

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF MID-TERM REVIEW WORKSHOP:
BIENNIAL PROGRESS REVIEW CYCLE OF THE REGIONAL DRM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION (RFA)
AND THE HYOGO FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION (HFA)
SUVA, FIJI

Date: 19 May 2010

Meeting in Suva, Fiji on April 13, 2010, participants of the 2009-11 Biennial Progress Review Cycle of the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action 2005 – 2015 (RFA) and the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) discussed the progress, shortcomings and potential improvements of the RFA¹. The meeting was jointly organized by UNISDR and SOPAC. Participants were divided into three groups, each with a different set of key questions aimed at obtaining specific perspectives as well as insights on the future implementation of the HFA through 2015 and beyond. *Group One* responded to questions 1, 2, and 3, *Group Two* responded to questions 4, 5 and 6, and *Group Three* responded to questions 7 and 8.

The following is a summary of the discussions of all three groups. Individual group responses to the posed questions can be found in the annex below.

Summary of the Workshop Discussions

In general, participants noted that the RFA has increased disaster risk management awareness amongst senior leaders which has contributed to the successful inclusion of the disaster risk management in the UNDAF for the Pacific Sub-Region 2008-2011. However, awareness within Pacific Island communities of the RFA needs to be improved and the lack of reliable and readily available data impeded the appropriate evaluation of the contributions of the RFA.

Additionally, participants noted that preparedness for sudden-onset disasters is lacking in the region and disaster risk management is not consistently reflected in all National Development Strategies. A 'national mandate' for disaster risk management was considered an important prerequisite for mainstreaming disaster risk management into the national and sectoral development agendas. The lack of commitment from all stakeholders at the policy and governance level, as well as religious beliefs and cultural dimensions also posed problems for successful implementation. Participants recommended that Community-Based Disaster Risk Management projects, which generate good practices but are carried out as isolated initiatives, be more incorporated across the wider regional network and more integrated with local governments. The health and education sectors were identified as being essential to increasing community awareness of disaster risk management.

During the discussion, it was also noted that communities and villages in Pacific Island Countries (PICs), which are characterized by strong social and traditional systems, are resilient to, though not necessarily safe from, disasters. Frequently, communities settle in risk-prone areas because of their dependency on land and resources or due to other opportunities afforded by the location. Development in recent years, such as the establishment of building codes, the South Pacific Engineers Association, the National Disaster Management Offices, and seed repositories, to name a few, have been important for the reduction of underlying risk factors. However, these initiatives are still in their infancy and will require further support to be fully developed. Overall, experience in the region has shown that the greatest success can be achieved when initiatives start from the bottom up and are synchronized with the countries' own policies and systems.

¹ For the discussion in Suva, Fiji, questions were posed with respect to the RFA as opposed to the general HFA in order to attain a more region-appropriate perspective on disaster risk reduction.

In terms of linking the RFA with climate change adaptation, it was suggested that SPREP, SOPAC, UNISDR and selected representatives of national governments set up a steering committee that could work to identify some common priorities and provide consistent technical inputs. Common National Action Plans were also supported as well as more involvement by National Disaster Management Offices in addressing climate change adaptation.

With respect to furthering the implementation of the RFA, participants agreed that better coordination amongst regional actors was needed as well as cost-benefit analysis to strengthen evidence-based decision making. Funding was also identified as a potential area of improvement as donor funding was not considered flexible or programmatic enough to suit the needs of PIC governments. To ensure successful RFA implementation, governments would also need to provide investments for implementation in order to match the written commitments that they have signed. Respondents also expressed a desire to strengthen the continuum between disaster risk reduction and disaster response by involving the UN-led Pacific Humanitarian Team more consistently in the discussions on the RFA.

Annex: Individual Group Responses

The following is a summary of the discussion of *Group One*, which responded to *questions 1, 2 and 3*.

Question 1: In your experience has the RFA been instrumental over the past five years in reducing disaster losses in communities and countries in the region?

Respondents found this question difficult to answer due to a lack of reliable and readily available data, as well as problems with attributing the RFA's contribution to reducing disaster losses in the Pacific. It was therefore suggested that in-depth studies may be needed which could generate data that might allow for attribution and a better understanding of the RFA's role and impact in the Pacific.

