Disaster Risk Reduction & the Pacific Communities

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Outline

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- Key Regional Progresses
- Key Challenges
- Way Forward

Regional Context

- The Pacific Island Countries (PICs) lie in the midst of the world's largest ocean and include some of the world's smallest nations. There are three sub-regions, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Melanesia consists mainly of high islands while Micronesia and Polynesia consists mainly of low-lying reefs or atolls and some high islands. Economic growth in PICs is low; the small and scattered island 'sea-locked' countries have small domestic markets and are characterized by low economic density as a result of their extreme remoteness, as well as high transportation and transaction costs linking to international markets.
- PICs are also among the most physically vulnerable nations in the world. They are highly exposed to adverse effects from climate change and natural hazards (including floods, droughts, tropical cyclones, storm surges, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis), which can result in disasters that affect their entire economies, human and physical capital, and impact their long-term development agendas. Since 1950, natural disasters have affected approximately 9.2 million people in the Pacific region, causing 9,811 reported deaths. This has cost the PICs around US$3.2 billion (in nominal terms) in associated damage costs.

Regional Context

- Disasters, climate and weather extremes and projected changes in climate, are increasingly recognized as a core development challenge, as they adversely impact social and economic development. Changes in increasing mean ocean and land temperatures, changes in the seasonality and duration of rainfall and increasing sea level are affecting agriculture, food security, fisheries, water resources and thus lives, livelihoods and economies. Furthermore, poor populations tend to live on low value land, in higher risk areas such as close to flood prone waterways and the coastline, making them vulnerable and more likely to be adversely affected by climate-related and natural events. More importantly, the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters and the effects of climate change are expected to increase due to pressures including increased population, and constrained land availability, which will force larger numbers of the poor to live in the more hazard prone areas. Hence there is widespread acceptance of the need to strengthen disaster early warnings and preparedness, and to mainstream disaster risk and climate change into development planning and financing.

Key Regional Progresses

- PICs have committed to mainstreaming climate change and DRM into national, budgetary and financing processes. This has been reflected in institutional and policy changes within government resulting in partner and donor support streamlined to implement priorities outlined in Joint National Action Plans (JNAPS) for climate change and DRM.
- Regional coordination mechanisms such as the Pacific Platform for DRM, the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable, Pacific Meteorological Council, Water and Sanitation Consultations and the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Allegiance (PIEMA) have been established to provide an avenue for partners and donors to coordinate their support to the implementation of national climate change and DRM priorities and share experiences in areas of comparative advantage.

Key Regional Progresses

- Progress has been made to develop and strengthen climate change and hazard data collection, observation systems and early warning systems that incorporate multiple hazard as well as improve coordination and interoperability of response to natural disasters, especially at the sub-national and local agency level.
- Information portals have emerged and are increasingly utilized that provide mechanisms for exchange of information between stakeholders.
- There has been significant capacity development in relation to climate change and DRM. The capacity development has taken place within relevant national agencies, and within national education systems including academic institutions and schools. Technical skills training has been provided via standalone training programmes or through capacity building components of projects and programmes.

Key Challenges

- As many regional and national climate and DRM priorities and needs are addressed through overseas development assistance, they tend to be project based and remain by and large supply driven. The increasing number of partners and diversity of programmes offered in the area of climate change and DRM to the region continue to cause difficulties with coordination, cooperation and coherence.
- Efforts to mainstream integrated approached to climate change and DRM into national planning and budgetary processes have been progressing at a national level. Nevertheless, though substantial national achievements have been attained there are recognised limitations in capacities and resources to translate integrated approaches into national and sector planning, and local actions.
- At both national and regional level, climate change and DRM have traditionally been the responsibility of different agencies. This has created cooperation challenges, despite their inter-related nature, and led to inefficient use of resources and uncoordinated efforts.

Key Challenges

- More investments in scientific data and information have been made in the past decade however, better links to policies and actions are required.
- Limitations in collection and access to data in a user-friendly format to assist in decision making has presented a challenge for the region. information such as demographic data, hazard mapping, weather and climate data and high resolution climate change projections is required for national and sub-national agencies to undertake evidence based planning and decision making and to implement climate change and DRM initiatives on the ground.