

# Beyond Barriers: Tonga Case Study

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# Acknowledgements

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## About the research

This project is exploring opportunities for integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction programming, focusing on local practice and implications at the community level, while recognising that these are often shaped by national and regional policy frameworks. It seeks to capture local evidence of best practice and identify ways to strengthen and build on these models.

Phase 1 (2020–22) involved case studies across the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) Disaster READY program, including [Fiji](#), [Solomon Islands](#), [Vanuatu](#), [Timor-Leste](#) and [Papua New Guinea \(PNG\)](#). Phase 2 (commencing in 2022) extended data collection outside of AHP programming to validate findings using a wider regional dataset, including this case study in Tonga. Data for this case study was collected through desk review<sup>1</sup> and key informant interviews with stakeholders operating in Tonga. Recommendations from this work will inform future programming for actors working in Tonga, as well as feeding into ongoing discussions at the regional level in the Pacific.

The research is being undertaken by Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and supported by World Vision Australia through the AHP Disaster READY and Partnership and Performance Funds 2. These funding streams are managed by Alinea Whitelum on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

## About Humanitarian Advisory Group

HAG was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that contributes to excellence in humanitarian practice. As an ethically driven business, we combine humanitarian passion with entrepreneurial agility to think and do things differently.

## About Disaster READY

The Disaster READY initiative is part of the AHP, a five-year (2017–22), \$50 million partnership between DFAT and Australian NGOs to improve humanitarian response. Disaster READY was designed to strengthen disaster preparedness and management across the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

Disaster READY serves to strengthen local humanitarian capability in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, PNG and Timor-Leste so that communities are better prepared for and able to manage and respond to rapid and slow-onset disasters. This includes ensuring that the rights and needs of women, people with disabilities, youth and children are being upheld and met in disaster preparedness and response at all levels. In addition, Disaster READY helps government, NGOs, the private sector and communities coordinate more effectively for inclusive disaster preparedness and response, and national NGOs and churches to have more influence and capacity in countries' humanitarian systems.

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1 A literature review from this research was published in July 2020: [Beyond Barriers: Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific](#).

# Abbreviations

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CCA	climate change adaptation
CCP	Climate Change Policy
CCTF	Climate Change Trust Fund
CDP	Community Development Plan
DRM	disaster risk management
DRR	disaster risk reduction
GDP	gross domestic product
GPA	Government Priority Agenda
HTHH	Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai
JNAP	Joint National Action Plan
MEIDECC	Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications
NCCCC	National Climate Change Coordination Committee
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEF	National Emergency Fund
NEMC	National Emergency Management Committee
NEMO	National Emergency Management Office
NEMP	National Emergency Management Plan
NGO	non-government organisation
PCRIC	Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company
TC	tropical cyclone
TSDF II	Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VEMP	Village Emergency Management Plan

# Introduction

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Tonga is highly vulnerable to natural hazards, many of which are projected to be exacerbated by climate change. The Pacific is among the world's most vulnerable region to disasters, with Tonga ranking in the top three world's most vulnerable countries.<sup>2</sup> As a result, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) continue to be major priorities for the Tongan Government.

Tonga was the first country in the Pacific region to develop a Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management (DRM), an integrated plan to reduce the risks associated with disasters and climate change.<sup>3</sup> The Government of Tonga has made significant progress towards mainstreaming DRR and CCA across all sectors. This case study explores Tonga's progress in integrating CCA and DRR, identifying key themes and opportunities for stakeholders to advance approaches that reduce risk and enhance resilience at the community level in Tonga.

## Purpose of the case study

This case study aims to describe a country-specific approach to CCA and DRR integration and inform the strengthening of community-level outcomes. The study focuses on community programming in Tonga where Disaster READY is not active.

This case study will complement five other case studies of countries where Disaster READY is active, and additional Pacific-wide datasets which contributed to a [final report](#) addressing the overarching questions below.

1. What are the existing challenges and opportunities in the implementation of integrated DRR and CCA programming?
2. How can AHP programs strengthen the integration of DRR and CCA at the community level in case study countries?

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2 Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft (2021), World Risk Report 2021, <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/world-risk-report-2021-focus-social-protection>; WFP (2022), The Pacific, available at <https://www.wfp.org/countries/pacific>

3 Government of Tonga (2018), [Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management](#), Nukuálofa, Tonga.

## Definitions

**Disaster risk reduction (DRR):** Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>

**Climate change adaptation (CCA):** The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to the expected climate and its effects.<sup>5</sup>

**Integration:** In this report, the term 'integration' is used to refer to the integration of DRR and CCA, meaning the combination of interventions that address CCA and DRR with the intention of improving humanitarian and development outcomes for at-risk and crisis-affected populations.<sup>6</sup>

## Methodology

Data collection was led by a national researcher in Tonga and supported by HAG. The data collection process included a special focus on the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai (HTHH) volcanic eruption in January 2022 and recovery plan. The research used a qualitative approach, including a desk review of over 20 documents and key informant interviews with critical stakeholders (see Figure 1). The other case studies in this research initiative included community consultations in the data collection, but due to the limitations of the response and recovery, as well as COVID-19 outbreaks in Tonga, the research team did not undertake community-level data collection (see the 'Limitations' section below). The national researcher contextualised the research tools for Tonga.

Figure 1: Methodology



4 IPCC (2019) *Glossary*

5 *ibid.*

6 This is a working definition adapted from the Global Nutrition Cluster and will be further refined and explored through this research. Available at: [Developing an Integrated Approach to Humanitarian Emergency Preparedness and Response](#)

## Limitations

**HTHH response and recovery:** The HTHH volcanic eruption and tsunami damaged the submarine fibre optic cables, drastically restricting communication throughout Tonga and with the rest of the world. Response and recovery was ongoing during the data collection process, preventing community-level consultations for research purposes.

**COVID-19 context and restrictions:** National COVID-19 restrictions hindered field travel in Tonga, as well as the ability to conduct community focus group discussions and interview some critical stakeholders due to competing priorities. This prevented the research from obtaining in-depth understandings of community perceptions regarding DRR, CCA and integration between the two.

**Representativeness:** 17 stakeholders participated in interviews. These methods elicited a range of perspectives, but the small number of participants relative to the population of Tonga means that findings should be considered in tandem with other context-specific factors.

## Structure of this report

This report presents a brief snapshot of findings from data collection in four main sections:

- ▶ The first section provides an **overview of the disaster and climate context** in Tonga
- ▶ The second section provides an **overview of policy and practices** that influence DRR and CCA interventions and approaches
- ▶ The third section presents the **key findings and opportunities for stakeholders** in Tonga.

