

CHAPTER 6

THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

We support the targets set by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Our common strategy in the South Pacific region is formulated in this report in the form of disaster reduction activities in five strategic areas. When fully implemented, these strategies will enable the region to meet the targets of IDNDR, while at the same time improve emergency management and disaster rehabilitation. In our region, we see disaster management as a continuum, and we intend to address disaster management in all its aspects, starting from improving emergency management and disaster preparedness and moving into disaster mitigation and post-disaster rehabilitation.

6.1 FIRST HALF OF THE DECADE: IDNDR ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

Of the fourteen Pacific Island Developing Countries represented in this report, twelve have formed and registered IDNDR committees. This demonstrates the interest of the region in international cooperation for natural disaster reduction. In most countries, the IDNDR committees are the same committee as the National Disaster Management Council, or a similar body. The notable exception to this is in PNG, where the IDNDR committee is a separate body, in which universities and other entities are also represented. Most other countries have, in view of their limited human resources, chosen to assign the roles of the IDNDR committee to their 'normal' disaster management infrastructure.

The extent to which countries themselves have initiated disaster reduction activities as part of their IDNDR efforts, varies between countries, but in general it can be said that most activities that are specifically labelled 'IDNDR activity' are supported by donor countries, in particular by the Australian IDNDR Coordination Committee.

Regarding the activities in the first half of the decade, a distinction has to be made between activities that are aimed at the IDNDR objectives, and those that are specifically labelled 'IDNDR activity'. The first type of activity is described in Chapter 2 of this report. As for the latter, it has to be concluded that those labelled 'IDNDR activity' are only a small part of disaster-related programmes, in most cases linked to the Australian IDNDR Coordination Committee. Nevertheless, the region has benefited from IDNDR in a number of ways, as described below:

- 6.1.1 IDNDR has been instrumental in bringing together South Pacific disaster managers on two occasions: in Solomon Islands in 1992 and in Vanuatu in 1993. Both meetings were organized and funded by the Australian IDNDR Coordination Committee, and have contributed to further the cause of disaster reduction in the region. The meeting in Vanuatu was seen as a preparation for the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, and has initiated the formulation of this report.
- 6.1.2 Several IDNDR projects and activities have been implemented in recent years. Most of these with assistance of the Australian IDNDR committee, and many under the umbrella of the

Australian "Pacific Disaster Preparedness Programme". Projects include the preparation of cyclone action guides for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Cyclone Awareness and Education Programme and provision of Australian IDNDR materials to the Pacific region.

- 6.1.3 The technical assistance provided by the South Pacific Programme Office of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs is closely linked to the international decade, because of close institutional links to the IDNDR Secretariat. The assistance has resulted in disaster management needs assessments for several Pacific island countries, the revision of the Fiji National Disaster Management Plan and various studies and project proposals. The assistance will be further intensified over the coming period with the implementation of the "South Pacific Disaster Reduction Programme".
- 6.1.4 The United Nations Disaster Management Training Programme [DMTP] complements the IDNDR objectives. The South Pacific workshop of DMTP was held in Apia, Western Samoa, in December 1993. The workshop brought together disaster managers and others involved in disaster reduction programmes from the whole region and has contributed to disaster reduction activities in the region.
- 6.1.5 The region has further gained some benefits from IDNDR activities in other regions and through global activities. Materials and studies carried out, or prepared for other regions have in cases proved useful for use in the Pacific. In particular, materials prepared for small island developing states in the Caribbean have contributed to disaster reduction efforts in our region. The distribution of the publication "STOP! Disasters" in the region and the preparations for the World Conference have contributed to a change of focus in the South Pacific toward more pre-disaster oriented disaster reduction efforts.

6.2 IDNDR IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE DECADE: TOWARDS AN ACTION PROGRAMME

As shown in Chapter 4, we have formulated four strategic areas for disaster reduction in the South Pacific in the second half of this Decade. The means that are currently available for the implementation of these strategies do not suffice for full implementation of these strategies. It would be beneficial to the region if the IDNDR infrastructure is used to strengthen our cause. We see opportunities for this in three directions:

- 6.2.1 IDNDR should play an increasing role within the South Pacific, in particular by raising awareness of the opportunities to reduce the toll of natural disasters and thus further contribute to a shift from disaster relief to disaster mitigation and preparedness. This could include distribution of IDNDR materials to policy makers, and also to community-oriented activities.
- 6.2.2 It is hoped that through the IDNDR activities, the region will gain increased access to technological and scientific information that can contribute to risk reduction, either from other regions, or from global sources. The region also hopes to secure and improve its access to telecommunication links and satellite facilities for natural hazard monitoring, assessment and information exchange.
- 6.2.3 Through the activities and meetings in IDNDR, the international community may increase its understanding and appreciation of the characteristics and vulnerabilities of Pacific island states,

and the impact disasters can have on sustainable development in the region. It is hoped that this may initiate further cooperation in efforts to reduce disasters in the region.

