

The **Pacific Insight Briefs** capture climate and disaster integration knowledge, lessons, and insights from the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership (Climate Partnership). The five thematic briefs draw on the experience of the Climate Partnership's community of aid program managers, implementing partners, technical experts, and staff.



Pacific Insight Brief 4 | Governance for Community Resilience

Effective long-term climate change action, building disaster resilience and taking advantage of new low-emissions development opportunities requires strong governance systems with appropriate climate risk informed policy, institutional, leadership, decision making, resource and accountability settings. In the Pacific region, progress is being made at local, sub-national, national and regional levels to better coordinate and integrate risk into formal and informal governance systems, though support and coordinated approaches are needed to accelerate change at scale.

This brief presents insights on opportunities to further strengthen resilient development outcomes through support for, and coordination with national and sub-national governance systems.

Insights



Pacific governments seek to mainstream climate risk into all aspects of planning and decision making. While climate action is a key priority for leaders across the Pacific, there are various challenges and barriers to progress. For example, power and influence of mandated climate and disaster resilience agencies across the Pacific varies and often struggles to deliver reform objectives. Supporting climate and disaster risk agencies to build appropriate influence, authority and resources through good governance programs is key, as is working with central agencies to integrate risk into whole of government budget and strategy.

With its strong focus on supporting government and sector led reforms across policy, planning, and institutions the Australia's aid program is well placed to support climate resilient governance through more focused approaches.

The influence of informal governance, including culture and custom, plays a critical role in how decisions are made at local, national and regional levels in the Pacific. Aid investments that recognise the interplay of formal and informal systems can embed climate and disaster risk more effectively into aid programming. In practice, this means working with and through existing systems such as formal government arrangements, as well as informal governance structures (e.g. local partnerships, relationships and networks which hold significant currency in the Pacific, to engage with the issues of climate and disaster risk, on their terms). Efforts to raise awareness of climate and disaster risk in the short and medium term, amongst local constituents, combined with local knowledge and insights, will result in better decision making and adaptation actions most appropriate for the context.

'In the Solomon Islands, and likely in other Pacific countries as well, there is a strong informal system – perhaps this is stronger than the formal system. Informal is a key system.' (Pacific Insight Briefs interview 2023, DFAT staff).

Local, informal and traditional governance play influential roles at community level and are significant for building resilience at the 'last mile'. Engaging with governance systems at local level means understanding local power dynamics and decision-making structures. It also means seeking the inclusion of diverse voices to contribute to more equitable and resilient development outcomes. For example, aid investments may engage with local Council of Chiefs as well as women's groups, churches, youth, organisations of people with disabilities and others to build in diverse experiences of climate and disaster risk into programming.

'Informal systems like Wantok build resilience. There is no social security for those outside of the formal system (the majority of the population) – if a house is flooded or needs repair – Wantok pitch in and do that. In rural areas, everyone pitches in to build someone's house. There is enormous community resilience in that sense.' (Pacific Insight Briefs interview 2023, DFAT staff).

Governance arrangements facilitate data and information sharing: Government ministries and agencies often have a wealth of data to support decision-making for resilient development. For example, National Disaster Management Offices' (NDMOs) data on climate and geohazards can support line ministry policies and programs; data held by Ministries of Women and Poverty Alleviation (or similar) on vulnerability and risk can inform more robust decision-making. Data sharing across government is easier when the governance arrangements facilitate engagement and communication across agencies and incentivise the use of data to inform national sectoral planning and shared resilient development objectives.

Case example | Community governance in Tonga

Climate Partnership research conducted in 2019 on community resilience explored local governance in Houma village, Tonga. In Houma, the monthly *Fono* (community meeting) provides a strong community governance structure through the sharing of information and views, and broader dialogue around community priorities and planning. Representatives of different committees including women, youth, electricity, water, fisheries, education and emergency report to the monthly *Fono*. The monthly meeting was open to all community members to attend to discuss community affairs as described by the Town Officer: *'The village meeting is where decisions are made.'* Working with existing local governance structures such as the *Fono* in Houma – and elsewhere at local level in the Pacific - is important for aid investments aimed at building resilience to climate and disaster risks.



Lessons



Understanding the political economy can inform partnership efforts. Incorporating climate and disaster risk resilience into political economy analysis can help inform Australian Aid program decisions around where and how to best support strong climate and disaster resilient governance. They are effective in identifying risk management knowledge gaps and help identify the most effective entry points for programs at national and sub-national levels.

Working with 'local champions' of climate resilient development and supporting them to make in-roads into important governance reform is an effective, if not necessary, strategy when seeking to support integration in governance systems. Informed through political economy analysis (see above), effort can be focused on working with and through the most influential stakeholders able to catalyse change.

Community development planning processes are often disconnected to national government development planning: Local and indigenous knowledge is an important source of community resilience. There are opportunities to support bottom-up linkages that bring local knowledge to inform national development planning processes. Strengthening the valuable links between community and sub-national government to national government would support resilient development outcomes. See Fiji case example below.

'Local government and communities have a wealth of information. Most countries have some kind of community development planning process, but this doesn't always inform national government planning or budgeting.' (Pacific Insight Briefs interview 2023, Gov4Res staff).

Decentralising authority, finances and decision-making to sub-national levels is an important entry point for community resilience building: There is a long-term trend across some Pacific islands governments towards decentralisation. PNG, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands for example are all progressing decentralisation agendas. Shifting control to provincial levels brings services closer to people, and delegates funding and decision-making authority to subnational level. Lessons from governance programs (e.g. Gov4Res) have highlighted that while decentralisation is under-funded in most Pacific countries, it provides an opportunity to integrate local climate, disaster and GEDSI considerations into community resilience building.

Case example | Connecting community, sub-national and national levels of governance

In Fiji, **Village Water Committees** are supported by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. Any issues at village level are channelled through the Village Chief to the Provincial Council, who then takes concerns to the Divisional Commissioner. What is learned from this example is the need to have clear lines of reporting and mechanisms to capture community feedback, which are key to successful governance processes.



Opportunities

Leverage opportunities that exist across Australia's investments in governance and public financial management: Approximately \$420M of Australian aid is invested in governance programs in the Pacific¹. While there are some examples of climate and disaster integration across the portfolio, opportunities exist to leverage Australia's governance and public financial management investments, while maintaining full respect for sovereign decision making, to progress greater climate and disaster resilience outcomes. For example:

- Building robust economic strategy and public financial management systems, that incorporate climate and disaster risk can result in systemic and sustained resilience benefits for countries and communities.
- Efforts to strengthen provincial and community engagement in decision making can incorporate initiatives to build awareness of risk at local levels.
- Direct budget support could be more readily tied to priorities around climate and disaster related policy reforms.

Investing in Pacific skills development: Further to the above, there is a shortage of awareness and skills in many Pacific countries to better integrate climate and disaster risk into public financial management and other management and governance systems. Working to support integration into accounting and finance courses at Pacific universities would support skill development, as would greater peer-peer learning, as an effective means to empower governments on what risk informed governance systems and processes look like. An example of this happening in practice in Fiji's Western Division is described in the quote below.

'The Commissioner Western's Office is now incorporating risk into other public sector projects, such as water projects and health centers. Lessons learned from the integration of risk management measures into this road project are also being used to inform larger projects such as the new Nadarivatu Government Station, which was partly destroyed during Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston (in 2016) and completely destroyed following TC Yasa (in 2020).' (Gov4Res Case Study – Risk informed road enhances accessibility of Vatawai Community, Fiji).

Value knowledge across the aid program: Pacific Island staff in DFAT Posts and Programs hold valuable knowledge on the intersection and dynamics of formal and informal governance systems. This knowledge could be better leveraged and more highly valued to better inform governance investments, for example, through local staff contributions to political economy analysis to inform partnership and investment efforts (as mentioned earlier).

Support innovative funding modalities for resilience: Meeting the emerging challenges associated with the changing nature of risk in the Pacific calls for additional innovative funding modalities. There are a range of funding mechanism established or in the pipeline intended to support climate and disaster resilient development. In Tonga for example there is an established Climate Change Trust Fund established to support community orientated resilience initiatives through transparent and efficient governance mechanisms. Evidence highlights positive results from approaches which build strong governance checks, while enabling ownership and control of spending by local entities, whether at national, or sub-national levels.



Women from Wala Island, Vanuatu, participate in a workshop on community resilience (Photo: ISF)

¹ DFAT Effective Governance Development Cooperation Factsheet (2022)
<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-cooperation-fact-sheet-governance.pdf>

Case example | Financing resilient development through government systems

The Australian government supported UNDP-led *Governance for Resilient Development in the Pacific (Gov4Res) Project* has supported governance reforms for resilient development in Fiji, through partnerships with Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management (MRMDDM). Key achievements of the Gov4Res approach include:

- The development of a Resilient Strategic Development Plan for MRMDDM, which provides a mandate for staff to include risk informed rural development across the ministry's activities, mechanisms, and processes.
- Development of a Guidance Manual and capacity building workshops for Provincial Administrators and District Officers to support the plan's implementation.
- Building linkages with Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to better understand vulnerability and risk, which led to the development of project specific risk maps.
- The reforms described above have led to more resilient community development investments in 21 communities (e.g. infrastructure including bridges, roads, footpaths and water tanks).

The approach to financing was direct budget support, integrating with government's own-source revenue. UNDP developed measures to manage risks to and from the investments and bore the costs of managing those risks. The financing modality was well received by government ministries as it aligned with their own development outcomes.

'The [financing] mechanism has also been attracting attention from other development partners in the region, who value the ability to provide financing direct to communities in a manner that is programmatic and delivered by government.' (UNDP Gov4Res Annual Report 2021-22).



Photo Left: Community member in Tailevu showing the area proposed for the new access road (Photo: UNDP)

Photo right: Josefa Bau, Manager of Natelei Eco-Lodge, pointing to the building damaged by TC Winston (Photo: UNDP)