*Photo: Lilu Kilistina, Houmale'eia Beach in the Haápai Group.*



# Section 1: Setting the scene – the disaster and climate context in Tonga

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This section provides a brief overview of Tonga's climate and disaster risk, and the institutional arrangements that structure climate and disaster risk reduction efforts.

## Climate and disaster risk profile

The Kingdom of Tonga (Tonga) is an archipelago of 169 volcanic islands and low and raised coral islands in the south-west Pacific, of which only 36 islands are inhabited.<sup>7</sup> Tonga is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change due to its geographical location and socio-economic features.<sup>8</sup>

Existing and projected climate change and disaster-related impacts facing Tonga include:

-  Sea-level rise, ocean acidification, temperature rise and the increasing intensity of tropical cyclones, which continue to pose a threat to the people of Tonga and its natural environment<sup>9</sup>
-  Rising air temperature: since 1980, the mean maximum temperature at Fua'amotu, near the nation's capital, has increased at a rate of over 0.30°C per decade<sup>10</sup>
-  Drought: previous droughts have resulted in water shortages, decreased harvests and food shortages. These impacts will be exacerbated as the frequency and/or intensity of droughts increases due to climate change<sup>11</sup>
-  Inundation and flooding as a result of sea-level rise.<sup>12</sup> Coastal flooding events can also have devastating impacts on coastal infrastructure, increasing the risks to coastal populations<sup>13</sup>
-  Tropical cyclones. On average, Tonga experiences 17 tropical cyclones per decade, with most occurring during cyclone season (between November and April).<sup>14</sup> Recent tropical cyclones that have devastated Tonga include tropical cyclone (TC) Gita in 2018 (damages and economic losses of approximately USD 164 million, equivalent to 38% of gross domestic product [GDP]) and TC Harold in 2020 (damages and economic losses of approximately USD 124 million, equivalent to 23% of GDP).<sup>15</sup>

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7 SPC & SDC (n.d.), *Tonga*

8 Government of Tonga (2020), *Tonga's Second Nationally Determined Contribution*

9 Ibid

10 Government of Tonga (2019), *Third National Communication on Climate Change*

11 Government of Tonga (2020), *Tonga's Second Nationally Determined Contribution*

12 Ibid

13 Aucan. J (2018), 'Effects of Climate Change on Sea Levels and Inundation Relevant to the Pacific Islands. Pacific Marine Climate Change Report Card', *Science Review 2018*

14 Ibid

15 Government of Tonga (2021), *Tonga Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021-2035*

## Box 1: Spotlight on the HTHH volcano and tsunami double disaster

On January 15, 2022, the HTHH volcano erupted and generated a tsunami, devastating the island nation and its communities. The disaster resulted in four deaths, displacement of 1,525 people from 317 households, damage to 468 houses, loss and disruption of communications due to damage to the submarine fibre optics telecommunications cable, and harm to coastal infrastructure and the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors. Approximately 84% of the population was affected.<sup>16</sup> The World Bank, in its rapid post-disaster damage assessment, estimated the economic damage caused by the disaster to be TOP 208 million (USD 90.4 million).<sup>17</sup> The government, mainly the Disaster Management Department, led the biggest relief operation ever undertaken in Tonga. The Emergency Operations Centre was activated on January 14 (preceding the eruption) due to a tsunami marine warning issued by the Tonga Meteorological Services.<sup>18</sup> The initial relief operation concluded three months later.<sup>19</sup>

## Overview of governance

Tonga's DRR and climate change policies sit within the **Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC)**. Although the national governance structure locates climate change and DRR within separate departments (the Department of Climate Change and the National Emergency Management Office [NEMO] respectively - see Figures 2 and 3), there has been increasing momentum towards integrating the two policy fields.

## Key governing bodies

- The **National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)**, is responsible for the provision of an appropriate system of rules, regulation and planning to effectively implement and inform disaster management strategies for all government sectors and the public (see Figure 2).<sup>20</sup>
- The **Department of Climate Change** is responsible for the provision of an effective system to facilitate climate change mitigation, adaptation and the phasing out of ozone-depleting substances.<sup>21</sup> At the national level, the governance arrangement for climate change follows the arrangement that was established for Tonga's JNAP2 (see Figure 3).
- The main implementing focal point for the JNAP is the **JNAP Secretariat**, established in 2011 to manage the day-to-day operations of the JNAP and to coordinate implementation activities across government departments.<sup>22</sup>

16 Government of Tonga, (2022), *Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haápai Volcanic Eruption and Tonga Tsunami (HTHH Disaster) Recovery and Building Back Better Plan 2022 - 2025*

17 The World Bank (2022), *Tonga Volcanic Eruption and Tsunami: World Bank Disaster Assessment Report. Estimates Damages at US\$90M*, 14 February

