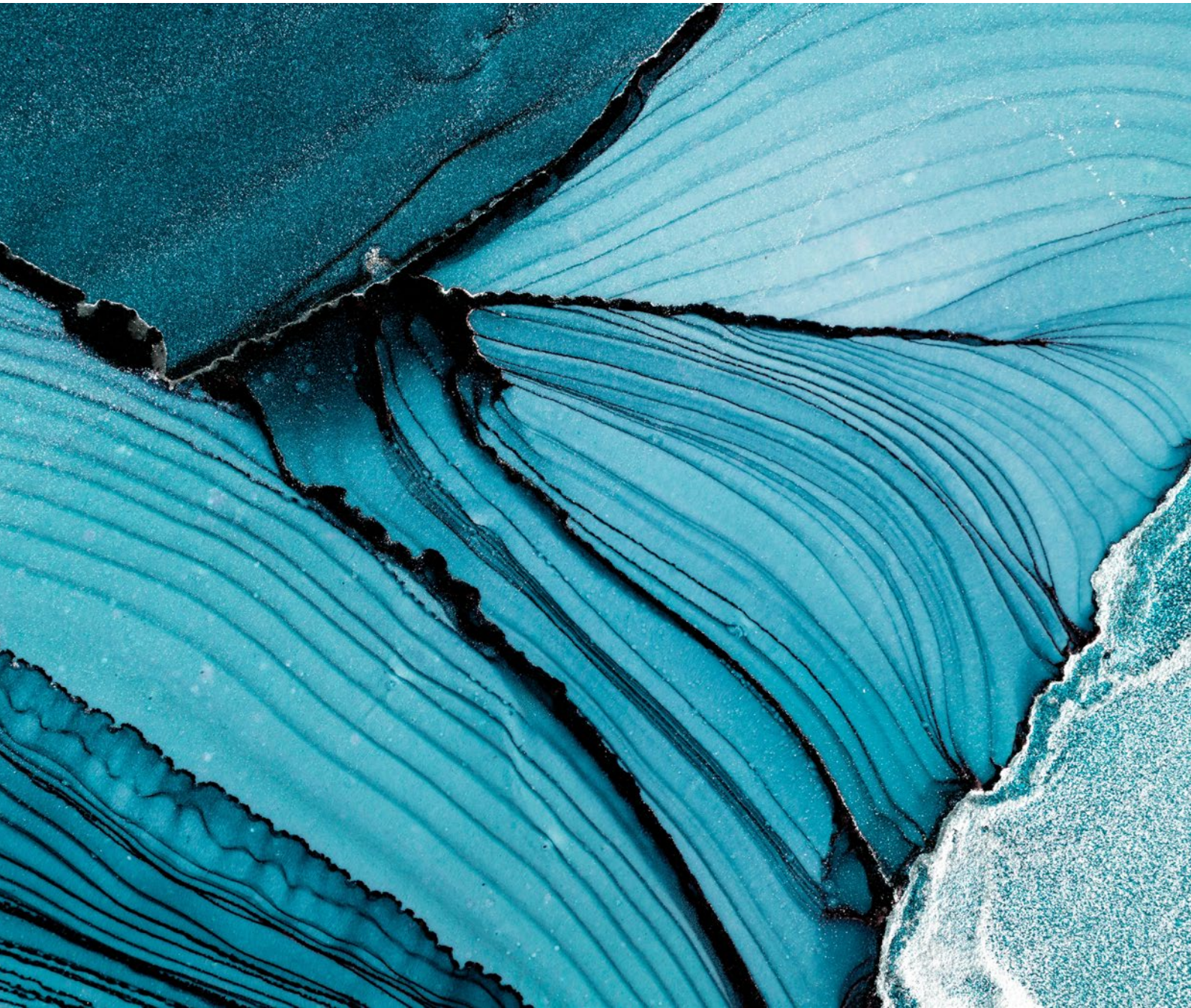




# GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS!

Building a shared agenda for operational actors on non-economic loss and damage in the Pacific Islands



PRACTICE PAPER SERIES



HUMANITARIAN  
ADVISORY GROUP



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The **Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme** is the regional organisation established by the Governments and Administrations of the Pacific charged with protecting and managing the region's environment and natural resources.

**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.



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## About Humanitarian Horizons 2021-24

Humanitarian Horizons 2021–24 is the second iteration of HAG’s partnership-based, sector-wide research program. Focusing on Asia and the Pacific, Humanitarian Horizons aims to progress thinking on the role of the humanitarian sector and produce evidence about ways to achieve better outcomes for crisis-affected people.

The research program for 2021–24 builds on achievements of the 2018–21 iteration and HAG’s experience supporting the sector for almost 10 years. Humanitarian Horizons has three interlocking streams: 1) Power, People and Local Leadership, 2) Greening the System and 3) Real-Time Analysis and Influence. It is underpinned by a fourth stream focused on governance, accountability, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

## About practice papers

The Real-Time Analysis and Influence Stream aims to provide timely exploration of emerging issues and thematic areas across the humanitarian sector and to produce practice papers. Practice papers are concise and high-level analysis pieces intended to inform humanitarian response practices and support decision-making and discussions about future action.

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# Introduction

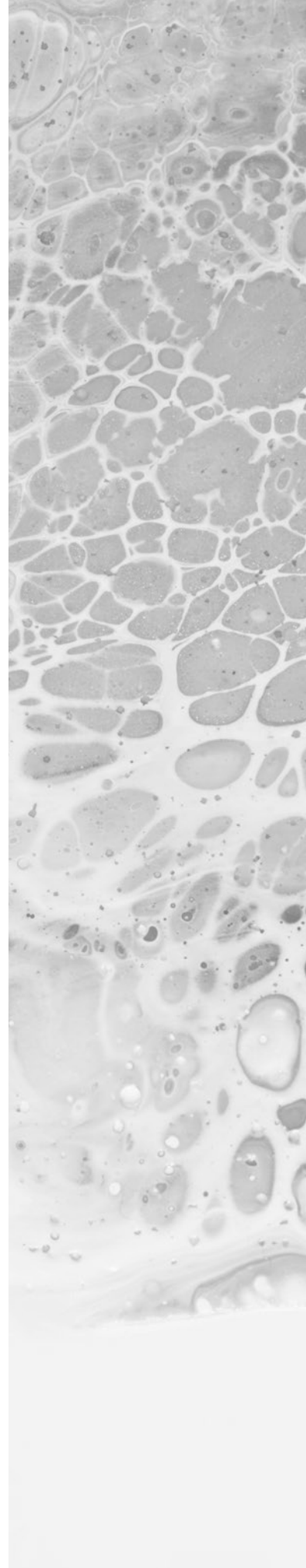
The Pacific Islands are amongst the countries most vulnerable to climate change globally. Higher temperatures are inflicting wide-ranging impacts on the region, including sea-level rise and an increase in the frequency and severity of climatic hazards.<sup>1</sup> Communities are already witnessing a range of impacts due to these changes in climate, resulting in significant and fundamental shifts in the way they live, where they live, and a loss of what they value.

