

Enhancing Pacific/Caribbean SIDS Collaboration

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Representatives from key regional organizations leading climate change and disaster risk reduction strategies in the Caribbean region recently attended the Pacific Platform meeting in Fiji, with the objective of establishing south-south collaboration among small island developing states (SIDS). SIDS countries share particularly high vulnerabilities, given their tiny size, limited economic base, majority of the population living along the coastline, and social trends such as the constant emigration of qualified professionals and youth. An example of the latter is that while Fiji provides tropical cyclone monitoring services to 10 Pacific island countries, it struggles to retain the full staff of 14 meteorologists needed to adequately provide these services, as trained meteorologists continuously leave to take up higher salaried positions in New Zealand and Australia.

Among the topics chosen for an initial exchange of experiences was a catastrophe risk insurance scheme for regions composed mainly of small islands developing states (SIDS), which use various insurance instruments to pool risks and provide a buffer for governments of small countries which can often be overwhelmed by the widespread and sudden hardships caused by large scale disasters. A representative from the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) spoke on that region's experience to date with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), in operation since 2005. To date this scheme has issued payouts to Dominica, St. Lucia and Turks and Caicos, which experienced extensive destruction due to earthquakes and wind damage from hurricanes. Given the lessons learned from the Caribbean experience with the catastrophe risk insurance scheme, CDERA and the University of the West Indies outlined some issues that the Pacific should address, as it considers whether it should adopt a similar scheme. One key concern is that such schemes usually do not cover damages from flooding due to excessive rains or seawater flooding, which are the most recurring types of disasters hitting the Pacific countries. Another aspect relates to understanding technically how the parametric triggers for payouts work, as Pacific governments are not familiar with such systems.

The Caribbean and Pacific regional organizations agreed to pursue broader and more sustained collaboration on the disaster risk reduction and climate change issues affecting SIDS, for transfer of expertise, technology and lessons learned. Areas chosen for particular attention include methodologies for generating climate information, and strategies for integrating disaster risk reduction into sectors such as agriculture, tourism,

water and sanitation, health and others. For the Pacific region, this collaboration will be led by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), which has the mandate to lead implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action for the Pacific, in coordination with UNDP Pacific Centre.