6.3 ACTION PROGRAMME RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, as proposed to the United Nations Global Conference in Barbados in May 1994, the World Conference and the IDNDR Secretariat are urged to give special recognition to small island developing states, so that their unique characteristics are taken into account in the development of natural disaster reduction programmes. Towards an action programme for the second half of the decade, we recommend the following:

- 6.3.1 The focus of the second half of the Decade be on the implementation of disaster mitigation projects at national and regional levels.** The first half of the Decade has focused on scientific studies and international cooperation. It is now time to focus on the in-country implementation of these findings.
- 6.3.2 The High Level Council and the Scientific and Technical Committee be tasked to actively support fundraising for identified disaster mitigation projects.** To make this Decade a success, funds and technical assistance are required to actually reduce risks within countries.
- 6.3.3 Action be taken to support and facilitate the setting up of a South Pacific Regional IDNDR Committee, which could serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas, information and strategies for disaster reduction in the region.** This would recognize the characteristics of the South Pacific, and provide opportunity for scientific and technical cooperation at regional level.
- 6.3.4 Action be taken to appoint a representative, nominated by the South Pacific Regional IDNDR Committee, of Pacific Island Developing Countries, to the Scientific and Technical Committee.** With the second half of the Decade focusing more on practical implementation of disaster reduction activities, adequate representation of regions becomes more important. This would allow full use of human and scientific resources from the region. Pacific island countries feel that the characteristics of their region, and its approaches to disaster reduction, warrant representation on this Committee.
- 6.3.5 The IDNDR Secretariat intensify efforts to facilitate exchange and cooperation between regions.** This will enable the South Pacific region to benefit more from lessons learned in other parts of the world. In particular, we hope to increase our cooperation with countries, organizations and individuals that may have similar conditions, problems and opportunities to those prevailing in our region.

CONCLUSION

Pacific Island Developing Countries are committed to reduce the impact of natural disasters. This has to be done in unique geographical conditions, where transport opportunities and costs determine the way in which disaster reduction efforts can take place. The region is prone to a wide range of natural hazards and its economic, social and environmental characteristics make it highly vulnerable. Human, financial and material resources needed to cope with disasters are very limited and costs of projects are high.

Several activities are in place to address the disaster issue at national and regional levels. When implemented in a coordinated and coherent manner, these activities and programmes will form a substantial contribution to our common strategy for risk reduction in the region. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction can provide a vehicle for additional programme support, create greater awareness for opportunities to reduce risks and assist in forging linkages with other regions and donor countries and organizations.

ACRONYMS

ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
AEMI	Australian Emergency Management Institute (of EMA)
AIDAB	Australian International Development Assistance Bureau
AODRO	Australian Overseas Disaster Response Organization
DHA-SPPO	Department of Humanitarian Affairs - South Pacific Programme Office
DMTP	Disaster Management Training Programme
DSO	Disaster Support Organization
EC	European Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EMA	Emergency Management Australia
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency (USA)
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
IDNDR	International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
NDC	National Disaster Committee
NDMC	National Disaster Management Committee
NGO	Non-Government Organization
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OFDA	Office of the US Foreign Disaster Assistance
PIC	Pacific Island Country
PIDP	Pacific Island Development Programme
SOPAC	South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission
SPC	South Pacific Commission
SPPO	South Pacific Programme Office
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SPSSD	South Pacific Satellite Storm Detection
STC	Scientific and Technical Committee
SWP	South West Pacific
TCP	Tropical Cyclone Programme
UNDHA	United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USP	University of the South Pacific
WCP	World Climate Programme
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WWW	World Weather Watch

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At the 6th SPREP Meeting held in Suva, Fiji in September 1993, the delegates agreed on a motion that SPREP prepare a regional report and to assist PICs prepare their national reports for the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction. SPREP then requested the South Pacific Programme Office of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs to put together a team of disaster management professionals for this purpose.

The team has made this report possible and the efforts of its individual members, viz, Joseph Chung and Lucas Vrolijkx (DHA-SPPO); Neville Koop (SPREP); Trevor Hatchard (EMA); and Joanne Burke (USAID/OFDA) is hereby acknowledged. Special recognition must be given here for Luc Vrolijkx' effort in putting the report together.

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