18 Government of Tonga (2022), *Tonga National Emergency Management Office situation report #12, 29 January 2022*

19 Interview 14

20 Ministry of MEIDECC (2020), *Annual Report of the Minister for the Ministry of MEIDECC for Fiscal Year 2019 – 2020*

21 Ibid.

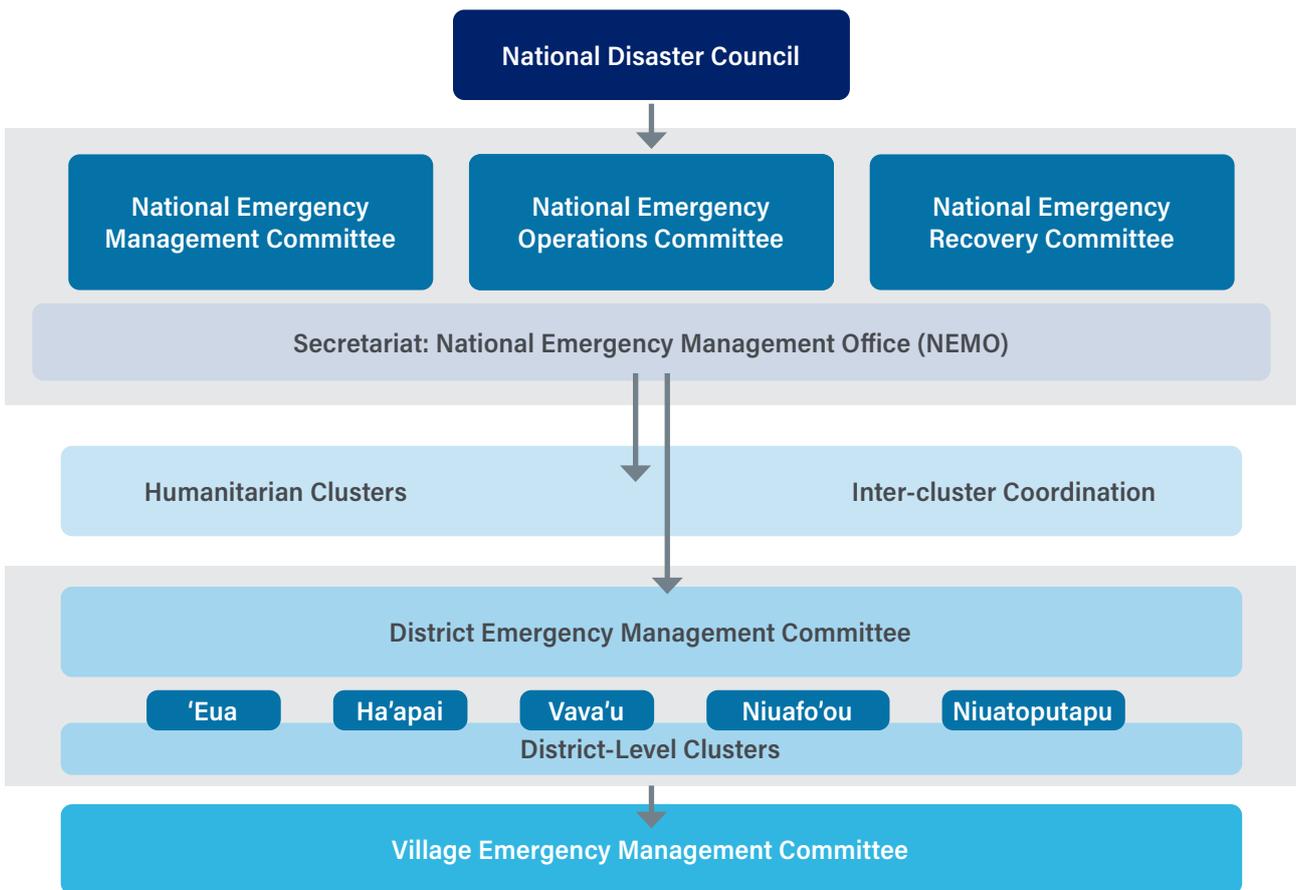
22 Government of Tonga (2019), *Third National Communication on Climate Change*

- As guided by the Tonga Emergency Management Act, 2007 (EMA), the Cabinet is the **National Disaster Council**. The National Disaster Council includes three tiers of execution at the national, district/islands and village levels.
- At the national level, three committees are responsible for Tonga's national emergency management operations: the **National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC)**, **National Emergency Operation Committee** and **National Emergency Recovery Committee**. The NEMO is the secretariat for all three committees.
- At the district level, a **District Emergency Management Committee** reports to the NEMC. At the village level, there is a **Village Emergency Management Committee**. The functions of these committees are detailed in the National Emergency Management Plan.<sup>23</sup>

## Governance arrangements for emergency management

NEMO is responsible for the provision of an appropriate system of rules, regulation and planning to effectively implement and inform disaster management strategies across all government sectors.<sup>24</sup> The overarching governance arrangement for disasters in Tonga is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Tonga's Emergency Governance Structure<sup>25</sup>



23 Government of Tonga (2021), *National Emergency Management Plan (Revised)*

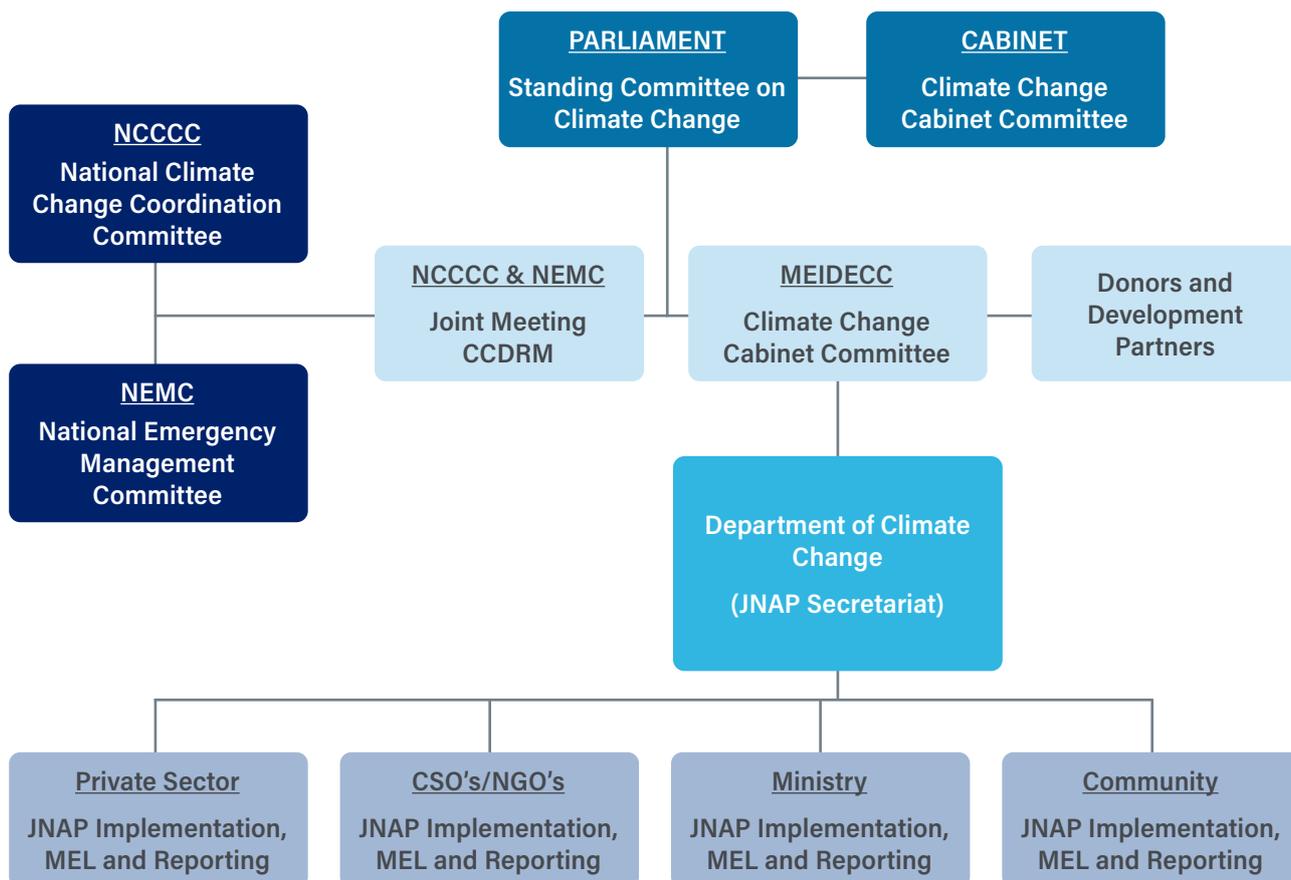
24 Government of Tonga (2020), *Annual Report of the Minister for the Ministry of MEIDECC for Fiscal Year 2019*

