



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

Pacific Regional Presences of IFRC, UNISDR, and UNOCHA

Joint Policy Brief for Pacific Island Nations on

COP 15 Copenhagen, 7 – 18 December 2009

The December 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change (the UNFCCC Fifteenth Conference of the Parties) will provide an unprecedented opportunity to establish an effective multilateral framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support climate change adaptation. Such an outcome is essential if potentially catastrophic increases in disaster impacts and associated poverty outcomes are to be avoided, especially in disaster-prone developing countries and Small Island Development States.

The IFRC, UNISDR and UNOCHA regional presences in the Pacific have joined hands in preparing this briefing note for policy makers and climate change negotiators from Pacific island countries. The policy brief highlights the importance of reducing disaster risk in all economic sectors and at all levels as a practical approach to adapt to climate change, reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development targets. It also urges Pacific island countries to scale up disaster response and preparedness at all levels since climate change is already resulting in an increase in the number and severity of disasters which over time will overwhelm the already limited capacities of national and local disaster management systems.

Global and Regional Policy Context:

The close and inextricable links between climate change and disaster risk was a leading thread at the Second Session of the **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction** (June 2009) where political leaders, including heads of State and heads of Governments, recognized in stark and unequivocal terms that reducing disaster risk is critical to managing

the impacts of climate change. The overwhelming view of the Global Platform was that urgent action is required to harmonize and link global, regional and national policy frameworks and policies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Therefore the Platform called to include disaster risk reduction as a concrete part of the deal on climate change to be negotiated at the United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. One group of countries proposed that a minimum of 30% of adaptation financing be made available to developing countries for investments in weather and climate related risk reduction and preparedness. This proposal is included in current negotiations text to be discussed in Copenhagen.

At the regional level, the **Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management** (May 2009) emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between the disaster risk management and climate change communities. The Platform agreed to strengthen the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation through joint development and implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) in least developed countries, national adaptations plans in all countries and National Action Plans for Disaster Risk Management, which are already being pursued in a few Pacific island countries. The Platform also recommended seeking opportunities for integrating the regional policy and planning frameworks that guide climate change and disaster risk management in the Pacific (PIFCCAP and Madang Frameworks).

The **United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Pacific Sub-Region** sets out the strategic focus of the UN's support to Pacific island countries for the period 2008 – 2012. The UNDAF makes special provisions for disaster risk reduction, the management of response, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation. Since its endorsement the UN System has committed to linking disaster risk reduction and management initiatives with existing and future climate change adaptation efforts through the development and implementation of integrated programmes in partnership with Pacific island countries to strengthen the resilience of Pacific island communities and foster sustainable development across all sectors and at all levels, from the national to the local.

In 2007, the **International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent** adopted a new resolution that tasked the IFRC with *“supporting National Societies in their work [on climate change adaptation], including through representation of their interests and concerns at the international level.* The movement committed to raising awareness about the humanitarian consequences of climate change and providing humanitarian assistance to those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, in particular in affected developing countries. Disaster preparedness was affirmed as a key element in the management of response. It is in this capacity that Red Cross in the Pacific seeks to improve individual and collective capacity to respond swiftly to the humanitarian challenges presented by climate change and to reduce the vulnerability of communities to climate change through community based disaster preparedness and risk reduction programmes that take a no-regrets approach to adaptation.



Key Messages:

- Climate change is not a future threat: Existing levels of green house gas emissions are already resulting in an increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, also in the Pacific.
- A further increase in the number of disasters will overwhelm national and local disaster managements systems in the Pacific. This challenge must be addressed by investing now in disaster risk reduction measures and scaling up disaster response and preparedness.
- Disaster risk reduction is a first line of defense to the impacts of climate change. Measures to reduce vulnerability and disaster risk have been tested in the Pacific and tools, capacities and supporting mechanisms are available for wider use in climate change adaptation.
- Country capacities to adapt to climate change and to reduce disaster risks need to be strengthened promptly. Adaptation funding should be invested to build institutional, technical and human capacities for resilient communities, especially in vulnerable small island states in the Pacific.
- Climate change is an additional driver of disaster risk exacerbating more conventional risk factors such as poor urban governance, vulnerable rural livelihoods and ecosystem

degradation. Failure to address these in an integrated manner will result in dramatic increases in disaster risk and associated poverty outcomes. However, an integrated approach to addressing these drivers can reduce risk, protect human development and facilitate climate change adaptation.

- We have solutions and the ability to implement them. The internationally agreed Hyogo Framework for Action and its regional adaptation, the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework, provide proven tools and approaches for building the resilience of Pacific island communities and nations.

Key Recommendations:

- Disaster risk reduction and preparedness should be confirmed and embedded as key elements of adaptation strategies in the final text of the Copenhagen Agreement. The focus must remain firmly on a solution-oriented approach to proactively addressing the unavoidable rise in risks we face.
- We must strengthen disaster reduction, preparedness and response systems at all levels (local, national and regional). This is essential if we are to meet the unprecedented contemporary challenges posed by climate change risks.
- Adaptation efforts must prioritize people and communities where vulnerabilities are highest. Adaptation must be fully integrated into longer-term disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies.
- Local level risk reduction and preparedness actions should be recognized as key elements in adapting to climate change. The agreement reached in Copenhagen must not only promote risk reduction at national level but also engage and empower local people, local governments and local civil society actors.
- Robust resource mobilization mechanisms must be developed for adaptation to ensure the flow of both financial and technical support to local actors working on climate change adaptation and disaster reduction and preparedness.
- Agreement must be reached to drastically reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to avoid catastrophes in the future.