Advancing climate change adaptation and disaster risk management with UNDP in the Pacific region

Climate change is one of the most crucial concerns for the Pacific region. The year 2017 was an especially important year for the Pacific, as Fiji was the host of the Climate Change conference, COP23. This was a great opportunity to promote the urgency of climate change that the Pacific faces. As Pacific Island Countries and Territories engage with key partners to tackle the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Volunteers with UNDP are providing critical contributions to tackle climate change adaptation and disaster risk management.
The first tsunami drill at schools in the Solomon Islands mobilized nearly 400 students and teachers, testing emergency management plans and newly constructed evacuation routes.
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PREPARING CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Jiye Suh (Republic of Korea) is a UN Volunteer Policy Specialist for Climate Change in the Solomon Islands. Serving in the Resilience and Sustainable Development team with UNDP, Jiye took charge of a highly technical disaster management project directly related to health, security and safety issues of communities around a gold mine in Guadalcanal Province. The project aims to support the
government, especially the National Disaster Management Office, and the communities, to prepare contingency planning based on scientific assessments that will be incorporated into risk assessment.

Jiye has been coordinating the scientific assessments, which include hydrological, geotechnical and physical environmental studies, with scientists, engineers, a technical advisor and the government to obtain findings that will eventually feed into contingency planning at national and community levels. Building rapport and maintaining relationships with a variety of stakeholders from public to private sectors – who have different interests – has also been an essential part of her work.

I find this project interesting, as it incorporates scientific evidence as the basis of decision making for preparation of the contingency planning at both national and community levels. The thing that keeps me moving is the fact that as a UN Volunteer, I am doing something good for people and society, and I am contributing to the peaceful and sustainable development of the world. --Jiye Suh

Jiye also took part in a project on tsunami evacuation drills led by the National Disaster Management Office for school children in the Western Province. The first tsunami drill at schools in the Solomon Islands mobilized nearly 400 students and teachers, testing the schools’ emergency management plans and newly constructed evacuation routes. Through repetitive evacuation drills, the school children began to take them seriously, comprehending that these measures would help them and their communities to be prepared for natural hazards.

"Joining UNV in the Solomon Islands sitting on Ring of Fire gave me an opportunity to experience a new geographic area, the Pacific, and to understand that climate change is really affecting everyday life of the entire population of Solomon Islands," Jiye shares. "I personally experienced a ‘paradigm shift’ of climate change from agriculture-oriented climate change (adaptation) to a more disaster-management focused climate change."

Before becoming a UN Volunteer in the Solomon Islands, Jiye worked for three and a half years in international development in African countries, dealing with agriculture covering food security, climate-resilient farming, livelihood and rural development.

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH FLOOD MANAGEMENT IN SAMOA

Recent extreme events in the Vaisigano River Catchment, located in Samoa’s capital city Apia, resulted in approximately US $200 million worth of damage. Climate projections for Samoa suggest that the risks will increase over time, which can potentially undermine development progress in urban Apia, where the majority of the population and economic activity is based.

In response, the Government of Samoa, in collaboration with UNDP, is putting into operation a comprehensive flood management solution. The key output of this is to strengthen adaptive capacity and reduce exposure to climate risks of vulnerable livelihoods and infrastructure in the Vaisigano catchment. The project has funding from the Green Climate Fund.

Prudence Raine (New Zealand), is a UN Volunteer in Climate Change Adaptation serving with the UNDP Multi-Country Office in Samoa. She has been working on this project from the initial project formulation stage to the implementation stage. In 2017, she engaged with local stakeholders and government officials to ensure that the project design was tailored to the specific climate change needs of the communities. Once the project was approved in December of that year, implementation began, with positive on-the-ground effects being measured already in early 2018.

Working on this project has allowed me to engage in tackling development challenges and volunteering to translate development into practice and targeted actions as we implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. --Prudence Raine
"A pressing number of development challenges exist in Samoa, therefore action is needed now to reduce threats of climate change-exacerbated floods, droughts and cyclones," Prudence says. "Having gained my Master's degree in Environmental Management and having worked previously in climate change adaptation, I knew that I wanted to carry on supporting local development and climate action projects. Working as a UN Volunteer in Samoa has given me a different and unique on-the-ground implementation experience of how development translates into practice."

Twenty-nine UN Volunteers are currently serving in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories across various UN entities – eight with UNDP, three with UNOCHA, one with UNICEF and one with UN Women in Fiji; seven with UNDP in Samoa; seven with UNDP in the Solomon Islands; one with UNDP in Vanuatu and another with UNDP in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Read more about SDG 13: Climate Action in Fiji
Read more about how Safety Drill Prepares Solomon Islands Schools for Tsunamis

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 13: Climate change, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals