LAW AND POLICIES THAT PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE AGAINST CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTER RISKS

Findings and Lessons Learned from Pacific Island Countries

Executive Summary
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Guided by Strategy 2030—our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade—we are committed to saving lives and changing minds.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development, and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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Law and Policies that Protect the Most Vulnerable Against Climate-Related Disaster Risks:
Findings and Lessons Learned from Pacific Island Countries

Executive Summary

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As global concerns, adaptation to a changing climate and the reduction of its destructive effects must be simultaneously addressed at international, regional, national, and local levels. This engenders significant complexity for law and policy-makers and requires the consideration of how international instruments are reflected in both regional and domestic spheres. A recent comparative assessment of previous literature on the topic highlights that achieving an effective integration of climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures largely depends on the existence of a favourable institutional and regulatory framework.1 However, the lack of viable normative models and standards, and empirical research on their impact at national and sub-national levels, were also detected. The basic connections between CCA and DRR lie in their partly overlapping goals, namely the reduction of losses due to weather and climate-related hazards (including both slow-onset and sudden events) and the improvement of community resilience (i.e. their capacity to regain equilibrium after critical system disruptions). The urgency of a greater CCA-DRR alignment has been increasingly reflected in many relevant resolutions and reports adopted at the international level in the last few years. Drawing on these findings, this report builds on the need for a more holistic approach to climate and disaster-governance, to be accomplished within the framework of the UN Agenda 2030 and its centrepiece the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Resulting from a combination of desk-based analysis and empirical research conducted in the region through qualitative techniques (mainly interviews with key-informants), the study represents one of the outputs of the research project “Leave No One Behind - Developing Climate-Smart/Disaster Risk Management Laws that Protect People in Vulnerable Situations for a Comprehensive Implementation of the UN Agenda 2030”. The main aim of the report is to contribute to the advancement of thinking on achieving a sustainable alignment of CCA and DRR, by exploring the role of law and policy-making in Pacific Island Countries (PICs). This is considered through the lens of the intersecting commitments made in 2015 by the international community, with specific regards to the binding provisions of the Paris Agreement on climate change as well as the development of national adaptation and DRR strategies. The third section is dedicated to a country case-study, the Republic of Fiji, which underwent a particularly innovative reform process for both its CCA and DRR sectors.

Key findings from the research feed into a consolidated list of suggested institutional, policy and legislative improvements, also considering the inclusion of vulnerable groups, for facilitating discussion among stakeholders and for supporting governments in the identification of good practice and models on law and policy-making (see section below). This resource will be beneficial for other countries, both within the Pacific Islands region and elsewhere in the world – in particular for those countries presenting PICs-like characteristics in terms of economic development, institutional setting, demographic and social characteristics, nature and level of exposure to weather and climate-related hazards, and types of vulnerabilities.

Additionally, this report supports the institutional and operational mandate of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Disaster Law Programme, which is to provide evidence-based models for law and policy-makers and to advocate for new and more effective normative frameworks that protect the most vulnerable against major hazards. This mandate was reiterated and expanded at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (December 2019), where participating States and Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies acknowledged the need to “ensure an integrated approach to disaster risk management and adaptation to climate change” in domestic disaster laws, policies, strategies and plans.
Suggested Improvements for CCA-DRR
Coherence in National Law and Policies

Institutional Improvements

- A cost-benefit assessment of centralising CCA-DRR responsibilities and implementation tasks (at both national and/or sub-national administrative level) should be carried out in view of evaluating the potential of a more coherent institutional mandate;
- The establishment of a “one-stop-shop” national authority could facilitate links with stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental and international) providing access to information and to opportunities for cooperation and support;
- A high-level governmental official could be nominated as CCA-DRR focal point. In this role he/she could advocate for internal reforms as well as represent the country in regional/international fora;
- All ministries should establish a focal point for CCA/DRR that should represent the entry point for inter-ministerial coordination;
- The creation of a single CCA-DRR national climate fund could be considered, thereby facilitating integrated programming and project implementation;
- Relevant ministries, departments and governmental agencies at national and sub-national levels should review their structures, organisational capacities, and adequacy of resources in order to identify gaps and training needs on technical and/or managerial skills in light of their CCA/DRR mandates;
- The Ministry of Economy/Finance should clearly identify CCA and/or DRR expenses in their budget speech and coordinate with other ministries/departments for a clear identification of respective CCA/DRR expenditures.
Policy Improvements

