to family, friends and neighbours as support during hazardous weather events,
- Rank the resources that are recommended for people from different communities