“ A loss is a heartbreaking feeling of losing something that is very valuable to oneself, and even if you recover back some losses, there are very strong connections that you might not get back. It’s a loss within a loss of its own.”<sup>2</sup>  
(Pacific researcher)

Over the last two decades, non-economic loss and damage (NELD) has emerged as a concept distinct from economic loss and damage such as that related to property, infrastructure, homes and livelihoods, and is prominent in UNFCCC key commitments. The establishment of mechanisms such as the Warsaw International Mechanism on loss and damage under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2013), the Paris Agreement (2015) and the Santiago Network, and the creation of the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (2023) – including through the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) – have been important steps in driving the NELD agenda.

Pacific Island advocates and governments have been key stakeholders in these global initiatives, spearheading international discussions and momentum on this crucial issue for more than 30 years, and driving action and advocacy across the region. In recent years, Pacific researchers have also undertaken significant work with communities across the region to explore their perspectives of the nature and scope of NELD.

Currently, most work on NELD is being undertaken in the research and policy spaces. The value of NELD cannot easily be expressed in monetary terms, which has left them mostly neglected in climate-risk and cost estimates. As a result, although NELD are vital to those affected, how to define and frame them remains ongoing within normative debates of what losses the global community are willing to accept because of unmitigated climate change. However, NELD is becoming an emerging consideration for climate and development actors working with communities in Pacific Island countries. Yet, as humanitarian work focuses predominantly on quantifiable losses there is a gap in understanding how humanitarian actors can engage with NELD, for what purposes, and in which spaces. Consequently, there is timely opportunity to develop a shared understanding of key NELD priorities and ways of working with communities in response to them across climate, development and humanitarian actors.



## WHAT DOES THIS PAPER DO?

This practice paper seeks to address this knowledge gap for humanitarian, climate and development actors seeking to incorporate NELD considerations into their practice in the Pacific Islands by:

1. Strengthening operational actors' understanding of NELD
2. Exploring how operational actors can include and prioritise key NELD aspects within their programs, strategies, and approaches through a shared agenda.

## WHO IS THIS PAPER FOR?

The key audiences for this paper are operational agencies that work in humanitarian, development and climate programming in the Pacific Islands, including local, national and international civil society actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), private sector actors, regional bodies, and national and international government agencies, including donors.

## STRUCTURE

Following the methodology, the paper provides an overview of NELD and how it can be prioritised in Pacific Island countries. It is followed by a section that discusses findings from the research in five key priority areas to contribute to a shared agenda for operational actors moving forward. The five priorities are:

- Key priority 1: Strengthen contextual framing
- Key priority 2: Improve understanding of the unique dimensions of NELD
- Key priority 3: Support nationally led approaches
- Key priority 4: Promote integrated approaches
- Key priority 5: Document impacts.

The final section provides a summary of key opportunities and actions.

### Box 1 Understanding key terms<sup>3</sup>

An overview of key terms used globally is shown below. Note that the contextualisation of terminology and definitions to describe experiences and impacts specific to the Pacific Islands is critical, as outlined in this paper.

**Loss and damage:** "The adverse impacts of climate change on human societies and the natural environment that have not been or cannot be minimised through climate adaptation or mitigation efforts."<sup>4</sup>

**Economic loss and damage:** Loss of or damage to resources, good and services that are commonly traded in markets, such as crops, homes and property.

**Non-economic loss and damage:** Although there is no formally agreed definition, NELD includes a broad range of climate change impacts that are not quantifiable in financial terms or as products commonly traded in markets. It can refer to impacts on lives, health, mobility, cultural heritage, territory, traditional and indigenous knowledge, ecosystems, and biodiversity and habitats.

# Methodology

This research was led by Humanitarian Advisory Group, in partnership with Pacific researcher Dr Moleen Nand and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The qualitative methods (Figure 2) employed included a review of policy, academic and grey literature, and key informant interviews with key operational, policy, donor and research actors in the Pacific region from February – April 2024. The paper provides a high-level overview of key issues, rather than an in-depth analysis of all NELD impacts and considerations in the Pacific Islands.

Figure 2 Overview of research methods



## UNDERPINNING OUR APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Research under the Humanitarian Horizons program is founded on principles of supporting local leadership and working in partnership. Our collaboration with Pacific researchers and agencies for this practice paper reflects this; they bring deep expertise and networks in both the Pacific Islands and internationally across loss and damage issues.

## LIMITATIONS

**Focus:** Practice papers are intended to be snapshots of emerging practices, gaps and opportunities within a particular context. This paper is not intended to provide a systematic review of NELD impacts or understandings across the Pacific Islands, or the economic aspects of loss and damage.

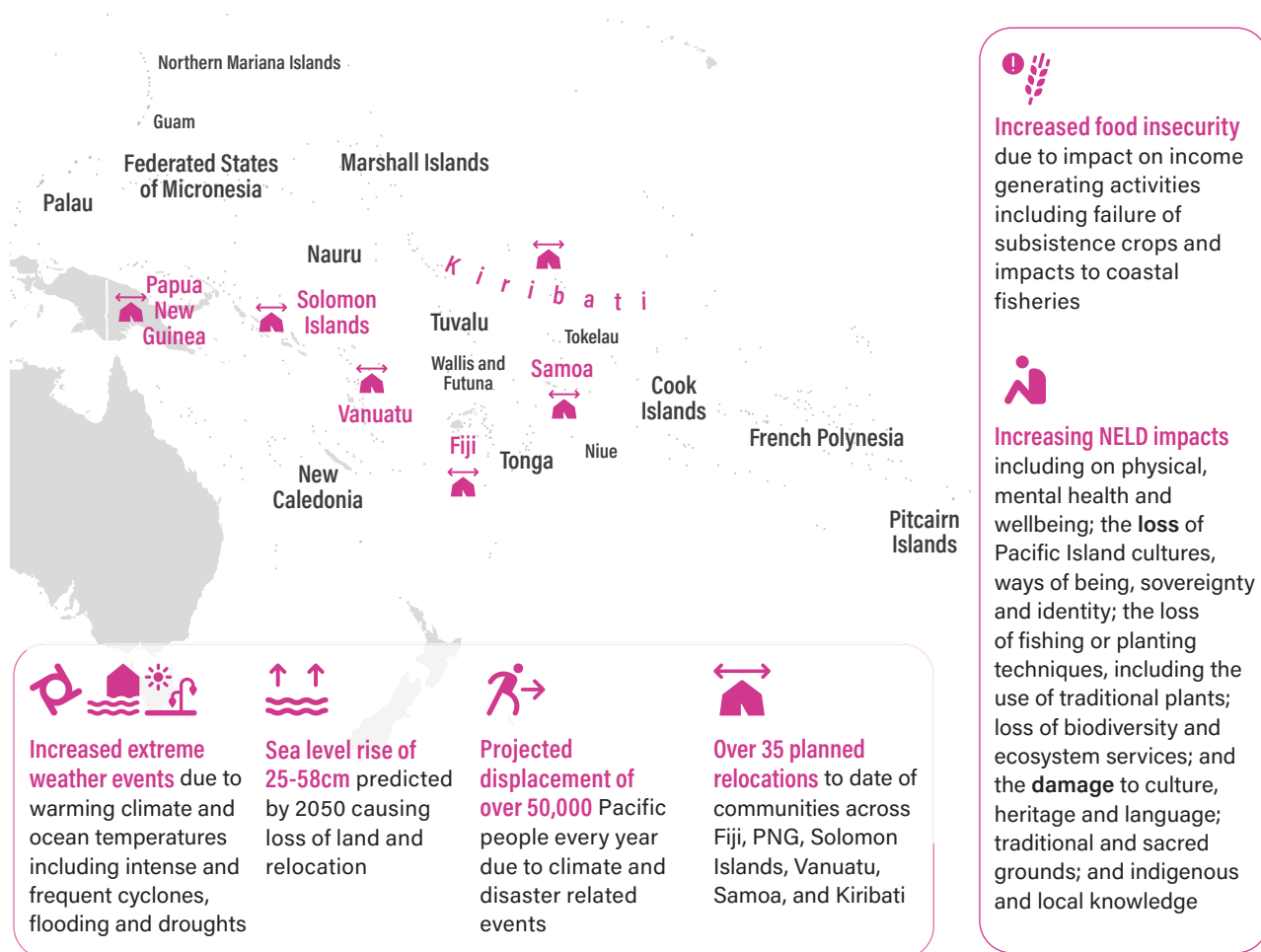
**Sampling and representativeness:** The sample of informants was not representative of all Pacific Islands humanitarian, development, and climate actors and therefore of their activities, perspectives and experiences of NELD. Moreover, the research did not seek perspectives from formal representatives of communities.

