



Wilton Park



Image: Image: Oliver Berg/dpa via Getty Images.
Twelve-year old Timoci Naulusala from Fiji speaks during the World Climate Conference in Bonn, Germany, 15 November 2017

Report

Navigating Pacific futures: climate change and resilience

Sunday 16 – Tuesday 18 December | WP1631

In association with:



PACIFIC ISLANDS
FORUM SECRETARIAT



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Pacific Island countries are uniquely affected by climate change. Climate change is a global problem that requires an ambitious and coordinated global solution. This high-level dialogue looked at Pacific priorities and concerns, and how the Pacific has led the call for ambitious international action on climate change.

The Paris Agreement, to which the United Kingdom, New Zealand and all Pacific Island countries are Parties, set the goal of holding the increase in global average temperature to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement also set the goal of increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change.

The UK and New Zealand are committed to supporting international action on climate change, including issues that were prioritised for discussion at the forum around access to climate finance, the climate/oceans nexus, climate change and security, and climate-related displacement and migration.

“He waka eke noa / we are all in the same canoe”

Executive summary

1. The forum, Navigating Pacific Futures: Climate Change and Resilience, focused on four key themes: climate finance; the oceans/climate nexus; climate change and security; and climate change-related displacement and migration. It brought together Pacific leaders, development partners, civil society, academics and officials to exchange perspectives and experience, and to promote new partnerships. Another objective of the forum was to ‘progress the conversation’. With that focus, the discussions helped to develop deeper, more nuanced understandings on the challenges, and to conceive new ideas for potential approaches to responding to Pacific needs and priorities.

“The Paris Agreement is no longer about great ambition; it is about great action”.

The global position

2. It was recognised that climate change is the largest single threat to the Pacific peoples, but also a global problem that requires a truly global solution. For the Pacific to successfully increase the level of public and political ambition on climate change, a wide range of voices need to be heard. In particular, it requires public opinion in developed countries to advocate alongside the Pacific on the need for higher climate ambition and the plight of Pacific islanders if ambition is not increased.

Reflections on COP24

3. The forum's opening session focussed on participants' immediate reactions to the 24th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP24), since the forum began the day after that event finished in Katowice, Poland. . Although full analyses on the outcomes had not yet been conducted, there was an overall sense that COP24 could have been more ambitious in terms of mitigation action and global finance. In particular, the recently-published report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the differential impacts of 1.5°C warming and the less ambitious 2°C limit could have been more readily embraced. However, on balance, COP24 had been a success and that the delivery of a universal rulebook on implementing the Paris Agreement had been a significant achievement.
4. Pacific countries felt the region had the ambition and political will to act on climate change but needed the developed world to match both ambition and will.
5. A number of interventions re-emphasised that Pacific Island countries live with the daily risk of natural disasters. This is a reality of their geography, but climate change is increasing the scale of events, like cyclones and droughts, and the level of risk they are exposed to. The underpinning climate science is non-negotiable and the fact that, after 24-years of the UNFCCC process, greenhouse gases and global temperatures continue to rise evidences that the rest of the world needs to be aware that the Pacific is dealing with climate impacts now and that it is not a distant or future threat. It requires immediate and urgent action.

Strengthening Pacific voices

6. Participants identified that Pacific voices have been heard but more is needed to tell the Pacific's story more effectively. Greater thought needs to be given to amplifying youth and indigenous voices. It was felt to be important that partners continually promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals alongside the Paris Agreement, and that Pacific needs to be kept at the heart of these discussions.
7. It was suggested that, in IPCC reports, the changes affecting the Pacific are masked by analyses regarding Asia, since the regions are considered together as Asia-Pacific. A Pacific-focused climate assessment is required to help funding bodies get a clearer picture of the impacts in the region.

