Communicating Climate Change for Risk Reduction in Pacific Communities

Guidance Note for Red Cross Staff and Volunteers

Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre

Vulnerability and Capacity Map
Nereningman village - Motalava Photo: Claude Cruells

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Communicating Climate Change for Risk Reduction in Pacific Communities

Many people working with Pacific communities to reduce the range of risks they face find they need to explain the causes, impacts and consequences of climate change. Many of them have found this very challenging. This Guidance Note draws on research and experience gathered from practitioners across the Pacific. It presents common challenges, a set of principles and examples to support communicating climate change for risk reduction. Some notes of caution have also been included.

A community-based response to climate change requires that communities not only understand the threat of climate change but are also motivated to take action to reduce the risks.

The way climate change is communicated in communities is extremely important. A community-based response to climate change requires that communities both understand the threat of climate change and are also motivated to take action to address the risks.

The number of locally produced and tailored materials for climate risk reduction is increasing every day but there is still very little guidance on *how* to communicate climate change in a way that motivates local action. There are also common limitations in many of the existing materials: some come from a global advocacy perspective and focus on worst case scenarios, some include too much climate science and some focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions rather than risk reduction or adaptation. This Guidance Note aims to address these gaps.

It is important that messages reach women and men, boys and girls. (Photo: Rebecca McNaught)

Challenges in communicating climate change for risk reduction in Pacific communities

From research and experience in the Pacific, practitioners found five main challenges:

1. Climate change is frequently blamed for anything negative in many Pacific communities. Whilst climate change is affecting Pacific communities in many and varied ways they also face many other challenges like remoteness from government and other support systems, population pressures; political instability; environmental degradation, migration and urbanization. Climate change is an additional pressure on Pacific communities that may exacerbate some of these issues - it can be challenging to work out where these links are, and where they are not.

2. It is common for the media and communication materials to focus on worst case scenario climate change. Climate change is a major issue but focusing primarily on long term and severe impacts (such as loss of islands from sea level rise) can be disempowering for Pacific communities. Scenarios many decades into the future can make people lose sight of real, simple and positive actions that can be done here and now to improve their lives.

3. It is difficult to communicate climate change without relying on science based messages. Scientific explanations of climate change can be confusing, but over simplified explanations can in fact be inaccurate. It is important but challenging to find a balance between accuracy and simplicity.

4. It is challenging to reach all members of a community, such as women. Women and men, boys and girls have different capacities and vulnerabilities to climate change. We need to ensure we can reach everyone in our work.

5. The uncertainty of climate projections can make people less motivated to act. Because projections do not tell us exactly what to expect sometimes people may think 'why should we act if we don't even know that climate change will happen this way?' It is important to support people to be comfortable with an uncertain future.

Same issue, different audiences

Tuvalu Red Cross volunteers in Tuvalu helping communities to repair and clean gutters for water collection (Photo: Tataua Pese)

Pacific island countries and their people are often shown as powerless and vulnerable in international climate change communications. Examples include focusing on long term, worst case scenarios and presenting Tuvalu as a sinking island. While dire messages have an important purpose at the global level in order to communicate the urgency of global cooperation and emissions reductions, they can be disempowering when used at the community level. For motivating risk reduction we can emphasise that Pacific communities have resilience resulting from generations of living with disasters and change. Much can be done here and now to reduce the risks climate change and other issues pose.

Building on strengths

Whilst there are many challenges in communicating climate change for risk reduction in Pacific communities, there are now hundreds of practitioners with a lot of valuable experience and knowledge. Many methods are being used to communicate climate change and often several of these are applied together to create engaging and informative programs. Some examples are:

- Radio shows (information programs and call back discussions)
- Drama
- Story telling
- Posters and other visual materials
- Climate change field schools
- Booklets, pamphlets and brochures
- Games and activities
- Community appraisal methods like transect walks, hazard mapping and focus group discussions
- Lectures and powerpoint presentations
- Animations and films

Principles for communicating climate change in Pacific communities

Drawing on the experiences of practitioners across the region there are three overall principles to keep in mind:

Principle 1: Tailor communication messages to your audience: What will you say?

Principle 2: Use mixed methods and approaches: How will you say it?

Principle 3: Manage your community engagement well: How will you prepare?

Key elements are also offered for each principle to help develop and deliver effective communications that both inform and motivate Pacific communities.

Principle 1: **Tailor communication messages to your audience:** What will you say?

1. Understand your specific audience – read vulnerability and capacity assessments, baseline surveys or other sources. Check your materials with a technical partner such as your meteorology office to ensure accuracy.

