

# Integrating Māori Ecological Wisdom and Civil Defence: A Contrasting Analysis of Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Hauraki Māori Communities

\*Author: Paora Moyle<sup>1</sup> ©

## Abstract

This article explores the response of Hauraki Māori communities to the housing crisis in Hauraki, which was intensified by Cyclone Gabrielle. It contrasts Indigenous disaster response strategies with existing civil defence protocols in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Drawing on two studies, 'He Whare, He Taonga' and 'Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle,' the findings highlight systemic inequities, the critical role of 'kāinga' (home) in resilience, and the importance of integrating Māori ecological wisdom into disaster management. While kāinga serve as protective factors and cultural anchors, colonial-constructed crises in the form of systemic barriers, including institutional racism, continue to undermine Māori-led solutions and well-being. The research calls for a paradigm shift towards culturally grounded, inclusive frameworks that value Māori knowledge and prioritise equitable decision-making. These insights contribute to the growing discourse on Indigenous knowledge in environmental governance and disaster resilience, offering actionable pathways for creating stronger, more equitable communities.

## Introduction

The response of Hauraki Māori communities to Cyclone Gabrielle has highlighted significant gaps between Indigenous approaches and current emergency management protocols in Aotearoa-New Zealand, including the exclusion of Māori ecological wisdom and systemic challenges in disaster response strategies. Our latest research, 'Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle' (Moyle, Kelly, & Messiter, 2025), investigates the key question: "How did Hauraki Māori mobilise to support whānau during Cyclone Gabrielle?" By examining this response, the research provides a contrasting perspective to official disaster management approaches, particularly those employed by local government entities like the Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC).

The first study, 'He Whare, He Taonga' (Te Whāriki Manawāhine Research, 2024), explored the link between family violence and housing poverty for Hauraki Wāhine Māori and their whānau to understand how these intersecting issues affect secure housing provision. The study confirmed a profound link, with key findings revealing that housing poverty manifests as limited access to affordable, secure, and culturally focused housing. These challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Paora Moyle, (Ngāti Porou) KSO, MSW (1st Class Honours). Email: paoramoyle5@gmail.com

represent a significant barrier preventing Wāhine and their whānau from achieving their housing goals. It also revealed that Wāhine Māori "*bear the burden of the violence*" at home, compounded by systemic violence from state agencies, with family violence increasing during natural disasters.

The 'He Whare, He Taonga' study informs our latest research project, 'Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle', which examines how Hauraki Māori mobilised to support whānau during the cyclone. This project focuses on their responses amid housing insecurity, systemic racism, and persistent disadvantage, particularly at the intersection of local authority/government-controlled housing.

Central to this is the concept of kāinga as a foundational element of both community resilience and cultural continuity, serving as a protective factor in disaster response efforts. By integrating insights from both studies, we aim to test the rigour of our results while highlighting the vulnerabilities and resilience of Hauraki Māori in the face of natural disasters and colonial-constructed crises, including systemic violence and bureaucratic obstacles.

This article examines the relationship between traditional ecological wisdom, community-driven mobilisation, and bureaucratic disaster management approaches, exploring synergies to enhance preparedness and response. This dual-lens approach contributes to literature on Indigenous knowledge in environmental governance and disaster resilience, highlighting the intersectionality of cultural knowledge, systemic barriers, and community-led responses. It contrasts the hierarchical, policy-driven frameworks of local authorities with mana whenua approaches that prioritise relational, place-based, and tikanga-informed responses, challenging existing emergency management paradigms. Advocating for a holistic, culturally grounded approach, this article demonstrates how integrating Māori perspectives into disaster management can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes for both Māori communities and Aotearoa-New Zealand as a whole.

## Background

### *He Whare, He Taonga Research*

The 'He Whare, He Taonga' (He Whare) research was instigated by Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki (Te Whāriki), a Tangata Whenua social support service with over 40 years of experience providing specialist mahi tūkinu services. Te Whāriki is deeply rooted in the Hauraki rohe, with 95% of its staff being whakapapa to the area. The organisation supports wāhine, tāne, and tamariki affected by historical, intergenerational, and systemic violence, using a traditional Hauraki 'Poutama Mauri Ora, Mauri Tū' approach (Messiter, 2023) grounded in mātauranga Māori to enable whānau to heal and reclaim their mana.

Over time, Te Whāriki identified the compounding effects of housing poverty and mahi tūkinu on Hauraki Wāhine Māori. Persistent systemic barriers, such as housing shortages, economic marginalisation, and the legacy of colonisation, have entrenched vulnerabilities within

Hauraki Māori communities. Recognising these challenges, Te Whāriki initiated the 'He Whare' research to explore how secure, stable housing could serve as a critical intervention to address these intersecting issues.