Climate/oceans nexus

8. The first thematic session began by identifying the Pacific as the only 'ocean continent' on earth. This gives the region a key role in advocating for the health and protection of the world's oceans. However, advocates need to be better at translating the oceans and climate science into accessible public and political messaging. The nature of the climate/oceans nexus is complicated.
9. Blue Carbon is at the heart of this nexus. Given the significant amounts of carbon stored in mangroves and sea grasses, action is required to conserve these environments – perhaps learning lessons from the successes and failures to halt deforestation on land. There was discussion on the need to address drivers of mangrove and seagrass loss, particularly around ensuring these ecosystems are adequately valued, not sacrificed for land reclamation, and not damaged and destroyed by (for example) pollution from terrestrial sources. In other words, blue carbon is not only about planting mangroves, which is a common climate change action; it is also about conserving the blue carbon systems that already exist.

“we're starting from a bad situation in relation to our oceans that is only going to get even worse”

10. The protection of coral reef systems is also important. Degraded and destroyed reefs can, reduce food security and cause some communities' livelihoods to become unsustainable long before they risk going under water. We can incentivise conservation, restoration and development of blue carbon systems by including them in countries' Nationally-Determined Contribution (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, including them in carbon markets, and by promoting the various co-benefits, such as those relevant to the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and migratory birds.
11. There was discussion around COP25 in Chile being considered the 'Oceans COP'. Participants agreed there is a need for increased political will to ensure oceans are at the heart of COP25.
12. Caution was heard around ensuring that bringing oceans into the UNFCCC does not duplicate work and provisions under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), or prevent relevant progress towards a legally binding instrument regarding marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ). Alignment and complementarity are required, not duplication.
13. Forum participants also noted that consideration is needed on how existing and future laws on oceans are to be enforced where national capacity is low or underdeveloped. In particular, with large Marine Protected Areas and Exclusive Economic Zones, the international community needs to work together to ensure these areas are protected.
14. The role of addressing emissions from shipping was discussed. There needs to be funding, possibly through the creation of a 'Blue Bond'. This funding would support Pacific Island countries to access: new, fuel-efficient, appropriately-sized ships; electric ships; streamlining logistics; and the 'greening' of ports with renewable electricity for powering and charging ships at dock. If done properly, such a package of measures could have co-benefits for intra-island shipping, boosting economic development.
15. There was recognition that challenges exist around countries' interests in mining deep sea minerals, which are needed for renewable energy and sustainable technologies. However, deep sea exploration may also introduce new risks into already-stressed oceans.

Climate finance

16. Pacific Island countries face extreme weather events with high fiscal impacts more frequently than once every five years. Globally, in 2017, there was US\$400 billion in climate change and natural disaster-related losses, approximately 70% of which was uninsured.
17. There was discussion around the need for risk modelling to understand how to insure against climate-related losses in the Pacific and to attract insurers. This needs increased support and input from the private sector. The region cannot afford delays, however, as the slow-onset impacts are happening and rapid onset impacts from extreme weather present an immediate threat.