25 Government of Tonga (2021), *National Emergency Management Plan (Revised)*

# Governance arrangements for climate change

The Climate Change Department is responsible for the provision of an effective system in place to facilitate climate change mitigation and adaptation and the phasing out of ozone depleting substances. At the national level, the governance arrangement for climate change follows the arrangement that was established for Tonga's JNAP2 or Joint National Action Plan 2 for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2018 – 2028<sup>26</sup> (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Climate Governance in Tonga - The JNAP management structure



26 Government of Tonga (2018), *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP 2) 2018-2028*

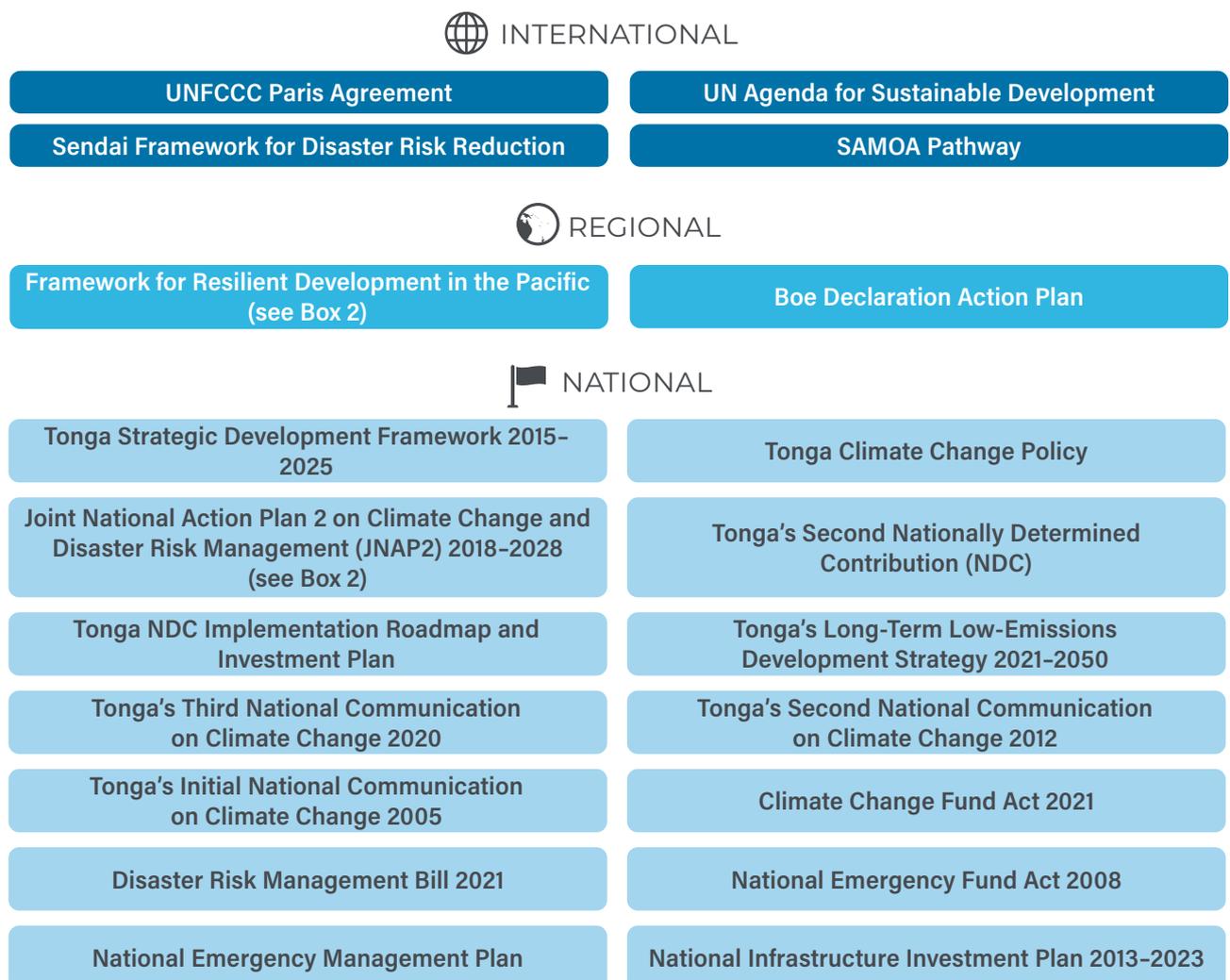
# Section 2: Lay of the land – Policy and practice in Tonga

This section provides a brief overview of Tonga’s climate and disaster risk, and the institutional arrangements that structure climate and disaster risk reduction efforts in Tonga – the context in which implementing agencies operate.

## Snapshot of key policies, plans and frameworks for DRR and CCA

Building resilience to both disasters and climate change is a key priority for the Tongan government, as demonstrated in its Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025 (TSDF II). The TSDF II details the national plan for resilience; one of its key outcomes is ‘a more inclusive, sustainable and effective land administration and environment management, with resilience to climate change and risk’.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 3: Key plans, policies and frameworks for DRR and CCA in Tonga



27 Government of Tonga (2015), *Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025*

## Box 2: Tonga Climate Change Policy & Joint National Action Plan

The JNAP2 was developed with the vision for 'A Tonga that is resilient to the impacts of climate change and climate-related disaster risks, and is able to protect and safeguard its present and future citizens.'<sup>28</sup> The CCP seeks to achieve this through three strategic goals: strengthened integrated risk management to enhance climate and disaster resilience; low-carbon development; and strengthened disaster preparedness, response and recovery specific targets.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear vision, goal, and objectives to direct Tonga's responses to the effects of climate change and to guide DRR over the years. The objectives of the CCP became the JNAP2's objectives, hence the achievements of the JNAP2's targets will ultimately fulfill the policy's targets.

