Cash transfers for disaster response: lessons from Tropical Cyclone Winston

Aisha Mansur, Jesse Doyle and Oleksiy Ivaschenko

Abstract

In 2016, following Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston, Fiji became the First Pacific Island country to channel post-disaster assistance through its existing social safety net programs. With wind speeds of up to 306km/h, TC Winston was one of the most powerful cyclones ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere, and the first Category 5 cyclone to directly strike Fiji. The Government swiftly mobilised funds through its existing social protection programs to channel cash assistance to poor households and vulnerable groups. Households covered under the Poverty Benefits Scheme, Social Pension Scheme, and Care and Protection Allowance were provided with a top-up payment equivalent to three months of their regular benefits, which was designed to help them meet their basic needs. This impact evaluation: (i) assesses the impact of these top-up cash transfers on poor households; and (ii) puts forward a list of recommendations on what measures could be put in place ex-ante to improve this type of response in the case of future natural disasters.
Cash transfers from disaster response: Lessons from tropical cyclone Winston

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Cash transfers for disaster response: Lessons from tropical cyclone Winston

1. Executive Summary

An impact evaluation of the Tropical Cyclone Winston social protection top up transfers was conducted by the World Bank in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS), and funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The main objectives of the impact evaluation were to: (i) assess the impact of TC Winston on the affected households, (ii) analyse the effects of top-up transfers and how they were spent, and (iii) assess whether top-up transfers were an appropriate response. Furthermore, a list of recommendations has been put together for consideration. It is anticipated that the results from the impact evaluation will help inform the government on how to improve the assistance channeled through their social protection (SP) system in the case of future natural disasters.

Tropical Cyclone Winston, the most powerful storm on record in the Southern Hemisphere, made landfall in Fiji on February 20, 2016, impacting over 540,000 people, or 60 percent of the total population, and leaving a trail of destruction across large parts of the country. A total of 44 people were killed and the damage to the housing and agriculture sectors was severe, with significant damage also to public buildings (particularly schools) and transport, as well as electricity and communications infrastructure. Some of the worst hit areas were outlying islands. The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) estimates total damage and losses to the productive, social and infrastructure sectors at US$959 million (22 percent of GDP). Including damages to

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1 The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of DFAT.
the environment and losses in eco-system services, the estimated damage and losses rise to US$1.38 billion (31 percent of GDP).

As a result, the Government of Fiji (GoF) decided to use its existing social protection system to provide additional assistance in the form of top-up transfers to the most vulnerable, as a key component of its disaster response. In recognising that natural disasters can adversely affect poor families and potentially reverse the previous gains in poverty reduction, the GoF on March 8, 2016, announced its decision to provide top-up payments to the beneficiaries of the three core existing social protection programs, the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS), Social Pension Scheme (SPS), and the Care and Protection Scheme (CPS). The payments were quickly rolled-out ten days after this decision. Under the first category – the PBS – 23,035 households (accounting for 90,000 people or 10 percent of the total population) were paid a lump sum of F$600 (US$300) to cover the necessary expenses for the next 3 months. Under the second category – the CPS – 3,257 families (accounting for 13,000 people) received a total of F$300 to cover for 3 months. Under the third category – the SPS - 17,232 pensioners over the age of 68, received an additional F$300. These transfers were made one month after the cyclone hit.

The impact evaluation survey was initiated in June 2016, nearly 3 months after TC Winston. The quantitative impact evaluation data was collected in Fiji during June 2016, with a sample size of about 700 households. The evaluation strategy uses the regression discontinuity design (RDD) in defining the treatment and control groups based on the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) eligibility (poverty score) threshold. The treatment group is formed from PBS recipient households (20 percent below threshold) in affected areas that have also received the intervention (top-up PBS benefit) post-TC Winston. The control group is formed from the PBS-evaluated (pre-TC Winston) households in affected areas that are not eligible for PBS, as they are above (but within 20 percent) the threshold. These households did not receive the intervention. The evaluation sample consists of 275 treatment and 270 control group households. Furthermore, a qualitative field survey was
carried out in November 2016, with a sample size of over 100 interviews, to better understand some of the findings of the quantitative field survey.

The analysis of the impact evaluation of the top-up transfers is structured around the assessment of the following components: (i) baseline characteristics, (ii) impact of TC Winston on affected households, (iii) effectiveness of top-up transfers, (iv) top-up transfers vs. other assistance, and (v) evaluation of the Government's broader response to TC Winston. The results of the impact evaluation of the TC Winston social protection top-up transfers can be summarised into the following key findings:

- The disaster responsive social protection intervention, in the form of top-up transfers to beneficiaries, was found to be an effective response following TC Winston.
- The in-kind humanitarian assistance provided effective immediate assistance to all affected households, and played a crucial role in sustaining the families until the markets were restored.
- Both poor and near-poor households were similarly affected by TC Winston, and the households receiving the top-up transfers were quicker to recover from the disaster shocks.
- Households acted rationally in their spending patterns and the top-up payments were used on essential items, which helped the beneficiaries cope and recover faster from the shocks.
- Knowledge on the top-up transfers was very low amongst the recipients, with majority of recipients unaware that they would be receiving the payment.

Based on these findings from the impact evaluation, the following recommendations are put forward for the Government's consideration, to help improve the disaster responsiveness of the social protection system:
• As a preparedness measure for future disasters the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines for disaster responsive social protection should be developed.
• A coordination mechanism for cash transfer interventions needs to be established for future disasters.
• The Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) database needs to be consolidated and expanded so that both poor and near-poor households can be better targeted in times of disaster.
• Humanitarian assistance should be complemented with both in-kind and cash assistance, based on access and functionality of local markets.
• A post-Disaster Communication Plan should be prepared to better inform the recipients.
• A follow-up impact evaluation survey should be conducted one year after TC Winston to assess the long-term impact of the top-up transfers
2. Introduction

Fiji is one of the largest and most developed countries in the Pacific and serves geographically and economically as the centre of the region. Fiji is an archipelago of 332 islands (of which approximately 110 are inhabited), and is spread over a land area of approximately 18,300km\(^2\) and a geographic area of almost 50,000km\(^2\). The country has a population of approximately 865,000\(^2\) people, with the majority of people residing primarily on the two largest islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Fiji is one of the wealthiest countries in the Pacific, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of US$4.53 billion and a gross national income (GNI) of US$4,870 per capita\(^3\). Fiji’s economic growth has been strong in recent years, reaching 3.6 percent in 2013, 5.3 percent in 2014, and an estimated 4 percent in 2015, which is significantly above the average of 2 percent for the period 1980–2012. This has been a result of strong credit growth, buoyant remittances, and improved labour market conditions which have boosted consumer demand. Furthermore, tourism and government spending on infrastructure has also supported the strong growth momentum. The economy is primarily based on agriculture, sugar, and tourism, with tourism being the largest foreign exchange earner over the years.

Fiji is highly vulnerable to external shocks and natural disasters and experiences one cyclone per year on average. Fiji is located in the tropical cyclone belt and experiences frequent tropical cyclones characterized by damaging winds, rain, and storm surge. Being surrounded by the Pacific Ring of Fire, it is also associated with extreme seismic activity, volcanic activity, large earthquakes, and tsunamis. Additionally, it suffers from extreme events associated with climate change, such as sea-level rise, temperature extremes and droughts, and experiences on average one cyclone per year. Since 1980, the various disasters have resulted in average annual economic damage of around F$35 million and

impacted the lives of around 40,000 people each year (Government of Fiji, 2016). Due to the increasing incidence of global disasters, it is expected that Fiji will incur, on average, F$158 million (US$85 million) per year in losses due to earthquakes and tropical cyclones. In the next 50 years, Fiji has a 50 percent chance of experiencing a loss exceeding F$1.5 billion (US$806 million), and a 10 percent chance of experiencing a loss exceeding F$3 billion (US$1.6 billion), however these figures may be worse once the impacts of climate change are taken into consideration (Government of Fiji, 2016).

Tropical Cyclone Winston, the most powerful storm on record in the Southern Hemisphere, made landfall in Fiji on February 20, 2016, impacting over 540,000 people, or 60 percent of the total population and leaving a trail of destruction across large parts of the country. A total of 44 people were killed and the damage to the housing and agriculture sectors was severe, with significant damage also to public buildings (particularly schools) and transport, as well as electricity and communications infrastructure. Some of the worst hit areas were outlying islands. The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) estimates total damage and losses to the productive, social and infrastructure sectors at US$959 million (22 percent of GDP). Including damages to the environment and losses in eco-system services, the estimated damage and losses rise to US$1.38 billion (31 percent of GDP). Among the damages, the housing sector was by far the worst hit, accounting for 59 percent of total damages with more than 30,000 homes destroyed or damaged, followed by transport infrastructure at 10 percent of total damages. Among the losses, the agriculture and fisheries sectors – which provide employment to an estimated 70 percent of the population – were the biggest contributors, at 61 percent of total losses. While agriculture flows are expected to recover within three years, fisheries flows are expected to take ten years, because of the damage to coastal mangrove and coral reef habitats (World Bank, 2016).

4 These figures are based on modelling from PCRAFI (2015) and reported in the Fiji PDNA 2016.
TC Winston had a pronounced geographical pattern of destruction. It has affected mostly the Northern part of the Viti Levu Island and the Southern part of the Vanua Levu Island, as well as a number of small remote islands in the Eastern Division (Figure 1). The path the cyclone took was primarily across the rural areas of Fiji, where average household incomes are lower, housing is less robust and agriculture is of overwhelming importance to livelihoods (Government of Fiji, 2016). The provinces of Ba, Ra, Tailevu, Naitasiri (all on the main island of Viti Levu), Bua (Vanua Levu) and Lomaiviti have been among the most affected, with per capita damage/losses estimated in access of F$5,000 (US$ 2,500) per person. These are also the most impoverished regions of Fiji according to a Poverty Mapping study conducted by the World Bank in 2011, which shows that the poverty incidence is highest (above 50 percent) in the provinces of Ra, Cakaudrove and Macuata, followed by the provinces of Nadroga/Navosa and Bua (between 40 and 50 percent).
In the wake of TC Winston, and with the support of development partners and civil society organizations, the Government of Fiji has mounted a major relief effort. The immediate priority has been humanitarian aid, providing food, water and shelter to those affected. Housing of some 30,000 households or 130,000 people (15 percent of the population) has been damaged or destroyed (World Bank, 2016). Agricultural assistance for the replanting of food crops began very soon after the cyclone hit, a process that then had to be repeated in some areas due to the heavy flooding caused by a subsequent weaker cyclone. In addition, the World Food Program (WFP) upon an official request from the Government, launched a US$714,311 Immediate Response Emergency Operation and a US$3,383,162 Emergency Operation, for a total of US$4,097,473 to
support food security and disaster relief, to which the Australian Government contributed AUD$1 million. In total Australia provided AUD$53 million in assistance.

The Government of Fiji decided to use its existing social protection system to provide additional assistance in the form of top-up transfers to the most vulnerable, as a key component of its disaster response. In recognising that natural disasters can adversely affect poor families and potentially reverse the previous gains in poverty reduction, the GoF on March 18, 2016 announced its decision to provide top-up payments to the beneficiaries of the three core existing social protection programs; the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS), Social Pension Scheme (SPS), and the Care and Protection Scheme (CPS). Under the first category – the PBS – 23,035 households (accounting for 90,000 people or 10 percent of the total population) were paid a lump sum of F$600 (US$300) to cover the necessary expenses for the next 3 months. Under the second category – the CPS – 3,257 families (accounting for 13,000 people) received a total of F$300 to cover for 3 months. Under the third category – the SPS – 17,232 pensioners over the age of 68, got an additional F$300. These transfers were made one month after the cyclone hit.

An impact evaluation of the top up transfers was conducted by the World Bank in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS), and funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The main objectives of the impact evaluation were to: (i) assess the impact of TC Winston on the affected households, (ii) analyse the effects of top-up transfers and how they were spent, and (iii) assess whether top-up transfers were an appropriate response. The impact evaluation data was collected in Fiji during June 2016, with a sample size of about 700 households. A food voucher top up financed by WFP, equivalent to F$150 per month was provided to approximately 72,000 people during May and June, but that intervention is out of scope of this study since at the time of data collection the vouchers were still

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6 Inputs provided by WFP team.
7 Inputs provided by DFAT team.
being distributed and most households had not used their vouchers. WFP support demonstrated the viability of linking the Fijian national social protection system with the timely and efficient provision of aid from humanitarian actors as a successful example of shock responsive social safety nets.