18. Discussions on climate finance showed that the Pacific has done proportionately well in securing international climate funding in recent years. However, capacity constraints, coupled with overly complex bidding processes, continues to limit the region from securing more funding. There was also frustration expressed around larger donor partners' reluctance to acknowledge and accept the reality of higher transactional cost of projects in the Pacific, whilst also being reluctant to fund 'proof of concept' or small-scale projects. Donors need to identify where they can fit in to existing policy mixes and add genuine value to a country's mitigation or adaptation strategies. Bodies like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) need to focus on their purpose of providing funding for climate projects and avoid focusing on reasons to reject proposals
19. The context within each individual country and the climate challenges they face are important for donors to understand. If donors insist on certain pre-determined solutions, there is a risk that solutions will not deliver the desired outcomes. At the same time, donor recipients need to avoid creating competition amongst themselves for development funding. It was felt this could be addressed by increasing and building regional capacity to access funds, whereas the current donor-led approach to capacity building is seen as simply increasing the capacity of consultants. Expertise is not being embedded in Pacific countries.
20. Extensive discussions on the use and utility of climate insurance illustrated a need for development partners to reconsider basing risk decisions on the existing 'Vulnerability Index'. This was considered to be flawed due to the limited factors used to assess vulnerability, as it ignores geographical and climate exposure factors.
21. There is scope for insurance facilities to be part of the wider climate finance solution, but this would require a willingness from donor partners to consider pathways for creating and delivering funding for insurance facilities. Industry experts acknowledged that most existing climate risk in the Pacific is insurable and attractive to the re-insurance industry, since the amounts required to be covered are relatively small compared to the industry's overall annual loss requirement of US\$500bn. The potential benefits of using insurance facilities are considerable, helped by the fact that there doesn't need to be a perfect insurance model for the Pacific. The suggestions for supporting insurance in the region included: an analysis of existing finance mechanisms to identify gaps, overlaps and solutions; regular risk modelling; the development of case studies; and insuring interests, not just assets, such as coral reefs, which protect coastal developments.
22. A warning was sounded around the high likelihood that within next five to ten years, climate risk will become part of how a country's credit risk is assessed. This will have an impact on, and have consequences for the Pacific, particularly in relation to future economic assessment on providing countries with climate finance. Already heavily-indebted countries are faced with needing to secure financial protection against slow onset impacts whilst avoiding taking on more debt to do so. The possibility of donor partners being prepared to act as international guarantors for such projects in the Pacific was raised.

"For the Pacific there can be no Plan B. Plan A is all we have"

Climate change and security

23. The Pacific Islands are on the frontline of climate change, with surface and ocean temperatures are rising leading to more extreme weather events, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, decreased fisheries, salinisation of fresh water supplies and agricultural soil, and forced relocation. Viewing these impacts through the lens of security is about placing the need for action into a different framework. Climate change is intrinsically linked to the security of life on earth. Discussions globally have been dominated by the effects of climate change rather than actions to reduce emissions.

24. There was unresolved debate about whether climate impacts and adaptations should be viewed through a security lens. There is a need to ensure that 'securitisation' doesn't dominate the wider climate discussions. It was recognised that 'security' as a concept is defined differently in different parts of the world. While the Pacific meaning is broad, encompassing a wide range of risks to human security, elsewhere it relates only to conflict/militaries. However, framing climate within the security space may be a way to 'get the story out' and gain traction globally. While the region sometimes talks about climate change being an existential crisis, other parts of the world are more inclined to view it as a security matter –Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, for example. This may be due to a lack of clarity about the nature of the security risks in the Pacific.
25. Discussions illustrated that scarcity and competition for resources in the region are emerging, requiring thinking on how territorial and sovereignty rights are considered and protected. Part of this also required countries to have appropriate resources to respond to the likely increased severity of extreme weather events and climate events. However, there was also an expectation that there would be an even greater role for international and multilateral organisations in humanitarian assistance and disaster recovery activities.
26. A key area of discussion around climate security was a need to avoid making generalisations about the nature of risks. In particular there is a need to identify what is different about risks in the Pacific, especially regarding traditional, unique cultural structures. Stemming from this, there needs to be an appreciation that solutions from other regions may not always apply to the Pacific. Cultural context adds a lot.