When the first iteration of the JNAP was issued, Tonga became the first country in the Pacific to have developed a joint action plan for CCA and DRM. The JNAP has helped Tonga refocus its resources on implementation of DRM, including CCA, in various sectors. Implementation of the JNAP (and JNAP2) is led by the Department of Climate Change and the JNAP Secretariat, established in 2011 to manage the day-to-day operations of the JNAP and to coordinate implementation activities across the various sectors of government.<sup>29</sup>

The JNAP2 provides the strategic action plan for both the TSDF II and the Tonga CCP. Its mission is 'To develop a resilient Tonga through an inclusive, participatory approach that is based on good governance, builds knowledgeable, proactive communications and supports a strong, sustainable development pathway'.<sup>30</sup>

The Tonga Disaster Risk Management Bill was passed by Tonga's Legislative Assembly in August 2021, and is currently awaiting royal assent prior to becoming an Act.<sup>31</sup> This Act is crucial as its purpose is to establish a coherent, legal, institutional and regulatory framework for:

- Planning and management of DRR and preparedness activities before a disaster occurs
- Coordinating emergency response during a disaster
- Facilitating disaster recovery work following a disaster.<sup>32</sup>

This new Act will establish Tonga's governance and institutional frameworks for the coordination of both Tonga's emergency management and DRR activities.<sup>33</sup>

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28 Government of Tonga (2016), *Tonga Climate Change Policy*

29 Government of Tonga (2019), *Third National Communication on Climate Change*

30 Government of Tonga (2016), *Tonga Climate Change Policy*

31 Office of the Legislative Assembly (2021), *Acts passed by the Legislative Assembly in its 2021 session*

32 Government of Tonga (2021), *Disaster Risk Management Bill 2021*

33 Pokharel, S. (2021), 'Shifting the paradigm: emergency management to disaster risk management in Tonga', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, January 2021 Edition

### Box 3: Snapshot of DRR and CCA financing mechanisms

Tonga receives funding from various multilateral and bilateral sources, as well as from the government's national budget for disaster-related projects and activities. There are also specific funds for disasters, including the:

#### Contingency Fund

Tonga's Public Finance Management Act (2002) sets a contingency fund with a maximum of 5% of the annual budget to cover unforeseen expenditures, including but not exclusive to disasters.<sup>34</sup>

#### National Emergency Fund (NEF)

The National Emergency Fund Act (2008) provides the primary mechanism for financing emergency response and recovery in Tonga. The NEF, administered by the Ministry of Finance, was established in 2008 to provide resources for timely, efficient relief and reconstruction in any emergency, including natural and human-made hazards, health emergencies, and outbreaks.<sup>35</sup>

#### Contingent financing

Tonga has access to the Asian Development Bank's Policy-Based Contingent Disaster Financing Instrument. The Government of Tonga is in discussions with the World Bank (at the time of writing) on development policy financing with a catastrophe-deferred drawdown option.<sup>36</sup> Both instruments provide contingency grants that may be withdrawn after the agreed-upon trigger in an emergency, allowing for rapid liquidity.

#### Sovereign insurance

Tonga has purchased parametric insurance coverage for earthquake, tsunami, and tropical cyclone risk from the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRIC). PCRIC's coverage focuses on emergency losses, which are estimated using a modelled representation of the event based on hazard parameters and calculation of total physical damages.<sup>37</sup>

#### Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF)

The CCTF was established as part of the Climate Resilient Sector Project in 2013, as a climate financing mechanism to meet the needs of the most vulnerable sectors and communities in Tonga through a small grants scheme. The CCTF is the first and only existing national fund for climate change in the Pacific region.<sup>38</sup>

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34 Government of Tonga (2021), *Tonga Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021-2035*

35 *ibid.*

36 World Bank (2020), *Tonga second resilience development policy operation with a catastrophe-deferred drawdown option*

37 Government of Tonga (2021), *Tonga Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021-2035*

38 UNFCCC (n.d.), *Tonga Climate Change Trust Fund - Tonga*

# Overview of DRR/CCA programming

In addition to the national government's line ministries/departments, various non-government, community based organisations (NGOs and CBOs), and donors are actively involved in disaster and climate change-related works throughout Tonga, from the national level down to the village/ community level:

- Civil Society Forum of Tonga
- Tonga Red Cross Society
- Caritas Tonga
- Live and Learn Tonga
- MORDI Tonga Trust
- Tonga Community Development Trust
- Tonga National Youth Congress
- Tonga Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship.
- Asian Development Bank
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- European Union
- Japan International Cooperation Agency
- New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

*Photo: Shutterstock*



# Section 3: Integration in action – Findings and Opportunities



## Finding 1: Approaches in Tonga are increasingly overcoming conceptual siloes that have separated DRR and CCA.

**'The commonality between the two is the people. Both DRR and CCA are for the people. [...] It makes more sense to use an integrated approach and work collaboratively, as we are all working for the same reason – for the benefit of the Tongan people.' (National actor)<sup>39</sup>**

Stakeholders in Tonga have made significant progress in holistically conceptualising and addressing DRR and CCA in an integrated way. One respondent challenged the working definition of integration as proposed by this research, claiming that 'integration of DRR and CCA is basically resilience.'<sup>40</sup> Participants reflected on key differences between the two, including that DRR addresses some hazards that are not climate related,<sup>41</sup> and the longer-term impacts that drive CCA approaches.<sup>42</sup> However, it was widely recognised that the similarities between the two are more compelling than their differences.

**'The two are overlapping, in my personal opinion. CCA is adapting to changes in the climate and environment while DRR deals with hazards like preparing for future disasters. Both have similar goals which include reducing impacts.' (National Actor)<sup>43</sup>**

Stakeholders reflected that integration is important for the primary benefit of communities.<sup>44</sup> Having faced several significant disasters in recent years, stakeholders were unified by the common goal of helping the Tongan people not only recover and rebuild, but build their resilience. Interviews demonstrated strong progress towards integration of DRR and CCA, with *all* participants interviewed stating their organisations had adopted integrated approaches to resilience in their programming. For example, one participant reflected on the need to align approaches with community ways of thinking, therefore taking a unified approach.<sup>45</sup> Another spoke to their organisation's recovery plans responding to the HTHH disaster, promoting resilience in a way that increases adaptation to climate change. Stakeholders also spoke of the various ways in which their organisations promoted engagement and participation through their integrated programs. For example, participants stated their organisation had established training programs on DRR-CCA integration,<sup>46</sup> while another highlighted how they engaged local communities and farmers to help implement their activities.<sup>47</sup>

Stakeholders highlighted a wide range of benefits available from integrated approaches. A government stakeholder noted that integration of DRR and CCA was essential for protecting the livelihoods of Tongan communities, by ensuring local businesses were resilient to shocks and impacts resulting from climate and disaster-related events.<sup>48</sup> Another actor emphasised that linking DRR