The purpose of this report is to present the key results that have emerged from the impact evaluation, and to provide some recommendations for future disaster response strategies. The quantitative field evaluation was conducted from June 7 to July 1, 2016 in affected areas of Viti Levu (Ba and Ra provinces) and surveyed two groups of households: those eligible for the social protection schemes (poor) before the disaster, and those ineligible but still near poor. The evaluation strategy involves the use of regression discontinuity design (RDD) to define the treatment and control groups based on the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) eligibility (poverty score) threshold. The treatment group is formed from the PBS recipient households (20 percent below threshold) in affected areas that received the intervention (top-up PBS benefit) post-TC Winston. The control group is formed from the PBS-evaluated (pre-TC Winston) households in affected areas that are not eligible for PBS, as they are above (but within 20 percent of) the threshold. These households did not receive an intervention. Furthermore, a qualitative field survey was carried out in November 2016, with a sample size of over 100 interviews, to better understand some of the findings of the quantitative field survey.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows: Section 3 describes the social protection top-up transfer intervention that is being evaluated, as well as the impact evaluation timeline. Section 4 provides an overview of the impact evaluation design and methodology. Section 5 presents an analysis of the impact evaluation results. Section 6 provides a summary of the key findings. Section 7 concludes with the key recommendations and way forward.
### 3. Social Protection Top-up Transfers

Four weeks into the disaster, on 18 March 2016, the Government disbursed F$19.9 million using the existing social welfare schemes and injected much needed cash into the economy. The cash top-up payments were intended to help households meet their immediate needs following TC Winston and were provided to all existing beneficiaries of the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS), Social Pension Scheme (SPS), and the Care and Protection Scheme (CPS), irrespective of whether they resided in the affected areas or not. This decision was driven by several factors: (i) the urgency of the situation (the need to respond); (ii) operational constraints (database not of sufficient quality to distinguish between affected and non-affected areas); (iii) the fact that current beneficiaries are considered to be disadvantaged anyway (even if they happen to be in non-affected areas); and (iv) the belief that inter-household sharing of resources would take place (e.g., households in non-affected areas would share the transfers with their extended kinship networks in affected areas). The main purpose of this report is to evaluate the impact of these top-up transfers, described in detail below, on the affected household’s ability to recover from these shocks following TC Winston.

Under the three schemes, existing beneficiaries were paid the equivalent of approximately three months’ worth of payments as a lump sum transfer. Under normal circumstances, the PBS benefit amount is F$30 per person (for up to four household members) plus an additional F$50 food voucher. In other words, for a household of 4 people the total value of the monthly benefit (including the food voucher) is F$170. Post-TC Winston, 23,035 PBS households (accounting for approximately 90,000 people or 10 percent of the population) received a sum of F$600 (US$300). Under the Care and Protection Program, 2,246 households (accounting for approximately 7,400 people or 0.8 percent of the population) received a sum of F$300 (US$150). Under the Social Pension Program, 16,436 households (accounting for approximately 157,000 people or 17 percent of the population) received a sum of F$30 (US$15) per week.

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8 The PBS is the main social welfare program in Fiji, targeting the poorest 10% of households through a rigorous assessment process involving household visits by the social welfare officer from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and the application of the proxy means testing methodology to identify households below the targeted threshold who then become eligible for the program. The total annual cost of the PBS is about 0.6% of GDP, while SPS and CPS account for 0.3% and 0.1%, respectively.
Protection Scheme, 3,257 families received a total of F$300 (US$150). For the Social Pension Scheme, 17,232 pensioners over the age of 68 received an additional F$300. These three welfare schemes and the top-up payouts made through them are summarized in Table 1 below. As the treatment and control groups are constructed based on the PBS poverty threshold (as described in detail further), the main intervention that is evaluated is the PBS top-up transfer, controlling for other assistance provided.

Table 1: Social Welfare Programs in Fiji and Top-up payments provided post-TC Winston

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program name</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Number of beneficiaries</th>
<th>Regular benefit size</th>
<th>Top-up benefit size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS)</td>
<td>The poorest 10% of households</td>
<td>23,035 households, or 90,000 individuals (10% of population)</td>
<td>F$30 per person (for up to four household members) + F$50 food voucher, or max. F$170</td>
<td>F$600 lump sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and Protection Scheme (CPS)</td>
<td>Disadvantaged households (facing special needs) with kids (e.g., single mothers with kids)</td>
<td>3,257 households</td>
<td>F$110 (maximum amount) + F$50 food voucher</td>
<td>F$300 lump sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Pension Scheme</td>
<td>Elderly (68+ years old) with no alternative means of support</td>
<td>17,232 individuals</td>
<td>F$50 + F$50 food voucher</td>
<td>F$300 lump sum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank estimates and the GoF.

In additional to the top-up benefits, withdrawals were also permitted through the Government's contributory social insurance program (the Fiji National Provident Fund), in the first two months of TC Winston. Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), allowed affected members to withdraw cash nine days after TC Winston, resulting in a significant injection of cash into the economy. Active members were allowed to withdraw up to F$1,000, plus an additional F$5,000 if they could present proof (property title) of having a house in the cyclone affected area. Within the first two months of the disaster, the FNPF
processed and approved 170,000 withdrawal applications, including 35,000 in the second (F$5,000) category. These one-time withdrawals have resulted in a massive injection of around F$250.2 million (or about 3 percent of GDP) cash into the economy (Mansur et al., 2016). For the purpose of this impact evaluation report, the FNPF withdrawals are controlled for while evaluating for the impacts of the PBS top-up transfers.