Climate change-related internal displacement and cross-border migration

27. 'Migration' is an umbrella term for all significant movement and, therefore, covers both internal movement and cross-border movement. Either way, for Pacific countries, identity is linked to the land and sea – culturally, genealogically and spiritually – which makes the thought of migration inconceivable for some. Loss of land would equate to a loss of personal and national identity. Consequently, talking about climate change and migration is extremely sensitive. Furthermore, even discussing the subject could lead some people and countries to believe that it is cheaper to move people than to mitigate emissions and help Pacific communities adapt in situ to environmental changes that are not of their own making. Such views do not respect Pacific peoples' connection to their land and sea territories. In other words, climate migration should be viewed as a failure to mitigate emissions and a failure of adaptation; not as an adaptation measure per se.
28. Some Pacific countries are already managing forced internal migration and have developed, or are in the process of developing, guidelines for addressing it. This highlights a need for relocations to be conducted very carefully. However, others in the region are resolute that planning for migration risks reducing focus and ambition to limit global temperature increases to 1.5°C, and gives the international community a reason to think there is no urgency.
29. If national and/or regional guidelines are developed, they ought to build on existing initiatives, such as the Protection Agenda, the Platform on Disaster Management, and the Framework for Resilient Development, and they should employ a human rights-based approach. Moreover, migration should be seen through a lens of 'continuity of community', not just 'from place A to place B'. This means thinking about moving whole communities (not individuals), as well as preserving culture and political institutions. Relocation programmes also need a significant education component for both migrant and destination communities, reflecting the need for a peace-building approach.

30. Evidence shows that climate migration is already happening in the Pacific and having security consequences, particularly for the migrants. This issue requires a long-term, strategic response. The Pacific has the opportunity to set the standard for how the rest of the world manages climate migration, including the development of appropriate regional architecture that involves existing Pacific diaspora in planning for how migration will be managed.
31. There was recognition that climate migration is a global challenge with local consequences and there needs to be a global response. There was a call from Pacific participants for the UK, New Zealand and Australia to introduce a 'climate visa' for Pacific Islanders that would allow for work, study and settlement for those forced to migrate as a consequence of climate change impacts. It was noted that Tonga and Samoa are now offering visa-free entry for Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati. These countries could help facilitate migration by working with existing diaspora communities.
32. There was also support for the idea that funding under the GCF should allow for land reclamation projects to help people avoid being forced to leave their land, and land acquisition to support those who cannot avoid relocation.

Conclusion

Discussions at the Wilton Park forum were open and frank, and tackled sensitive issues. There was agreement that the bringing together of leaders, policy officials, academics and practitioners had led to very useful discussions, and the issues required further and deeper follow-up dialogue.

Until the forum, many participants from outside the Pacific had a low level of awareness about the intimate and visceral attachment of Pacific Islanders to their land and sea. The exchange of cultural awareness is a fundamental element to increasing non-Pacific understanding of the Pacific's approach to climate ambition and action. Knowledge of Pacific realities must inform and change the way policy makers in developed countries discuss and shape future policy options.

The discussions during the event illustrated the depth, ingenuity and collaboration that is possible outside of structured summits that simply rehearse standard lines rather than looking for solutions. No single individual, country or region in isolation has the answer. Bringing people together and giving them the opportunity to share their expertise and ideas, and to learn from one another in a constructive environment helps progress the conversation and provides hope that the challenges faced by the Pacific are surmountable.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington | March 2019

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Annex

Policy ideas from working groups

Four working Groups developed ideas that could be used to inform future policy discussions. These are shown in no particular order and are not final or fully-formed suggestions.

Oceans/climate nexus

- Develop a common understanding on language used by the oceans and climate policy-making communities.
- Don't re-invent the wheel – make use of existing expertise and forums. Clearly articulate the different regimes under which actions can take place – UNFCCC, UNCLOS, BBNJ, OPOC, Sea Bed Authority, etc.
- Key to making progress is mapping what the term ocean/climate nexus actually means in the Pacific. Is this the most appropriate phrase?
- Develop an engagement strategy that identifies where progress on the ocean/climate nexus might be best taken forward (i.e. at UNFCCC or elsewhere?).
- There need to be conversations soon about maritime boundaries, but there is also a need to develop a coherent approach to protect national interests through the international rules-based order.
- Develop a strategic communications plan around the oceans – complex science must be clearly translated, accessible, and relevant.
- Pacific leaders should consider a political statement on the oceans ahead of the UNSG's Conference in September, including defining actions they believe are necessary.
- Identify how to capture traditional knowledge and blend it with new data.