**Terminology:** NELD is a term used commonly in policy, academia, and international institutions, where it is understood as distinct from economic loss and damage (see Box 1 above). Pacific island interviewees involved in this research used a range of terms equating to non-economic loss and damage, often without distinguishing this category from economic loss and damage. Findings were analysed with an emphasis on the meaning of NELD and openness to variety and context in how this concept was expressed. The analysis was also reliant on researchers' interpretation of local Pacific Island framings of NELD.

# Setting the scene

The Pacific Islands have been at the forefront of global discussions and action on loss and damage for many years. It is already experiencing significant climate change impacts, causing displacement and relocation of households and communities alongside a broad range of other losses and damage. Figure 3 provides a snapshot of some of these overarching climate-related impacts across the region. A specific discussion of NELD impacts is outlined under Priority 1 below.

**Figure 3 Snapshot of current and projected trends for climate related impacts in the Pacific Islands<sup>5</sup>**



## KEY ACTORS AND INITIATIVES IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Several key bodies are involved in NELD-related initiatives in the Pacific (Table 1). National governments are the key drivers of NELD playing a vital role in UNFCCC negotiations around its framing and the implementation agenda. In particular, the investment in the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage following COP28 has spurred much debate about the focus and direction of responses to NELD in Pacific Island countries. Regional bodies such as members of the Council for Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), for example the Pacific Community (SPC), and the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN) have established working groups, produced policy papers, and undertaken advocacy on the issue.<sup>6</sup> Regional actors such as SPREP have spearheaded initiatives such as roundtables and contributions to the technical papers produced by the Warsaw International Mechanism Executive Committee.



**Table 1 Overview of key actors and their roles in addressing NELD in the Pacific Islands**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Focus</b>
<b>National and local actors</b>	National and sub-national governments and civil society organisations are leading and engaging with NELD issues at the national level, and contributing to regional and global platforms.
<b>The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific</b>	CROP is a partnership of regional and intergovernmental agencies within the Pacific. Several of CROP’s member agencies support NELD-related initiatives and research.
<b>The Pacific Community (SPC)</b>	SPC convenes Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) to identify and lead policy dialogues and articulate Pacific priorities for feeding into global mechanisms. SPC was part of the Pacific Pavilion that showed examples of loss and damage, including NELD, at COP28 in Dubai.
<b>Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)</b>	SPREP is currently leading multiple NELD research and program initiatives, including hosting the Pacific’s first Loss and Damage Dialogue in July 2023.
<b>Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)</b>	PIFs is a key policy body. Its 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent includes themes of climate change and disasters, as well as the ocean and natural environment, acknowledging the importance of both economic and non-economic forms of loss and damage in the Pacific.
<b>Regional civil society bodies</b>	The Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and PICAN play key advocacy and evidence generation roles, and support the engagement of civil society in NELD issues.
<b>Other actors</b>	A range of UN agencies, donors and private sector bodies are engaged in identifying and mitigating NELD impacts in partnership with regional bodies and national and local actors.

## REGIONAL POLICY ARCHITECTURE

Multiple frameworks highlight the impacts of loss and damage in the Pacific, and can serve as regional policies and strategies to which future loss and damage policy and practices can be aligned. These include the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), led by the Pacific Resilience Partnership as the umbrella mechanism for implementation, the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, and the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility.

Aspects of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent are particularly relevant to NELD, prioritising the importance of Pacific peoples and their culture. Both documents focus on outlining resilience-based approaches for Pacific communities in responding to climate change and disasters.



# Non-economic loss and damage priorities for operational actors in the Pacific Islands: Building a shared agenda

To date, NELD research has focused on policy, technical issues, and financing. However, there is now increasing demand for a better understanding of NELD from an operational perspective, and to understand its relevance for programming. There is an important role for operational agencies, both local and international, across the climate, development, and humanitarian sectors in the conceptualising of NELD and its integration into policy frameworks, yet less is known about how operational agencies can better understand and address NELD in their initiatives and programs.

“ In responding to NELD, the interest of the communities is sometimes overlooked and that needs to be improved ... operational actors, including NGOs and international agencies, play a critical role in better defining the things that really need attention for non-economic loss and damage.<sup>7</sup> (Pacific researcher)

## KEY PRIORITIES

The following section outlines five key priorities for operational agencies to support a better understanding of NELD to guide future planning and programming in the Pacific Islands. They are intended to inform dialogue and thinking among local and national non-government, development, disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate and humanitarian actors, and provide examples of current initiatives and resources to support better coordination and linkages. The five priorities are:

1. Strengthen contextual framing
2. Improve understanding of the unique dimensions of NELD
3. Support nationally led approaches
4. Promote integrated approaches
5. Document impacts.

## **Key priority 1: Strengthen contextual framing**

Many interviewees stated that understanding and addressing NELD in the Pacific Islands is a new and emerging area for operational actors and there is a key gap in understanding what the relevant priorities and needs are. They outlined a critical need to better comprehend NELD in the Pacific Islands by facilitating a bottom-up contextualised understanding of communities' experiences, and their needs and priorities in reducing or addressing the impacts of NELD.<sup>8</sup> In 2023, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) convened a series of technical workshops and meetings to better understand NELD perspectives across different stakeholders (see text box below).

