

**Lessons for Future  
 Action: Climate Change  
 Adaptation and Disaster  
 Risk Reduction**

**Community Based Responses**

One of five summary briefs for decision-makers, produced from the outcomes of the Lessons for Future Action conference: access to key insights, lessons learned, good practice and the gaps and needs for future action



## Introduction

Communities are often on the frontline of climate change and natural disasters, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Communities are the group most often adversely impacted and they are also key actors in the implementation of many responses.

Communities hold important knowledge and experience with regards to effective climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction methods. Community social networks, traditional knowledge, and the strength of existing community organizations are significant assets. However, given the current scale and scope of threats, many communities lack the resources necessary to fully respond to climate change and natural disasters.

Identifying community needs and building on community strengths requires a clear understanding of who the 'community' is. A balance must be found between engaging communities in bottom-up approaches and the over-consultation of communities, where the overallocation of time and resources for local consultation can lead to too little time and money available for the implementation of responses.

As such, community based responses to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction must be nested within other approaches to addressing risks and building resilience in SIDS in a manner that is simultaneously inclusive and efficient.

Also, community based responses cannot be seen in isolation, rather they form an important component of national planning which raises both challenges and opportunities with regards to linking local needs to national agendas.

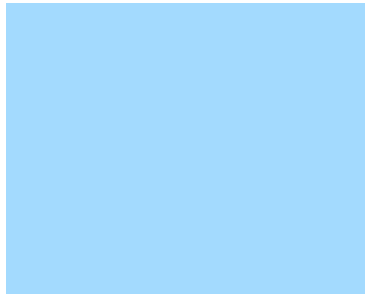
## Benefits

As the first to experience many of the impacts from climate change and natural disasters, communities are the best placed to determine local needs from response activities. Whereas data on the socio-economic impacts of climate change and disasters is lacking in many SIDS, communities have long timelines over which to observe livelihood impacts. Likewise, as the custodians of unique cultures, local communities can help ensure that climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction methods are culturally appropriate.

Furthermore, indigenous knowledge, including knowledge held by women can, if the scope of change isn't too great, provide important insights into response activities. Coupling traditional knowledge with scientific information and incorporating the results into national and regional strategies can strengthen community responses. Community input into activities such as mapping causal links for the provision of ecosystem services as well as local monitoring of indicators of change improves the quality of climate change and disaster science.

Finally, mobilizing existing community organizations and social networks can reduce the overall resources required to implement climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction activities. In particular, targeted capacity building of such organizations and networks makes the most of past investments and avoids the replication of efforts.

*"Communities are the front line of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction" Frank Wickham, Government of Solomon Islands*



## Benefits from a Regional Approach

The Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Project (PACC) aims to significantly improve the effectiveness of responses to climate change in the Pacific. Working in fourteen countries, PACC supports a number of activities that engage communities in the development of climate change science and the implementation of adaptation activities.

Examples of community-based approaches supported through PACC include:

- The University of the South Pacific in Marshall Islands Summer Science Camp brings together more than 50 students to engage in environmental discussions;
- The adoption of community level water resource bylaws in Samoa which are both created and enforced by the local community; and
- A pilot project on community vulnerability in Papua New Guinea including assessments of the socio-economic impacts of climate change on local livelihoods.

*"Locals should have practical hands on experience when it comes to modelling tools...we need to convert science for locals to understand." Simpson Abraham, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)*





## Challenges

Engaging communities in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction is essential if actions are to be effective and sustainable. However community-based responses still require management, mainstreaming and support. As such, there are many challenges that must be addressed in order for community contributions to be maximized.

*“Communication is one of the under-utilised tools to linking national planning to local and sub-national levels and also scaling up to national, regional and global support” - Indi Mclymont-Lafayette, Panos Caribbean*

## Policy challenges

It is important that community actions are consistent with and supported by national and regional policies. In particular, while many climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction activities are implemented at the local level, they are still reliant upon national support in the form of funding, capacity building and the provision of knowledge and information. Designing national policies that integrate community needs requires clear communication channels as well as adequate time and resources for community engagement. The engagement of communities in policy planning is particularly challenging when considering remote communities who tend to be highly vulnerable but are often excluded from consultations as a result of the high cost of participation.

Furthermore, community-based responses require long-term planning. This presents possible difficulties with regards to aligning long-term resilience and capacity building needs with short term funding cycles.