Climate finance

- Explore the possibility for a follow-up conversation that follows same informality and is focussed on finance only.
- UK to consider establishing a DFID risk-financing innovation lab in the Pacific.
- Fill evidence gaps by consolidating experience and evidence from the Pacific to support bids for concessionality (given that transaction costs of aid and investment are higher than in other regions).
- Pacific Island countries need budget support to access green finance and project funding. Donor money should be deployed through Pacific Island countries' existing central structures rather than as separate stand-alone projects.
- Donors need to be creative and innovative about how they provide budgetary support for capacity building at sustainable levels.
- Recognise that funding for resilience requires a different modality than funding for development. While there can be complementarities, resilience is not necessarily development, and vice versa.
- UK chairing of GCF is an opportunity for the UK to drive GCF to deliver in support of the Pacific priorities and in line with the reasons why the GCF was originally established.

- Increase awareness within the Pacific region of the availability of – and means of accessing – private sector funding, supported by the private sector looking at specific financing ideas, including:
 - Contingent finance – PPPs to develop new insurance products for slow-onset impacts.
 - Investment – use unspent donor money to guarantee loans for investment projects.
 - Create the world’s first resilience bond in the Pacific, perhaps combining with parametric insurance elements?
 - More information on opportunities that private finance bring to the table.
- There is a need for a better definition of what a small island developing state (SIDS) actually is.

Climate change and security

- Identify case studies/examples of security stresses in the Pacific, whilst exploring in detail the full range of existing resource and security stresses – including food, water and energy. This will help Pacific Island countries and partners to be clear what their climate security risks are and to develop a clear and loud voice for discussion on the issue at multilateral forums.
- Examine how climate security issues emerge and impact at multiple levels:
 - Personal
 - Community
 - National
 - Regional
 - International
- In the context of the action planning happening under the Boe Declaration, feed in migration issues to protect migrants and destination communities, using peace-building approaches.
- UK to discuss with Germany and the Dominican Republic how both countries will promote climate security during their UNSC Presidencies.
- Look at a suite of tools: legislation, enforcement, forecasting, data collection, ecocide law.
- Support Pacific Island countries’ capacity to prosecute illegal fishing within their justice systems. Identify any gaps in domestic legislation and help fill those gaps.
- Pacific Island countries to share data more effectively across national and regional agencies.
- Pacific Island countries to take climate security forward within the next leaders’ meeting at the Pacific Island Forum (PIF).
- Develop an informal grouping of countries committed to taking climate security forward.
- Pacific Island countries need to prepare for and provide COP25 with a clear strategy for ensuring that climate security is considered fully at COP25 and beyond as a mechanism for increasing the level of ambition for tackling climate change.

- There is a need to close the ‘science-to-policy-to-practice’ circle and to ensure that science provides effective inputs to policy solutions in this policy area.

Climate change-related internal displacement and cross-border migration

- Plan for future events/displacement. Identify how donors could best support this.
- Assess the mechanisms in place to support and assist those who chose not to or are unable to migrate.
- Conduct a stocktake of relocations that have already happened, are happening, or are planned/expected.
- Undertake case studies of what has worked well and what issues have arisen in the region, as well as a literature review about forced and planned relocation globally.
- A formalised system of sharing lessons learned is needed, e.g. through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat or the Commonwealth, which could also facilitate such exchanges with Caribbean SIDS.
- Use satellite data mapping to identify vulnerabilities and carry out forecasting of where people may need to move from and therefore need focused effort on in situ adaptation; and
- Conduct a research programme co-designed by affected people.
- Identify how the Pacific voice is strengthened on climate migration, including the identification of champions who are visible and vocal.
- How do we protect cultural and political structures of disappearing lands? Destination countries need to be open to allowing community migration.
- Not just about people. How do we protect endemic species, flora and fauna from sea-level rise and inundation?