



© kurakururarin1991
Bikendrik island resort in
Majuro, Marshall Islands.

Effective approaches to building resilience and supporting adaptation to climate change in Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

“Climate change and natural disasters disproportionately impact Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and roll back development gains. These countries are located in some of the most natural disaster-prone regions of the world and the effects of climate change are compounding the intensity of these disasters, as well as creating new developmental challenges.” (OECD, 2016)

The Paris Agreement of 2015 sets out a global framework to tackle climate change and support the transition to a sustainable low carbon future. The agreement also aims to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to adapt to climate change. Global efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on public health and protecting economic development, risk disrupting funding and support for countries to successfully adapt to climate change, a risk that is particularly acute in vulnerable Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Drawing on a rapid review of evaluations, this note shares evidence about effective approaches to building resilience to climate change. It aims to support the development and implementation of COVID-19 related support in Small Island Developing States, to ensure support is relevant and effective.

Evaluation evidence is key to learning from the past and a way to leverage known successes.

The **COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition** is a network of the independent evaluation units of countries, United Nations organisations, international NGOs, and multilateral institutions. Participants work together to provide credible evidence to inform international co-operation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – helping to ensure lessons are learnt and that the global development community delivers on its promises. **The Coalition is about learning with the world.**

Building Climate Resilience and Supporting Adaptation in SIDS

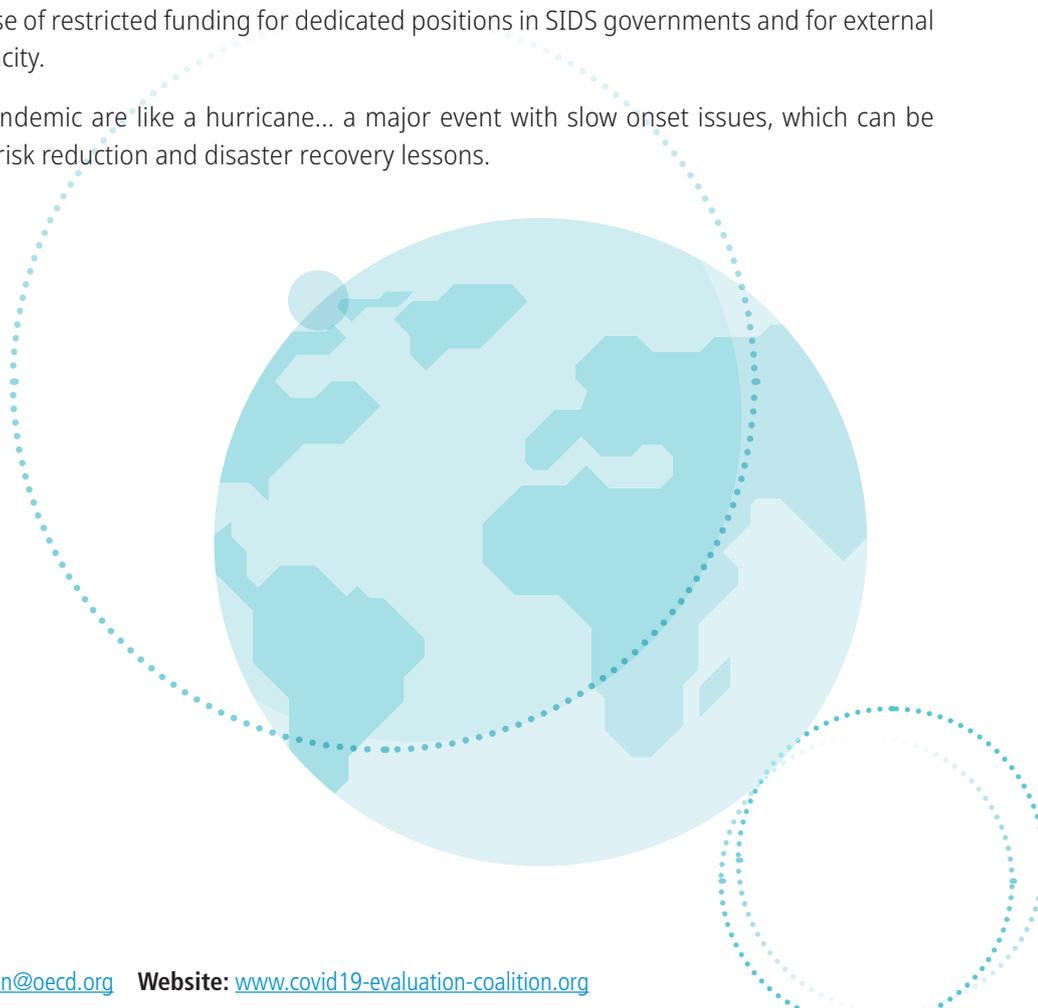
Background

Developing countries, and SIDS in particular, are among the most heavily affected by climate change. This is because they face a higher frequency of natural disasters, often lack strong systems to manage and recover from disasters, and have economies that are dependent on sectors particularly sensitive to the effects of climate change, such as agriculture or tourism. As such, climate change adaptation is highly relevant to the needs of SIDS and has become a major focus of international co-operation in these contexts. Climate change adaptation programmes often incorporate a gender-sensitive approach because climate change disproportionately affects women and girls.

There is a real risk that the ways in which international partners and SIDS respond to the COVID-19 pandemic will undermine progress in supporting greater climate resilience. COVID-19 is likely to impact the capacity of SIDS to adapt to climate change in the following ways:

- **Reduced funding:** Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation related funding are being re-purposed or delayed by shifting priorities due to COVID-19 responses.
- **Increased vulnerability to climate events:** Resilience of climate vulnerable states is at risk due to COVID-19 secondary impacts such as economic, education and health system stresses – these limit capacity to respond to, and recover from, climate events such as cyclones.
