

South-South Cooperation between Pacific and Caribbean Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management

With the greatest concentration of small island states worldwide, both the Pacific and the Caribbean regions face common threats based on the similar geography of small islands, accelerating climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of related disasters; tropical cyclones and seawater flooding are annual occurrences, with the consequent damages and setbacks for human development.

The social and economic vulnerabilities common to SIDS are apparent in both the Caribbean and the Pacific, due to their small scale and limited economic diversification, which hamper the resilience of such states and their populations for recovery from post-disaster.

At the same time, SIDS countries and local communities have a range of capacities and practices for effective disaster prevention and management, as well as for coping with and adapting to climate change. There is great potential for exchange of ideas, experiences and best practices between SIDS in the Pacific and the Caribbean, in order to find suitable solutions and replicate best practices for addressing the various threats posed by climate change and disasters.

Under this initiative, UNDP, as a neutral broker with long-term presence on the ground in both regions and their member countries, plays a facilitation role to lay the ground work for sustained South-South cooperation on these urgent development issues.

Expected outcome

The project aims to achieve strengthened safety and resilience of Pacific and Caribbean SIDS communities to a range of natural hazards by facilitating and supporting a South-South cooperation program targeted at strengthening climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction capacity in SIDS, based on the transfer of appropriate 'Southern' expertise and technologies. Activities fall under three focus areas: documentation and dissemination of best practices on integrated climate change adaptation and disaster risk management specific to the SIDS context; transfer and exchange of related technologies and methodologies; and mainstreaming of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation into national action planning.

Partnership model

UNDP Pacific Centre coordinates the project, with extensive support from the regional UNDP programme Caribbean Risk Management Initiative (CRMI) and UNDP's sub-regional centre in Trinidad and Tobago. Regional partners - who are involved in the project's governance structure and will lead the implementation of various activities - include Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), CARICOM Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and University of the West Indies (UWI) from the Caribbean region. Key partners from the Pacific region include the Pacific Islands Applied Geo-Science Commission (SOPAC), South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP), and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and University of the South Pacific (USP).

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Small islands collaborating on shared risk management issues

The vast Pacific Ocean, with island countries dotted across it, has many similarities with the Caribbean, where similar small island countries populate the Caribbean Seas.

Exchanges between the two regions have started now through the project: “South-South Cooperation between Pacific and Caribbean Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management”. The project aims to encourage a systematic sharing of knowledge and experiences to strengthen community safety and resilience to a range of natural disasters in both regions.



A Pacific delegation travelled to Jamaica in July 2010, to learn about the approach to disaster risk management undertaken by the national Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), which is recognized as one of the most effective national disaster management agencies in the region.

One example of the ingenuity of remote communities in managing these risks was showcased at the regional meeting of disaster risk stakeholders held annually in the Caribbean, the Comprehensive Disaster Management Forum. The Director of Solomon Islands’ National Disaster Management Office, Loti Yates, made a presentation to those in attendance on the traditional coping practices employed in some of the 900 islands which comprise this country. In the month before hurricane season starts, local people gather and process staple foods, such as cassava, breadfruit and taro, preserving and preparing these then burying them underground, wrapping them in thick layers of coconut fronds, or tying them under the roof. When hurricanes do strike, these remote communities often cannot be reached by national authorities to deliver any aid for days or weeks, but in the meantime, they will at least not go hungry, due to the food prepared and stored using traditional methods.

The Pacific group then visited various points of the Rio Cobre flood early warning system recently set up in Jamaica to cover an extensive flood plain on the outskirts of Kingston. This system operates both manually and automatically, with a simple yet effective mechanism for monitoring and warning the population for recurring floods and displays similarities to the flood early warning systems installed in the Navua area of Fiji. The Pacific delegation also travelled to Barbados, Cuba, and St. Lucia to meet with counterparts there and to witness disaster risk management practices on the ground.

Ófa Faánunu of Tonga Meteorological Service, who was a part of the Pacific delegation, was greatly inspired by the meteorology training programmes in the Caribbean. “We in the Pacific have challenges in finding and retaining qualified meteorologists. Training programmes like they have in the Caribbean could be a good idea to get more



The Pacific delegation and CDEMA coordinating unit staff

meteorologists trained as well as upskilling those in the field already,” said Faánunu. During his presentation at the platform meeting, Carlos Fuller (Deputy Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre) said that when the Caribbean countries decided to have a Master’s programme in climate change, they started looking at what universities in other parts of the world were doing. “We got relevant syllabus from the University of the South Pacific and developed the curriculum. Our Master’s programme has now been running for the past eight years,” said Fuller.

Subsequently a Caribbean group arrived in Fiji to take part in the annual meeting of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management. In a related field visit, women of the Naviti Island community, Yasawas Island group, shared with the Caribbean delegation that when the cyclone comes, they gather their fishing nets and shelve them high up in their homes, and the men move their boats inland to the mangroves to prevent any damage.

Remote island communities, such as the Gunu village, draw on traditional knowledge as well as recently developed community disaster plans to cope with the threat of cyclones. Their grandfathers could read the winds and interpret the behaviours of the birds; now radio communications with the mainland helps them keep alert. The recent training series with Pacific Community-focused Integrated Disaster Risk Reduction Project (PCIDRR) has allowed the community to form disaster committees and writes up a plan.

Nicole Williams of the International Federation of the Red Cross Caribbean Regional office commented that “the achievement of the disaster plan is that the community sat down to talk about cyclones and disaster preparation and has identified ways to work together”. The Fijians shared that its culture is based on oral tradition. During the conversation between the Yasawas islanders and Caribbean delegation, it emerged that the best way to help incorporate the written plan into the daily life of the village would be to share it verbally at community gatherings or to translate it into a song or a story. This is the next step to strengthen community resilience.

Dr. Asha Kambon, a regional adviser at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), shared her experience from Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake. “Many women in Haiti sold products that they grew or made from their homes with many getting loans to start their business. The earthquake destroyed their homes and as a consequence their means of livelihood. As a result, recovery programmes were required to provide women with a means to earn an income as well as give them ready access to microfinance,” she said. Carlos Fuller (Deputy Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre) and Tomás Gutiérrez (Director General of the Institute of Meteorology and Permanent Representative of Cuba with the World Meteorological Organization) shared their approach to climate modelling, something which is relatively new in the Pacific. In the Caribbean, the emphasis has been on the development of high resolution scenarios for small islands, with information on how different climate scenarios may impact on rainfall patterns, temperature and the length of the wet and dry seasons and the effect these changes will have on agricultural production. The modelling undertaken in Belize revealed the likely impact changes in climate was to have on both sugar and citrus production; which are major export commodities for that country.



Shown here (left to right) are: Dr. Thomas Gutiérrez, Ms. Jacinda Fairholm, Ms. Nicole Williams, Dr. Asha Kambon, and Dr. Carlos Fuller

LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS THE OCEANS: WATCH IT ONLINE

Exchanges between the Pacific and the Caribbean have been captured in the film *Looking South Across the Oceans: Promoting Cooperation Among Small Island Developing States*, which tell the story of how small island developing states (SIDS) in both regions have embarked on a journey to share knowledge and experiences to strengthen the resilience of their communities to natural disasters and climate change. It highlights that many adaptable solutions to the challenges posed by natural disasters can be found by looking South.