**“ We realised that not everyone understands economic and non-economic loss and damage as we do ... only the people that go to COP understand it in this way ... different stakeholders have different ideas.”<sup>9</sup>**  
(Regional organisation representative)

### **Box 2. The Pacific Loss and Damage Dialogue**

SPREP and Climate Analytics recently convened a series of technical workshops and meetings related to loss and damage, including the first regional Pacific Loss and Damage Dialogue in July 2023 in Samoa. The event brought together representatives from governments, civil society, and the private sector. Interviewees outlined that this was an important opportunity to discuss the issue collectively as there continue to be different perspectives and understandings of NELD. For example, some stakeholders highlighted the importance of developing a formal definition that delineates specific NELD categories for funding purposes whilst other emphasized the need to build more contextual definitions that can shift according to needs and priorities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Contextualising global approaches**

Global approaches and understandings of NELD need to be contextualised to reflect the diversity of Pacific Islands communities and voices. High-level characterisations of NELD drawn from those developed by the UNFCCC provide important framing but do not capture diverse and holistic understandings of how communities experience loss in the Pacific Islands context.<sup>11</sup>

**“ The UNFCCC definition of NELD ... loosely includes humanity. It focuses on 'things' and does not expand to look at who the 'owners' of those things are ... Our understanding of NELD is very different in the Pacific because we do not consider these things but how these affect us as people and communities. I really think there is a mismatch in the global frame or definition of NELD versus how we frame it in the Pacific.”<sup>12</sup>**  
(Pacific researcher)

Pacific stakeholders highlight the importance of local, traditional, indigenous and cultural knowledge about the impacts of NELD driving the understandings and actions of operational actors (see key priority 2). Pacific Islands communities have a fundamental connection to their land; it is a core part of their history, identity, and wellbeing. For many, it is where their ancestors are buried and is steeped in rich cultural and traditional heritage. Throughout the Pacific Islands, community, language, culture, kinship, belonging, spirituality and identity are intrinsically connected to a sense of place and home, and interviewees outlined that the global framing of NELD does not currently reflect this. Work is continuing on advancing global framing,

understanding and identification of approaches in relation to NELDs, in particular through the Non-Economic Losses Expert Group under the Warsaw International Mechanism. There is a key opportunity for the Pacific Island experiences to contribute to and shape these framings.

“ All of those things [NELD impacts] tie to our culture, which defines who we are as islanders. Pacific Islanders’ identity is tied to their land, which is owned by customary landholders, and it defines cultural practices and how they live they life – if they lose their land, they lose what defines them as Samoans or Tuvaluans, for example.”<sup>13</sup> (Regional organisation representative)

At the same time, Pacific stakeholders recognised the importance of being able to connect and link the global framing and understanding of NELD with experiences of loss and damage on the ground. Operational actors must be able to recognise, and navigate both perspectives, and distinguish between the key elements that are distinctive for Pacific Island countries and communities.<sup>14</sup>

## Challenges

There are several key challenges to strengthening understanding of NELD in the Pacific Islands. Several actors highlighted that NELD can be a highly sensitive and complex issue for individuals and communities to discuss, because it relates to loss and the associated ongoing psychosocial impacts (see key consideration 2). Debates over terminology and definitions continue within global and regional forums and mechanisms continue to highlight several challenges. This includes the complexity of the issue, the differences in community perceptions and understandings, including not differentiating between economic and non-economic loss and damage, and of the need for categories of NELD to be delineated enable funding through emerging financing mechanisms.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the challenges of integration of NELD into programming lays with operational actors having the responsibility of consolidating different framings of both economic and non-economic loss and damages into tangible practice.

“ These losses in the Pacific cannot be differentiated as to whether they are economic or non-economic. These losses are losses. They are experiential, and experienced by people on the ground.”<sup>16</sup> (Pacific actor)



**KEY TAKEAWAY: Operational actors need to adapt and contextualise global approaches and strengthen contextual understanding of NELD experiences and impacts in the Pacific Islands.**



**Key priority 2: Improve understanding of the unique dimensions of NELD**

Research has demonstrated that NELD is a complex and multifaceted issue, and is understood and experienced in diverse ways across communities. Similarly, researchers, policymakers and practitioners exhibit diverse examples and understandings of NELD in the Pacific Islands.

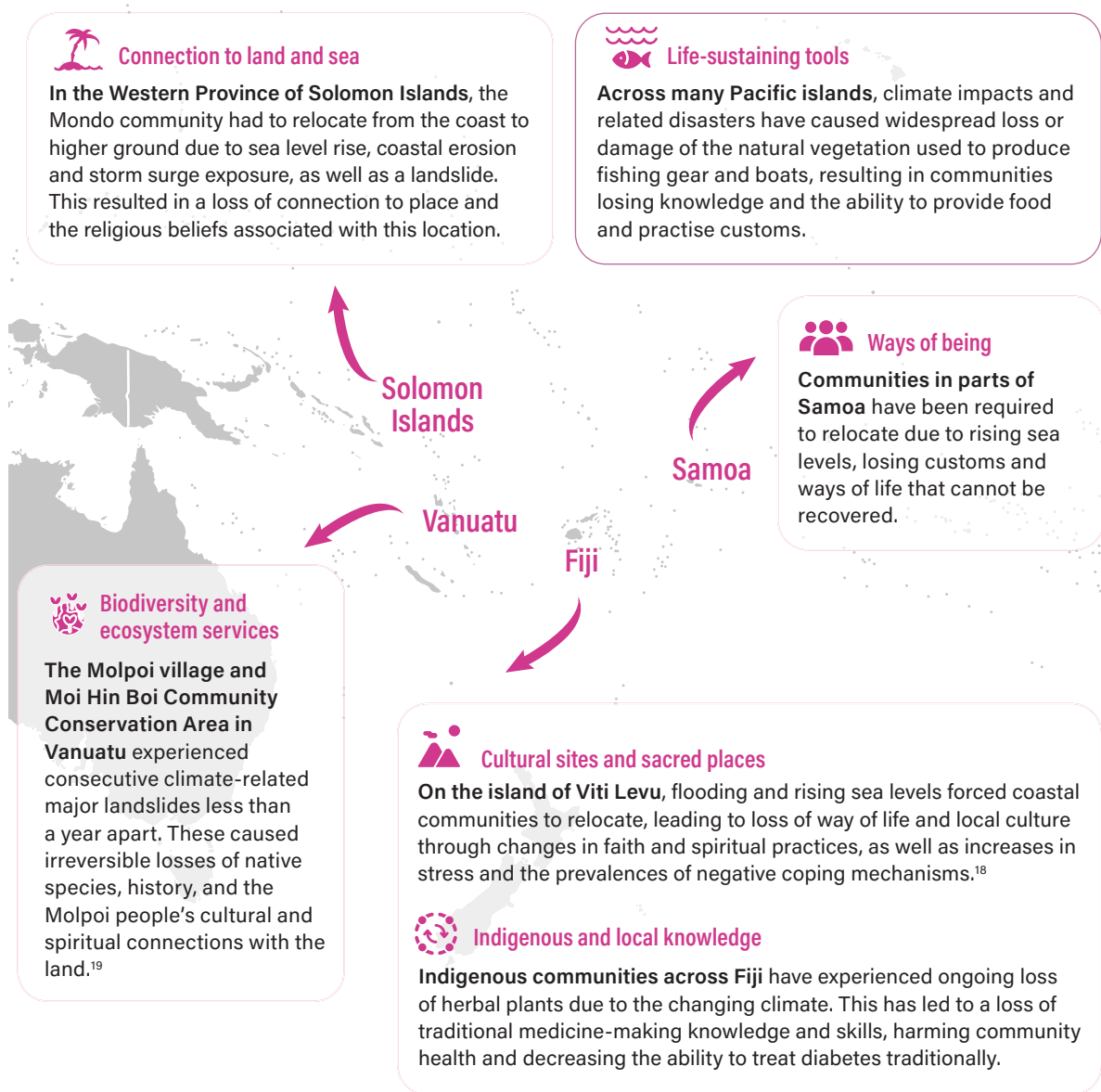
A recent study entitled ‘*Understanding and responding to climate-driven non-economic loss and damage in the Pacific Islands*’ used the perspectives of 42 Pacific islanders to identify the eight most widely experienced and impactful dimensions of NELD. Figure 3 lists these dimensions, and Figure 4 gives corresponding examples of impacts across some Pacific islands (as described by interviewees). Using these framings can help operational actors to include these issues in programming and in discussions with communities.