The Government also rolled out a Housing Program, or “Help for Homes” initiative which was designed to assist families to rebuild homes during the early recovery stage of TC Winston. A total of 30,000 homes were reported damaged or destroyed and under the program the government provided housing vouchers to help severely impacted lower-income households rebuild their dwellings. This initiative was implemented by the Department of Social Welfare with social workers conducting household visits and assessments in late May-June 2016. Eligible households received an electronic card, which then permitted them to spend the assistance on essential building materials at a set of nominated hardware retailers. This program is targeted to households with an annual income under F$50,000 (US$24,000) who experienced housing damage. The three categories of benefits provided were: F$1,500 (US$717) for houses with partial roofing damage; F$3,000 (US$1,434) for houses with a serious roofing damage; and F$7,000 (US$3,345) for almost/completely demolished households.

The budget allocation announced for this program during its initial launch was F$70 million (or about 1 percent of GDP). However, the expected total cost was anticipated to be much higher at F$184 million, for assistance up to 2018 (Government of Fiji, 2016a). The initial Phase 1 amount of F$70 million, comprised 30 percent of the total housing sector reconstruction needs following TC Winston (Government of Fiji, 2017). The government has so far completed two phases of the program and will shortly be initiating

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9 Households living in informal settlements in the affected areas also received F $1,500 (US$750).
Phase 3. Recent estimates suggest that in Phase 1 the government has contributed F$88 million and assisted over 24,000 people, and in Phase 2 has contributed F$20 million and assisted 3,800 people. For Phase 3, the government has announced a budget of F$25 million to assist around 6,000 people. The distribution period for the housing vouchers coincided with the impact evaluation survey data collection in June 2016. It is important to note that as of end of June 2016, the households effectively did not have an opportunity to utilize the housing vouchers. Hence, whilst this paper is not evaluating their impact, it does control for the housing vouchers.

The timeline of post-TC Winston interventions, as well as the timeline for the impact evaluation data collection are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Timeline for TC Winston Response and Impact Evaluation

- **March 18th**: PBS, C&P, SPS payments
- **April 18th**: 75% of HHs have accessed top
- **May 24th – June 30th**: Help for Homes Vouchers Issued
- **February 29th – April 29th**: FNPF Drawdowns permitted for a period of 60 days

**Source**: Compiled by the authors.
4. Impact Evaluation Survey

The impact evaluation survey was conducted in June 2016, nearly 3 months after TC Winston. The impact evaluation data was collected in Fiji during June 2016, with a sample size of about 700 households. The evaluation strategy uses the regression discontinuity design (RDD) in defining the treatment and control groups. Regression discontinuity design (RDD) is an impact evaluation method that can be used for programs that have a continuous eligibility index with a clearly defined cut-off score to determine who is eligible to receive the program and who is not (World Bank, 2011b). The Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) satisfies both these conditions, since the PBS eligibility is based on a continuous poverty index, and the threshold level of the poverty index (cut-off score) is used for determining eligibility. For this evaluation, the treatment group is formed from the PBS recipient households (20 percent below threshold) in affected areas that have also received an intervention (top-up PBS benefit) post-TC Winston. The control group is formed from the PBS-evaluated (pre-TC Winston) households in affected areas that are not eligible for PBS, as they are above (but within 20 percent of) the threshold. These households did not receive the intervention. The evaluation sample consists of 275 treatment and 270 control group households (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Affected Area</th>
<th>Non-Affected Area</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS)</td>
<td>275 (Treatment)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and Protection Scheme (CPS)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Pension Scheme</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-eligible</td>
<td>270 (Control)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.
The geographic focus of the impact evaluation is on Ba and Ra provinces along the northern coast of Viti Levu. This is the region which comprises the majority of affected households from TC Winston. These provinces include the districts (called “tikinas” in Fiji) of Ba, Raki Raki, Tavua and Korovou. Vanua Levu (2nd largest island which had its southern parts affected) and the outlying islands were excluded from the evaluation. The objective of the sampling was to select, through a random procedure, a representative set of PBS recipients (treatments) and non-recipients (controls) in affected areas, allowing for the limitations of the data set.12

Ultimately, 81 percent of the target households were found and interviewed during the field work. This is considered an excellent result given the difficulties of sampling in the affected regions in which many beneficiaries had been forced to move home (e.g., stay with relatives/friends) as a consequence of TC Winston. Importantly, all households were interviewed within a timeframe of 3 weeks (with the majority within 2 weeks), between June 7 and July 1, 2016.

5. Impact Evaluation Analysis

The analysis of the impact evaluation of the top-up transfers is structured around the assessment of the following components; (i) baseline characteristics, (ii) impact of TC Winston on affected households, (iii) effectiveness of top-up transfers, (iv) top-up transfers vs. other assistance, and (v) evaluation of the Government’s effort of TC Winston. The results of the impact evaluation broadly indicate that following TC Winston, both poor and near poor households were severely affected by TC Winston and faced similar shocks. The functionality of markets was impacted and recovered only one month after the disaster. Households were forced to reduce their food consumption. The top-up transfers were found to be a timely and effective intervention one-month after TC

12 It was decided to exclude the Lautoka and Vunidawa from the evaluation as both regions were partly affected by TC Winston and it would not be possible to readily determine whether beneficiaries were in an area affected by TC Winston.
Winston, with the majority of households spending their top-up transfers on essential items only. Households who received the top-up transfers were seen to have recovered faster than those households who did not receive the top-up. Also, in-kind humanitarian assistance in the form of food rations, building materials and temporary shelters provided effective and immediate assistance to all affected households. Lastly, the results show an overwhelmingly positive perception of the Government’s response to TC Winston by the households. The detailed results of the impact evaluation have been summarised below.