- **Widening capacity gaps:** Capacity gaps in SIDS for disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and disaster response may widen because of restricted funding for dedicated positions in SIDS governments and for external experts to supplement capacity.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are like a hurricane... a major event with slow onset issues, which can be addressed by applying disaster risk reduction and disaster recovery lessons.





Building Climate Resilience and Supporting Adaptation in SIDS

1. A holistic approach: Frame Covid-19-related goals and climate change risks within the broader development goals of partner countries.

- Evaluations found the most effective approach to climate change adaptation begins with an understanding of the development goals in a given country or community then assesses the climate and non-climate stresses that can impede progress toward those goals. An example of this approach is the Pacific Risk Resilience Programme, which has demonstrated good success, government ownership and good prospects for program replication and scale-up. This contrasts with traditional approaches where climate change and disaster risks have been managed as stand-alone activities outside of development and humanitarian policy and practice, and have started with data about climate and hazards as a way to design projects.
- International assistance projects that are not focused on addressing climate change - including support to COVID-19 response and recovery - can benefit from the use of a climate lens throughout the programme cycle. Evaluations found that many development projects are impacted by natural disasters, including typhoons and rising sea temperatures, and the knock-on effects of these on human and economic systems. A climate change lens in planning and implementation can help to ensure that project investments are safeguarded and sustainable over the long-term.
- In mainstreaming climate considerations in the COVID-19 response and recovery, efforts should be focussed on where they are likely to be most effective. Areas where it is critical for resilience to be mainstreamed include food production systems; key economic infrastructure (such as roads, bridges and wharves); coastal zone management; key services such as water supplies, health and education; and planning and land management. Climate change adaptation and resilience programmes should consider underlying determinants of vulnerability such as severe overcrowding, proliferation of informal housing and unplanned settlement, inadequate water supply, poor sanitation and solid waste disposal.

2. Strengthen capacities: Focus on increasing local capacity to build resilience to climate change.

- Evidence from evaluations shows that climate resilience building programmes are more likely to be relevant if they are linked to partner country priorities and more likely to be sustainable if they are locally owned and build on existing mechanisms. Small population size and dispersed and remote populations impose structural constraints on SIDS that limit specialisation and institutional capacities. Investing to build local capacity and expertise is key to supporting SIDS adapt to climate change, as well as in achieving other short and longer-term goals.
- With Australian funding, the Pacific Community's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees worked with national agencies to develop and maintain local food crop nurseries using its curated collection of climate-ready plant varieties. While the project was not designed to increase climate resilience, the project generated unexpected resilience benefits, which were demonstrated during recovery from Cyclone Pam in 2015. Tuvalu nurseries were able to respond to requests immediately following the disaster and distribute fast-maturing sweet potato seedlings from their own stock, helping communities to recover more quickly.