## Implementation challenges

The first challenge in supporting community based responses to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction is in defining who the community is. In SIDS this is particularly challenging because of the large number of different cultures and communities within relatively small areas. In addition to defining communities, stocktaking exercises to identify effective community organizations as well as existing community programs (both formal and informal) are required.

Communication with communities can also be difficult given differences in language and culture and high mobility between communities. However, communication is essential to ensure communities can access new knowledge on climate change and to ensure the integration of traditional knowledge within planning and policies.

Finally, gender considerations and the role of youth are particularly important at the community level. Women hold significant knowledge and are exposed to unique vulnerabilities. As such, steps should be taken to include women and youth from the beginning of any project.



## Good Practice Examples

### Jamaica - Voices from Mocho

The Panos Oral Testimony Project was implemented in the Mocho community in order to better understand the community experience of environmental and climate change issues and to communicate those experiences to national, regional and international audiences.

In particular, the project presented “oral testimonies” gathered through open-ended interviews around a series of topics, drawing on direct personal memory and experience. In doing so the project gathered first-hand accounts from the communities facing environmental and climate change on a daily basis.

Based on these accounts, a book and bi-monthly newsletter on climate change, environmental, and community issues is being produced. Furthermore, community residents are being supported with training aimed at strengthening their capacity to deal with those environmental issues that they identified and prioritized.

### Solomon Islands – Building social and ecological resilience of the Roviana Community

Under the Pacific Adaptation Strategy Assistance Program, the Solomon Islands project to build the social and ecological resilience of the Roviana community aims to build community level climate change adaptation capacity in the Roviana and Vonavona Lagoons and to foster development of community adaptive strategies. The project works through local community-based organizations and local churches in order to build on existing capacity.

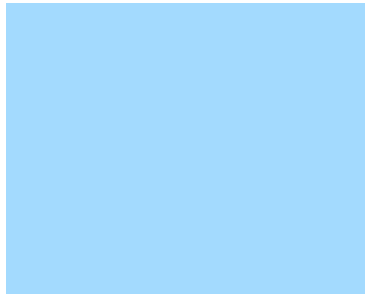
Through community organizations, the project pilots an approach bringing together traditional and scientific understanding to assess the vulnerability of remote traditional communities to the impacts of climate change. This will result in increased long-term local capacity to monitor changes as they happen, and encourages the communities to take ownership of collective responses.

## Lessons Learned

In order to ensure that community-based responses to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are mainstreamed into national and regional responses, policy-makers and practitioners may wish to:

- Strengthen community governance, including through capacity building and institutional support;
- Provide practical and relevant tools to communities in a way that ensures that their use can be sustained;
- Pilot different implementation options to find the approach best suited to community needs and preferences;
- Ensure the appropriate planning of consultations, including with women, and good coordination with other regional and national donors and partners;
- Target powerful people in communities and get them onside;
- Consider the needs and challenges associated with working with more remote communities; and
- Build an understanding of local factors that may impact the success of programs.

*“We need to continue to approach our work on two fronts, at the community level and at the policy level. We have made more progress at the policy level and the thrust must now be directed at the communities.” Kenrick Leslie, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)*



## Areas for Further Investment

Making the most of community-based responses to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction requires effective communication and collaboration between communities, community-based organizations, national governments, regional organizations and the scientific community. Investments in mechanisms to transmit information and needs are, therefore, critical precursors to success.

As a baseline, understanding community needs as well as conducting a stocktaking of community capacities is critical. This understanding requires the bringing together of scientific and traditional knowledge as well as the mainstreaming of gender considerations.

As a next step, investments in on-the-ground demonstrations and the testing of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction techniques can both promote the adoption of such techniques as well as ensure that methods are adopted from and adapted to local circumstances.

Finally, the needs and vulnerabilities of remote communities cannot be ignored in spite of the often high costs of engagement. Ensuring that donors are aware of the importance of engaging remote communities can support funding more aligned with national priorities and local needs.

The Lessons for Future Action Conference brought together community, national, regional and international actors to discuss climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In doing so, it opened dialogue on the role of community-based responses in the context of broader plans and policies.

Through building a better understanding of community needs and capacities, the Conference helped define the potential role of communities and place community-based responses within wider efforts to reduce the vulnerability of SIDS to climate change and natural disasters.

*"Greater participation in projects by sharing knowledge and skills, identifying priorities and deciding on outcomes, will help strengthen the sustainability of projects that tackle long term goals and avoid exclusion of the needs and priorities of marginal groups."* Gita Charndarpal and Ulric Trotz, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)







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