# NELD IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Figure 3 Overview of NELD dimensions in the Pacific Islands<sup>17</sup>



Figure 4 Examples of NELD across the Pacific<sup>18</sup>



### Box 3. Understanding impacts on different groups

Currently, there is little evidence showing how NELD affects diverse or marginalised groups in the Pacific Islands. However, this and previous research has highlighted that losses are experienced distinctly by individuals in relation to their specific circumstances. These factors can include social status, community and cultural values, social identity and similar intangible but highly valued concepts.<sup>21</sup> Interviewees also outlined that evidence about how disasters affect different marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities or diverse sexual and gender identities in the Pacific Islands, can also be drawn on in understanding the differentiated impacts of NELD.



## Greater prominence for considering psychosocial impacts

“ Mental health is an area that is overlooked big time. Mental health issues or the psychological damage are so widespread, but people do not think of these things ... No one really evaluates the psychological impacts.”<sup>22</sup> (Pacific researcher)

As part of exploring the dimensions of NELD, Pacific stakeholders emphasised the need to understand their long-term and multi-generational psychosocial impacts for communities (as shown in the first dimension in Figure 3). The Pacific Islands are at the forefront of the climate crisis, with some countries such as Tuvalu and Kiribati facing existential challenges in relation to the impacts of sea level rise. In Fiji alone, more than 50 villages have been earmarked for relocation in the next 5–10 years, because their ancestral lands are projected to become unsafe or uninhabitable.<sup>23</sup>

Evidence shows that the ongoing threat of climate impacts causes unique trauma to Pacific Islands communities. They live with constant anxiety of being forced to abandon their homes, leaving them unable to pass down land, traditional, knowledge and culture to their children.

“ For us, wherever we are, our totem will be around us. And if I am asked to move, I will leave behind my totem. Some tribes, their totem is the 'kuka' or the mud crabs. We will reach a time, when we will say 'I do not even know what is a kuka' but our totem is a kuka. So this brings about a disconnect.”<sup>24</sup> (Pacific researcher)

Many communities will refuse to relocate due to their ancestral and spiritual connection to land and place, choosing to stay in place to fight the increasing impacts of climate change. For some, choosing to stay is a way to fight climate injustice and shift the narrative to one of resistance and resilience.<sup>25</sup>

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of developing a better understanding of the long-term and cross-generational mental health impacts of loss and damage in the Pacific Islands.<sup>26</sup> Operational actors can work together to ensure contextualised psychosocial support is available and accessible to communities who are facing these losses, and delivered through trusted sources. This could include efforts to strengthen existing family and community support systems and promote positive coping mechanisms for people struggling with loss. For example, in the Pacific Islands, where religion is a core aspect of daily life, local churches are uniquely positioned to support communities facing this type of trauma. Operational actors can work with and support church leaders and other community groups to deliver these services.<sup>27</sup>



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Operational and research actors can work with communities and local experts to explore the diversity of ways NELD is understood across dimensions that are unique to Pacific Island communities.

### **Key priority 3: Support nationally led approaches**

**“ The first step is to make space to have conversations and allow countries to have conversations widely within their communities. Because that is important – we can’t just go ahead and say here’s the money, go and do something about it. Countries need to have their own internal conversations.”<sup>28</sup> (Regional organisation representative)**

National-level initiatives designed to incorporate NELD in policy and programming are emerging. Many Pacific Island governments are already considering and incorporating these approaches, although it may not always be labelled as NELD. There are opportunities to support stronger understandings of NELD at the national level to better streamline and promote these strategies where they already exist in climate change and DRM policies, and to identify opportunities to integrate NELD considerations in new policies and initiatives. They are supported by regional programs and bodies, and include environmental adaptation programs, climate or human mobility policies and approaches, documenting NELD impacts, and some sector-specific initiatives related to biodiversity. SPREP is currently coordinating a loss and damage initiative across five countries (as outlined in Box 4 below), and other international donor-funded projects are underway. For example, the Building Our Pacific Loss and Damage Response Project (BOLD Response) is a six-year initiative funded by the International Climate Initiative in Germany, to be implemented in the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Fiji.

#### **Box 4. Addressing Climate Change Loss and Damage – Pacific Regional Partnership**

In June 2024, SPREP commenced an initiative designed to support five Pacific countries – Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Niue, Tonga and one Territory – Tokelau – to develop their understanding, evidence base and priorities for mitigating loss and damage arising from climate change impacts. The project has five objectives: supporting countries to address non-economic loss and damage; involving women, girls and vulnerable groups in decision-making; improving regional capability; highlighting Pacific priorities to inform the UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund; and generating increased interest from donors to support addressing loss and damage.<sup>29</sup>

Despite some promise, these approaches are nascent and not widespread across the region and have predominantly focused on exploring opportunities to access funding mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund.<sup>30</sup> A key challenge to date has been developing and implementing specific processes for communities to feed into national and regional discussions. International donors also outlined that they lack the resources and the ability to forge direct links with communities to understand their priorities.<sup>31</sup> There is a currently a gap in effectively supporting communities to advocate and feed into national government and international donor efforts to address NELD.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Developing a localised approach**

There is an opportunity to develop a localised approach for considering and addressing NELD at the national level from the outset. This can draw from emerging knowledge and evidence about locally led humanitarian action and development across the region, including best practices in supporting national leadership, funding and partnerships.<sup>33</sup> Countries such as Fiji have been advocating for this approach, to increase national capacity and investment to lead planning and ensure that there are technical resources in-country.