The research aimed to amplify Wāhine voices and identify culturally informed, whānau-centric strategies grounded in tikanga Māori. Findings revealed that systemic housing disparities perpetuate violence and impede recovery and resilience for Wāhine and their whānau. The findings highlighted the urgent need for holistic, community-driven approaches to create safe, supportive environments that promote healing and well-being. It recommended including Hauraki Wāhine Māori leaders in all housing policy and funding decisions and advocated for bespoke, Hauraki-led housing solutions. The research emphasised that addressing housing poverty for Wāhine Māori is essential for building a stronger, more inclusive Hauraki and Aotearoa.

### *Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle Research*

The 'Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle' (Cyclone Gabrielle) research, funded by the Health Research Council, was instigated by Te Whāriki, as part of their ongoing commitment to addressing systemic inequities and enhancing community resilience. Drawing on the findings of the He Whare project, this research focused on understanding how extreme weather events, such as Cyclone Gabrielle, exacerbate vulnerabilities for Māori communities already affected by housing poverty, systemic marginalisation, and socio-economic disadvantage.

The research aimed to document the experiences of Hauraki Māori during and after Cyclone Gabrielle, focusing on how whānau, hapū, and iwi mobilised to respond to the disaster. It sought to identify gaps in official civil defence responses, highlight strengths in Māori-led disaster recovery efforts, and explore the role of traditional knowledge and community networks in crisis situations. The overarching goal was to inform future disaster preparedness and response strategies, ensuring they are equitable, culturally informed, and responsive to the needs of marginalised communities.

Findings revealed significant disparities in resource allocation and support during the cyclone, with many Hauraki Māori whānau being overlooked or underserved by official responses, a breach of Te Tiriti guarantees. The study highlighted the resilience and resourcefulness of Māori communities, who relied on traditional knowledge, community networks, and collective action to provide for their people. It also signposted the importance of integrating Māori perspectives into disaster policies and strategies to ensure more effective and equitable outcomes in future crises.

## *Key Expansions*

The He Whare research laid the groundwork for understanding the intersection of housing poverty and mahi tūkino within Hauraki Māori communities. It established housing as a foundational intervention for addressing systemic inequities, intergenerational trauma, and the challenges faced by Wāhine Māori and their whānau. By amplifying Wāhine voices and employing culturally grounded methodologies, this research brought forward holistic, compassionate community-driven solutions rooted in mātauranga Māori. The project emphasised the critical role of stable housing in enabling recovery, empowerment, and long-term resilience for marginalised groups.

Building on this foundation, the Cyclone Gabrielle research expanded the focus from systemic inequities to the acute challenges posed by natural disasters. It explored how extreme weather events compounded vulnerabilities already present within Hauraki Māori communities, such as housing poverty, homelessness, and resource scarcity. This research broadened the lens to examine disaster response and recovery, documenting how local Māori communities mobilised to address gaps left by inadequate civil defence efforts. It highlighted the importance of traditional knowledge, strong community networks, and collective action in mitigating the impacts of crises.

Together, these projects demonstrate a progression from addressing long-term colonial constructed crises, like housing poverty, to responding to urgent, crisis-driven needs during natural disasters. They share a commitment to centring Māori voices and resilience, while effecting systemic change. The Cyclone Gabrielle research not only deepens the insights of He Whare but also expands its application by identifying culturally informed strategies for disaster preparedness and recovery that can be integrated into civil defence policies, ensuring equitable outcomes for marginalised populations. This integration requires whanau Māori voices supported by hapu to be included in the achievement of equitable outcomes for whanau Māori. This is a Te Tiriti issue for mana whenua and a Treaty issue for all other impacted whānau.

## Methodology

### *Cyclone Gabrielle Methodology*

The Cyclone Gabrielle project examined how Hauraki Māori experienced and responded to Cyclone Gabrielle, contrasting community and local government perspectives on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Using a Kaupapa Māori methodology (Smith, 1999) the study employed qualitative techniques like pūrākau (Lee, 2009), semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, emphasising whanaungatanga and in-person interactions.

Using an adapted version of the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū analysis framework (Moyle, 2024), the research report is structured into four findings chapters:

- **PŪ (Origin):** Explored motivations for disaster preparedness and response, drawing on intergenerational ties to kāinga, whenua, and mātauranga Māori.
- **RĀ (Enlightenment):** Effective practices and outcomes in community responses to extreme weather, noting strengths and unity.
- **KA (Past, Present, Future):** Past and present experiences to improve future disaster management, identifying challenges and lessons learned.
- **Ū (Sustenance):** Practical, sustainable strategies for disaster preparedness and response, with recommendations for local civil defence improvements.

The Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework promotes continuous learning by integrating insights from each phase back into the beginning. It focuses on community-based knowledge and experiences, offering an ethical approach to Kaupapa Māori research and disaster response. The framework provided more focus through contrast and reflexive thematic analysis, and collaboration with the Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC) ensured engagement with official perspectives.

Ethical approval was obtained from Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi. The project outcomes included enhanced analytical depth and increased accessibility of findings through diverse dissemination strategies, including infographics, videos, and a dedicated website.

### *He Whare Methodology*

The He Whare project focused on the link between family violence and housing poverty, and compassionate housing solutions from the perspective of Wāhine Māori. Using a Mana enhancing Wāhine methodology (ref), the study employed pūrākau for qualitative data collection and the Pū-Rā-Kā-Ū framework to organise the findings into four key thematic areas. Innovative methods like the ‘Brown Paper Bag’ symbolising Indigenous resilience and ‘Waha Pikitia’ for visual storytelling were introduced (Moyle, et al., 2024). Ethical approval was obtained from UNITEC, ensuring informed consent and data security. The study intentionally fore-fronted the voices of Wāhine Māori, providing deep insights into their lived experiences and resistance to colonial-constructed crises. Findings were primarily disseminated through traditional academic formats like journal articles, and conference presentations.

### *Key Similarities and Differences Between the Projects*

The He Whare project addressed housing poverty and family violence from the perspectives of Wāhine Māori, while the Cyclone Gabrielle project explored Hauraki Māori disaster management responses. Both examined Hauraki Māori resilience, using pūrākau as a data collection method and the Pū-Rā-Kā-Ū framework for organising findings. However, He Whare employed a Mana Wāhine lens and causal layered thematic analysis, focusing exclusively on

Wāhine Māori voices, whereas Cyclone Gabrielle applied contrast and reflexive thematic analysis and collaborated with the Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC).

He Whare used traditional academic dissemination, while Cyclone Gabrielle embraced diverse, whānau accessible formats like infographics, videos, and a dedicated website. He Whare applied the framework linearly, progressing from origins to solutions, while Cyclone Gabrielle adopted a cyclical approach, towards continuous learning and refinement. Collaboration with TCDC ensured Cyclone Gabrielle’s findings supported practical disaster management, and its dissemination strategies improved accessibility and impact. Both projects upheld high ethical standards, with Cyclone Gabrielle enhancing the Pū-Rā-Kā-Ū framework for actionable, community-driven outcomes (Moyle, 2024).

## Weaving the Past into the Future through PŪ-RĀ-KA-Ū

### Pu - Kāinga Kaha

PŪ (Source) represents the tamariki of the PŪ-RĀ-KA-Ū framework, potential, the starting of an idea, or the beginning of a journey, deeply rooted in nurturing and kāinga connections. The He Whare study revealed ‘kāinga’ as more than a physical space; for Hauraki Wāhine, it embodies belonging, protection, stability, and control over their lives and aspirations. As Pai articulates, "Home is a place to be and belong, surrounded by people you are connected to."

Sourced in a profound relationship with Papa-tu-a-nuku, ‘kāinga’ serves as a protective factor, sustaining Hauraki Wāhine and their whānau across generations. Despite enduring violence, houselessness, and historical injustices, they offered compassionate housing solutions through the He Whare research.

The Cyclone Gabrielle study expanded the understanding of kāinga kaha and compassionate housing solutions, showing that kāinga connections motivated Māori to mobilise during the cyclone. Integrating Māori ecological wisdom of environmental weather patterns and kaitiakitanga principles into disaster management strategies is key to supporting disaster preparedness and recovery for Hauraki Māori communities.

For those whānau who whakapapa to Hauraki, this wisdom, responsibilities, and obligations passed down from their parents and grandparents, grounded in the care and protection of Hauraki, similar to how Wāhine described protecting their tamariki from state-imposed violence.

Participants highlighted the essential role of a whakapapa connection to place, and the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission in Hauraki.

*“And this is our forever home here on our papakāinga. This is my whenua, I was brought up here in this house. I can't go anywhere else.” – Mia & Wii*

*“It's a continuation of legacy as he taonga tuku iho on that which has been bequeathed, passed down to us.” – Hue.*

For these participants, integrating Māori wisdom, kaitiakitanga principles, and community engagement into civil defence strategies is key.