The predominant opinion was that the RFA has contributed to improved levels of preparedness for some types of disasters, in particular events that allow for a reasonable warning time. However, the respondents noted that preparedness for sudden-onset disasters is less developed. Examples mentioned included the response to recent Cyclone Tomas (March 2010) in Fiji, which was characterized by good preparedness, and Tonga, which was better prepared for cyclones than tsunamis.

The main obstacle identified as preventing the RFA from achieving its intended outcome was that disaster risk management is still not consistently reflected in all PICs National Development Strategies. A 'national mandate' for disaster risk management was considered an important prerequisite for mainstreaming disaster risk management into the national and sectoral development agendas. Regional and global frameworks for disaster risk management were not considered sufficient to achieve this.

Question 2: How has the RFA informed decision making or priority setting in the Pacific region?

The RFA, which has been endorsed by Pacific leaders, increased the recognition of disaster risk management by decision-makers. The development and endorsement of National Action Plans for Disaster Risk Management by several PICs was mentioned as a sound example of effective priority setting and mainstreaming of disaster risk management.

The perspective of development partners was that overall the RFA has underpinned disaster risk management work in the region. Proof of this was the inclusion of disaster risk management in the UNDAF for the Pacific Sub-Region 2008-2012. However, it had also occurred that partners would decide to meet PICs requests for support without making sure that these were in line with various regional policy commitments, such as the RFA.

Question 3: What specific elements of the RFA have been pursued or implemented well and why?

Again, respondents encountered difficulties answering the question due to a lack of reliable and readily available data. However, there was agreement that PICs lacked the necessary implementation capacities to act upon regional and national policy commitments. Staff in relevant departments at the national and sub-national levels was overloaded and did not have the capacity to absorb technical assistance and resources, even when available. In addition to this, the capacity of many regional partners was stretched, as they generally cover 10 – 17 countries across the region.

Another factor mentioned was a lack of commitment from all stakeholders at the policy and governance level, which is still limited in many cases. Also, cultural dimensions and religious

beliefs were found to provide barriers to the successful implementation of the RFA and the disaster risk management activities proposed therein.

The following is a summary of the discussion of *Group Two*, which responded to *questions 4, 5 and 6*.

Question 4: In your experience, does the RFA sufficiently encourage community participation and the utilization of local knowledge to reduce disaster risk? I.e. In the Pacific, have communities and local authorities been empowered and is local knowledge and community action being useful/tapped into to manage and reduce disaster risk? If so, how? If not, why not?

The RFA is only a tool that encourages community participation. The actual implementation is another challenge. Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) projects in the Pacific are usually carried out as isolated initiatives. They often generate a considerable repertoire of good practices; however, these are rarely shared across the wider regional network of PICs and partners. Many CBDRM projects claim to work at the provincial level, but actually do not engage effectively with local government. They mostly work through National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs) at the national level.

At the moment CBDRM is incorporated in the RFA as a cross-cutting issue and respondents deliberated whether CBDRM should receive greater emphasis in the RFA and become a theme on its own. This was only considered possible if it reflected PICs disaster risk management priorities. Respondents also discussed whether it was too early for the RFA to demonstrate evidence of enhanced community participation.

Respondents were of the opinion that there is little, if any, awareness of the RFA within Pacific Island communities. It was also felt that local government representatives would most likely not have heard about the RFA as yet. A major challenge is that there is no budget allocation for disaster risk management at the provincial and district level in most countries. Where it exists, the understanding of disaster risk management is very limited, explaining why there have been no significant improvements in regards to risk sensitive infrastructure and development planning.

In terms of the institutional mechanisms responsible for ensuring links with the community, respondents were of the opinion that a broad spectrum of stakeholders at the national level needs to collaborate better in order to achieve this. The establishment of National Platforms for Disaster Risk Management was discussed as an opportune mechanism for achieving this. The Ministries of Finance and Development Planning could facilitate the trickling down process, as most ministries and departments have counterparts at the district level. In particular, the health and education sectors were considered key when it comes to raising community awareness of disaster risk management and CBDRM.