### Box 5. Developing national approaches to address NELD in Fiji

Climate mobility – via displacement, migration, or planned relocation – is increasingly occurring as a result of climate impacts, including NELD, in the Pacific. The relocation of communities away from their ancestral land is a last resort, but unfortunately it is becoming more common in many Pacific countries.

In 2018, Fiji became one of the first countries to develop a national framework to guide relocation, accompanied by standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide implementation. In April 2024, the Platform for Disaster Displacement supported the Fiji Government, in partnership with GIZ, to develop a framework and set of tools to integrate understanding of NELD into decision-making processes for planned relocation.

The Fiji Government aims to develop a method of valuing tangible and intangible cultural assets that can be integrated into both risk assessments (before relocations) and impact assessments (after relocation). This work is being led in close coordination with Indigenous Fijian institutions. The method has been validated with stakeholders in Fiji and is currently being tested with relocated communities.<sup>34</sup>

Non-government operational actors, including NGOs and CBOs, have longstanding and strong relationships with communities. They can support community input and voice into government-led national and sub-national discussions and policy development by providing links with community leaders, channels for discussion and financial investment. These efforts can improve understanding of how NELD is occurring at the community level and inform appropriate policy and action.

Interviewees outlined that identifying country and sector-level priorities for addressing NELD is important, particularly because it is not feasible or practical to undertake whole-of-country loss and damage assessments. National governments and non-government actors should discuss what sectors should be prioritised and use available knowledge and evidence to develop sector-specific plans for assessing and mitigating impacts.<sup>35</sup> Operational actors can work with governments to support the identification of priority sectors and support investment in national plans. For example, this could include helping to develop policies for cultural history preservation (if identified as a priority; see key consideration 4) or a national funding mechanism for responding to extreme weather events. Operational actors can facilitate the filtering up of community knowledge, experiences and priorities to inform international knowledge, policy and dialogue. Donors also highlighted the importance of intermediary partners supporting this process.

### Box 6. ActionAid supporting community discussions

ActionAid is currently supporting women's groups in Vanuatu to discuss, document and collect information about the impacts of NELD through stories and case studies. This initiative has enabled women to influence discussions about mitigating and addressing losses and damages due to climate impacts and related disasters, and for community leaders to influence NGO and government actors.<sup>36</sup>

**“ We don't have close relationship at the community level – it is important on loss and damage to have community needs reflected. We need to look to partners who have links with communities for feedback ... we don't have a defined mechanism for this to happen.”** (Donor representative)



**Key takeaway: Support the development of nationally-led approaches and priorities for addressing NELD.**



## Key priority 4: Promote integrated approaches

An integrated approach to NELD in the Pacific Islands that considers actions across the disaster management spectrum, as well as in climate adaptation and mitigation, and by different types of actors, is critical. This is well recognised in loss and damage research and by emerging initiatives such as in the humanitarian sector (as outlined in Box 7 below).<sup>38</sup>

### Box 7. Loss and damage from a humanitarian perspective

In August 2023, the InterAgency Standing Committee Climate Crisis Sub-Group released key messages on the role of humanitarian action in averting and minimising loss and damage. These messages identify key gaps for humanitarian actors to address in mitigation, adaptation, preparedness (including disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action), and response. They also include a set of principles to guide humanitarian action, including in integrated response, involving a range of development and peace actors.

Despite recognition of the need for broad and integrated action, the interviewees highlighted that current approaches are fragmented and siloed. There is a gap in effective and integrated approaches to reducing, mitigating and addressing NELD impacts across climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and management programming. Operational agencies are still formulating how to integrate approaches in practice, particularly as many agencies, especially community-based organisations in the Pacific, work across the spectrum of development, climate and humanitarian issues. There is also a gap in understanding the role of different actors at different points in time, or how diverse actors should work together across distinct but related areas of work.

**“ Humanitarian, climate change and DRR actors need to find a way to collaborate and work with each other... They are always in their particular lane and where they should sit and they focus on the now. They don't focus on the interconnected and systems risks and their role ... There is a huge role for humanitarian and DRR actors - they are working and operating in different areas but they can contribute to building overall resilience of the system.”<sup>39</sup> (Pacific researcher)**

The next section contains some initial ideas for NELD approaches that emerged from the interviews and from existing research and policy guidance. They are intended as a starting point to guide internal operational actor conversations and planning for incorporating NELD impacts in their programming and partnerships.

### Preparedness

Agencies can integrate NELD with disaster preparedness, DRR, climate change adaptation and anticipatory action activities. An integrated understanding of the key characteristics of NELD in the Pacific Islands will allow operating actors to plan and prepare for protecting these intangible assets. Activities should be coordinated across local and national government, communities, development actors, humanitarians, and climate and environmental actors.



### **Examples of key actions to consider:**

- Clarify the role of development, humanitarian, and climate actors in averting or minimising NELD impacts, and outlining this in existing plans and processes
- Raise awareness and incorporate traditional knowledge and practice into integrated DRR and climate change adaptation activities to help communities understand their importance
- Prioritise protection of sacred sites or places with high spiritual or religious value
- Determine what preparedness and adaptation processes would allow communities to substantially continue their traditional or existing livelihoods
- Assess how anticipatory action mechanisms such as early warning signals, anticipatory cash assistance (including through government social protection programs), or distribution of supplies can minimise risks to livelihoods, health and wellbeing
- Review SOPs and processes for response and consulting communities to develop actions relating to specific NELD dimensions
- Assess loss and damage beyond economic impacts
- Explore how social protection mechanisms could be used to avert or minimise NELD impacts.



### **Response**

Integrating NELD concerns can be challenging because lifesaving operations can deprioritise environmental and cultural concerns. However, increasing recognition of the connectedness between response and recovery, the importance of protecting both people and place, and humanitarians' commitment to 'do no harm' create entry points for integrating NELD in response operations.