This analysis contrasts holistic, culturally grounded approaches with conventional, Western-centric disaster management strategies. Recognising the multi-layered nature of kāinga kaha and Māori ecological wisdom is crucial for policymakers and disaster response authorities to better support Hauraki Māori communities. These Indigenous approaches are key to culturally focused disaster management, ensuring enhanced preparedness, resilience, and wellbeing.

## RĀ - Contextual Resilience

RĀ (Enlightenment) represents the rangatahi phase in the framework, nurturing the development of ideas, resilience, and wellness amidst challenges. The He Whare study demonstrated how kāinga kaha connections provided strength to Wāhine Māori navigating family violence and housing poverty. Weaving the two kaupapa together, the Cyclone Gabrielle research showed how these connections were pivotal for Hauraki communities during environmental disasters.

For Hauraki Māori, whānau, whakapapa and connection to whenua create a profound sense of belonging, rangatiratanga, and security, transcending immediate challenges. As one participant reflected,

*“Being on the whenua of our tīpuna doesn’t take us away from our meaning of Te Ao Māori.”*

Yet, He Whare highlighted the harsh reality that resilience for many Wāhine is less about empowerment and more about survival. As one explained,

*“Getting knocked down and up again to protect my babies is not resilience—it’s survival against enduring injustices.”*

Both studies revealed the tension between Māori resilience and systemic inequities. While Hauraki Māori showed remarkable ability to mobilise and support whānau during Cyclone Gabrielle, participants critiqued how resilience was often imposed upon them. Wāhine described how societal expectations of resilience overlooked the cumulative toll of intersecting hardships, including family violence, systemic discrimination, and state intervention. For some, resilience meant enduring violence at home while simultaneously fighting the state to prevent their tamariki from being uplifted.

During Cyclone Gabrielle, Hauraki Māori relied on previously established local networks, and ecological wisdom to respond effectively, filling gaps left by disconnected civil defence authorities. Marae and community networks provided critical support to the most vulnerable, including the elderly, disabled, and those with mental health needs. However, some participants described this resilience as *“driven by necessity”* rather than choice, as authorities relied on their self-reliance during crises without providing sufficient resources or

support. Some felt blamed by local authorities for “*not being prepared enough*” despite structural barriers rooted in colonial constructs.

Both studies emphasised the importance of community-based support systems, such as marae and whānau networks, which stepped in where official systems fell short. These findings challenge conventional understandings of resilience, presenting it as a contextual, collective response shaped by historical, social, and structural factors rather than an inherent or individual trait. By centring the voices of those directly impacted and addressing the systemic injustices faced by Hauraki Māori, these research projects reveal the urgent need for equitable, community-driven disaster resilience and recovery.

## KA -Enduring Injustices

KA (Past, Present, Future) represents the pakeke of the PŪ-RĀ-KA-Ū framework and showcases how past experiences inform present actions and future planning. In this context, detailing participants' experiences, is essential to ensure their voices are prioritised, emphasising their lived realities over external interpretations and providing a foundation for pathways forward over time.

KA draws from both studies, which examines colonial-constructed crises as “*enduring injustices.*” These injustices reflect the ongoing hardships faced by Māori communities as a direct result of historical and contemporary colonial practices and policies. Such crises are not natural or inevitable; they stem from racism, systemic discrimination and marginalisation.

### *Hauraki Housing Crisis and Impact on Whānau Māori*

The He Whare study highlighted a critical and serious housing crisis in Hauraki, particularly in the Thames-Coromandel district, where 50% of the housing stock consists of holiday homes. The limited availability of rentals for residents exacerbates the crisis. The remaining housing is often old, damp, and in poor condition, with substandard water quality. High rents driven by market demand further amplify the problem, making it nearly impossible for Wāhine Māori and their whānau to find affordable, decent housing in Hauraki.

Advancing the insights from these findings, the Cyclone Gabrielle research revealed that many whānau were living in makeshift shelters or substandard dwellings in the mangroves before the cyclone, and the damage from the cyclone left them with even fewer options for safe shelter. Additionally, many of these individuals, including the elderly, disabled, and those with mental health challenges, were deemed undeserving of emergency housing as they had already been labelled as “*living rough.*” The research was critical in showing that the cyclone intensified the housing crisis in Hauraki, particularly affecting Wāhine and their whānau who already faced housing insecurity.



### *Increased Family Violence During Crises*

Participants in the He Whare study highlighted the increased risk of family violence among Hauraki Wāhine and their whānau during extreme periods of stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclones Hale and Gabrielle. This risk is made worse by housing insecurity and dwelling issues like poverty, power loss, and inadequate heating.