39 Interview 14

40 Interview 7

41 Interview 2

42 Interviews 2, 4, 5, 14

43 Interview 2

44 Interviews 1, 6–8, 10

45 Interview 10

46 Interviews 1, 7

47 Interview 8

48 Interview 9

and CCA was essential to their organisation's 'do-no-harm' approach, stating that the safeguarding of natural habitat was a core consideration in their operations.<sup>49</sup> Other examples highlighted by stakeholders included recognition of DRR-CCA integration as cost-effective in the long term, while it was noted that integrated approaches were essential to improving social protection measure through better understandings of distinctive and disproportionate vulnerabilities faced by women and girls.<sup>50</sup>

**'We use an integrated approach because we are all about building and strengthening the resilience of the Tongan communities.' (National actor)<sup>51</sup>**



### Opportunities:

Continue to drive resilience as a key priority, continuously reflected in policy, practice and language

Ensure that community priorities are centralised in communication around resilience. Avoid perpetuating divides and siloes that do not align with community perspectives or concepts

Explore lessons and opportunities from the HTHH response and recovery to advance progress on DRR-CCA integration, through identifying best practice examples and gaps between policy and action



## Finding 2: Increasingly integrated policy frameworks and governance mechanisms at the national level contribute to programmatic approaches to integration.

The policy framework and governance journey in Tonga has evolved significantly to provide an integrated policy platform. For example, the 2014 merging of Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change to be housed under one Ministry – MEIDECC – has been seen as a significant step towards increasing resilience in policy and practice.<sup>52</sup>

**'Our work is aligned to the relevant, regional and international resilience policy frameworks [...] This means that what we roll out in the communities are all in line with the existing policy frameworks.'<sup>53</sup>**

Interview data suggests that integration at the national level contributes to integration at the sub-national or community level. Many respondents reflected on the linkages between their organisation's integrated programmatic approaches and how they align to integrated policy structures; for example, one participant noted that plans and policies at the national level help influence programs delivered at the local level.<sup>54</sup> Target 12 of the JNAP 2 focuses on strengthening the capacity and awareness of local communities on DRR-CCA.<sup>55</sup>

49 Interview 8

50 Interview 10

51 Interview 6

52 Interviews 2, 3, 6, 10

53 Interview 6

54 Interview 2

55 Government of Tonga (2018), *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP 2) 2018-2028*

‘When integration exists at the national policies and plans, they also happen to some extent to those [at] the local level.’ (National actor)<sup>56</sup>

Several organisations spoke of their Community Development Plans (CDPs) and Village Emergency Management Plans (VEMPs) (see Box 3) as examples of integrated approaches aligned with policy priorities, such as the National Emergency Management Plan (NEMP) and the JNAP 2.<sup>57</sup> Other examples of good practice was the CCTF and Climate Change Fund Act. They were viewed as being inclusive of all relevant sectors and stakeholders, including local communities. The CCTF is a dedicated fund for communities to use for CCA and DRR activities.<sup>58</sup> These examples indicate links between existing structures or plans at the community level and national-level policy.<sup>59</sup>

#### Box 4: Disaster and emergency management at the local level

**Community Development Plans** are community-led and formulated plans designed specifically to address the community-identified needs and issues related to emergency management in Tongan communities.<sup>60</sup> The CDPs align closely to Phase 2 of the Tonga Rural Innovation Project, which aims to improve the livelihoods of communities and strengthen their resilience to disasters and climate change impacts with a focus on resilient infrastructure and agricultural training and production.<sup>61</sup>

‘The CDPs were developed in a bottom-up approach. We only facilitated the discussions and the communities did most of the work, giving them ownership and the opportunity to always take the lead. The CDPs can be replicated in other Pacific countries. These CDPs can also be continuously reviewed and revised to meet the changing needs of the local communities.’ (National actor)<sup>62</sup>

**Village Emergency Management Plans** are community-designed plans designed to strengthen the resilience of Tongan villages to emergency and disaster risks. The Government of Tonga’s Emergency Management Act mandates the establishment of emergency management committees to implement and coordinate emergency management plans at the national, island/district and village levels.<sup>63</sup>

‘The VEMPs have both DRR and CCA considerations and its development was led by the communities themselves. I see community ownership in the VEMPs and it’s different from the usual top-down approach like in the NEMP. VEMPs are also available in Tongan language which is readable by the Tongan communities.’ (National actor)<sup>64</sup>

56 Interview 2

57 Interview 1, 8, 11

58 Interview 3

59 Interviews 10, 11,

60 Government of Tonga (2015), *How the community plans formulated?*

61 IFAD (2021), *Tonga 2000001197: TRIP interim (mid-term) review report November 2021*

62 Interview 8

63 Government of Tonga (2021), *Tonga strategic roadmap for emergency and disaster risk management 2021-2023*

64 Interview 11

The relationship between policy and practice, however, is inconsistent; some participants reflected that there was a gap in how policies were reaching communities.<sup>65</sup> Contextualisation and translation of policy into the Tongan language was mentioned as a way to improve community engagement.<sup>66</sup> While community members' development of CDPs and VEMPs has helped to overcome this barrier, many national policies do not reach communities in an accessible format, if at all.

**'I do not see any relationship between the policy framework and integrated approaches at the community level ... dissemination of the policy is just at the government level, rarely reaching communities.'**<sup>67</sup>

There is greater scope for communities to influence national-level policies. Examples were referenced of the missed opportunity of policies being developed at the government level then shared with other stakeholders, including communities, rather than consulting with communities in developing the policies.<sup>68</sup>

**'[The JNAP2] was developed with contributions from all relevant stakeholders including NGOs – a plus for inclusivity. It's also underpinned by various principles including the integration of climate change and DRR and community ownership, which emphasises opportunities for contributions from the communities.'** (National actor)<sup>69</sup>

Several stakeholders emphasised the importance of inclusivity in the development of plans and policies and the design of programs (see Box 5). In addition, many highlighted the opportunity for policies at the national level to better incorporate traditional knowledge and practices used at the community level, emphasising how these can complement science-based approaches and benefit approaches to DRM at the national, island/district and community levels.<sup>70</sup>

**'Tongan knowledge is used for timing the planting of crops like yams according to the Tongan calendar, various fishing practices according to the phases of the moon and also natural signs from animals and plants for forecasting of weather events like for tropical cyclones. However, I think there's limited records of traditional knowledge, something that needs strengthening in Tonga.'** (National actor)<sup>71</sup>