2. Use simple, but accurate, locally appropriate language and terms. Modify and simplify existing materials, such as those that talk only about the long term (like 2100) or present worst cases, as this can be disempowering for communities. Do not rely only on written materials, as there may be people with low literacy. Use the local language and avoid complicated scientific graphs and tables in village settings. Use locally relevant terms and concepts like 'Vanua' for land or home, and 'mother earth' for the wider world.

3. Start with people's own lived experience of climate and weather and how they already affect local livelihoods. You can talk about what they think is causing any changes. You may find out some misunderstandings that you can address tactfully and sensitively during the rest of your time with the community. Refer to specific past events rather than '30 years ago' to help identify a reference point for past events – for example cyclones, events like Independence Day or when they were a child.

4. Discuss the many causes of change in the community and then highlight where climate may (or may not) be linked. This can result in actions being implemented that improve lives and livelihoods regardless of the climate impacts. For example the coastal erosion that a community is experiencing may be caused primarily by local sand mining or clearing of coastal vegetation and not sea-level rise (but future sea level rise will make the problem even worse). In this case local action can address the immediate problem and reduce the severity of future impacts.

5. Prepare to discuss a range of ideas about causes and impacts of change. Many people think earthquakes, volcanos and tsunamis are caused by climate change, which is not correct. Some think climate change is because of telecommunication towers or religious beliefs. Some think climate change is causing many problems in the community like social and economic change. Take time to slowly and sensitively address these with respect – use community champions (see Principle 2) to help.

6. Build support by using positive and action-focused messages. Talk about existing capacities, local knowledge and practices that the community uses in current climate and weather events. Use this as a basis for talking about what to do now. Bring examples from other communities - ideally from the same area or same country. Choose pictures of people in action in presentations. Scenarios are a useful way of linking actions with climate and weather information.

At all times try to seek an outcome where both community knowledge and climate information can work together for the benefit of the community.

7. Acknowledge and respect local beliefs, values and practices. Pacific communities have lived with natural climate variability and extreme weather for generations. Communities have valuable knowledge and practices to predict and deal with these changes. Acknowledge and build on this. Sometimes local knowledge, such as traditional ways to predict weather or seasons, doesn't work as well anymore. Respectfully introduce other sources of information like seasonal forecasts. Where local beliefs conflict with climate science, you may want to use a trusted community member to discuss these sensitive topics. At all times try to seek an outcome where both community knowledge and climate information can work together for the benefit of the community.

8. Focus on messages that show multiple benefits of risk reduction. In Pacific communities we must urgently take action here and now to reduce climate risks. Try to make sure that these actions have multiple benefits. For example replanting the foreshore can improve reef health, reduce storm surge, reduce soil loss from gardens near the shore and strengthen the shore in the face of long-term sea level rise. In the long run it can also remove a small amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Some people call this a 'no-regrets' approach – even if the climate doesn't change as projected the action still has positive outcomes because we maintained a focus on risk reduction. It may be appropriate to discuss the efforts and challenges faced in reducing greenhouse gas emissions globally, particularly if the community ask – but try to return to risk reduction action they can take right now.

9. Focus on climate change projections within a generation or one's own life. Communities may want information about the longer-term implications of climate change but it is more empowering to focus on impacts and actions within a generation or one's own lifetime. This is a timeframe that people can imagine and can act on. Scientific reports about climate projections are usually too complex to use in a community but any simplified interpretation should be double checked for accuracy, maybe by someone in your meteorology office.

10. Link climate and weather information and climate change projections with risk reduction actions. A weather warning can tell us about an impending violent weather event such as a storm and cyclone; a seasonal forecast may tell us that the upcoming season could be particularly wet; and a climate projection gives us a description of what the climate may be like in the coming decades or centuries. The Red Cross operates a help desk for its staff and volunteers at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society ifrc@iri.columbia.edu – don't be afraid to ask for help in interpreting information into action.

Case study: **Building on current climate and weather**

Vanuatu Red Cross branch staff actively participating in a train the trainer on the Klaod Nasara resources and tools (Photo: Julie Webb)

The Klaod Nasara animation and Resource Kit uses tailored, action-focused messages and a mix of methods to communicate climate variability such as El Nino and La Nina in Vanuatu. Klaod Nasara is a five-minute animation based on a simple and locally appropriate yet technically accurate story. There is also a DVD and toolkit that goes with the animation and includes suggested games and activities for different audiences. The Pacific Adventures of the Climate Crab is a version for the Pacific. Both are available at: http://www.pacificclimatechangescience.org/animations

Principle 2: **Use mixed methods and approaches:** How will you say it?