- Policies on (or with relevance for) CCA and/or DRR should refer to relevant international instruments agreed by the country (i.e. agreements, strategies, frameworks) and link with their content and principles, contributing to consistent implementation of the commitments taken at the international level.
- Both short- and longer-term climate risk-informed perspectives should be mainstreamed in any sectoral development strategy or planning document, bridging with respective budgets and/or national expenditures;
- The identification of sustainable development planning policies should be based on comprehensive and risk-informed analysis, as well as on the best available scientific knowledge on climate projections and related risks;
- Policies on (or with relevance for) CCA and/or DRR should include the review and update of related legislation favouring reciprocal synergies between the two sectors;
- Policies on (or with relevance for) CCA and/or DRR should expressly link and cross-reference one another, aligning with respective goals in order to facilitate overall consistency among different sectors;
- Policies on (or with relevance for) CCA and/or DRR should arrange for proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in order to ensure transparency and accountability for adaptation and disaster risk management actions.

Legislative Improvements

- CCA and/or DRR legislation should refer to relevant international tools agreed by the country (i.e. agreements, strategies, frameworks) and link with its content and principles, contributing to a consistent and harmonised implementation of the commitments taken at the international level;
- CCA and/or DRR legislation should link and include reference to the monitoring and implementation of relevant CCA and or DRR related policies;
- All State entities and government departments should align their decisions, policies, programmes and activities to the principles and objectives of the CCA and/or DRR- related legislation;
- Any national or sub-national act, regulation or implementing decision that does not adequately take account of the requirements included in the CCA and/or DRR related legislation should be open to judicial review and determination of legality;
- CCA and/or DRR related legislation should comprise enforcement measures and regulate the capacity to adopt secondary legislation (i.e. regulations), standards and codes of practice - in order to guarantee the efficient implementation of primary law;
- CCA and/or DRR related legislation should regulate and ensure sufficient resources for the functioning of information and knowledge management systems and publicly accessible information platforms, including for instance 'Integrated Risk Scenarios' and projected risks over different time horizons;
- CCA and/or DRR related legislation should regulate and ensure the arrangement of training opportunities for public officials on CCA-DRR related issues and governance skills.
Law and Policy Improvements on the Protection and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups

- Law and policies on CCA and/or DRR should include a definition of vulnerable groups and identify a clear and wide-ranging list of categories to include therein. This should be in line with relevant international frameworks and ensure coherence between the different tools;
- Law and policies on CCA and/or DRR should identify governance mechanisms, agencies and procedures that are specifically entrusted with the consideration of the rights and needs of vulnerable groups;
- Law and policies on CCA and/or DRR should promote gender and social inclusion as key elements for strengthening resilience to weather and climate-related hazards.
- Law and policies on CCA and/or DRR should optimise their impact by duly recognising the interconnections between different types of vulnerabilities;
- Civil society organisations, such as National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, associations and other entities representing vulnerable groups should be systematically included in consultations and drafting processes of new policies and laws;
- Civil society organisations, associations and other entities representing vulnerable groups should be invited to all relevant events, meetings, working groups, and technical evaluations concerning CCA and/or DRR.
ENDNOTES

1 Natoli T., Literature review on aligning climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR), IFRC | UCC (2019).
2 This project has received funding from the Irish Research Council and the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 713279. The IFRC also wishes to thank and acknowledge the support provided by the German Government for the completion of this project. For more information, see: https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/what-we-do/disaster-law/leave-no-one-behind/.
3 Note that all references to “legislation” include both primary and secondary legislation, as variously defined in domestic legal systems.