

# Prologue

Pacific Island communities are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters — ranging from tropical cyclones, drought, floods, storm surges and tsunamis. Each year, these events result in significant loss of life, the destruction of homes, public infrastructure and livelihoods and the reversal of hard-won economic gains. Recently, deadly tsunami and earthquake events in the Indian Ocean region have focused the attention of the world community, particularly those living in small islands and coastal regions, to the need for greater vigilance in disaster prevention and preparedness. This is all the more important as evidence mounts that climate change will exacerbate the incidence of extreme events and potential disasters.

For island leaders and their development partners, the lessons are clear. Communities across the region need to counter the negative impacts of extreme climate events and other natural disasters by improving their preparedness and response.

## Regional context

In 1995, during the International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders issued the Madang Vision Statement, which declared that: *'vulnerability to the effects of natural hazards, environmental damage and other threats will be overcome'*. Subsequent efforts focused largely on disaster preparedness, response and relief but these tended to be under-resourced and operated outside mainstream government processes.

In preparation for the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, January 2005), Pacific Island representatives adopted a regional position paper which emphasized the need for mainstreaming risk management into national development planning and for strengthening the capacity of Pacific Island states to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. The paper recognized disasters as including not only those resulting from natural hazards, but also social, environmental, and technological hazards. From this paper as well as from the 2005–2015 Hyogo Framework for Action, Pacific Island representatives derived a regional plan of action entitled: *An Investment for Sustainable Development in Pacific Island Countries: Disaster Risk Framework for Action 2005–2015*. The Framework was discussed at a regional meeting in Madang in June 2005 and the revised version, Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management: A Framework for Action 2005–2015, was presented at the Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting for regional endorsement.

Over the past three years, the region has also seen a renewed interest in climate change adaptation, starting with the Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Programme and the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change, Climate Variability and Sea Level Rise (2000). This interest was also spurred by two High Level Adaptation Consultations (2003–2004), the momentum built by sustainable development initiatives, and by recent pilot operations

in Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, and Tonga. The revised Framework for Action on Climate Change, Climate Variability and Sea Level Rise was similarly presented at the 2005 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting.

Adaptation to climate change, and risk management of natural hazards are core development issues for Pacific Island countries. As the required policy and technical responses are not particularly complex, the economic, social and environmental benefits of managing these risks far outweigh their costs. What seems to have been lacking is the political will to mainstream risk management into national development planning and to ensure that policy and program responses to the challenges are sustained, relevant and effective.

In order to address these concerns, this Policy Note advocates practical measures that countries can take to influence their national development policies and strengthen their programs. Importantly, it addresses factors which may constrain or limit collaborative action between communities, island leaders, experts and development partners. It suggests new institutional approaches, incentives, and instruments to promote risk management of natural hazards, including climate proofing capital investments.

## Objective and target audience

The goal of this Policy Note is to influence policy makers and development partners in the Pacific Islands region to undertake risk management of natural hazards and minimize the future impacts of natural disasters, climate change and sea level rise. As a short-term objective, the Policy Note aims to review the disaster trends and lessons learned from pilot risk management of natural hazards initiatives, and recommend a strategic way forward. Particular attention is paid to the three 'I's' of risk management of natural hazards: Incentives, Institutions and Instruments.

The Policy Note targets high-level decision makers in the Pacific Islands region, regional organizations and major development partners.

## Scope

This Policy Note focuses only on natural hazards. Technological and other hazards are not as relevant in the Pacific at present. While the focus of the analysis is on the Pacific Islands region, comparative experiences from other small island states (particularly the Caribbean) are also provided to illustrate alternative approaches.

The recommendations in this Policy Note are relevant to all Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). However, Papua New Guinea has been excluded from the analysis of disaster trends (Section 1). Its large size, type and impact of disasters would bias the overall picture experienced in the smaller PICTs.

## Definitions

Given the similarity of approaches, the global agendas for disaster risk management and adaptation to climate change are increasingly merging. The Policy Note recognizes this by adopting the term 'risk management of natural hazards' (RMNH) to refer to the management of all natural hazard risks — including climate and other natural hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis — to minimize the likelihood of them becoming natural disasters (see Glossary).

The term 'adaptation', when used separately from RMNH, refers to the various processes, policies and actions designed to limit the potential impacts of climate change, climate variability, extreme events and sea level rise.

## Method

A group of regional and international specialists, with experience relevant to the challenges facing PICTs, collaborated on the Policy Note under the coordination of the World Bank. Over several months, the collaborators contributed individual written papers covering:

- Analysis of the incentives, institutions and instruments affecting RMNH in the Pacific;
- International experience with RMNH (particularly in the Caribbean);
- Regional experience, particularly that of regional organizations;
- Lessons learned from pilot operations in Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia;
- Specialized inputs on disaster insurance and disaster trend analysis.

The analysis of disasters was based on the EM-DAT, the OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, from which most world disaster statistics are derived for the period 1950–2005. For 1994–2005, these data were adjusted by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission statistics which are more complete. The trends between the two periods (1950–2005 and 1994–2005) are similar and the longer period (1950–2005) was selected to illustrate regional trends.

The inputs to the Policy Note were compiled and the resulting drafts discussed with the collaborators and their organizations, and reviewed by peers.

The Policy Note suggestions reflect the experience of the individual contributors and not the official views of their respective organizations. The Policy Note is intended to offer an independent, objective and honest view of the issues concerned and a possible way ahead. The authors believe that the ideas and issues raised will lead to a better informed discussion on risk management of natural hazards, as well as appropriate changes in current development practice and decision making in the Pacific Islands region. A number of country profiles are being prepared to demonstrate how the policy note can be made relevant to specific conditions in some of the Pacific Island countries.

# Contributors

(listed alphabetically)

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