As regards the role of the NDMOs, respondents felt that they are more geared towards disaster response and have a lack of capacity, often without dedicated personnel to focus on CBDRM issues. Also, NDMOs are often hesitating to collaborate meaningfully and over an extended period with CSO/NGOs.

Question 5: In your experience does the general public in the Pacific region have a culture of safety and resilience? For example, do people in the Pacific seek information about land safety, building structures, etc. prior to building or purchasing properties? Do they expect politicians to have national and local disaster risk reduction plans in place? Do they acquire, or are required by law to acquire, insurance for their properties, crops and

livelihoods if they live in disaster prone areas? Are they fully informed, trained if necessary, and equipped about what needs to be done in case of a disaster?

Respondents felt that there is only limited awareness of disaster preparedness, disaster risk management, plans and legislation at the community level and in the general public. Disaster relevant information is not shared effectively at the national level (several reasons were mentioned, including legal restrictions), which also limits its dissemination down to the community level. In addition, there is a lack of resources and capacities at the community level to access information even when available.

Communities and villages in PICs are characterized by strong social and traditional systems which makes them resilient to, though not necessarily safe from, disasters. There is often a high level of risk acceptance, even among communities demonstrating heightened risk awareness. Frequently, communities settle in risk-prone areas because of their dependency on land and resources, or due to other opportunities afforded by the location.

The main stakeholders who should drive disaster risk management and a culture of safety at the local level were identified to be the agriculture, health, and education sectors.

Question 6: How can implementation of RFA Theme 6, reducing the underlying risk factors, be strengthened?

In response to this question, participants opted to identify good practices in the Pacific for the implementation of Theme 6, which could be built on during the coming years.

A number of countries have made progress with the development of **building codes**; however, they usually remain difficult to enforce and implement due to a variety of reasons, e.g. custom land laws, etc. More focus should be placed on analysing and addressing these bottlenecks in order for building codes to achieve their intended risk reduction goals.

The launch of the **South Pacific Engineers Association** has been a promising development in recent years. The Association was established to create a register of engineers and to promote higher operating standards. In Fiji, the National Engineers Registration Act is not active. Overall, there is still a lack of awareness across the Pacific at the community level regarding basic building principles that can limit damage from natural hazards. Recent events have proven that major damage has been to homes that are non-compliant with these principles.

National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs) in the Pacific are in general small and under-resourced units with a variety of responsibilities ranging from preparedness, to response, and disaster risk reduction. Apart from strengthening the human and financial capacities of NDMOs, it was considered crucial to get the Ministries of Finance and Planning more engaged in disaster risk reduction, as they are likely to give weight to any intervention and to command the necessary leadership across other key development sectors, which is important for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development. It was felt that NDMOs are often very policy-heavy with little capacity to implement.

There are also a number of **experiences at the sector level** which can be exploited further in order to address underlying disaster risk. For example, in Samoa a tree was discovered after the tsunami in 2009 that was particularly resilient to the impact of the salt water. The Ministry of Agriculture is now considering planting more of these trees in coastal areas. Such experiences could be shared across the region. In Fiji, the Ministry of Agriculture opted to set up seed depositories in a range of locations across the country after the January 2009 floods. This has considerably reduced vulnerability of the agricultural sector to weather extremes over the past months, as seed production could continue in those locations that had not been impacted by natural hazards.

Community participation was also considered an important determinant of successful disaster risk reduction. After the tsunami disaster in Samoa, communities themselves - and not the government - decided to move to less hazardous locations on elevated grounds. The fact that the majority of households had access to safe lands was certainly a key to success.

The Pacific has a number of well developed **generic regional approaches**. However, experience has shown that the greatest success can be achieved when initiatives start small and are in sync with countries' own policies and systems. This provides opportunities for improvement which are consistent with the capacity of under-resourced NDMOs and government departments in the Pacific.

The following is a summary of the discussion of *Group Three*, which responded to *questions 7 and 8*.

Question 7: How should climate change adaptation be integrated in the next five years of the RFA implementation?

