

Samoa Red Cross Society

A 'Climate of Change' in Samoa

Location: Apia, Samoa, 2006

Ground breaking work by the Samoa Red Cross is ensuring that the voices of vulnerable people are being heard in the climate change arena and that practical steps for reducing risk are being taken.

What does climate change mean for vulnerable groups in the Pacific, and how can the Red Cross assist in addressing it? Samoa Red Cross has been answering these tricky questions with some innovative work.

So what's the problem?

Global warming is caused by gases released from the burning of fuel. These gases trap the sun's heat, slowly raising the temperature on earth, which changes our climate. Climate change is likely to increase the intensity and frequency of weather related events such as floods, droughts and cyclones. It will also gradually raise sea levels and change the natural systems that we depend on for our livelihoods and well-being.

Many Pacific Island communities are already noticing changes that can be attributed to climate change. These changes are affecting the core mission of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement; to improve the lives of vulnerable people. To cope with a changing climate we need to reduce our vulnerabilities (also known as 'climate change adaptation').

Step 0. Where did it all begin?

In 2003 Pacific Red Cross Societies recognised the need to build their knowledge of climate change science and impacts, interact with players in the climate change sector and strengthen their skills in community based preparedness and action. In 2004 Samoa and Tuvalu Red Cross Societies volunteered to undertake pilot projects on climate change. After some initiation by the Pacific Delegation's Climate Change Officer in 2005, Samoa Red Cross was off and running.

Samoa holds some of the oldest weather records in the Pacific. These data show a steady increase in temperature and decrease in rainfall. Communities share this observation and identify

water scarcity as a big issue. Government departments also identified water as a key priority in the 'National Adaptation Programme of Action'.

Step 1. Education of Samoa Red Cross branch members, volunteers and staff

Samoa Red Cross recruited Maka Sapolu as the Climate Change/Disaster Preparedness Officer. He undertook a climate change workshop on Samoa's two main islands with Red Cross staff and volunteers. Samoa Red Cross then convened community leaders and government representatives to discuss integration of climate change with disaster management.

Step 2. Building a network and collecting information

The Samoa Red Cross established new contacts with Departments of Meteorology, Environment and Health, the National Disaster Management Office, Water Authority and NGO's to gather information on climate change science and policy. Climate change information was translated into Samoan with presentations emphasising implications for vulnerable people.



Figure 1: A young Samoa Red Cross volunteer talks at a workshop on climate change.

Step 3. Prioritising

A matrix of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) was used to analyse information collected and identify where Samoa Red Cross could be most effective addressing climate change. Samoa Red Cross has experience and strengths in first aid, disaster preparedness and response, water projects and blood donation.



It also has many young volunteers willing to assist those in need. Specific opportunities for Red Cross work on climate change include the areas of water availability and health impacts of disasters on vulnerable people.

Lessons Learnt

- Climate change directly affects the work of Samoa Red Cross, addressing these new risks is part of its core mandate to protect vulnerable people
- Adapting to climate change isn't just about building expensive sea walls - there are many low cost adaptation options that the Samoa Red Cross can assist with
- To address climate change, the Red Cross needs to build new networks and establish dialogues with all relevant stakeholders
- Climate change provides a new opportunity to disseminate Red Cross roles and principles to a wider audience

Where to from here?

Samoa Red Cross identified three core areas to work on in the coming year:

Advocacy:

- Be a voice for vulnerable groups using new links to Government Ministries

Action:

- Assist with interpretation of meteorological information such as weather warnings (nearly every village in Samoa has a different name for north, east, south and west!)
- Use Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments to assist vulnerable urban groups
- Find vulnerable groups in remote places using the government's aerial photography archives
- Work towards the sustainability of VCA projects by facilitating partnerships between vulnerable groups of women and the 'Women in Business' NGO

Awareness:

- Integrate climate change into disaster management training at the Red Cross

- Step up public health awareness utilising young volunteers and drama skits to reduce illness during drought and flooding
- A climate change/disaster preparedness special on the 'Do you know' TV program
- Assist other Red Cross societies to address climate risks



Figure 2. Samoa Red Cross have been undertaking climate change adaptation with vulnerable urban groups in Samoa's capital by providing an integrated approach to disaster preparedness, health and sustainable livelihoods

Conclusion

So why should a National Society become involved with climate change?

- To become an important voice for the most vulnerable in the climate change arena
- Climate change provides an additional argument for proactive disaster risk reduction and may offer new funding opportunities for these programs
- National Red Cross Societies are in a unique position to work with groups and individuals that governments may find difficult to reach
- National Societies can offer many low or no cost steps communities can take to reduce the impacts of climate change, from disaster preparedness to health

Climate Change is a social and economic issue that threatens livelihoods and cuts across many sectors such as health and disaster management. In the words of Samoa Red Cross "The Red Cross has a responsibility to work on climate change".

© International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Any part of this document may be cited, copied, translated into other languages or adapted to meet local needs without prior permission from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, provided that the source is clearly stated.

Samoa Red Cross National Headquarters
PO BOX 1616, Apia, Samoa
Email: samoaredcross@samoa.ws
Telephone: (+685) 23686

**International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,**
Pacific Delegation
PO BOX 2507, Government Buildings, Suva, FIJI
E-mail: bec.mcnaught@ifrc.org
Telephone: (+679) 3311855