

Factsheet

Project: Coping with climate change in the Pacific island region

Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Lead executing agency: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Term: 2009 to 2018, village resettlement sub-project launched in 2016

Living with climate change

Flooding, storms, species extinction – for years now, the people of Fiji, host country of this year’s UN Climate Change Conference, have been fighting the effects of climate change. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is working on behalf of the German Government and the European Union (EU) to assist Fiji and its neighbouring Pacific island states to better manage the impact of climate change.

The consequences of climate change are being seen sooner in the Pacific region than in other regions. Rising sea levels and the increase in tropical cyclones, flooding and prolonged periods of drought are making things very difficult for the region’s residents, who number over 11 million.

Fiji, the host country of this year’s Climate Change Conference, is being hit particularly hard by rising sea levels. Ono Island has already lost more than 15 metres of land. 40 residents of the village of Narikoso, which is located right on the island’s shore, now have no other option but to move to higher ground nearby. Their houses are located in the particularly high risk ‘red zone’, right next to the ocean. The remaining villagers will have to follow suit at some point, perhaps in 20 years, perhaps in 50; it all depends on how rapidly sea levels rise. Consequently, the Fijian Government is now planning to resettle those affected. GIZ is working on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the EU to assist Fiji with this task. Developed in cooperation with GIZ, the model for sustainable and fair resettlement is being incorporated into a national resettlement plan to be unveiled by Fiji at the Climate Change Conference. This is paving the way for similar initiatives in other island states. After all, it is estimated that over 100 communities will have to relocate in the Pacific region alone over the next few years.

Making safe places habitable

History has shown just how crucial it is to have a good resettlement plan in place: a resettlement attempt in 2011 triggered a mudslide, which destroyed mangrove and coniferous forests on its way into the sea. These forests were actually designed to protect the coastline from storms and flooding. Efforts are being undertaken to prevent this happening again in future. The pilot project supported by GIZ is the first in the region to be conducted on the basis of an ordered planning and coordination process. Geologists have checked the new location, the relevant ministries are undergoing training and residents are being closely involved in the plans. The new infrastructure is being set up in such a way that the families remaining in the old village can later join those relocated before them.

Additionally, the destroyed mangroves are being reforested and new trees planted to help prevent soil erosion.

Communicating climate change so people understand it

Kelepi Saukitoga is one of the villagers who has to relocate. He had to nail his front door shut to prevent his children accidentally falling into the water in front of it. 'They don't yet understand why all this is happening and why we are the ones being affected by it,' he says. In order to effectively tackle the daily challenges of climate change in Fiji, it is important that its residents understand how this phenomenon is coming about. Consequently, GIZ worked with the education ministries of Fiji, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga to integrate the topics of climate change and disaster risk management into school curricula. To this end, age-appropriate learning materials have been created with a local focus and teachers have taken part in training. These teachers are now explaining to 300,000 children and young people in over 1,800 schools what climate change is and what it involves in a way they can understand.

Securing food and income sources

Flooding in residential areas is just one consequence of climate change. The phenomenon is also having a negative impact on food and water supply, with rising sea levels leading to soil salination, which is spoiling drinking water. Rainfall is also irregular and land and sea temperatures are increasing. Coral and fish are dying as waters become ever warmer and more acidic. If they disappear, then the Pacific region will begin to experience a food shortage. GIZ is therefore assisting Fiji's residents with planting heat-tolerant varieties of fruit and vegetables and keeping animals that can cope well with the climatic conditions, such as pigs, chickens and bees. Some of the produce is being sold to tourists, while the rest is being used by the residents themselves.

Sharing experiences and mobilising young people

A group of six young people from Fiji and the Pacific island states of Kiribati, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Vanuatu will travel to the UN Climate Change Conference. Going by the collective name of Pacific Voices, these young people have produced video clips showing how they are addressing the challenges posed to their region by climate change. They will present these clips to the public at the conference in Bonn. One of the screenings will take place at the 'Our World - Our Future' event, which is being held at the Climate Planet in the Rheinaue Leisure Park at 13:30 on 10 November 2017.

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