*"We're seeing a significant increase in family violence, with whānau seeking support for that and oranga hinengaro. Add the fact that we've experienced 10 extreme weather events in 2023, and it's clear that Pare Hauraki requires attention, as well as a level of fairness and equity for our people."*

This situation is further complicated by what Wāhine described as a *"colonial constructed minefield"* that often turns against them when they seek help. For example, seeking support from Oranga Tamariki can result in their children being uplifted because they are deemed incapable of keeping them safe from the parent choosing to use violence.

The Cyclone Gabrielle research expanded on these findings, revealing that many Hauraki whānau were forced into overcrowded or substandard living conditions due to damaged homes and infrastructure. The existing housing crisis in Hauraki, compounded by the cyclone and the stress resulting from the disaster, created an environment conducive to increased tensions within whānau.

*"They're struggling, and in most cases, living in substandard housing that they just make do with. There aren't many rental options in Hauraki, and whānau can't afford to rent anyway. All of this leads to significant stress and increased violence."*

Extreme stress from natural disasters like Cyclone Gabrielle significantly raises the risk of family violence among Hauraki whānau. This situation is further complicated for those already dealing with pre-existing issues like poverty, experiences of violence, and systemic barriers. These layers need to be better understood to develop effective solutions.

### *Discrimination Based on Being Māori, Wāhine, and Poor*

The He Whare research found that Wāhine in Hauraki face systemic barriers to housing. These barriers include difficulties obtaining mortgages, affording new construction, and competing for market rentals, with no available social or emergency housing. Government agencies often push unsuitable motel accommodations and use marginalising terms like 'homeless' and 'overcrowded,' reflecting systemic racism. Wāhine also face discrimination based on their identity as Māori, being single parents, and escaping violent situations, resulting in housing eligibility denials by Kāinga Ora. These challenges leave Wāhine feeling demoralised and exhausted, significantly affecting their well-being.

The Cyclone Gabrielle research highlighted the *"land-rich but cash-poor"* situation of Hauraki Māori whānau, who own ancestral lands but lack the funds for development or maintenance. This economic disparity, rooted in historical land alienation, restricts their ability to repair

cyclone damage or access support. Many whānau faced frustrating, weeks-long cycles of back-and-forth communications with the Council to prove ownership or correct land information. One participant described the process as *"pulling out my hair"* while dealing with multiple departments and outdated maps, which led to unnecessary delays in obtaining building consents and repair services. This situation left whānau frustrated and reluctant to engage with the Council when it sought to build civil defence preparedness with them.

### *Agency Discrimination and Forced Compliance*

The He Whare study revealed significant barriers Wāhine face in accessing housing, which are exacerbated by violence both at home and through multiple agency interactions. These agencies too often use the threat of child removal as leverage to coerce Wāhine into compliance with their demands. This situation leaves Wāhine feeling vulnerable and fearful, as one individual described:

*"They fear their tamariki being uplifted... They're better off being invisible than seen."*  
*Another shared, "Our Wāhine carry the burden of risk for failed successive government policies over many years."*

Similarly, the Kāinga Ora housing system presents substantial challenges for Wāhine, intensifying their struggles rather than alleviating them. Wāhine are often unfairly held accountable for damages caused by their partners and can experience sudden evictions without proper notice. Many are forced into unsafe housing options, leading to disruptions in community ties and support networks. If they decline housing outside their home area, they face longer waiting periods.

He Whare showed, Kāinga Ora often prioritises families from urban areas, neglecting the housing needs of local Wāhine. This systemic violence and negligence, alongside culturally ignorant planning, results in excessive waiting times that make it nearly impossible for Wāhine to improve their circumstances.

The Cyclone Gabrielle research expanded on these findings. Whānau described experiencing a *"historical trauma and mistrust"* towards TCDC due to *"forced compliance and punitive measures,"* highlighting additional agency harm. While TCDC's civil defence strategy claims to prioritise those with the greatest needs, whānau participants reported a different experience. They recalled a marae urgently needing a generator for displaced whānau and essential services during Cyclone Gabrielle. Despite requesting a generator from TCDC, they were told none were available. However, social service kaimahi observed a helicopter delivering generators to a wealthier, predominantly non-Māori community earlier that day.

This illustrates how power and systemic biases can influence emergency resource allocation, suggesting that wealthy, non-Māori communities with more economic and social capital are able to influence decision-makers at the Council and Civil Defence, thereby perpetuating inequities. This example also exposes systemic biases against Māori communities, eroding trust and reinforcing perceptions of racial bias and neglect. Such incidents are not isolated;

they reflect broader historical patterns of marginalisation and chronic under-resourcing of Hauraki Māori communities, which include vulnerable tamariki, the elderly, and the disabled. It showcases the importance of prioritising these communities in TCDC and civil defence efforts.

### *Agency Discrimination Against Vulnerable Whānau*

Wāhine and their tamariki with neurodiverse conditions face significant discrimination in housing and education. They often encounter biased judgments from landlords and agents, resulting in denials for housing and school enrolments. One Wahine described her experience, saying:

*Even kindy (kindergarten) is a struggle... They just burden me for his behavioural issues too, like they tell me my baby is ADHD. He's just active all the time and gets bored easily."*

This discrimination forces whānau into unhealthy living conditions, negatively impacting their children's health and increasing the risk of being reported to state agencies for neglect. The systemic disregard for their needs highlights the urgent need for equitable and compassionate treatment to improve their living conditions and overall well-being.

The Cyclone Gabrielle further exposed the shortcomings of existing support systems and displayed the unique vulnerabilities of the elderly and disabled during the disaster. Power outages posed severe risks to those relying on electrical medical equipment, creating life-threatening situations and immense stress. Limited access to emergency services and healthcare left these individuals without essential care. The lack of tailored infrastructure and emergency planning became glaringly evident.

Additionally, the aftermath of the cyclone disproportionately affected elderly and disabled individuals during the recovery phase. Navigating bureaucratic processes for aid or home repairs proved challenging, and the physical demands of cleanup were often beyond their capabilities, leaving them dependent on strained community resources.

The findings reveal significant discrimination and systemic inadequacies faced by Hauraki Wāhine, their neurodiverse tamariki, the elderly, and disabled individuals in housing, education, and emergency support. This highlights the urgent need for equitable and compassionate actions.

## **Ū - Transformative Outcomes, Compassionate Actions**

### *Key He Whare Compassionate Solutions*

The Ū section of the He Whare study, with Wāhine central to its focus, emphasised that accessible healing pathways are essential to creating compassionate, safe, and secure kāinga for Wāhine. Reconnecting Wāhine to whenua, tikanga Māori, and traditional Māori values is a

transformative action that strengthens these pathways. This includes the art of whakarongo; actively listening to their stories, believing their truths, and understanding their needs, leading to compassionate actions that support the healing process for Hauraki Wāhine and whānau.

They brought the voice of Hauraki people to our attention and contributed to a call for action, so that our tamariki remain with their whānau and can be raised in healthy villages, and our women are respected for their leadership and cosmological origins. Wāhine spoke about compassionate and transformative housing, envisioning the redesign of the current housing system.

A central solution identified by participants is the development of papakāinga (communal housing on ancestral land). Papakāinga is seen as not only a housing strategy but also a means to restore Māori self-determination, reconnecting whānau with their whenua and whakapapa. One participant explained:

*"We have whenua, and on that land, there are whakapapa connections; it's more than a whare. It's the connection to the whenua, and housing is the four walls and how we bring about whānau connectivity amongst that landscape."*

Despite its transformative potential, participants noted significant barriers to papakāinga development, including restrictive legislation, costly compliance requirements, and systemic inequities in funding. One participant reflected:

*"We've done a hundred-year strategic planning...part of that includes lobbying council to transfer the authority to us, to consent our own people. We've got planners, architects, and engineers in our iwi kāinga. We want to draw on their expertise to create kāinga developments that are future-proofed."*

Participants also called for integrated wraparound support services as part of the papakāinga model. These include financial literacy programs, health and social support, and pathways to homeownership. One wāhine articulated the systemic challenges underpinning these solutions:

*"Our Wāhine carry the burden of risk for failed government policies over many years. And those failures were based on neoliberalist policies that assumed that the one percent of resourcing should stay in the hands of those that own it, and that those who are poor need to prove their worth."*

Hauraki Wāhine were resolute in realising transformative housing outcomes through the implementation of compassionate actions articulated throughout the He Whare research. Papakāinga emerged as a vital theme, emphasising collective well-being, multigenerational living, and restoring Māori mana motuhake. This vision of housing extends beyond physical structures, encompassing social, cultural, and spiritual significance.

### *Key Cyclone Gabrielle Solutions*

The Cyclone Gabrielle research solutions built on the principles articulated in He Whare, showcasing how culturally grounded housing approaches can be implemented in crisis situations. One of the most impactful solutions was the use of relocatable housing, which provided quick, flexible shelter for whānau whose homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by the cyclone.

