



Inaugural Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction Ministers & Officials Meetings

14th – 16th September 2022

Nadi, Fiji

Concept Note

31 August 2022

Introduction

Disasters continue to have a significant impact on the development of Pacific island countries. In recent years several countries have suffered from the effects of tropical cyclones. In 2015 Tropical Cyclone Pam caused widespread damage to Vanuatu amounting to 63% of GDP, displacing an estimated 65,000 people and negatively impacting the livelihoods of over 80% of Vanuatu's rural population. The 2015-2016 drought in the Republic of the Marshall Islands caused significant disruptions to national production, with a loss of 3.4% of RMI's GDP. In 2016, Cyclone Winston struck Fiji and caused damage and losses equivalent to 31% of Fiji's GDP.¹ In 2018 Cyclone Gita caused economic loss to Tonga equivalent to 37.8% of GDP. In January 2022 Tonga was devastated by a volcanic eruption and tsunami which resulted in economic damage of approximately USD90.4 million².

To address the impact of disasters caused by climate change-related or geological hazards Pacific island countries have established a number of policies, guidelines and legislation to guide their efforts at reducing disaster risk and improving response and recovery capability at the national and regional level. The *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2017 - 2030 (FRDP)* which was approved by Pacific leaders in 2016 provides high level strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters, in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development. Goal 1 under the FRDP emphasises the need for integrated approaches to addressing climate change and disasters in the context of social and economic development planning processes and practices. Goal 2 is a focus on the importance of a low carbon development pathway to help improve energy security, decreased net emissions of greenhouse gasses and enhanced resilience of energy infrastructure. Goal 3 specifically addresses the need for strengthened disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

In September 2018 Pacific leaders strengthened their guidance for addressing climate change and disaster risk through the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. Through the Declaration and the subsequent Boe Declaration Action Plan 2019, leaders called for '*strengthening humanitarian assistance, disaster preparedness and response and long-term Pacific Resilience through existing regional mechanisms...*'. Further, Pacific leaders supported the '*development of a standard operating procedure for regional responses to humanitarian assistance and disaster response including the identification of resources by Member Country available for deployment regionally and globally*'

More recently, the region, through the draft 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent is committing to, *inter alia* "...pursue innovative measures to address climate change impacts and disaster risk...". Further, it specifically reflects the intent of such commitment under two strategic areas: 'Peace and Security' and 'Climate Change and Disasters'.

¹ An Overview of Climate and Disaster Risk Financing Options for Pacific Island Countries, PIFS, May 2021

² Global Rapid Post Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report, World Bank GFDRR, February 2022

These regional policy commitments establish the strategic foundation for the proposed Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction Ministers Meeting.

Rationale for the Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting

Of critical importance to resilience-building efforts is the need for strong and consistent leadership at the national and regional levels. This is to catalyze and galvanise efforts to build resilience - strengthening disaster risk reduction/climate change adaptation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. In recent times, the challenge of addressing these imperatives has been further exacerbated by the compounding effects of a multiple hazard front that the region has experienced over the period 2020 to 2022 through the COVID-19 pandemic and its convergence with natural hazards such as Tropical Cyclone Harold (Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga, April 2020) Tropical Cyclone Yasa (Fiji, December 2020) and the more recent volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga in January 2022.

The Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting represents the first opportunity in the region for a Ministers level meeting on disaster risk and resilience. Previous regional meetings dating back to 1992 included national officials through the participation of the heads of the National Disaster Management Office from each country. It is increasingly evident however that, given the frequency and emerging complexity of hazard events, the increasing exposure and vulnerability of Pacific communities to these events and other external shocks, there is a need for higher level dialogue and leadership.

Ministers responsible for DRR within Pacific island countries can be a potent force: they can more compellingly influence increased action at national and sub national level within each country and provide the necessary political leadership and sustained commitment to support sub regional and regional initiatives to deal with transboundary risks. National officials require this support to help fulfill their responsibilities. Regional and international partners welcome high-level guidance to better focus their support for the greater benefit of Pacific Island Countries.

In addition, the meeting provides an opportunity for Pacific Ministers responsible for DRR to present a collective voice in helping to guide the implementation of the FRDP, Boe Declaration and 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy. This will complement other relevant Ministers arrangements that meet regularly and support this agenda e.g. Climate Change Ministers, Finance & Economic Ministers, and Foreign Ministers.

Finally, the Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting will be a strategic precursor for the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR), jointly hosted by the Government of Australia and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in Brisbane, Australia from 19th – 22nd September 2022. The APMCDRR is also an inaugural event in which the Pacific will receive significant prominence with the ability to share, in a wider setting, its experiences and know-how in climate and disaster resilience building.

Focus of the Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting

While the opportunities presented by a dedicated DRR Ministers meeting are vast and diverse, there is acknowledgement that the meeting in 2022 serve as an initial springboard and therefore focus first on garnering the interest and commitment by Ministers to address a select number of current strategic DRR imperatives.

