

Webinar Series on the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) and the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP).

Webinar 1: Laws and the pandemic – a Pacific case for resilience within a multi-hazard impact

Summary

Purpose



WEBINAR 1: Laws & the pandemic: A Pacific case for resilience within a multi-hazard impact

The Pacific region has been lauded for its effective early warning early action approach to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In this era of global pandemic, the governance arrangements - both policy and legislation - of several countries have been severely tested. In addition to COVID-19, Tropical Cyclone Harold and ongoing drought have had a big impact in many countries creating a 'compound disaster'.

The webinar will hear from government representatives on the frontline of the response. Based on early lessons, they will outline how disaster and climate risk governance can be further strengthened at the local level.

The Pacific region was lauded with their quick response to contain the spread of the coronavirus, instituting travel and other national restrictions as early as January, 2020 in an effort to keep the virus at bay. In this era of global pandemic, the governance arrangements – both policy and legislation of several countries have been severely tested. In addition to COVID 19, some of our Pacific countries had to also cope with Tropical Cyclones Tino and Harold and ongoing drought creating 'compound disasters'.

Lessons can be drawn from this in regards existing policies and legislative structures and their robustness not only to handle pandemics such as COVID 19 but when faced with multiple impacts. This webinar facilitated by the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) through the Risk Governance Technical Working Group (TWG) afforded an opportunity to hear from Tuvalu, Fiji and the Republic of Marshall Islands National Disaster Management Offices, who shared the lessons learnt and identified potential practical opportunities aimed at strengthening disaster and climate risk legislative frameworks, including their implementation at the local level.

This webinar is the first of the PRP webinar series which:

1. Showcase resilience initiatives within the context of multiple hazards;
2. Showcase collective and innovative resilience efforts at the regional, national and community levels;
3. Should be about learning from each other;
4. Should drive and facilitate improved resilience actions

Background

The Risk Governance TWG understands that well-functioning disaster and climate risk management arrangements must be grounded in a strong legislative and policy basis, at national and local level to guide all aspects of risk management. As highlighted by **Mr. Engel Raygadas**, the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) Taskforce Chair, building resilience is also about the policies and legislations that provide the enabling environment to facilitate effective responses and actions. **Ms. Vasiti Soko**, Director of the Fiji National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) who co-chairs the Risk Governance

TWG and moderated the webinar introduced the session by highlighting that at times of multiple impacts, decision-makers have to come up with solutions that ensure the safety and well-being of their people despite any perceived gaps in existing laws and legislations. By the same token, National Disaster Management Offices (NDMO) around the region at the front-line of their national responses, would also have had to demonstrate a certain amount of flexibility to implement the directives, policies and legislations at hand as part of the response measures to such impacts.

Summary of Discussions and Interventions

Mr. Sumeo Silu, the Director of Tuvalu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) shared Tuvalu experience of having to trigger overlapping state of emergencies (SOE's) responding to Tropical Cyclone Tino that impacted all islands of Tuvalu from 17 and 24 January, 2020 and whilst this first SOE was still in effect triggering a second SOE in response to the first positive case of COVID-19 reported in Fiji on the 19th March, 2020 that involved the closure of Tuvalu airspaces and maritime borders with the exception of cargo vessels and fuel tankers. Whilst the current Tuvalu National Disaster Management Act provides an extensive list of disasters and multiple hazards, the year 2020 has highlighted the need to strengthen multiple hazard approach and consider the evolving nature of disasters including the need to strengthen and better align prevention and response measures across all relevant government ministries and departments, non-government organisation's and committees. There is also a need to clarify the declaration of a SOE under the national disaster management act and the powers conferred to the NDMO where there are two disasters occurring simultaneously. Mr. Silu further added that despite the successful management of past and present disasters under Tuvalu's current legislation, there have been several national, regional and international developments in disaster management which Tuvalu is keen to see integrated in their current NDM Act.

Mr. Mesake Mataitoga, the Senior Disaster Risk Reduction Officer of Fiji NDMO highlighted that Fiji also had to deal with multiple hazards all at once including 3 tropical cyclones and confirmed COVID-19 cases. A state of natural disaster was declared under the Natural Disaster Management (NDM) Act of 1988 for both COVID 19 and TC Harold. Simultaneously, the Public Health Act of 1935 was implemented with a total of 8 amendments to existing laws done including the creation of the COVID-19 Response Act of 2020 in response to and to ensure containment of COVID 19. Whilst the NDM Act of 1988 has been tried and tested over the years, a review is being considered to ensure it is more encompassing of other types of disasters beyond natural disasters, it is more inclusive ensuring that no-one is left behind and reflects global targets and indicators contextualized to Fiji case. Mr. Mataitoga emphasized that regulations need to be flexible and versatile enough to enable timely and effective response to those who need it the most and ways forward should include strengthened linkages down to the grassroots level.

Mr. Timmy Langrine, the Director of the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) NDMO shared RMI experience in dealing with COVID-19. Prior COVID-19, RMI had implemented preparatory measures to prevent a measles outbreak from reaching their shores through travel restrictions and border control measures. For COVID-19, RMI Government declared a State of Emergency (SOE) imposing border closures and focusing on preparatory measures including establishing isolation and quarantine units, handwashing stations and ensuring essential items were transferred in a safe manner to the outer islands. When the SOE was declared, the NDMO along with relevant clusters were activated working closely with partners including following advise from WHO and CDC. One area of improvement that

RMI sees is the relaxation of the procurement code to allow for timely implementation of the preparatory work. This only happens if a State of Disaster is declared but not for SOE.

Key Messages

The Question and Answer sessions, were also keen to understand how integrated the responses were particularly for COVID 19 between the NDMO and health ministry or other agencies that are responsible for health pandemics and how other stakeholders such as Civil Society are reflected in these policies and legislations as well as in these response measures.

For all panellists, they highlighted the importance of governance arrangements both policy and legislation to be able to enable effective national responses within multi-hazard scenarios which should be underpinned by a whole of government, stakeholder, donor and partner approach supporting and facilitating a whole of society and people-centred response. Tuvalu, Fiji and Republic of the Marshall Islands highlighted that despite the constraints within existing laws, they were able to respond in an effective manner. Nevertheless, opportunities for improvements were also identified learning from the experiences from those at the frontline of their national responses when faced with multiple impacts.

Meet the Panelist

WEBINAR 1: LAWS & THE PANDEMIC: A PACIFIC CASE FOR RESILIENCE WITHIN A MULTI-HAZARD IMPACT



Moderator

Ms. Vasiti Soko

Director of Fiji National Disaster Management Office & Co-chair of the PRP Technical Working Group on Risk Governance



PRP Taskforce Chair to officially open the PRP Webinar Series

Mr. Engel Raygadas

Deputy Permanent Secretary for International, European & Pacific Affairs, French Polynesia.

PANELISTS



Mr. Timmy Langrine

Director of the Republic of the Marshall Islands National Disaster Management Office



Mr. Mesake Mataitoga

Senior Disaster Risk Reduction Officer
Fiji National Disaster Management Office



Mr. Sumeo Silo

Director
Tuvalu National Disaster Management Office