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65 Interview 4

66 Interview 1

67 Interview 4

68 Interviews 1, 2, 4, 10

69 Interview 2

70 Interviews 8, 11

71 Interview 2

## Box 5: Inclusion at all levels is fundamental to integration

**'Inclusivity is vital because different groups play different roles and have different capacities thus all provide different experience and perspectives. The majority of the most vulnerable individuals in a community are the marginalised groups.'** (National actor)<sup>72</sup>

The importance of inclusive integrated approaches is recognised in Tonga's guiding integrated frameworks and in practice.<sup>73</sup> For example, one of the outcomes in the national umbrella policy, TSDF II, is:

**'A more inclusive, sustainable and effective land administration and environment management, with resilience to climate change and risk.'**<sup>74</sup>

Further, some of the JNAP 2's guiding principles emphasise the importance of inclusivity; the realisation of a 'Resilient Tonga' will require strong community ownership, participation and collaboration. Equity, fairness and gender inclusivity are also among the plan's guiding principles.<sup>75</sup>

This progress is significant and there is scope to extend operationalisation of the policies into practice. For example, disability inclusion was raised as an area that needed to be strengthened in line with what has been set out in guiding policies.<sup>76</sup> Examples included ensuring that information is tailored to people living with disabilities, strengthening collaboration between organisations that focus on the needs of people living with disabilities and other actors, and ensuring that resilience approaches also promote accessibility.<sup>77</sup>

**'The issue for me is the implementation of the policies. Like we have inclusiveness in the policies but when we implement our activities, we do not include everybody, for example, the people living with disabilities. This is often raised as an issue where people living with disabilities are not often involved.'** (National actor)<sup>78</sup>



### Opportunities:

Facilitate and support the development and monitoring/review of CDPs and VEMPs

Support the development of information, including dissemination of policies, into Tongan language

Strengthen the linkages between policy and practice, particularly with respect to meaningful inclusion from planning to implementation

Support opportunities for communities to influence policies at the national level; for example, integration of traditional knowledge and practice

72 Interview 5

73 Government of Tonga (2015), *Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025*; Government of Tonga (2018), *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP 2) 2018-2028*; Interviews 1, 3, 5, 6

74 Government of Tonga (2015), *Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025*, p. 59

75 Government of Tonga (2018), *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP 2) 2018-2028*, p 26 and 27

76 Interviews 1, 2, 11

77 Interview 8

78 Interview 1



### Finding 3: Coordination mechanisms for DRR and CCA can be strengthened to facilitate more effective integration.

All stakeholders interviewed were aware of the existing coordination mechanisms and described them as effective, albeit primarily at a high level. Within Tonga's CCA Management structure (see Figure 2), NCCCC and NEMC hold a regular joint meeting to provide high-level oversight, policy guidance and coordination of DRR and CCA activities.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the JNAP Task Force and NGO Forum is a multi-sector NGO working group consisting of private sector organisations, CSOs, NGOs, ministries, and community groups.<sup>80</sup>

Respondents perceived coordination mechanisms to be less effective at the sub-national and local levels.<sup>81</sup> Both coordination mechanisms are government-led and often perceived to be top down and lack meaningful engagement with key actors.<sup>82</sup>

**'These forums are effective only at a high level, when it comes to its effectiveness and practicality at a community level, I am not fully aware of this happening.' (National actor)<sup>83</sup>**

Non-government organisation representation in coordination meetings was perceived to be generally low, resulting in limited opportunities for meaningful engagement.<sup>84</sup> Key actors were often excluded from coordination meetings, while the NGO Forum is currently inactive.<sup>85</sup>

**'Often, [NGOs] are invited to be presented with final products but not included right from the planning and consultation phase. NGOs need to be given the opportunity to provide feedback and have a say in the matters rather than just being invited to be just present.' (National actor)<sup>86</sup>**

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79 Interview 5

80 Interview 5

81 Interviews 1–3

82 Interviews 2, 4, 10

83 Interview 4

84 Interviews 1, 10

85 Interview 10

86 Interview 1

## Box 6: Strengthening communication in coordination

**'Communication is key to coordinating these forums and this is something I feel that the government can actually improve on, to ensure that the forums are not only inclusive but also effective.' (National actor)<sup>87</sup>**

Communication and information sharing in DRR and CCA coordination mechanisms were perceived as poor,<sup>88</sup> and linked to the issues around representation of different actors. For example, respondents spoke of the barriers in information sharing between government ministries and NGOs.<sup>89</sup> One respondent stated that the National Water Tank Project, which involved NGOs and government agencies working together, was affected by a lack of coordination between the two groups. They claimed this resulted in data duplication and wasted resources.<sup>90</sup>

Whilst there was an identified need to strengthen communication to enhance effective coordination, evidence of positive examples of information sharing and coordination at the community level emerged.<sup>91</sup> For example, one respondent stated their organisation had created a referral pathway, allowing for a simple and accessible process for information sharing within the community.<sup>92</sup>



### Opportunities:

Prioritise active representation and participation of vulnerable groups and NGOs in coordination mechanisms and implement aligned communication pathways

Establish standard practice or guidance around information sharing with communities and external stakeholders, including the use of the Tongan language

Build upon existing examples of two-way community-level information management approaches to promote scale-up across communication systems

87 Interview 2

88 Interviews 2, 4

89 Interview 1

90 Interview 6

91 Interview 1

92 Interview 1



## Finding 4: Recovery planning for the most recent disaster indicates that the integration of DRR and CCA will be fundamental in future efforts to build resilience in Tonga.

The devastation caused by the HTHH volcano and tsunami (refer to Box 1 on page 8) put considerable stress on actors supporting communities in the response and transition to recovery. As damaging as this compound disaster has been, it provides an opportunity for updating and strengthening strategy and renewing urgency around building community resilience. Other case studies in this series have demonstrated the links between devastating disasters and strategic drives to strengthen integration.<sup>93</sup>

Since the HTHH disaster, assistance in various forms has poured into Tonga from bilateral and multilateral partners, development and humanitarian partners and the Tongan diaspora.<sup>94</sup> In other countries, this type of drastic increase in funding and international attention has led to increased resources devoted to long-term resilience projects, not only to repair damage in the immediate aftermath of disaster, but for DRR and CCA activities in the years that follow.<sup>95</sup> For example, in Vanuatu, TC Pam in 2015 has been consistently referenced as contributing heavily to the country's extensive update of plans and policies and drive towards integration of DRR and CCA.<sup>96</sup> The HTHH disaster recovery plan (see Box 6) can further strengthen and build upon Tonga's progress towards the integration of DRR and CCA in resilience efforts.