5.1 Baseline characteristics

Similar baseline characteristics were found for both poor and near-poor households in pre-TC Winston situation. The survey collected basic housing and demographic information on the PBS recipients (treatment group) and non-PBS recipients (control group), and found remarkably similar results for a number of features, including: (i) land type and dwelling ownership status, (ii) quality of dwelling/living conditions, (iii) possession of durable goods, and (iv) household demographics. Some key findings from the survey indicate that the majority of PBS and non-PBS recipients; live in traditional villages (56 percent and 54.1 percent, respectively), own their living quarters (89.1 percent and 91.5 percent, respectively), and have electricity connection (62.5 percent and 65.6 percent, respectively); while both groups have a low rate of possession of durable goods, such as owning a refrigerator (22.5 percent and 24.4 percent, respectively). The only notable difference (significant at a 5 percent level) between the PBS and non-PBS recipients appears to be for the category of dwelling material, with a lower share of PBS recipients having wooden walls (17.8 percent and 25.9 percent, respectively), and a higher share of PBS recipients having walls made of tin/corrugated iron (61.8 percent and 52.6 percent, respectively). This finding is not surprising, considering that the tin/corrugated iron walls are strongly associated with the poverty status in Fiji, and this variable has a significant weight in determining the overall poverty score for the PBS eligibility. Overall, the findings indicate a very balanced sample of the two comparable
groups (treatment and control), having very similar baseline characteristics for housing and demographics (Table 3), which in turn demonstrates high confidence in the results of the impact evaluation survey.

Table 3: Baseline characteristics of Treatment and Control groups – Pre-TC Winston.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Significance (P&lt;0.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. or Rooms</td>
<td>Rooms</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head's education</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH Size</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet facility</td>
<td>Flush private</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water sealed</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking fuel</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>-1.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.
Note: * denotes significance at a 10% level.

5.2 Impact of TC Winston on affected households

All households, including poor households, suffered severe losses in the wake of TC Winston. The results indicate that both PBS recipients (treatment group) and non-recipients (control group) faced similar shocks in the affected areas, with the highest
shocks reported for: (i) damage to the dwelling’s roof (72.7 percent and 75.6 percent, respectively), (ii) loss of crops/harvest (50.9 percent and 52.6 percent respectively), and (iii) damage to agricultural land (41.5 percent and 46.3 percent, respectively). About a third of households reported total loss of dwelling (Figure 3), and this is also the only statistically significant difference (significant at a 10 percent level) between the two groups (37.8 percent and 30.7 percent, respectively). A significant share of households also reported the loss of food stocks (37.8 percent and 34.4 percent, respectively) and the loss of livestock (18.9 percent and 20.7 percent, respectively). Importantly, the findings suggest that in times of disaster all affected households need to be provided with assistance, while the social protection system can be used to target assistance to poor and near-poor households.

Figure 3: Percentage of households in affected areas experiencing a given shock

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.
Local market access (or lack of) for households was found to be a major problem right after TC Winston. The PBS recipients reported a sharp decline in their ability to purchase all necessary goods and services from their local markets, with access to local markets dropping from 83.9 percent to 37.4 percent immediately after TC Winston. However, market access was restored to nearly the same level within a month (Figure 4). Three months into the disaster, the survey finds that some households are still finding it difficult to access electricity (24 percent), food (22 percent) and water (18 percent). The findings suggest that the top-up payments were an effective intervention one month after the disaster, once markets were restored.

**Figure 4: Households’ access to local markets before and after the disaster**

![Bar chart showing access to local markets before and after the disaster](image)

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*

The majority of households changed their consumption patterns and reported having consumed less expensive food as a result of TC Winston. The results are fairly similar across all categories of respondents and this suggests that both PBS and non-PBS households switched to less costly food items. On average, 79 percent of households reported having consumed less expensive food following TC Winston (Figure 5). However, we cannot say with certainty whether the reduced consumption by households
took place because of lack of money to purchase food or inability to purchase due to non-functioning markets. Nonetheless, we can conclude with certainty that households were forced to modify their consumption patterns and their intake of food items was compromised.

**Figure 5: Households’ reduced food consumption after the disaster**

![Graph showing percentage of food consumption reduced](image)

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*

With poor households relying heavily on social transfers even before TC Winston, this reliance grew stronger in the aftermath of the disaster, while the reliance on the agricultural income decreased. The survey results indicate that pre-TC Winston (Figure 6), the PBS recipients were heavily reliant on pensions, social transfers and remittances (44.4 percent) as their main source of income (compared to 5.9 percent for non-PBS recipients), while the non-PBS recipients were heavily reliant on agricultural income and subsistence farming (48.3 percent) as their main source of pre-TC Winston income (compared to 27.3 percent for PBS recipients). Post-TC Winston the situation has not changed much for the two groups in terms of their main source of income, however it should be noted that the PBS recipients seem to be coping better as a result of the disaster, as there is a rise in their pensions/social transfers/remittances, most likely due to the top-up payments they received, while the non-PBS recipients are seen to have a significant fall in their agricultural income (and no increase in pensions or remittances).
The results indicate that the poor and near-poor households have clearly different income profiles. While the poor are unequivocally seen to need immediate assistance as they lack any means of support, it is in fact the near poor households who could be in the most jeopardy following a disaster. This is for two reasons: (i) their main source of income is highly sensitive to disasters; and (ii) they are just above the perceived poverty threshold to qualify for assistance from the Government.

**Figure 6: Households’ main source of income before and after the disaster**

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*
The Government of Fiji made a timely decision to provide top-up payments, which were swiftly executed to ensure that the beneficiaries received the top-up payments within one month of the disaster. Fiji already has an advanced electronic banking system in place which is used to make regular social welfare payments to the beneficiaries. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that 98 percent of PBS recipients surveyed have reported having received their top-up transfers through electronic means. The findings of the impact evaluation survey also indicate that 76 percent of households withdrew their top-up payments within the first month of receiving them (Figure 7), which indicates that the banking infrastructure quickly recovered in the research sites. The results are fairly

Box 1. Assessing for signs of communal tensions or jealousy caused by the top-up payments

The cash transfer top up payments did not appear to trigger any serious communal tensions. However, families did express feeling a sense of awkwardness in receiving the cash payments when neighbours equally affected had not. This was particularly obvious in iTaukei Fijian settlements, where there were some reported instances of jealousy between neighbours and a feeling of awkwardness from the recipients of the top up. However, this did not result in any threatening actions, and nor did it result in any sharing of the top up payments (discussed further in section below). Furthermore, in Indo-Fijian households, there were no reported tensions.

In a few villages, it was observed that the issue of equity in the distribution of the payments had caused tensions between families and one respondent shared how uncomfortable they were to talk about top-up payments and its fairness. However, again these tensions did not result in any physical confrontations, as there was a general recognition that everyone had been affected by the cyclone.

