



CLIMATE-FRAGILITY RISK FACTSHEET

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

Climate change is the **single greatest threat** to the livelihood, security and well-being of Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). **Displacement and forced migration** and **diminishing food and water resources** have emerged as human security issues, while degrading **ocean and land resources** are undermining economic growth, health and productivity, livelihoods and employment, and thus national and regional stability. Responses should be tailored to Pacific SIDS' unique circumstances, to their respective development statuses, institutions, diverse cultures and environments. Sufficient investment, effective coordination and informed policy-making will all be vital to success.

5 CLIMATE FRAGILITY RISKS

Five critical fragility risks link climate change to insecurity and conflict in Pacific SIDS:

1 Risk 1: Displacement and forced migration

Long before land disappears beneath the ocean, it will become unproductive due to **salt water intrusion, coastal erosion and reef degradation** - in the absence of ambitious adaptations, this may force the displacement and migration of thousands of people. Forced migration is already affecting a number of Pacific SIDS, such as Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Tuvalu. The fact that such changes undermine complex and often contested traditional **land tenure systems** increases the potential for conflict and fragility.

2 Risk 2: Challenges to the blue economy

Climate change threatens to **permanently degrade** and **destabilise** a massive proportion of **coral reefs and ecosystems**, which are critical for the regional economy and people's livelihoods. Marine-based tourism and tuna fisheries, which account for a significant part of regional and national gross domestic product and employment, are under threat. A degrading blue economy will act as a **threat multiplier** for both coastal communities and whole economies. Moreover, projected changes in the migratory paths of key tuna species will exacerbate **geopolitical tensions** between Pacific SIDS and distant water fishing nations over sustainable, equitable management arrangements.

3 Risk 3: Decline in health and productivity of Pacific People - food and water security

The projected **erosion of healthy and affordable traditional food and water sources** for local communities represents a major threat to the health, productivity and security of Pacific people. In the face of irreversible ocean and coastal resource degradation, extreme weather events and shortage of arable land, the region is becoming increasingly dependent on **cheap food imports** with low nutritional value. This occurs against a backdrop of rising **non-communicable disease** rates in Pacific people. On top of that crisis, **water-borne diseases** like dysentery, typhoid, dengue and malaria are predicted to grow and spread to new sites.

4 Risk 4: Coping capacity and natural disasters





The Pacific is one of the most exposed regions to **natural disasters** and also one of the least **insurable**. Crime and violence often spike in the immediate aftermath of disasters, affecting the most vulnerable and stretching traditional response capacities. Successive hazards, with shortening recovery periods in between crises, present significant fragility risks and bear the potential for **short-term conflict** and **longer-term deterioration** of sustainable livelihoods and economic integrity.

5 Risk 5: Impacts of sea-level rise on maritime zone and boundaries

Maritime boundaries are critical for governance, security, and law enforcement, as well as natural resource management within and between countries in the Pacific. All SIDS are at risk of **losing land** and thus **resources** from their **shrinking exclusive economic zones**; the lowest-lying atolls are at risk of **complete inundation**.

CLIMATE CONTEXT

Climate risks and impacts vary considerably across the region. The implications of exceeding 1.5°C are stark; above this threshold there is a significant increase in the likelihood of exceeding tipping points that will make many low-lying islands uninhabitable. Climate change is projected to impact the region in a number of ways, including, among others:

-  Increasing annual mean temperatures
-  Sea-level rise
-  Salt water intrusion and coastal erosion
-  Increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, e.g. cyclones

70-90% of corals will bleach at 1.5°C of global warming, and 99% at 2°C (IPCC, 2018).

Tuna catches are expected to decline by over 20% in the Western Pacific under a high emissions scenario.



5 ENTRY POINTS TO ADDRESS RISKS

Despite the manifold challenges, Pacific people are traditionally highly resilient and determined to survive and thrive. Pacific Leaders recently endorsed the **Boe Declaration on Regional Security 2018** as well as the associated Action Plan 2019 and established a Sub-Committee of the Forum Officials' Committee on Regional Security Cooperation. Thus they are bringing to bear their collective arsenal of leadership, policy and capacities to address climate security in the context of existing security challenges in the region. While effective implementation will take time, there are a number of responses that decision-makers can support now. Beyond the **overarching necessity of greater ambition in mitigation commitments and supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement**, these include:

- 1 **Providing financial resources through fit-for-purpose modalities.** Scaled-up **development, security and climate finance** is critical in this space, as are grants and highly concessional finance options. Channelling them through Pacific SIDS' own **country systems**, engaging resilient private sector and non-state actors, and using existing regional arrangements will help reduce transaction costs and administrative burdens.
- 2 **Accelerating international cooperation and efficient development programs to manage climate change-induced migration.** Providing support for the development of localised **vulnerability assessments, plans and international and local displacement policies** is critical to give more certainty and security to displaced individuals and affected communities.
- 3 **Addressing Pacific SIDS' concerns about the implications of climate change for maritime jurisdictions and associated resources.** Decision-makers should develop suitable proposals for progressive **international law** and associated technical approaches and capacities to help Pacific SIDS address climate-related border and resource uncertainties.
- 4 **Strengthening data collection, monitoring and early warning systems and improving understanding and knowledge of localised impacts and risks.** It is important to gather sufficiently robust and **granular data and information**, including from extensive traditional and cultural knowledge and systems, about some of the key climate fragility issues in the region in order to better inform resilience-building.
- 5 **Ensuring there is a clear, coordinated and efficient UN support system for the region and country-specific situations.** A coordinated multilateral system approach and informed climate security assessments should complement the region's efforts to **implement the Boe Declaration and Action Plan**. Climate security assessment approaches need to be tailored at different levels, drawing on the multifaceted nature of challenges facing Pacific peoples. Moreover, Pacific leaders have requested that the UN Secretary-General appoint a **special adviser on climate change and security** and called on the UNSC to appoint a **special rapporteur** to ensure the UN system can effectively respond.

¹¹ This factsheet and associated Risk Brief received invaluable inputs from Viliame Wilikilagi (PIFS), Sylvie Goyet (SPC), Tagaloa Cooper and Espen Ronneberg (SPREP), Professor Jon Barnett, Doctor Ian Fry, Benjamin Pohl, Lukas Ruettinger, Tony Edwards (COP Niue), UN Climate Security Mechanism; Dr. Johann Bell (ANCORS UOW).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTS

- 98% of the Pacific region is covered by ocean.
- The 14 independent SIDS are home to 10 million people.
- There are still a number of territories of France, the United States and New Zealand woven into the Pacific family of islands.
- The economy is highly dependent on maritime resources and tourism.
- Over the last three years, single tropical cyclone events have caused losses of 30% and 64% of GDP in Fiji and Vanuatu, respectively.

POLITICS & SECURITY

The Pacific Islands are highly diverse in terms of political and governance maturity, population, development, migration prospects, and potential for instability. Overall, the Pacific faces multifaceted security challenges, including geopolitical tensions in an increasingly crowded and contested region.

FURTHER READING

- Pasisi, Coral (2019). Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: Pacific Region (full version).
- PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report.
- World Bank (2017). Pacific Possible.

LEGAL NOTICE

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The **Climate Security Expert Network**, which comprises some 30 international experts, supports the **Group of Friends on Climate and Security** and the **Climate Security Mechanism of the UN** system by synthesising scientific knowledge and expertise, advising on entry points for building resilience to climate-security risks, and helping to strengthen a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of addressing climate-related security risks.

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