It was suggested that SPREP, SOPAC, UNISDR and selected representatives of national governments set up a **steering committee** that can work to identify some common priorities and provide consistent technical inputs in order to link disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation throughout the Pacific.

Another entry point mentioned was **joint programming** of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction initiatives and the pooling of resources. In particular, the development of **common National Action Plans for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation** was considered an important entry point. For this to happen, more emphasis would have to be placed on bringing together the DRM and CCA stakeholders and to identify ways to utilize contributions from different parts of government. Some examples already exist in the Pacific, such as in Tonga and the Federated States of Micronesia. A panel of DRR/CCA experts at the national level to guide policy and strategic planning was also considered necessary. The SOPAC Integrated Water Resources Management project in the Pacific was mentioned as a good example of getting different interest groups together to provide integrated solutions for flood response and water resources management.

A Further important entry point for an integrated approach was at the **community level** where the issues of environmental degradation, climate change and DRM naturally come together and where it is easier to plan and mitigate their consequences in an integrated manner. Awareness raising, such as the King tide festivals in Tuvalu, was considered good practice in helping visitors better understand the risks to which the community is regularly exposed.

In regard to resource mobilization, it was felt that NDMOs need to get more involved in order to be able to tap into resources for climate change adaptation, such as the AusAID-supported CCA initiative. In general, PICs still have difficulty in sourcing funding for climate change adaptation. An example from the Cook Islands was cited, where it was a challenge to secure funds for extra costs to ensure the new port facilities are built in a climate-resilient manner.

Question 8: What are the three most important things the international/regional community could support in the Pacific for furthering the implementation of the RFA?

A number of key challenges and issues were identified for implementing the RFA. Firstly, it was considered important to find appropriate solutions for better coordinating the many regional actors working in the Pacific. A prerequisite for this was to ensure the continuity of SOPAC's DRM mandate and functions at the regional level (beyond SOPAC's transition into SPC), as well as for

SOPAC to strike an appropriate balance between its role as regional DRM coordinator and implementer of key technical programmes. There was also the question of what is an appropriate level of regional technical support to move ahead national DRM agendas in a manner that generates government ownership and sustainability.

Donor funding was not considered flexible or programmatic enough to suit the needs of PIC governments. In particular, difficulties in securing funding support for NAP implementation mechanisms were considered a tremendous set back which slowed down progress in DRM. It was felt that donors should also investigate avenues within their own institutions for mainstreaming DRR in their development funding, for example by including DRR criteria into guidelines for the preparation of project documents. This would contribute to making development investment more resilient to the impacts of natural hazards.

Also, governments need to demonstrate their commitment. They have already done so in writing by endorsing their National Action Plans, the RFA and the HFA. However, they are not yet providing matching investments for implementing their DRM priorities through national resourcing of DRM or by tapping into regional and global support. This is a challenge; since PIC's relatively easy access to post-disaster humanitarian assistance may act as 'discouragement' to invest in DRM. It is therefore important to place more effort into the ability to assess and communicate the long-term economic benefits of disaster risk reduction versus post-disaster humanitarian assistance. This would help by supporting advocacy for DRM with evidence based arguments.

Respondents also expressed a desire to strengthen the continuum between disaster risk reduction and disaster response by involving the UN-led Pacific Humanitarian Team more consistently in the discussions on the RFA.

For the coming years of RFA implementation, the following recommendations were made:

- Coordination at regional and national level to be proactive and strong in order to manage and bring in multiple partners/sectors/levels;
- Further clarify the roles of partners and stakeholders vis-à-vis the RFA and how they can support its implementation;
- Develop and integrate financial targets into the RFA and NAPs (e.g. % of humanitarian assistance; % of adaptation funding; and similar);
- Provide more flexible funding for DRM programmes;
- Disaster risk management and reduction is not the sole responsibility of the NDMOs and effective avenues for mainstreaming DRR into national and sectoral development needs to be found;
- Examine how the linkages between response and DRR could be strengthened in order to achieve a better continuum;

Strengthen evidence-based decision making on disaster risk reduction through socio-economic impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis.

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