1. Use a mix of methods and resources that are tailored to the audience. A combination of posters, songs, games, presentations and other activities will keep people engaged. You can also plan to leave materials in the community. There are examples available.
See http://www.pacificclimatechange.net to get started.

2. Think about your audience to decide how much science to include. Will they understand graphs, averages and percentages? As a general rule avoid using graphs and a lot of data in a village. Keep messages and materials accurate but simple – review materials after you have read up on the community and imagine how they would be received. Test your materials in a pilot and allow time and resources to change them after testing.

3. Prepare your materials in layers: introduce more when the audience is ready. For example don't start with 'what is climate change' but start with a discussion about their experiences of weather. Use simple non-scientific wording (for example say 'smoke from burning fuels' not 'greenhouse gases'). As your audience becomes comfortable introduce more information. You don't have to prove your expertise! Try not to overwhelm them at the start – give simple but accurate information.

4. Identify trusted male and female community champions to pass on climate messages, act as facilitators and raise awareness. This will enhance your impact and make it easier to discuss sensitive topics. Use female champions as well as male, people with disability and youth. Using local groups and church leaders may help gain support and pass on complex information.

5. Don't be too serious: use games and humour to create a relaxed and trusting environment. See www.climatecentre.org/games for ideas.

6. Include learning by doing. Practical activities yield longer-lasting results. For example a field school on preserving bananas for cyclone recovery can strengthen a message on preparedness.

7. Use two-way communication. Sometimes you will communicate information to participants but give time for them to speak as soon as you can. Some may be shy to speak so create an environment where everyone feels able to talk. You could start with small group discussions about experiences with climate hazards and report back. Walk around to make sure no one is dominating.

8. Give participants a chance to talk amongst themselves, particularly as a way to encourage those less likely to speak in a larger group to talk. Ask them to share the group conversations with the room to address common issues.

9. Use different methods for different groups. For example having a separate group of youth will allow them to voice their thoughts and you can use more creative communication approaches with them.

10. Use formal and informal communication methods. Make time to talk / story with groups or individuals during cooking, eating, sharing kava or walking. This will engage people less likely to speak in formal settings, especially women, and to clarify any confusion. You can do this during transect walks to gather information and understand climate and other changes in the community.

Case Study: **Tailoring messages and methods**

Solomon Islands Red Cross used mixed methods on Pileni Island in remote Temotu province. They made a present seasonal calendar and compared it to a past seasonal calendar and then a future climate projection. Climate change related questions were included in men and women's focus group discussions, risk mapping and historical profiling, so that climate change was considered alongside other issues faced. They tailored climate change messages and the order of tools for the diverse communities across the country.

Pileni fishermen being interviewed by Solomon Islands Red Cross volunteers. Photo: Rebecca McNaught

Principle 3: **Manage your community engagement well:** How will you prepare?

1. Do your research before you go to the community so that you understand the key climate and non-climate challenges the community may face (such as deforestation, health problems or poor water supplies). You might find this information in past vulnerability and capacity assessments, government documents or other documents from past or current projects.

2. Understand links between climate change and other community challenges so that you can provide accurate information and clarification as appropriate. You may find useful information from government departments for example from the health department on the links between malaria or dengue and weather patterns.

3. Get the best available climate and weather information. Your Red Cross, national disaster management or meteorology office should be good sources of information. The climate centre team can help in interpreting information (contact details at the end).

4. Invest in facilitator confidence, training and skills – facilitating conversations and workshops on climate change in Pacific communities can be challenging and it is very important that we do this well. Providing good training and support to facilitators is an important investment in the quality of the activities you are running. Having good facilitators will give you the best chance of raising awareness and motivating action.

5. Engage female staff, volunteers and community champions to run community sessions and to work with women's groups to ensure women and men can participate. Also plan engagement with other groups such as youth.

6. Think about if, how and when to introduce climate change from the very start – do you want to use 'climate change' in the invitations? Will this attract more people? Will it make it harder for you to make sure the community thinks about the other challenges they face? If you start with awareness raising (rather than a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment process for example) will they focus only on climate change?

7. Plan enough time with communities – it is important to build up a trusting relationship with communities and to allow time for questions, concerns and even fears to be discussed. This takes time and flexibility for example by being around in the evenings, on Sundays or for community events. Plan this time in your program and make sure you arrange your activities at times appropriate to women, men and children. Plan return visits to build trust over time, introduce more information and to follow up any outstanding questions.