Source: TC Winston IE Qualitative Survey field notes.

5.3 Effectiveness of Top-up transfers

The Government of Fiji made a timely decision to provide top-up payments, which were swiftly executed to ensure that the beneficiaries received the top-up payments within one month of the disaster. Fiji already has an advanced electronic banking system in place which is used to make regular social welfare payments to the beneficiaries. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that 98 percent of PBS recipients surveyed have reported having received their top-up transfers through electronic means. The findings of the impact evaluation survey also indicate that 76 percent of households withdrew their top-up payments within the first month of receiving them (Figure 7), which indicates that the banking infrastructure quickly recovered in the research sites. The results are fairly

13 A very small fraction of regular social welfare payments are made through the post office for some of the hard to reach outer islands.
similar across both male and female headed households, suggesting no apparent difference in the access or utilisation of funds between the two genders.

**Figure 7: Withdrawal of top-up payments by households within the first month of receiving**

Knowledge of the top-up transfer payments was found to be very low amongst the top-up recipients, with majority of recipients unaware that they would be receiving the top-up payment. The survey finds that only 48 percent of beneficiaries were aware that they would be receiving the top-up payment, and only 58 percent of beneficiaries were aware of the intent of the payment and why they were receiving it. The qualitative survey also validates these findings, and households were quick to identify radio as their most preferred medium of information, and the most effective as they found it to be cheap and able to function even without electricity (battery operated radios). The findings indicate that a stronger public information campaign could have been employed by the government for reaching out to the affected communities and beneficiaries, and informing them about the forthcoming support, the eligibility and advice on how best to use the money received. *The results indicate the need for a post-disaster Communication*
Plan to be developed for reaching out to the communities in a short period of time with maximum impact.

About a quarter of PBS recipients had to travel to receive their top-up payments. The survey finds that around 33 percent of PBS recipients had to travel to receive their top-up payments, while the average distance travelled was reported to be 9km. The main form of transportation for the majority of recipients was walking (54.6 percent), followed by boat (34.3 percent) and taxi (7.4 percent) (Figure 8). The survey also finds that those recipients who took the bus, boat or taxi spent an average of F$10 on transportation.

Figure 8: Main form of transportation for receiving Top-up payments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation for receiving PBS top-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus 2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat 34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking 54.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi 7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own car 0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.

Top-up transfers were predominantly spent by recipient households on essential items, and the majority of top-up payments were fully utilized within the first month of receiving. 78 percent of households reported having spent all of their top-up payments within four weeks of gaining access to the funds (Figure 9). Household spending patterns show that 99 percent of the top-up amount was spent on essential items (Figure 10), with food (30.1 percent) and materials to repair damaged dwellings (21.6 percent) forming the two most important categories of expenditure, followed by clothing and school supplies (14.9 percent). Less than 1 percent of the assistance has been reported to be
spent on kava, alcohol or cigarettes, addressing a common concern that additional social assistance would be used unwisely for ‘non-essential items’ (Figure 10). The results are fairly similar for male and female headed households. As discussed earlier, most households also experienced changes in their consumption patterns, with 79 percent of households reporting having consumed less expensive food items as a result of TC Winston. The results suggest that households acted rationally and the top-up payment was put to good use, making the top-up transfers an effective disaster response.

Figure 9: PBS household spending pattern

![Figure 9: PBS household spending pattern](image)

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.

Figure 10: Percentage of top-up assistance spent on various items

![Figure 10: Percentage of top-up assistance spent on various items](image)

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.
The impact evaluation analysis suggests that, three months after the cyclone took place, beneficiaries under the PBS were more likely to have recovered from the shocks they faced, relative to comparable households that did not receive the additional assistance. This includes better odds of recovering from total loss of dwelling, damage to agricultural land, and loss of food stocks (Table 4). Furthermore, even when controlling for other forms of assistance, such as the housing voucher, the results indicate that the top-up transfers to PBS recipients played a significant role in overcoming the adverse effects of TC Winston. A further regression analysis was run to investigate the impact of the top-up transfers on the recovery from shocks. The results indicate that households who received the cash transfers were 8 to 10 percent more likely to report having had housing damage fixed, followed by strong evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of cash transfers increases in the presence of a functioning local market, and the presence of strong district effects in the recovery process (Ivaschenko et al., 2016). The qualitative research findings indicate that outside of general consumption, there were a range of livelihood or income generation activities which were reportedly supported by the top-up payments, such as bus fares to help family members get to work, buying seedlings and farming tools, and investing in new livelihoods e.g. buying brush-cutters, livestock etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shock type</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total loss of dwelling</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to roof of dwelling</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to walls of dwelling</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to agricultural land</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to village/ neighbourhood infrastructure</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of crops/ harvest</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>PBS % 2016</td>
<td>PBS % 2015</td>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of livestock</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious sickness, injury or disability of any HH member</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>-3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict/ violence/ insecurity</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of food stocks</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of employment or inability to work</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of agricultural tools/ other productive assets</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>-1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*

Households did not share their top-up transfers with other families or individuals. The impact evaluation survey results indicate that contrary to popular belief, the top-up transfers were rarely seen to be shared with other households or communities, with only 4 percent of PBS households reporting that they shared their top-up payments with others. Even, when the results are disaggregated according to the affected and non-affected areas, the percentage of sharing of top-up transfers is still very low (4 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively), and surprisingly also low for sharing of regular PBS payments (10.9 percent and 15.7 percent, respectively) (Figure 11). The results suggest that in times of disaster, assistance should be closely targeted to the most affected households, as inter-household transfers from less affected areas will not necessarily be forthcoming.
Figure 11: Household sharing of Top-up and Regular transfers with other households

Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.

Box 2. Inter-household sharing of commodities but not cash

The qualitative research findings show that commodities, especially food stuff, were widely shared between households in both villages and settlements. While people provided help to others in the form of shelter, cooking food, building and cleaning, cash was rarely provided to others. This indicates that cash appears to operate differently to other sharing patterns within the community, and as such families were able to use the cash transfer top up payments for their own recovery and expenditure needs.

