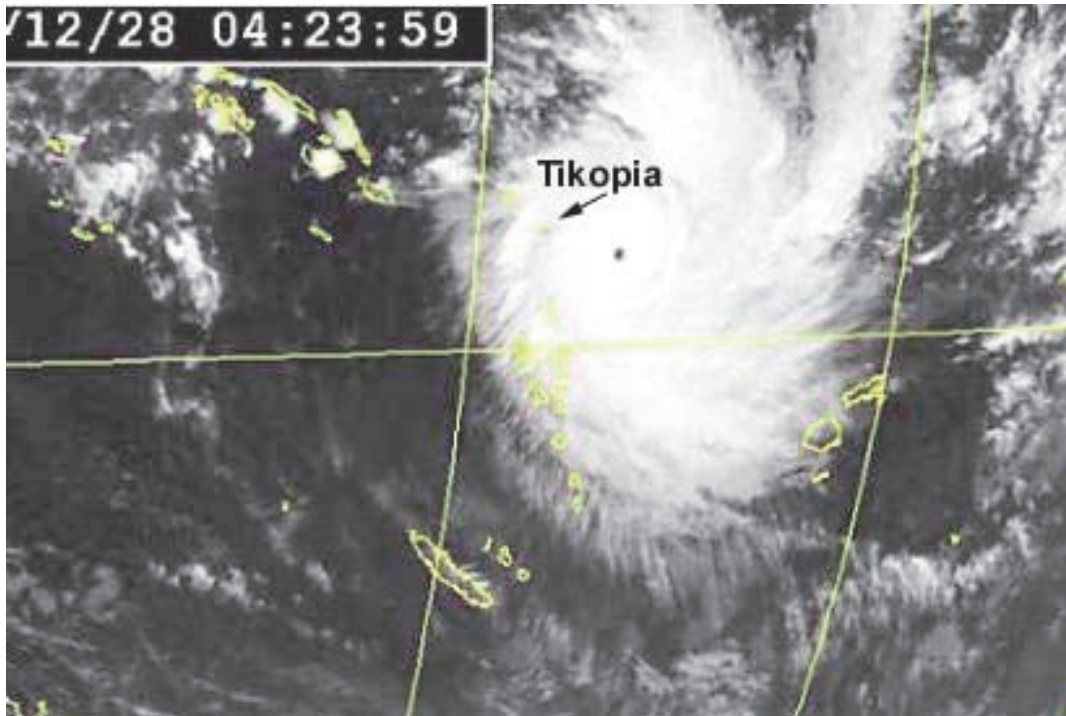


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Case Study - Cyclonic Storm

Cyclone Zoe, Solomon Islands December 27 - 29, 2002



Source: DisasterRelief.org

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/79a568bbb0a6f01049256cb0000b712d?OpenDocument>

Date: 15 Jan 2003

Cyclone Zoe battered remote regions of the Solomon Islands (SOI) in late December, but tenacious residents survived without fatalities, despite the incredible destruction inflicted by the storm.

Anticipation escalated earlier this month regarding the fate of the 3,700 residents of the remote islands of Tikopia and Anuta, as the storm rendered communication systems inoperable across the region.

When rescue vessels finally reached the islands almost one week later, officials discovered widespread destruction but no victims. Officials said islanders took shelter in caves, thus suffering only minor cuts and bruises throughout the ordeal.

The vicious South Pacific storm slammed the islands with 33-foot waves driven by winds of more than 200 mph, washing away most of the coastal villages on the islands.

"The assessment team found that damage to structures and crops on Anuta was significantly less than on Tikopia," Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told the Disaster News Network. "There are sufficient food supplies for two or three months."

In addition to demolished homes, buildings and churches, the water supply system on Tikopia suffered damages as well, but fresh drinking water has now been made available.

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Relief teams delivered medical supplies to Anuta and set up a clinic in the island's school, which was not damaged, Downer also reported. Local police installed VHF radio equipment to restore communications, he said.

Efforts to get relief supplies to the remote islands were hampered by the cash-strapped Solomon Islands government, which was unable to pay for food, fuel and other supplies.

Despite criticism of the slow response to the Dec. 28 cyclone, officials said they were doing everything possible.

"Given the government's current financial problems as well as the weather in the area, we could not have responded earlier than we have done," said Loti Yates, director of the National Disaster Management Office.

As relief efforts continued on the islands, a magnitude 5.8 earthquake occurred 75 miles southeast of the capital city of Honiara, with a population of 50,000. There were no immediate reports of damages or injuries.