**'The plan is already there. Now, we just need to implement it with the assistance of donors, development partners and other relevant stakeholders, not forgetting the local communities.'**<sup>97</sup>

93 Humanitarian Advisory Group & World Vision Australia (2021-2022), *Beyond Barriers Case Studies: Papua New Guinea; Solomon Islands; Vanuatu*

94 Government of Tonga (2022), *Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haápai (HTHH) Volcanic Eruption & Resulting Tsunami & COVID-19 Response – SitRep #60*

95 Humanitarian Advisory Group & World Vision Australia (2021-2022), *Beyond Barriers case studies: Fiji; Papua New Guinea; Vanuatu*

96 Humanitarian Advisory Group & World Vision Australia (2021-2022), *Beyond Barriers: Vanuatu case study*

97 Interview 14

Photo: Shutterstock



## Box 7: The recovery plan

**'Building back better and resilience are elements evident right throughout the plan. Focusing on vulnerable populations is another element. The plan rightly focuses on resilience building as we don't just want recovery but also resilience to future disasters.' (National actor)<sup>98</sup>**

The HTHH Disaster Recovery and Building Back Better Plan 2022–2025 was developed by the Government of Tonga, and endorsed by the Cabinet in March 2022, to meet recovery and reconstruction needs. Importantly, the recovery plan priorities articulate the importance of fostering climate and disaster resilience, and can be the basis for managing similar disasters in the future. Additionally, the plan was developed as a resource mobilisation tool for future recovery activities.<sup>99</sup>

The purpose of the recovery plan is to rebuild residential and non-residential, infrastructure, lives and livelihoods of the affected islands, with a vision of 'recovery with greater resilience'.<sup>100</sup> The concept of rebuilding back better is utilised in the plan to support the national impact of Tonga's overarching development framework, the Tonga Strategic Development Framework II, 2015 – 2025.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the recovery plan focuses on recovery of the affected areas in four priority sectors: housing recovery, food security and livelihoods, tourism, and public infrastructure.

The vision for the HTHH recovery plan is recovery with greater resilience, with emphasis on:

- inclusive and sustainable recovery process for the current and future generations of Tonga
- inclusive process that is resilient in the face of climate change, natural disasters and health shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic
- inclusive recovery that ensures that the marginalized and vulnerable people are not left behind.

The plan notes several risk reduction proposals for the mitigation of future risks, such as relocation to higher ground from coastal areas (including tourist resorts), rebuilding of coastal protection foreshores, replanting of crops/trees and raising local communities' awareness about disaster management.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Tonga shortly after the HTHH disaster limited community consultation and input into the development of the plan; however, implementation of the plan will rely heavily on communities.<sup>102</sup> As the COVID-19 situation continues to stabilise, there may be more opportunities to strengthen community feedback on and engagement in the plan's direction.<sup>103</sup> For example, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of recovery efforts can focus on the needs of local communities and ensure that their priorities are reflected.<sup>104</sup> It was also suggested that the HTHH Plan be reviewed alongside CDPs and VEMPs to better align local and national priorities, and that CDPs and VEMPs be updated to incorporate relevant elements of the HTHH Plan.<sup>105</sup>

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98 Interview 14

99 Government of Tonga (2022), *Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haápai Volcanic Eruption and Tonga Tsunami (HTHH Disaster) Recovery and Building Back Better Plan 2022-2025*

100 Government of Tonga (2022), *Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haápai Volcanic Eruption and Tonga Tsunami (HTHH Disaster) Recovery and Building Back Better Plan 2022-2025*

101 Government of Tonga (2015), *Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025*,

102 Interviews 6, 14

103 Interviews 12–14

104 Interview 12

105 Interview 13

The Government of Tonga's leadership on integration in the recovery and beyond is further demonstrated in other government planning documents. For example, the Government Priority Agenda (GPA) 2022–2024 names 'resilience' as one of its three priority thematic areas, the others being people focus and economic recovery.<sup>106</sup> The GPA acknowledges the importance of mainstreaming resilience into all economic, reconstruction and recovery activities, demonstrating that resilience is being prioritised across the Government's policies, both in terms of an integrated approach to CCA and DRR and integrating resilience across all areas.



### Opportunities:

Ensure that the implementation of the HTHH Plan translates into consistent incorporation of resilience into recovery

Share lessons learned in Tonga with other Pacific countries to support further integration of DRR and CCA in practice throughout the region

Advocate for regular monitoring and evaluation of the plan and opportunities for community members to provide feedback

106 Government of Tonga (2022), *Government of Tonga Budget Statement for year ending 30th June 2022*

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## Summary: Snapshot of findings and opportunities

There is significant opportunity to build on the good practice and progress that is being made in policies and operational practices to enhance community outcomes related to DRR and CCA in Tonga. Four key findings and corresponding opportunities for consideration by implementing agencies are summarised below. Future phases of this research may seek to deepen the dataset and implement and assess recommendations designed to link evidence to impact.

 Key findings	 Opportunities
<p>Approaches in Tonga are increasingly overcoming conceptual siloes that have separated DRR and CCA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue to drive resilience as a key priority, continuously reflected in policy, practice and language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that community priorities are centralised in communication around resilience. Avoiding perpetuating divides and siloes that do not align with community perspectives or concepts</li> </ul>
<p>Increasingly integrated policy frameworks and governance mechanisms at the national level contribute to programmatic approaches to integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate and support the development and monitoring/review of CDPs and VEMPs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support the development of information, including dissemination of policies, in Tongan language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strengthen the linkages between policy and practice, particularly with respect to meaningful inclusion from planning to implementation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support opportunities for communities to influence policies at the national level; for example, integration of traditional knowledge and practice</li> </ul>
<p>Coordination mechanisms for DRR and CCA can be strengthened to facilitate more effective integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prioritise active representation and participation of vulnerable groups and NGOs in coordination mechanisms and implement aligned communication pathways</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Establish standard practice or guidance around information sharing with communities and external stakeholders, including the use of the Tongan language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Build upon existing examples of two-way community-level information management approaches to promote scale-up across communication systems</li> </ul>
<p>Recovery planning for the most recent disaster indicates that the integration of DRR and CCA will be fundamental in future efforts to build resilience in Tonga</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the implementation of the HTHH Plan translates into consistent incorporation of resilience into recovery</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Share lessons learned in Tonga with other Pacific countries to support further integration of DRR and CCA in practice throughout the region</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for regular monitoring and evaluation of the plan and opportunities for community members to provide feedback</li> </ul>