Furthermore, when families were probed as to why they had not shared their cash payment, most of them simply replied that they did not have enough to share as they were too poor, and they had urgent needs. One Fijian single mother living in a village said, “People didn’t ask for money, they know my need, I was able to use the cash for myself and my family’s needs”.

Source: TC Winston IE Qualitative Survey field notes.

The evaluation indicates an overwhelmingly positive assessment by the households of the government response to TC Winston. The evaluation finds that 86 percent of households found the response of the government following TC Winston to be either
‘good’, ‘very good’ or ‘perfect’. In fact, this percentage is 90 percent for PBS top-up recipients in the affected areas (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Households' satisfaction with the Government’s efforts post TC Winston**

![Evaluation score in the affected area](image)

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*

### 5.4 Top-up transfers vs. other assistance

In-kind humanitarian assistance has been the main first response, and it delivered the most needed items to the households. The results of the evaluation suggest that the efforts of the Government of Fiji, military, development partners and NGOs have resulted in an effective delivery of a wide range of items to sustain the households in the first days and weeks after the TC Winston. Nearly all households in the affected areas were reached with some form of non-cash assistance, regardless of top-up benefits. The survey finds that both groups of PBS recipients and non-PBS recipients were similar in receiving all types of non-cash assistance, with the exception of the food vouchers (which were by design targeted to PBS recipients), and the most prevalent form of humanitarian support was in the form of food/food packs (85.1 percent and 89.3 percent, respectively),
tarpaulins/tents (46.2 percent and 47 percent, respectively), and soap/hygiene products (35.3 percent and 36.7 percent, respectively) (Figure 13). In addition, the evaluation finds that only, 18 percent of households would have preferred the relief items in cash. The qualitative research study further probes into this and finds that almost all respondents regarded food assistance (food items, rations and food vouchers) as one of the most effective forms of support immediately to within a month after TC Winston. Preference for in-kind assistance was dominant until one month after the disaster, after which it decreases and becomes fairly similar to the preference for cash. However, many respondents were still in favour of in-kind assistance, as road damage and debris created obstacles for reaching functioning markets. The results indicate that the humanitarian/in-kind assistance in the form of food rations, building materials and temporary shelters provided effective immediate assistance to all affected households, and played a crucial role in sustaining the families until the markets were restored.
The evaluation also finds that 15 percent of households in the affected area also withdrew funds from the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF). The survey finds a low FNPF withdrawal rate amongst the PBS (13.1 percent) and non-PBS recipients (15.6 percent), with the average amount (if withdrawn) per household to be F$1,348 (PBS) and F$1,201 (non-PBS), respectively. Overall, the coverage of the poor (such as the PBS recipients) though the FNPF is very low, as the FNPF scheme generally targets government employees or those working in the formal sector (Figure 14).
The evaluation finds that 37.2 percent of households in the affected area received the ‘Help for Homes’ voucher (at the time of the survey). The survey finds that the ‘Help for Home’ or housing vouchers were received by 42.2 percent of PBS and 32.2 percent of non-PBS recipients, with the PBS recipients being more likely to receive these vouchers (significant at 1 percent). However, given the receipt of the voucher, the average amounts are very similar between the two groups, indicating that there is no bias in the amounts received by the PBS and non-PBS recipients. The value of the Housing Voucher received ranges between F$1500 (51 percent households), F$3000 (14 percent households), and F$7000 (34 percent households). The Housing Voucher was found to be distributed to households mostly in line with the level of damage experienced, with 50.8 percent of households experiencing total loss of dwelling receiving the highest amount for the recovery and repair (Table 5). Not a single household reporting no housing loss received a full voucher amount. The survey further finds that 41.6 percent of Housing Voucher beneficiaries expect their homes to be fully recovered from damage, as a result of the voucher, while 89 percent of beneficiaries anticipate that at least half of the damage will be fixed due to the Housing Vouchers (Table 6). Given the timing of this program, further
evaluation is needed to understand how the housing vouchers were utilized, and to what extent the amounts provided were adequate to rebuild.

**Table 5: Households receiving Housing Voucher amount based on level of damage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Damage level</th>
<th>Housing Voucher Amount Received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F$7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total loss of dwelling</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to roof of dwelling</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to walls of dwelling</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reported damage</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*

**Table 6: Households predicted recovery rate of dwelling as a result of Housing Voucher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing received</th>
<th>Voucher amount</th>
<th>Predicted recovery rate of dwelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F$7,000</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F$3,000</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;F$1,500</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: TC Winston IE Data, June 2016.*
Mere is a PBS recipient in Vatukacevaceva village, Raki Raki district. She is a single elderly woman whose house was completely destroyed in TC Winston. She received a F$7000 housing voucher from the government and managed to source all the required materials. As her village had a number of carpenters, they built her a much better home than she previously had for no cost; the Chief of her village has been insistent that all new houses are built to withstand a category 5 cyclone.

Her village has also received significant food and other commodity based assistance which was shared with her, by a village committee which ensured that all in-kind donations were fairly distributed among households. With her PBS funding, Mere has invested in five female goats, which her grandchildren help her to look after. All five goats are now pregnant and when the kids mature she plans to sell them for roughly F$400. She will sell the male goats and continue to use the females for breeding. Three other women in the village have used the PBS top up to buy brush-cutters. They can make F$10 for each compound where they cut the grass, and up to F$70 a day.

Source: TC Winston IE Qualitative Survey field notes.
6. Summary of Key Findings

The results of the impact evaluation of the TC Winston social protection top-up transfers can be summarised into the following key findings.

The disaster responsive social protection intervention, in the form of top-up transfers to beneficiaries, was found to be an effective response following TC Winston. It was rapidly implemented within one month of the disaster and clearly targeted towards the poorest households (PBS, SPS, CPS recipients). Furthermore, the top-up transfers were distributed in a timely manner (by planning or default) that allowed affected families to take advantage of recovering markets. The impact evaluation findings suggest that the top-up payments were an effective intervention one month after the disaster, once markets were restored, and should be planned as such for future response interventions.