Tikopia culture in the spotlight

Source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Date: 7 Jan 2003

ReliefWeb <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/UNID/19072C64C6356F26C1256CA9003C2E0C>

Cyclone Zoe has also focused world attention on the culture of the people of Tikopia - who belong to the Solomon Islands' small Polynesian minority. For generations the Tikopia have learnt to live with the devastating impact of cyclones, and have managed to find refuge on different parts of the island in a bid to minimize loss of life. But other practices, such as abortion and infanticide, are also believed to be an integral part of traditional Tikopia society, where survival hinged on the ability to control population growth.

Presenter/Interviewer: James Panichi

Speakers: Dr. Judith Macdonald, a lecturer in anthropology at New Zealand's Waikato University
MACDONALD: "The island is on the typhoon belt, or the cyclone belt, so every year they will deal with heavy winds, sometimes they will deal with cyclones every five or ten years. The one they have just had is a hundred-year one.

"But the techniques of leaving the seaside, leaving the houses and going up into the shelter of the mountains is something they have done for a very long time. So that that would have contributed to their survival.

PANICHI: Media reports have run reports about caves on the island. Did those caves play a part in their survival, and do they in fact exist?

MACDONALD: "People say the population went into caves, but there aren't enough caves for 1500 odd people. There is a very large cave on the weather side of the island, but 30 or 40 could get in there. It's more like rocky overhangs, big rocks that stick out.

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The reports suggest the people were actually moving around the island and the direction of the wind changed, and so they'd get behind a ridge here and a rock there."

PANICHI: It would indicate though that whatever techniques they were using in avoiding the fury of the storm, they were quite successful in doing so. After all, they didn't lose a single person in the course of what was such a powerful typhoon.

MACDONALD: "Yes, it's marvelous that no-one has died. To have survived a couple of days of winds of that intensity - they wouldn't have been able to stand up in that wind. So they have done incredibly well."

PANICHI: Is the challenge for the islands now that of surviving after the typhoon, and getting their economy and agriculture back on track?

MACDONALD: "That's the greatest problem. We get a lot of publicity after the cyclone, then two or three months on, when food supplies have run out, there's no international interest. And that's when awful things can happen.

"In the 1950s, there were a couple of wicked cyclones and in the couple of months afterwards some people died of starvation.

"I fear in this case that the damage has been awful - I have seen the aerial photos and the gardens that were very fertile have been soaked with sea-water, and sand has gone across them as well. Tikopians say they think it will take them three years to recover.

PANICHI: Does this suggest to you that the international community and the Solomon Islands government will have to assist Tikopia and other islands in the area which has been affected for some time to come.

MACDONALD: "I think so. Personally, I think the best thing would be to shift some people off the island, to give it a chance to recover a bit more. After that one of the 1950s, the government made land available in another part of the Solomons and a whole village was set up there of people taken off the island to relieve the population pressure.

"I think there are now at least three large Tikopian communities in other parts of the Solomons and I think that if the government could assist some of the people who are maybe less productive - like older women and children - perhaps they could go and stay with relatives elsewhere, leaving abled men on the island to eat the food and replant it.

PANICHI: Have those Tikopian communities elsewhere in Solomon Islands been successful? Has the resettlement program worked?

MACDONALD: "They've been tremendously successful. The Tikopians are very proud of their culture. Raymond Firth's book "We the Tikopia" was given that title because they were always saying "We the Tikopia do this, we the Tikopia do that".

"So, when they went to other parts of the Solomons, they took their culture with them, even though they were away from chiefs, and they were living among people who were very foreign to them, it didn't seem to bother them at all.

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"I spent one year with a resettled group on San Cristobal, and they said to me 'This is just another piece of Tikopia, on another land'."

PANICHI: On a more political level, there is also the issue that a lot of people have suggested, that the Tikopians who are Polynesians, are not receiving too much support from neighbouring Solomon Islands and Melanesian countries, due also to a lack of ethnic solidarity. Is there anything to that argument?

MACDONALD: "One has to take into account that the Polynesians on the Solomon Islands only make up about two per cent of the population. Therefore, they are not terribly well represented in central government.

"And they are also in the further outer reaches of Solomon Islands' political body: Rennell and Bellona to the south, Tikopia and Anuta to the east, and Sikaiana to the North. Because of their small numbers, I do think that they don't have a very strong voice.

"But we also have to take on board the fact that that Solomon Islands government is quite bankrupt, and I suspect they wouldn't be able to help anyone at the moment."

PANICHI: You mentioned anthropologist Raymond Firth, whose book "We the Tikopia" has obviously had an impact on the way the world sees the islands. It was written in the 1920s. Do you believe it still stands up by today's standards?

MACDONALD: "Yes, for the reason that I mentioned before: they are very proud of their customs, and they want to keep up their uniqueness, of being Tikopia rather than anybody else.

"I went to the island 50 years after Raymond wrote that book, to see how much change had occurred. And apart from the fact that the island was a third Christian when he was there, and had been entirely converted to Christianity when I was there, the old gods were still around.