A participant described the transformative impact of relocatable housing on a wāhine who had been living in a shed, with no running water and a bucket for a toilet:

*"She wailed when she could see the truck coming from the corner, till they'd landed, she just wailed. So that there was huge calling herself home, and all her nieces, who I believe they'd all fallen out for one reason or another, they all came there to tautoko her and they were wailing. And so, it was like, you're at a tangi. It was, it was a real welcome home."*

These relocatable homes were designed with the potential to be integrated into papakāinga developments, creating a real-time solution that aligns with the long-term vision articulated in the He Whare study. As the homes are relocated to ancestral lands across Hauraki Māori communities, they embody both practicality and cultural connection. One participant explained:

*"We need to think of relocatable housing not as the end but as a step toward creating sustainable, multigenerational papakāinga solutions."*

The Cyclone Gabrielle research also demonstrated the strength of existing Māori disaster-response networks. Communities were able to quickly mobilise support for whānau, leveraging collective knowledge from previous crises. A participant noted:

*"We activated our network through previous disasters. The community was up and running within 6 to 12 hours without external direction."*

Participants also acknowledged challenges, including bureaucratic delays, logistical issues with infrastructure like plumbing and electricity, and the need for improved coordination. However, these obstacles were met with adaptive learning and resourcefulness. One participant reflected:

*"We learned a lot from the cyclone. Every challenge made us stronger and more prepared for the next time."*

### *Combined Effect Of He Whare and Cyclone Gabrielle Solutions*

The Cyclone Gabrielle research built directly on the solutions articulated by participants in the He Whare study. The long-term vision of papakāinga, combined with the immediate practicality of relocatable housing, showcases the importance of self-determination, community networks, and cultural connection in housing solutions.

Participants emphasised how the lessons learned during the cyclone response, coordinating logistics, adapting strategies, and leveraging collective action; reflected and expanded on the values identified in the He Whare study. One participant articulated the importance of this combined effect:

*"Papakāinga is about restoring mana. It's about reconnecting our people to the land and each other."*

The Cyclone Gabrielle research also highlighted the critical need to devolve decision-making and funding to Māori communities. Participants stressed that solutions must prioritise whānau autonomy and address systemic inequities that have persisted for generations. As one participant shared:

*"There are all the constraints around building on papakāinga. If, because of legislation you can claim the right to the papakāinga, then there are a whole range of compliances that you have to go through to enable you to even live there, let alone it being designed as a papakāinga. The white person's law has set us up to be homeless, to experience housing poverty...our Tiriti rights are bound up in local authority bureaucracy, meanwhile our whānau suffer."*

The He Whare and Cyclone Gabrielle research solutions present complementary approaches to addressing housing challenges for Māori communities. He Whare emphasises long-term, culturally aligned reform, while Cyclone Gabrielle demonstrates how these principles can be mobilised in crisis contexts. Together, these studies provide a powerful blueprint for building thriving, resilient communities that honour the mana, knowledge, and rangatiratanga of Hauraki Māori.

## Discussion

Both studies advocate for community-led solutions. The He Whare study called for culturally focused housing initiatives, while the Cyclone Gabrielle research recommended integrating Māori ecological wisdom into governance (Moyle, Kelly, & Messiter, 2024). Both highlight the importance of Māori representation in decision-making to address systemic barriers and enhance community resilience.

The findings reveal the profound connections between cultural identity, resilience, and systemic challenges for Hauraki Māori communities. At the heart of these challenges lies the concept of kāinga kaha; home as a source of belonging, safety, and connection to whenua and tīpuna. This foundation sustains Wāhine and their whānau through intersecting hardships, including housing poverty, family violence, systemic discrimination, and natural disasters. Yet, resilience, often framed as a positive trait, is frequently imposed as a survival mechanism, masking the structural failures that perpetuate these inequities.

One of the most pressing challenges is Hauraki's housing crisis, where holiday homes dominate, and rental properties are scarce, expensive, and frequently substandard. The lack

of quality, affordable housing forces many whānau into precarious living conditions that amplify stress, health risks, and family violence (Moyle, Kelly, & Messiter, 2024).

The Cyclone Gabrielle research further exposed these vulnerabilities, leaving already disadvantaged whānau with even fewer options and revealing systemic biases in resource allocation. The studies illustrate how vulnerable groups, including Wāhine, the elderly, disabled individuals, and neurodiverse tamariki, are consistently deprioritised, highlighting the need for equity-focused responses.