The inaugural Ministers Meeting will focus on addressing the following:

1. Risk informed development: The FRDP provides high level strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters, in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development. The FRDP evolved at the regional level in response and to complement and support strategic national initiatives to integrate climate change and disaster considerations into all decision-making and governance. The main intent of integration is to ensure that all development is risk informed; that climate and disaster related risk, and gender and social inclusion, are fundamental aspects of planning, financing and implementing development at all levels. Some significant progress in ensuring that development approaches are risk informed can be noted across the region. While progress has been made, there is need for more prominent political level support for several reasons. The related but separate ongoing discourse on climate change and disaster risk at the global and regional level hampers efforts of countries to drive a programmatic approach to integration of all risks into development. Our Pacific leaders are vocal about the impacts of climate change and the actions required to reduce these. There however is less concern about the importance of integrated approaches in a Pacific islands context, and inadequate political drive to establish the partnerships, coordination and financing mechanisms required to sustain these approaches. Ministers leadership and guidance are required to ensure a consistency of effort and the success of national and regional initiatives.
2. Disaster preparedness and response – The damage and loss from disaster events in the Pacific has far reaching effects on fragile island economies and requires a suite of varied actions across the disaster risk management continuum. Focused disaster preparedness and response is an important part of the overall suite of disaster risk management interventions and properly planned and implemented, can significantly minimise the potential impact of hazard events. Given the dispersed nature of communities over a wide geographical landscape, national authorities are challenged to have in place adequate and effective early warning systems to alert and advise the communities of imminent threats and the actions required. Authorities are also challenged to effectively and efficiently coordinate response efforts. Further, authorities have also faced challenges to provide relevant and focussed disaster risk financing opportunities to support humanitarian response and early recovery. All of these imperatives must be underpinned by a sound understanding of risk. As a result, humanitarian support that is urgently required in the immediate aftermath of a hazard event does not reach target communities as early as required thus causing an additional strain on already affected populations. There are several regional and national level disaster preparedness and response initiatives which have been instituted and which would benefit from the support and guidance of Ministers responsible for Disaster Risk Reduction/Management in Pacific island countries.

3. Resilient recovery - Disaster impact on Pacific Island countries is well chronicled and there is typically a significant hive of activity to develop a more comprehensive understanding of economic and social impact and in turn a comprehensive approach to disaster recovery planning and implementation. Countries have benefitted from assistance made available through different donors to strengthen and make infrastructure more resilient to future hazard events. The investment being made have yielded a number of interesting experiences including some of the challenges that the local industry and stakeholders must address to effectively 'build back better' or 'build forward better'. It is important to consider many implications of resilient investment planning and implementation, not the least of which is the sustainability of investments over the longer term and strengthened leadership and guidance by Ministers is essential.
4. Commitment to Action: What can Ministers agree to pursue individually and collectively to strengthen the implementation of resilience action in the Pacific? – It is important that there are some concrete actions that Ministers commit to by the conclusion of the meeting. A 'Declaration' will be issued by Ministers to reflect their commitment to action to address key priorities in resilience strengthening in the Pacific.

The discussions on the three main focus areas outlined above resonates with the Thematic Pillars of the APMCDRR as follows:

- Thematic Pillar 1: Investing in Resilience and Preparedness
- Thematic Pillar 2: Shock Proof Systems, Services and Infrastructure
- Thematic Pillar 3: Resilient Communities

This will enable Ministers to relate the content and outcomes from the discussions within this inaugural meeting to thematic structure of the APMCDRR which Ministers will transition to in the week following.

Outcomes

The inaugural Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting will be able to immediately and directly support and enhance:

1. The ongoing initiative to strengthen integrated approaches to addressing climate change and disaster risk in the context of national and local level development policy, planning and practice.
2. The current effort to strengthen key national emergency/disaster response agencies (e.g. NDMOs Police, Armed Forces and Fire & Emergency Services), in terms of their ability to guide national preparedness and effectively and efficiently manage a coordinated response to disasters;
3. National and regional action to develop and implement multi hazard early warning systems;
4. Understanding of financing opportunities available to Pacific island countries to address climate and disaster resilience and in particular disaster preparedness and response;

5. The current regional effort to establish a regional Humanitarian Action and Disaster Response mechanism (HADR) and related initiatives in response to the Leaders decision on the Boe Declaration Action Plan, noting that the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the HADR is directly linked to successful action on 2 above;
6. A deeper understanding of the needs, aspirations and contributions of different stakeholder groups that address the needs of the most vulnerable groups including women, youth, children and the elderly;
7. Political leadership, commitment and resources to resilience action at national and subnational level in Pacific island countries.

Output

The main output of the meeting is a 'Declaration' by Ministers to commit to action in connection with the focus of their discussions.

Participants

It is expected that a Cabinet Minister or Assistant Minister responsible for DRR/Management in Pacific island countries and territories will be in attendance. Coordination is taking place with UNDRR to ensure that the invitations are extended to the same Ministers and officials attending the APMCDRR in Brisbane, Australia from 19th – 22nd September 2022.

Location & Dates

The Ministers and DRM Official's meetings will be held at the Sofitel Hotel, Denarau Island in Nadi, Fiji on 14th – 16th September 2022.

Format

The Pacific DRR Ministers Meeting will be conducted using a hybrid format to accommodate those Ministers that are able to attend in-person and those that may still be unable to travel due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Papers for discussion at the Ministers will be shared and discussed in advance with the relevant national officials to ensure that Ministers are well briefed and prepared for their meeting.

Pacific DRR Officials Meeting

In advance of the Ministers meeting, an in-person meeting of national DRR Officials representing Pacific island countries will also take place.

The meeting for DRR Officials (with provision for remote connection for those unable to travel to Fiji) is to be held in two segments on Wednesday 14th September and Friday 16th September. The purpose of this meeting is to better acquaint officials with the specifics of the agenda of the Ministers meeting and to ensure that the draft 'Declaration' is ready for endorsement by Ministers at the conclusion of their meeting on 16th September.

Organisation and Facilitation

The Ministers and Official's meetings will be jointly organised and facilitated by the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). The SPC and PIFS are working in close collaboration with other partner organisations under the umbrella of the Pacific Resilience Partnership such as the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDP and others to facilitate the meeting.

Hosting

The Government of Fiji is hosting the meetings through the leadership of Hon. Inia Seruiratu, Minister for Rural & Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

Agenda

A Provisional Annotated Agenda for the Ministers and Officials meetings has been developed.