

## **SOPAC Intervention at HFA Meeting on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**Jotham Napat, Government of Vanuatu**

I am indeed honoured to have been given this opportunity to make a presentation at this informal meeting of the HFA, in advance of the inaugural meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and would like to express my gratitude to the UNISDR for supporting my attendance here as part of the delegation of SOPAC - the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission.

Over the next few minutes I would like to recount the process that was taken, as well as share the experiences of the Republic of Vanuatu in developing its Disaster Risk Management National Action Plan. I understand that it is the first such exercise to have taken place in the Pacific and perhaps is also significant in this regard at a global level.

I sincerely hope that the experiences that we have had in Vanuatu in developing a National Action Plan will prove to be of some use to other countries and supporting agencies represented here today, as you consider taking further steps toward implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action both at regional and national levels.

The Vanuatu Disaster Risk Management National Action Plan is an adaptation of the *Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action 2005 – 2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, which is the Pacific Islands regional adaptation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and my colleague will speak about its genesis in the second session of this meeting. It was launched by the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, following a comprehensive consultative process which had commenced 5 months earlier, in June 2006. The development of the NAP was made possible through the support of the Pacific Disaster Risk Management Partnership Network for which SOPAC is the Lead Facilitator. SOPAC, the World Bank, the UNDP Pacific Resources Centre, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat who are members of Regional DRM Partnership Network were the key advisors to Vanuatu and provided their support through the whole process.

As a first in the Pacific the experience toward the Vanuatu National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management is interesting in that there was no template or blueprint available to guide this important development process. Planning for the exercise was initially heavily supported and guided by those members of the Partnership Network that I have already mentioned; however, as the process progressed I am pleased to advise that with increased confidence from those of us at national level, the local, national element of the initiative began to play an ever increasing role in determining the specific processes that needed to be followed, as well as determining the nature of the DRM initiatives that were to be captured within the NAP.

The NAP initiative for my country commenced in late June 2006 with a regional high level advocacy mission to Vanuatu being made by senior representatives of those members of the Partnership Network that were willing to support NAP development. The purpose of the mission was primarily to raise awareness of and to garner commitment in respect of being strategic in mainstreaming disaster risk management, at the highest political level, which is absolutely tantamount to the success of any significant development initiative if it is to succeed.

Aside from this the high level advocacy discussions also informed our Government that the Partnership Network was going to provide support toward the development of and more importantly the implementation of the priorities identified under our NAP. Such a commitment I believe provided a strong reassurance to my Government that although the process would not necessarily be easy, it would in the long-term allow a more strategic level of engagement both in the identification and development of the NAP priorities and the implementation plan of delivering against these through the various mechanisms that we have available to us such as our national budgetary and planning processes, our bilateral and regional relationships, as well as an LDC.

As an adjunct to this high level advocacy mission, a team of senior, national officials were identified by my Government to work with members of the Regional Partnership Network at 2 levels. At a high level, Government's Directors General or Chief Executive Officers were designated as the "Reference Group" or Steering Committee.

All the phases of the exercise, and particularly towards the end of the development plan process whence the NAP had been drafted, were subject to the close oversight and required review and the concurrence of this Reference Group.

At an operational level, a National Action Plan Task Force was appointed to identify gaps that existed within and across the country in relation to disaster risk management. The Task Force was comprised of senior officials from multiple agencies across our administration to garner a wide range of perspectives in relation to the various natural hazards that Vanuatu is prone to. The Task Force led consultations at national level with groups of stakeholders across Government and also at provincial and local, community levels.

By the end of September 2006 a draft NAP had been developed and in the following month priorities under the NAP were identified. The NAP, as stated earlier, was launched in November 2006 but it was not until February and March of this year that we were able to develop a Provisional Indicative Implementation Programme – the PIP, which will be crucial to realising the mainstreaming of DRM, nationally, and to implementing the key priorities identified under the NAP.

The PIP adds value to the NAP process by identifying the indicative costs of all actions and sub actions identified under the NAP. The PIP also articulates a programme management arrangement that is to be put into place to manage NAP implementation.

The experience of developing a NAP has highlighted many interesting lessons for us and I would like to share some of these with you in the event that these may be of some value to your countries as they consider the national adaptation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The **first lesson** is that unless there is a high level of political will and commitment, a whole-of-government and optimally a whole-of-country approach to mainstreaming disaster risk management is not going to be possible.

In the case of my country Vanuatu a high level of political commitment and support provided the overall guidance to Government agencies and also provided a useful signal to the community that the Government was indeed interested in supporting community safety and that it recognised that the community needed to be at the forefront of any change initiatives that were designed to enhance community safety and resilience.

As an extension of this it is also important that the advocacy be extended beyond the political level at the early stages of NAP development process – beyond politicians and government senior officials to not only secure support during the development phase of the NAP but to build national partnerships and ownership of the NAP in view of the need for a ‘whole-of-government and as already mentioned the all important all-of-country approach’ to DRM.

**Secondly**, is that at officials level there needs to be a mutually supportive effort between all key players. That is we need to accept that in order for disaster risk management to be mainstreamed into every crevice of our national apparatus and result in making a community difference we must view the challenge as being an important extension to our existing jobs.

In Vanuatu my colleagues co-opted to support this process through adopting a multi-agency / all-of-government approach and embracing the exercise as a necessity for effectiveness as opposed to it being a distraction. Officials need to be made to understand that the mainstreaming of DRM should be and has become part of their core job and responsibilities.

In this connection it is also important that all officials identified to lead the effort are exposed to some specific skills development on how to lead and manage change. It is often taken for granted that new initiatives will easily be mainstreamed because there is Government support. Unfortunately however our experience in the Pacific is such that some investment needs to be made in relation to changing mindsets and building competence so that any change or improvement over the longer term is easier to realise, to understand and to describe.

A **third lesson** relates to the need for active community participation in the whole effort. Unfortunately we were not able to canvas opinion amongst all our community groups due to the scattered nature of our population across many islands and the timeframe that we had set ourselves to reach a draft NAP. However, we are confident that the extent of consultation that we were able to undertake in respect of the community dimension was invaluable to informing the NAP and that these will be beneficial as we address the challenge of implementation.

A **fourth lesson** related to the need for full and wide ranging communication and utilising the most appropriate medium for this. In developing our NAP we have had to ensure that the dissemination of all information, as well as the stakeholder consultations were conducted in the 3 major languages that we use in Vanuatu (that is Bislama, English and French). As we move forward with implementation we will need to ensure that we maintain consistency in our communication approach.

Now and **finally** to the most important issue and challenge and that is of mainstreaming and the extent to which we need to work in order to effectively get the message across.

In the fragile economies and environments of the Pacific where I am from I am mindful that we need to advocate that disaster risk management be a “way of life” and an imperative as we strive toward sustainable development. This was certainly the case during the times of our ancestors when their lives were led largely according to what the seasons dictated governed and guided through traditional knowledge and practice. With the ever changing climate conditions that we face now, and compounded by the other human-induced, technological and other hazards, I do not believe that have a choice but to make disaster risk management a way of life.

It is not enough to just try to mainstream DRM into national planning and budgeting processes. We need to target communities and influence a lifestyle change so that they are more concerned with the changes happening around them in order that they can adjust and adapt to these.

This is the **most important lesson** to be learned from our NAP process in Vanuatu. It challenges us now and will continue to challenge us at different levels and I am confident that we can meet this challenge. ***We just all need to continue to work together.***

I thank you once again for the opportunity to make this intervention and trust that we all have success in the work that we have ahead of us in building the safety and resilience of our communities.