8. Plan practical activities along with your awareness-raising – an awareness activity that is linked to a broader analysis process (like a VCA), community planning or a hands on activity will be more empowering than simple awareness raising activities. With this approach, communities will be taking action in response to climate change while becoming more aware of its implications. The Early Warning Early Action framework of the Red Cross is a useful way of thinking about the link between actions and climate information. http://www.climatecentre.org/site/early-warning-early-action

9. Reach out for support; find a mentor. Seek support from a knowledgeable person in your National Society, the national government agency responsible for climate change, specialists in NGOs, UN agencies or the private sector. You could seek support from the Pacific Red Cross network too.

10. Set up a working group in your National Society, province or country to share materials and develop your skills in climate change communication.

***Useful resource**: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2011) Public awareness and public education for disaster risk reduction: a guide, IFRC, Geneva, Switzerland www.ifrc.org*

Some notes of caution:

- **Give honest answers** – if you don't know the answer to a question be honest and say you will try to find out. And then follow up with the answer as soon as you can. Providing incorrect or misleading information can be more damaging than not providing any information at all. It may be better not to try to communicate climate change if you are not confident but instead focus on risk reduction and introduce climate change later.

- **Take care when discussing 'mitigation'**. There may be some confusion about the term mitigation in the context of climate change and disaster management. In disaster management mitigation means taking action to reduce disaster impacts and in climate change it means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Some people may have the idea that we can and should take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the local level as a priority. They may also think that taking this mitigation action will directly reduce the climate change impacts they do and will experience locally. Take time to clarify if needed.

- **Climate change poses significant – and sometimes new – challenges** for Pacific communities. Whilst building on existing community knowledge and skills is important it is also important not to rely only on past experiences of climate hazards to guide action.

If you don't feel confident in facilitating a discussion about climate change and risk reduction in a community then seek out support to help you before you start.

- **Many common community practices can increase vulnerability to climate change** (for example sand mining can lead to more coastal erosion than sea level rise in the short term). Climate change is not happening in isolation to development and it is critical to ensure that an awareness raising activity does not result in a community attributing all problems to climate change.

- **Talking about the long term impacts of climate change can make people feel afraid** or less interested in taking action now – allow fears to be voiced and to return to the positive and action focused messages.

- **Start where you are comfortable** – if you don't feel confident in facilitating a discussion about climate change and risk reduction in a community then seek out support to help you before you start. Remember to do your research and be prepared before you go.

- **Don't be afraid to ask for advice!**

Where to go for more support and information

- Your Red Cross head office may have a climate change focal point – this could be your first contact for support and information

- The Pacific Regional Office of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Suva, Fiji

- The Climate Centre supports the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its partners in reducing the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on vulnerable people. It is a good source of information and support: www.climatecentre.org or email climatecentre@climatecentre.org

- National or provincial meteorology and climate change department staff may be able to help

- Climate networks in your country are a good way to get in touch with other agencies working on climate change (you should be able to find these networks through the government)

SUMMARY: Principles for communicating climate change for risk reduction in Pacific communities

Principle 1: **Tailor communication messages to your audience:** What will you say?

1. Understand your specific audience
2. Use simple, but accurate, locally appropriate language and terms
3. Start with people's own lived experience of climate and weather
4. Discuss the many causes of change in the community
5. Prepare to discuss a range of ideas about causes and impacts of change
6. Build support by using positive and action-focused messages
7. Acknowledge and respect local beliefs, values and practices
8. Focus on messages that show the multiple benefits of risk reduction
9. Focus on climate change projections within a generation or one's own life
10. Link climate and weather information with risk reduction actions

Principle 2: **Use mixed methods and approaches:** How will you say it?

1. Use a mix of methods and resources
2. Think about your audience to decide how much science to include
3. Prepare your materials in layers: introduce more when the audience is ready
4. Identify trusted male and female community champions
5. Don't be too serious: use games and humour
6. Include learning by doing to demonstrate messages
7. Use two-way communication
8. Give participants a chance to talk amongst themselves
9. Use different methods for different groups
10. Use formal and informal communication methods

Principle 3: **Manage your community engagement well:** How will you prepare?

1. Do your research before you go to the community
2. Understand links between climate change and other community challenges
3. Get the best available climate and weather information
4. Invest in facilitator confidence, training and skills
5. Engage female staff, volunteers and community champions
6. Think about if, how and when to introduce climate change from the very start
7. Plan enough time with communities
8. Plan practical activities along with your awareness-raising
9. Reach out for support; find a mentor
10. Set up a working group

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