"And a lot of the traditional practices were still of great pride to them. Certainly, the traditional chiefly hierarchical structures were still there."

PANICHI: The book highlights several rather controversial aspects of Tikopian culture and society, such as its history of abortion and infanticide. Is that still relevant today?

MACDONALD: "All small-scale societies have to cope with marginal environments, and traditionally have had ways of controlling their population.

"They know perfectly well the bad effect of letting the population grow unhindered, so they have all sorts of techniques - for example, you have infanticide among the [North American] Inuit.

"The Tikopia recognised very clearly that being on such a little island they did have to control their population. So, traditionally, only the oldest son was allowed to marry. Others were allowed to have sexual affairs, but they weren't allowed to produce children from them. That kept the population at the right level."

"Then, when the missionaries came, they saw these people who technically weren't married, having affairs. And they said: "naughty naughty, get married". And that, in Tikopian terms, meant having babies. So, the population went up by 50 per cent between 1930 and the mid-50s. And that's why a couple of hundred people died after those bad cyclones in the 50s."

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PANICHI: In more general terms, how did a Polynesian population arrive on those islands, which are surrounded by Melanesian countries? What's their history?

MACDONALD: "Well, true Polynesia is the triangle with Hawaii in the North, down to New Zealand and Easter Island. But it looks from the archeological record as though around 1000 years ago, small canoes went out from Polynesian islands like Tuvalu - probably driven out by population pressure or warfare - and they went back out to parts of Melanesia and either conquered people on outlying islands, or found unoccupied ones.

"But that would have happened about 1000 years ago - that's when the Tikopians arrived." PANICHI: Is there evidence to suggest that Tikopia had been uninhabited?

MACDONALD: "No, oral tradition suggests there were probably Melanesians on Tikopia, who were driven out by the Tikopia."

Forgotten isolated Pacific island pleading for food in face of famine

Source: Agence France-Presse (AFP) by Bruce Edwards

Date: 5 Nov 2003

HONIARA, Nov 5 (AFP) - A Pacific island that won global attention nearly a year ago when it was left isolated for a week after a cyclone is pleading for emergency food supplies to fend off famine in the wake of another storm, authorities said here Wednesday.

In December last year Cyclone Zoe hit the volcanic island of Tikopia, in the Solomon Islands, destroying much of its food crop. What they managed to re-grow was decimated by Cyclone Gina in early June.

Australia, New Zealand and France took more than a week to send in planes to find out what had happened to the island.

Its fate was also clouded by the fact that the Solomons were mired in an ethnic conflict.

Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) director Loti Yates said the 3,000 residents of Tikopia, 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from Honiara, are now desperate for relief food. "They have less food now than when Zoe hit the island," Yates said. "Everything had started to be re-grown after Tropical Cyclone Zoe, only to be flattened again by Tropical Cyclone Gina."

Now the people have only sago palm to roast, which is considered a last resort, in addition to fishing in the surrounding waters.

"They can't stockpile anything now," Yates said. "They eat everything we land on the island."

On Saturday, the Church of Melanesia hopes to send a boat to Tikopia, two and a half days sailing from Honiara, and Yates said the NDMO would load it with food supplies.

A food security assessment conducted in September concluded that Tikopia still requires assistance and the the NDMO has appealed to donors to provide emergency food supplies.

"This assessment further justifies the need for us to keep supporting these people with food until they are back on their feet," Yates said.

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So far, however, the NDMO has no offers of help. mjf/mmc

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Solomon Islands: Food supply for people of Tikopia and Anuta

Dec. 01, 2003

HONIARA, Solomon Islands (PFnet News) -- Relief food supply is on its way to the people of Tikopia and Anuta islands in the Temotu Province. The National Disaster Management Office, NDMO Honiara told SIBC news that an Australian Navy landing craft left Honiara yesterday for Tikopia and Anuta via provincial capital, Lata. Assistant Director of NDMO, Martin Karani revealed that 64 tones of rice from Honiara are onboard the landing craft. It is expected that the vessel will call in at the provincial capital, Lata to collect local food, and an officer of the National Disaster Management Office before sailing to Tikopia and Anuta.



Meanwhile, Karani revealed that the Disaster Management Office has been unable to send building materials for the Clinic and Staff House on Tikopia on the landing craft because it's a small vessel.

He however adds that the building material will be sent on the first available ship to Tikopia and Anuta. Karani conveyed thanks from the Disaster Management Office to AusAID for the food supply, and also appreciation to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, RAMSI for their help in providing the landing craft to take the food to the people of Tikopia and Anuta. Cyclone Zoe devastated the two islands in January this year, during which food crops on the islands were destroyed.

