The Role of Disaster Relief in Pacific Island Countries: A Cause of Increasing Vulnerability?

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Climate Change, Extreme Events and Adaptation

- EEs likely to be initial signals of CC
- Changes in mean conditions may increase effects of EEs
- Climatic extremes are major hazards in PICs
- People living on islands are not inherently vulnerable
- PI communities are great adaptors
  - To environment and environmental change and variability
  - To economic, social and political change
    - Colonialism
    - Independence
    - Globalisation
- Nevertheless these processes of change are reducing resilience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disaster</th>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tropical Cyclones</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floods</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Drought</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landslides</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Volcanic Eruption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsunami</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
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Data extracted from ReliefWeb
EE Adaptation Options for PICs

‘Traditional’
- Food security
- Inter-community cooperation
- Traditional knowledge and its transmission
- Settlements and buildings

Contemporary
- Variants of the ‘traditional’
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative
- New elements
  - Technocratic responses
    - Seawalls
    - River control
    - EWS
  - Centralized DRM
    - NDMOs
    - Preparedness
    - Post-disaster assessment
- Disaster Relief

Increasing:
- Quantities of assistance
- Range of elements
- Speed of implementation
- Sophistication
- Number of players
Relief in PICs: A Brief History

‘Contact’
♦ e.g. London Missionary Society (LMS): 1840s: two tropical cyclones in the Cook Islands.

Colonial Governments
♦ e.g. Fiji, 1886, tropical cyclone: Rice, ships’ biscuits and sugar, Yams from unaffected communities, Planting material for sweet potato, maize and cassava, Costs charged against the tax refunds for the respective provinces
♦ By mid 20th century relief operations common in Fiji

Newly independent governments
♦ e.g. Fiji independent 1970, Hurricane Bebe 1972: “Prime Ministers Hurricane Relief Committee”

The contemporary Pacific region
♦ Relief prompt and substantial
♦ Numerous Donors
  ♦ UN / multilateral, Bilateral, International NGOs and IFRC, National governments, Local NGOs and RC committees
♦ Relief has increasingly become an expectation
Pacific Is. Disaster Relief: A Brief History

Inter-Community  Missionary  Government  Bilateral  International Organizations  Humanitarian Organizations

High Level of Uptake  Medium Level of Uptake  Low Level of Uptake

“Contact”

Colonialism

Independence

Globalisation

Past

Present

High Level of Uptake
The Effects of Relief

Purposeful

♦ Alleviation of suffering
♦ Development assistance
♦ Welfare (Bayliss-Smith et al.)
♦ Political benefits

Incidental

♦ Introduction of new foods, buildings
  ● Imports
  ● Crops
♦ Reduces food security
  ● Surplus production
  ● Food preservation
  ● Famine foods
  ● Crop biodiversity
  ● Intercommunity sharing

No longer required
Disasters reflect pre-disaster conditions
- Carry-over principle (Quarantelli and Dynes)
- Progression of vulnerability (Wisner et al.)

PIC pre-disaster conditions have changed through time

Influenced by general change and the provision of relief after previous disasters

![Diagram showing Linking Relief to Vulnerability](image-url)
Moral Dilemma

- CC may lead to increased losses
- Quantum very difficult to establish
- Nevertheless, polluters should compensate for losses they have caused

BUT

- Relief may be maladaptive
  - Increasing future vulnerability
- Having contributed to increasing vulnerability, should relief be reduced?
  - Hardship
- What then is the responsibility of polluters?
  - Contribute to DRR
  - Community capacity building
Differential Humanitarian Responses

**Solomon Islands Tsunami**
- April 2007
- Severe damage to coastal communities and facilities
- Western Province, capital Gizo and numerous islands
- 52 fatalities
- 9,000 homeless

**Cyclone Guba**
- November 2007
- Severe flooding: Oro and Milne Bay provinces
- Official death toll: 149
- 1,800-2,000 houses destroyed
- 9,500 people displaced.
- 58,000 people required urgent assistance, 150,000 affected

**How much international relief?**
- Nearly US$20 million
- Less than US$2 million

**Future Implications:**
more climate disasters ➔ increased donor fatigue, disinterest?
Conclusions

♦ Many factors are contributing to growing vulnerability in PICs

♦ Relief and CC are just two of these:
  ● Will the need for disaster relief increase as an effect of climate change?
  ● How secure is the likelihood of continued relief?
    ■ As a form of aid
    ■ As a form of compensation
  ● Can the maladaptive effects of disaster relief be reversed?

Thanks for Listening