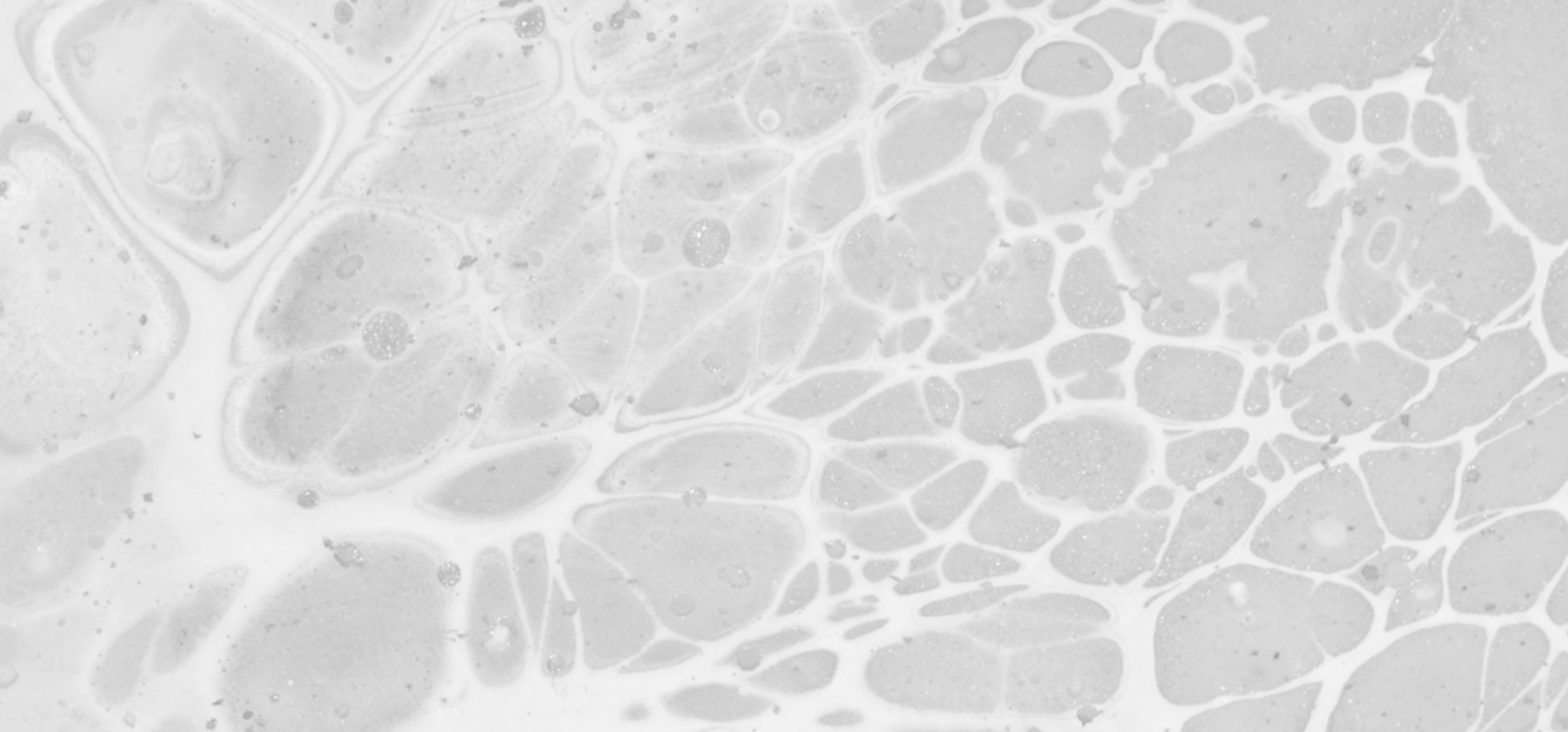


### **Examples of key actions to consider:**

- Integrate NELD components, such as indicators associated with the eight dimensions of NELD highlighted in Figure 2, into post-disaster needs assessments
- Prioritise psychosocial support for communities facing acute NELD impacts immediately after a disaster
- Consult and work with communities to understand what assistance is culturally appropriate, drawing on traditional knowledge and practice where relevant
- Ensure that humanitarian response is environmentally sustainable and does not cause unintended harm to the environment, biodiversity, or natural resources
- Ensure humanitarian operations and infrastructure do not damage sacred or cultural sites
- Take steps to 'green' humanitarian operations; seek opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and shift to renewable energy sources if possible.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Box 8. Needs assessments**

SPREP is supporting the development of revised post-disaster needs assessment that captures a broad range of issues, rather than just economic impacts. This information is intended to be used to improve understanding of loss and damage impacts – including NELD – experienced by communities, and what has or has not been achieved through recovery.<sup>41</sup>



## Recovery

Recovery efforts provide many opportunities to address NELD impacts. Once the initial emergency phase is over, and there is more time to assess the long-term impacts of the disaster and response, these processes can be adapted to include NELD impacts. Recovery efforts must be planned and implemented in partnership with local actors and communities to ensure intangible and cultural aspects are prioritised. Activities should be coordinated across local and national government, communities, humanitarians, development actors and environmental and conservation groups.

### **Examples of key actions to consider:**

- Develop metrics and carry out NELD impact assessments jointly with communities to inform recovery efforts. Aligning these metrics with international tools and charters is important for transferability and impact
- Work with communities to support the restoration of traditional ways of life after disasters, for example, rebuilding churches and traditional places of worship, cleaning up and/or restoring sacred sites, reviving traditional methods of fishing and farming (including through government-run cash for work programs)
- Incorporate traditional knowledge, customs, and practices to conserve native species, totem species, and biodiversity in agriculture and livelihood activities
- Support and promote community-based initiatives that integrate nature-based solutions to strengthen resilience and protect the environment from future shocks and damage
- Provide or facilitate sustainable options for long-term psychosocial support, for example, through churches and civil society organisations.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Operational actors need to develop integrated approaches across the disaster management continuum and climate mitigation and adaptation efforts



## Key priority 5: Capture and document practices and knowledge

Pacific stakeholders highlighted that a priority for addressing NELD impacts is to capture and document community and indigenous practices and knowledge to preserve cultural history. Many stakeholders continue to identify the critical importance of doing this across Pacific Islands and communities.

**“ In addressing things from a NELD perspective, documenting cultural history and knowledge, sharing it, protecting gravesites of ancestors – these things sound simple, but I think they’re really important, and I don’t think they’re being done consistently at all across the Pacific or at the same rate across different countries.”<sup>42</sup> (Pacific researcher)**

Several interviewees highlighted that operational actors have an important role in supporting communities and knowledge holders to the document stories, traditional practices and case studies. This would involve strengthening documentation about the impacts of NELD and ways communities are adapting or addressing impacts, as well as capturing cultural and indigenous knowledge, practices and language that may not exist in official records.<sup>43</sup> Approaches to documentation might include digital memorialisation, working with community and traditional leaders to document and preserve oral history, or case studies in particular contexts.

**“ We need to have them for all countries ... if we can collect the different approaches such as the memorialisation idea from the Marshall Islands or there’s a similar approach in Niue, we need to be able to document and put the options down and let the communities decide what is most useful for them.”<sup>44</sup> (Regional organisation representative)**

Other interviewees noted that whilst documenting practice is important from a preservation perspective, for communities this can contribute to a ‘lifting out’, and decontextualization of traditional and spiritual knowledge. In addition, because much knowledge is passed orally through generations and not present in written records, many losses remain unseen outside the communities experiencing them. Recording these losses can also be a highly sensitive and traumatising process (as outlined in key priority 2).

### Box 9. Memorialising

The Marshall Islands Government is considering a strategy of memorialisation in some of the areas at risk of climate impacts, involving creating a virtual history to preserve knowledge. This would include aspects such as visual images of places, descriptions of their cultural significance, and associated historical events.