Despite these challenges, the resilience demonstrated by Hauraki Māori communities is deeply rooted in their cultural knowledge, connections, and unity. The studies emphasise the importance of listening to and valuing pūrākau, the lived experiences of Wāhine and whānau Māori, which expose not only the hardships but also the pathways to transformative solutions. These voices point to the need for culturally informed, community-led initiatives, such as the relocatable housing project facilitated by Te Whāriki Manawāhine O Hauraki. This initiative (Moyle, Kelly, & Messiter, 2024) integrates flexibility, cultural intelligence, and economic accessibility, serving as a model for housing solutions that respect the dignity and aspirations of whānau Māori.

However, addressing these challenges requires more than localised solutions. Both studies highlight the systemic racism embedded in housing, social services, and disaster response frameworks, which continues to undermine Māori dignity and self-determination. Participants described barriers such as discriminatory housing policies, agency harm, and inadequate emergency planning, which disproportionately affect marginalised groups. The studies advocate for fundamental policy changes that prioritise equitable resource allocation and culturally focused practices. These reforms must address historical disadvantages, including the economic disparities caused by land alienation, and integrate financial literacy and traditional knowledge to support whānau Māori.

The Cyclone Gabrielle research built directly on the solutions articulated by participants in the He Whare study. The long-term vision of papakāinga, combined with the immediate practicality of relocatable housing, showcases the importance of self-determination, community networks, and cultural connection in housing solutions.

Participants emphasised how the lessons learned during the cyclone response, coordinating logistics, adapting strategies, and utilising collective action, reflected and expanded on the values identified in the He Whare study. One participant articulated the importance of this combined effect:

*"Papakāinga is about restoring mana. It's about reconnecting our people to the land and each other."*

The Cyclone Gabrielle research also highlighted the critical need to devolve decision-making and funding to Māori communities. Participants expressed frustration with the complex legal and bureaucratic barriers that Māori face when trying to build on their traditional lands, papakāinga. They highlighted that these requirements are overwhelming and perpetuate

housing poverty among Māori, criticising the legal system for creating these disproportionate obstacles. They stressed that solutions must prioritise whānau autonomy and address systemic inequities that have persisted for generations.

The He Whare and Cyclone Gabrielle research solutions present complementary approaches to addressing housing challenges for Māori communities. He Whare emphasises long-term, culturally aligned reform, while Cyclone Gabrielle demonstrates how these principles can be mobilised in crisis contexts. Together, these studies provide a powerful blueprint for building thriving, resilient communities that honour the mana, knowledge, and rangatiratanga of Hauraki Māori.

Resilience, as described in the findings, should not be romanticised or misunderstood as a justification for systemic neglect. Instead, it must be supported by equitable systems that uphold Tino Rangatiratanga and genuinely support whānau. The research highlights the transformative potential of integrating mātauranga Māori and collective action into housing and disaster planning, recognising the strength and wisdom of Hauraki Māori communities.

## Conclusion

This article highlights the importance of integrating Māori ecological wisdom and culturally grounded practices into disaster management frameworks. Drawing on findings from He Whare and Cyclone Gabrielle studies, it explores the resilience and resourcefulness of Hauraki Māori communities while revealing the systemic inequities they face.

Both studies emphasise the multifaceted significance of kāinga; not just as a physical space but as a cultural belonging, protection, and resilience. During Cyclone Gabrielle, kāinga connections motivated rapid mobilisation, showcasing the importance of whānau, whakapapa and whenua in navigating crises. Resilience, often framed as a strength, was revealed as a necessity imposed by systemic inequities. While He Whare participants described resilience as a daily fight for survival against structural violence, Cyclone Gabrielle participants relied on traditional networks in the absence of institutional support.

The concept of colonial-constructed crises is central to both studies, illustrating how systemic barriers like housing poverty, child removals, and economic inequities worsen the impacts of natural disasters. The Cyclone Gabrielle study expanded on this by exposing discriminatory resource allocation and bureaucratic obstacles faced by Māori communities. These obstacles highlight the urgent need for significant systemic transformation to dismantle institutional racism and address historical injustices.

Both studies advocate for community-led solutions, demonstrating the transformative potential of Māori ecological wisdom in governance. Initiatives like relocatable housing projects and strengthened marae-based networks highlight the value of culturally informed, community-driven approaches. Principles of whanaungatanga, kaitiakitanga, and mātauranga Māori offer practical pathways for more effective and inclusive disaster management



strategies. By centring Māori perspectives, this research offers a roadmap for sustainable and just practices that honour the strength and aspirations of Hauraki Māori communities and beyond.

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