The in-kind humanitarian assistance provided effective immediate assistance to all affected households, and played a crucial role in sustaining the families until the markets were restored. Nearly all households in the affected areas were reached with some form of non-cash assistance, in the form of food rations, building materials and temporary shelters, regardless of top-up benefits. This assistance was found to be even more crucial immediately after TC Winston when the markets were severely impacted. Therefore, when markets did recover one month after TC Winston, the cash assistance top up transfers meant that families could purchase their own resources and recover faster from the disaster impacts.

Both poor and near-poor households were similarly affected by TC Winston, and the households receiving the top-up transfers were quicker to recover from the disaster shocks. The PBS and non-PBS recipients faced similar shocks following TC Winston and the impact evaluation suggests that both poor and near-poor, and all affected households, need to be provided assistance in times of disaster. The findings also suggest that three months after the cyclone took place, beneficiaries under the PBS were more likely to have recovered from the shocks they faced, relative to comparable households that did not
receive the additional assistance. The results also indicate that assistance should be closely targeted to the most affected households, as inter-household transfers from less affected areas will not necessarily be forthcoming.

Households acted rationally in their spending patterns and the top-up payments were used on essential items, which helped the beneficiaries cope and recover faster from the shocks. Top-up transfers were predominantly spent by recipient households on essential items, and the majority of top-up payments were fully utilized within the first month of receiving them. Less than 1 percent of the assistance was reported to be spent on kava, alcohol or cigarettes, addressing a common concern that additional social assistance would be used unwisely for ‘non-essential items’, and making the top-up transfers an effective disaster response strategy.

Knowledge on the top-up transfers was very low amongst the recipients, with majority of recipients unaware that they would be receiving the payment. The findings indicate that a more comprehensive and engaging public information campaign could have been employed by the government for reaching out to the affected communities and beneficiaries, and informing them about the forthcoming support, the eligibility and advice on how best to use the money received. The findings suggest the need for strengthening communication outreach in times of disaster and sharing important messages on the initiative for achieving greater impact.

7. Recommendations and Way Forward

Based on the findings of the impact evaluation of the TC Winston social protection top-up transfers, the following recommendations can be put forward for the Government’s consideration moving forward, to help improve the disaster responsiveness of the social protection system.

Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) and guidelines for disaster responsive social protection. The government’s response to TC Winston was unprecedented in terms of its use of the existing social protection programs for disaster response, and although
the overall response was found to be generally swift and effective, it did run into certain implementation challenges, such as the inability to target near-poor households and effectively convey information on the top-up payments to the beneficiaries. There is a rising need to work on preparedness for future disasters and the development of standard operating procedures and guidelines will be a step in this direction. The SOPs and guidelines should enable the government to smoothly roll-out an emergency cash transfer operation in the event of a disaster. The SOPs should categorise the disaster levels and determine what the social protection response should be at each level, and should be linked to the broader Disaster Management Framework of Fiji. These documents can further provide guidance on how to activate and scale up existing social welfare programs in response to disasters and can help the government deliver better targeted and timely programs.

Establish a coordination mechanism for cash transfer interventions in times of disaster. The government was quick to identify opportunities for channelling humanitarian assistance through its existing social assistance system. This collaboration has led to the response being better targeted, timely and reducing duplication of effort, on the part of both the government and humanitarian actors. There is a need to now formalise this coordination mechanism between the two, so that in future disasters all cash transfer interventions (including cash, vouchers and public-works) are managed separately by the government, or coordinated using agreed standards. Suva is home to the Pacific Regional Cash Working Group which evolved from the informal working group set up during TC Winston, however, Fiji could consider a country level cash working group bringing government and humanitarian actors together and working across clusters. Having a dedicated national working group would ensure that from the beginning all cash-based interventions are prioritised and sequenced to provide the maximum relief to the affected families.

Consolidation of the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) database so that both poor and near-poor households can be better targeted in times of disaster. The PBS is a poverty-targeted
social assistance program of the government and maintains a comprehensive poverty registry of households meeting the minimum poverty threshold of the program (i.e., eligible for the PBS), and those families which are above the poverty cut-off score (i.e., not eligible for the PBS). As a result of TC Winston, it is anticipated that households in the PBS which were previously just above the poverty cut-off, may have drifted below the cut-off and are now in need of urgent assistance. Following TC Winston, the government was unable to extend its social welfare assistance to these near-poor households as the PBS database had not been upgraded to include the electronic records of these households. It is suggested that the government intensifies the efforts of consolidating and centralizing the PBS Registry, through allocation of additional staff and resources, so that in future disasters it has the option of extending its assistance to near poor households as well as undertaking geographical targeting of assistance, based on the registry.

Complement humanitarian assistance with both in-kind and cash assistance, based on access and functionality of local markets. The case of TC Winston demonstrates the effectiveness of in-kind humanitarian assistance in providing immediate relief to affected families, especially during the period when markets are severely impacted. However, once markets are restored, the top-up cash payments have been found to be an effective intervention one month after the disaster, allowing the families to use the cash assistance to purchase their own resources and recover faster from the disaster impacts. For future disasters, the government may consider channelling humanitarian assistance in the form of both in-kind and cash assistance, and synchronising the two so that the in-kind assistance is substituted by cash assistance, once the markets are up and running. This could save valuable time on procurement and boost the local economy, provided that the markets are sufficiently capacitated by then.

Develop a Post-Disaster Communication Plan. Post-TC Winston the government has been seen to struggle to effectively reach out to the communities, especially for information on top-up payments. The impact evaluation results also show low awareness amongst beneficiaries that they would be receiving the top-up payments, and this was followed by
low understanding on the overall intent of the top-up payments. There is a need to therefore strengthen the communication channel for future disasters and develop a Post-Disaster Communication Plan which identifies the strategy to be employed by the government for reaching out to the beneficiaries in times of disaster and informing them and the communities about the assistance being provided to them.

Follow-up impact evaluation survey. A follow-up impact evaluation survey should be conducted to assess the long-term impact of the top-up transfers on the PBS and non-PBS recipients following TC Winston, as well as to assess the long-term resilience built by the regular social assistance payments. The panel dataset will enable analysis to be conducted over time to assess the recovery process of the households, and whether the top-up payments have in fact sustained the recipients in the long run compared to the non-recipients. The results of the follow-up impact evaluation survey can be a valuable resource for the Government to inform its future disaster responsive social protection initiatives.
8. References