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Operational and research actors can support communities to document traditional knowledge and practices in a culturally sensitive way, and outline the NELD impacts they are experiencing in their own terms

# Moving forward

Now is a critical time for humanitarian, development, disaster and climate programming actors to improve their understanding of NELD and find ways to work with communities and across stakeholders to minimise non-economic impacts. Whilst recognising that these non-economic impacts are distinctive and unique across contexts and communities in the Pacific Islands, there is a need to create a shared agenda for operational actors that supports national and local leadership. This paper contributes to that agenda-setting process by putting forward five key priorities, with associated opportunities and practical steps.



**Key priority 1: Strengthen contextual understanding of NELD experiences and impacts in the Pacific Islands to inform and contextualise global approaches.**

## Key steps for operational agencies:

- 1. Build agency awareness:** Provide opportunities to reflect on, conceptualise or understand NELD across programs, teams or strategies, drawing on local partners and experts.
- 2. Contextualise understanding:** Articulate how programs and actions will draw on and adapt global definitions of NELD, and engage with global initiatives or approaches whilst prioritising and advocating for contextual understanding across the Pacific Islands.
- 3. Strengthen staff knowledge and skills:** Plan and resource for knowledge and skills building for staff, including being able to navigate global and contextual framings of NELD with communities.



**Key priority 2: Work with communities and local experts to explore the diversity of ways NELD is understood across dimensions that are unique to Pacific Islands communities.**

## Key steps for operational agencies:

- 1. Enabling discussions:** Draw on local expertise and representatives to develop appropriate and ethical ways to engage in conversations with communities about how they think about and conceive NELD impact.
- 2. Draw on traditional knowledge and experts:** Build in default processes as part of programming to consistently draw on and value traditional knowledge and expertise in relation to NELD. These may be local researchers, community representatives or local groups.
- 3. Psychosocial impacts:** Consider how programs can incorporate awareness of the psychosocial impacts of NELD in working with communities.



### **Key priority 3: Support the development of nationally-led approaches and priorities for addressing NELD.**

#### **Key steps for operational agencies:**

- 1. Support national approaches:** Work closely with national and sub-national governments and non-government actors to align strategies and programs to support local NELD priorities, sectoral plans or assessments and develop them into a national approach.
- 2. Be an effective intermediary:** International organisations can play an effective intermediary role in linking community priorities and perspectives with those of international donors.



### **Key priority 4: Develop integrated approaches for averting, minimising, and addressing NELD across the disaster management continuum and climate mitigation and adaptation efforts**

#### **Key steps for operational agencies:**

- 1. Collaborate:** Identify opportunities for collaborating with local and national actors who focus on different aspects of disaster management or climate-related programming, and identify how approaches to NELD can be coordinated rather than replicating existing siloes.
- 2. Minimise duplication:** Look for opportunities to integrate NELD considerations into existing disaster or climate related national and organisational strategies or policies, rather than creating new standalone approaches or structures.



### **Key priority 5: Support communities to document traditional knowledge and practices in a culturally sensitive way, and outline the NELD impacts they are experiencing in their own terms**

#### **Key steps for operational agencies:**

- 1. Identify community priorities:** Work with community leaders, local actors and marginalised groups to identify their priorities for capturing or documenting important traditional knowledge and practices. Share these practices in appropriate platforms and networks to maximise their visibility (with the communities' participation and consent).
- 2. Enable community ownership:** Ensure that this documentation belongs to the community, particularly if generated through organisational activities.

# Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from CSIRO, Climate change information for the Pacific, <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/climate-change/pacific-climate-change-info> accessed July 5 2024.
- 2 Interview 15
- 3 Adapted from 'What is 'non-economic' loss and damage (NELD)?' available from <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/explainers/what-is-non-economic-loss-and-damage-neld/>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Data from: SPREP, Pacific Climate Change Factsheet, 2008, available at: <https://www.sprep.org/attachments/Publications/FactSheet/pacificclimate.pdf>, World Meteorological Organisation, Climate change impacts increase in the South-West Pacific, 2023, available at: <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/climate-change-impacts-increase-south-west-pacific> and R Clissold et al, Non-economic loss and damage: insights from the Pacific Islands, 2021, available at: <https://climateanalytics.org/comment/non-economic-loss-and-damage-insights-from-the-pacific-islands>
- 6 CROP agencies include the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Pacific Islands Development Program, University of the South Pacific, Pacific Tourism Organisation, Forum Fisheries Agency, Pacific Aviation Safety Office, and Pacific Power Association.
- 7 Interview 10
- 8 Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 7-10, 12-16, 18
- 9 Interview 14
- 10 Interviews 11, 17
- 11 Interviews 1,3,4,6,7,9,13,15,17,18
- 12 Interview 7
- 13 Interview 14
- 14 Interviews 4, 5, 10, 12 & 16
- 15 See for example, Steadman et al., *What do we have to lose? Responding to climate-induced loss and damage to cultural heritage*, 2022: [https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI\\_What\\_do\\_we\\_have\\_to Lose.pdf](https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI_What_do_we_have_to Lose.pdf)
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- 18 Examples drawn from interviews with Pacific researchers and actors.
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- 20 IIED, *Living in the shadow of loss and damage: uncovering non-economic impacts*, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/living-shadow-loss-and-damage-uncovering-non-economic-impacts>
- 21 Interviews 12 & 14
- 22 Interview 5
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- 24 Interview 5
- 25 Climate Mobility Hub, *Staying in place*, available from <https://climatemobility.unsw.edu.au/staying-in-place/>, accessed June 15 2024
- 26 Interviews 3, 5, 8, 11, 14 & 15
- 27 UNHCR, *Emergency handbook: Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)*, 2024, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/emergency-assistance/health-and-nutrition/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-mhpss>
- 28 Interview 14
- 29 SPREP, *Addressing Climate Change Loss and Damage – Pacific Regional Partnership*, <https://www.sprep.org/project/addressing-climate-change-loss-and-damage-pacific-regional-partnership>
- 30 For example, SPC has supported several technical studies of funding proposals for the Green Climate Fund related to loss and damage.
- 31 Interviews 11 & 13
- 32 Interview 14
- 33 Key resources include HAG and PIANGO, *Localisation Measurement Framework (2020)* and regional baseline synthesis; Roche et al., *Locally led development in the Pacific*, and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's *Locally led development guidance note*.
- 34 Fiji National Planned Relocation Guidelines, 2018, <https://www.preventionweb.net/media/97379/download?startDownload=20240805> and Platform on Disaster Displacement, *Assessing NELD in planned relocations in Fiji*, 2024, <https://pamad.disasterdisplacement.org/2024/05/13/neld-relocations-fiji/>
- 35 Interview 14
- 36 Interview 12
- 37 Interview 11
- 38 Loss and Damage Youth Coalition, *Non-Economic Loss and Damage: Understanding and Addressing Response, Gaps*, 2023, available at: <https://weadapt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/LDYC-Policy-Brief.pdf>
- 39 Interview 15
- 40 For guidance on greening humanitarian action, see the [Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific](#).
- 41 Interview 14
- 42 Interview 15
- 43 Interview 17
- 44 Interview 13