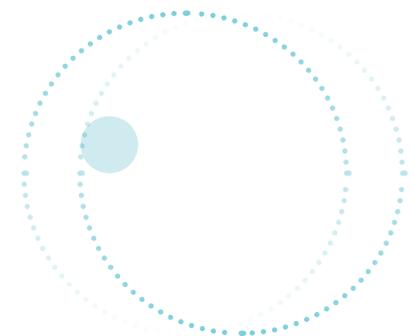
Building Climate Resilience and Supporting Adaptation in SIDS

2 (continued). Strengthen capacities: Focus on increasing local capacity to build resilience to climate change.

- Evaluations have found that capacity-building investments in many different areas have improved climate change adaptability in SIDS. This includes investments strengthening government and institutions; improving public financial management systems, improving national coordination and planning capacity; fostering community leadership; and building the capacity of civil society and other local actors. The implications of these findings should be considered when supporting SIDS capacities to respond to and recover from COVID-19 (and other) pandemics.
- DFAT's evaluation of the response to Cyclone Pam found that Australia's investment in disaster risk reduction programmes and preparedness training at the national, provincial and community level played a key part in increasing the capacity of vulnerable communities to prepare for and respond to disasters. As a result, many lives were saved and the impact of the cyclone was reduced. Previous investments made to the National Disaster Management Office including the provision of Australian technical assistance prior to and during the crisis enabled the Vanuatu Government to take greater control of the Cyclone Pam response. Many Australian funded NGOs built on existing disaster preparedness programmes with Community Disaster Committees (CDCs) and were largely effective at addressing the needs of communities and building local capacity. Remote community groups reported that had it not been for the training and preparedness activities, they would not have received information about the cyclone including how to get to safe houses and identifying vulnerable individuals in need of assistance.
- Canada has been a long-standing supporter of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). This network of Caribbean states provides mutual support for disaster response and early recovery activities. Support for this regional network constitutes an important investment in local ownership and capacity.

3. Work together: Strengthen co-ordination and co-operation to ensure efforts focus on areas where they are most needed and effective.

- The capacity constraints in SIDS make coordination by donors essential to reduce the burden on governments and local agencies. Greater recognition of the extent and impact of climate change has increased the number of donors working to improve climate adaptability in SIDS. Coordination and cooperation are needed to facilitate synergies and economies of scale and identify gaps while reducing duplication and the burden on SIDS. These lessons should be kept in mind as additional and often short term, development and humanitarian funds are mobilized around COVID-19.
- In the Pacific, evaluations have found positive results when the largest donors have supported regional organisations and worked in ways to minimise duplication and additional work for Pacific governments and agencies.



Building Climate Resilience and Supporting Adaptation in SIDS

4. Take a long view: Integrate work to build resilience to climate change into emergency responses.

- Major disasters, especially rapid onset ones, tend to receive significant emergency funding whereas smaller, more recurrent ones struggle to attract assistance. Support for climate and disaster resilience tends to be provided in the wake of major disasters and then progressively fade away. Development partners should design response, recovery and reconstruction programmes after disasters - and into the humanitarian relief and recovery efforts related to COVID-19 - in ways that reduce vulnerabilities and promote climate and disaster resilience over time.
- Australia's Humanitarian Action Policy requires early recovery to be "integrated as part of humanitarian action, in support of longer-term development." In response to Cyclone Winston, Australia placed more emphasis on supporting local partners who had pre-existing activities in-country and an established relationship with the Government of Fiji. A higher priority was placed on localisation, disaster preparedness and reducing disaster risk. Under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership funding was allocated over five years to strengthen local humanitarian capability in the Pacific region to anticipate, prepare for, respond to and reduce risks from natural hazards. These priorities were also reflected in DFAT's Humanitarian Strategy (2016) where Australia will continue to support effective climate adaptation and efforts to reduce loss and damage in line with the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

5. Financing mechanisms need to recognise and reduce the economic vulnerability of SIDS and provide predictable long term funding.

- Limited fiscal revenues and constrained access to concessional finance can result in debt distress for SIDS that in turn limits resilience building. An international dialogue on the eligibility criteria for accessing concessional finance is needed to ensure that SIDS are able to access the finance they need at terms and conditions most suited to their specific circumstances. All aspects of vulnerability need to be considered in developing concessional finance eligibility criteria need and allocations.
- Innovative financing mechanisms can also help SIDS avoid or cope with debt. Development partners can support access to insurance and other forms of risk transfer and risk sharing mechanisms. The World Bank's efforts to reduce the premium on disaster risk pooling mechanisms is a good example of this.
- A key focus of Canada's climate finance which is of relevance to SIDS was disaster risk financing that supports climate change adaptation and acknowledges that climate change is affecting countries and systems need to be in place to deal with the impacts.
- The Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative has received Canadian support since 2018 along with four other donors and supports SIDS in the South Pacific. This sovereign insurance platform provides pay-outs to members when they are affected by natural disasters. The multi-donor fund also supports public sector capacity building efforts, particularly related to using climate information systems more effectively.

Building Climate Resilience and Supporting Adaptation in SIDS

5 (continued). Financing mechanisms need to recognise and reduce the economic vulnerability of SIDS and provide predictable long term funding.

- Finance for climate adaptability in SIDS tends to follow large disasters while predictable, long-term financing is scarce. Finance for climate adaptability is typically short term because of donor cycles. The scale and complexity of the challenges facing SIDS make it essential that programmes are funded over the long-term (10-15 years). An evaluation that assessed 26 climate change adaptation projects found no investment of fewer than 5 years was successful in achieving outcomes. Sustained funding can help bring about system level change needed to build resilience for smaller and more frequent disasters, which can lead to larger cumulative damage over time.
- An example of this is the Kiribati Adaptation Programme, where each project phase builds upon the experience of the previous phase to support the country's long-term adaptation plan. A recent evaluation of climate change programming in Pacific Island Countries found that a minimum timeframe of five years is needed to build trusted relationships, and for climate-related outcomes to emerge.

6. Find the right skills: There should be a balance of technical and development expertise in design and implementation.

- Evaluations found that integrating climate change into development programming requires an understanding of how current and future climatic conditions could impact projects, which underscores the need for an intentional approach to integrating relevant knowledge. Properly integrating climate change into international assistance requires sufficient access to technical expertise. An evaluation that assessed 26 climate change adaptation projects found the majority of successful projects benefited from access to internal or external climate change expertise from design through to implementation.



COVID-19 GLOBAL Evaluation Coalition

LESSONS FROM EVALUATION

3

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD, its member countries or the participants in the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition. *Lessons from Evaluation* are rapid syntheses of evidence identified from evaluations published by participants of the Global COVID-19 Evaluation Coalition. Lessons presented in this brief are not prescriptive, and users are advised to carefully review these lessons along with lessons from comprehensive and systematic reviews in the context of country, sector, and thematic conditions. The contributors do not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accept no responsibility for any consequence of their use.

This brief was brought to you by evaluators from...



Australian Government

Evaluation References

- Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013, [Australian Support for Climate Change, Environment and Disaster Risk Management in the Pacific: Findings and Recommendations of an Independent Review and Needs Assessment](#).
- Evaluation of the Caribbean Regional Development Program, 2011-12-2016-17, <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/index.aspx?lang=eng>
- Evaluation of Natural Disaster Reconstruction Assistance in the Philippines, 2013-14 to 2018-19, <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2019/endra-earcn-philippines.aspx?lang=eng>
- Hay, J.E, Manley, M., Lal, P., Bennett, C., Chong, J., Campbell, J. and W. Thorp, 2016, [Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction: Research Synthesis Report](#). Submitted to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington.
- Mid-Term Review of Global Affairs Canada's Climate Finance Programming, 2015-15 to 2018-19, Publication forthcoming.
- OECD/The World Bank (2016), [Climate and Disaster Resilience Financing in Small Island Developing States](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.
- OECD (2018), [Making Development Co-operation Work for Small Island Developing States](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.
- The Office of Development Effectiveness, 2015, [Climate and Oceans Support Program in the Pacific \(COSPPac\): Independent progress review and DFAT management response](#), Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- The Office of Development Effectiveness, 2017, [Humanitarian Assistance In The Pacific: An evaluation of the effectiveness of Australia's response to Cyclone Pam](#), Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- The Office of Development Effectiveness, 2018, [Climate change evaluation](#), Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.