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# Climate Change in the Pacific: issues and responses

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# 1. The problem

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## Double trouble

- Global warming and associated sea level rise
- Related shifts in rainfall patterns, storm frequency and intensity



# Experts' prognosis

“Sea level rise is expected to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, erosion and other coastal hazards, thus threatening vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities that support the livelihood of island communities.”



# Ongoing effects on the Pacific

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Across the Pacific countries, new patterns of water shortages, droughts and increased risk of tropical cyclones.



# Climate change's projected impacts

Key among others:

- Damage to coral reefs
- Inundation, flooding, erosion and intrusion of sea water
- Submersion of low-lying islands.



## 2. Adding to the problem - vulnerability and exposure

- The Pacific Islands states' vulnerability to climate change is increased by limits on their adaptive capacity, their size and geographical distribution.



# Prior non-climate issues

- Some states are close to tipping point - climate change will exacerbate existing challenges for development rather than create a distinct set of new issues.



# Why is sea-level rise an issue?



# Focus on small atoll countries



# Tarawa, Kiribati



# Historical adaptation

- The Pacific Island states have an historical resilience to environmental change.
- Not clear how effective these measures will be in dealing with the magnitude of climate change.



# Uncertainty - the million dollar question

- More than physical effects – social–biophysical effects and interactions?
- How does migration fit into this equation?
- When will confidence thresholds be breached?



### 3. What's being done ?

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- The Pacific Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006-2015 has as its goal:  
“to ensure Pacific island people build their capacity to be resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change...”



# Regional adaptation

The Niue Declaration recognises:

- “ ... the importance of retaining the Pacific’s social and cultural identity and the desire of Pacific peoples to continue to live in their own countries, where possible.”
- “ ... adaptation is a critical response for Pacific governments, and requires urgent support from regional agencies and development partners alike”.



# Forced migration – hype or reality?

*“Doomed’ Kiribatis seek place to move to”*

*“Global warming could see New Zealand swamped by refugees”*

*“Pacific Islanders flee Tuvalu”*



# New Zealand's response

- Correction: there is no agreement with Tuvalu to relocate its population
- New Zealand does and will help the Pacific Islands, through many channels



# Adaptation is our primary focus

- New Zealand supports climate change adaptation through sustainable development via:
  - funding and technical assistance
  - regional collaboration
  - migrants' remittances and skill and knowledge transfers
  - support for disaster mitigation.



# Potential migration outlets

- New Zealand has specific immigration avenues for Pacific migrants that could potentially respond to climate change migration
- New Zealand can build upon experience and close ties in its responses



# Could forced migration happen in the Pacific?

- Many unknowns about the potential for forced migration in the Pacific
- Sudden mass migration most likely the exception, not the norm



# Idyllic paradise ?

