

Managing Risk Comprehensively: Slow Onset Climatic Processes
Suva Expert Dialogue
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Narrative Report
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The discussion about slow onset events made it clear that creeping environmental problems are different from those caused by sudden, extreme events, but are just as complex and severe. Addressing different climate problems requires similar resources, including finance, technology, capacity building, data, research, and innovation.

Slow onset events may be speeding up. Speakers described numerous injuries their countries already are experiencing relating to slow onset events. The Philippines see reductions in agricultural production following severe weather. Suriname reports a high rate of change; hurricanes are intruding higher into rivers, and saltwater intrusion is increasing. Timor Leste already is experiencing desertification in some areas, while other lands are under water from sea rise. Houses and roads have been damaged, and some people, usually the poor, will eventually need to move. The Cook Islands are seeing impacts on small-scale black pearl businesses. MCII noted that sea level rise increased the costs of Hurricane Sandy by about 30%.

More information was provided on needs rather than ways for facilitating action. Major issues were raised, but without sufficient time to discuss them. Special attention should be paid to displaced populations, livelihood diversity, social protection, and food security. Overall, the focus should be on actions that make the most difference to people's lives.

Fairness and equity were concerns. Who will pay to protect vulnerable people and ecosystems, or to compensate for injuries and restoration costs? Is it fair for the most affected countries to assume the costs of problems they did not create?

Lack of appropriate, accessible data is a problem at the community level, particularly in Africa. Data from large studies has not been sufficiently downscaled to be useful for local planning. When data is available, it often is in a format that is hard to understand or to apply effectively to climate-related problems.

Multiple, integrated, and innovative approaches are needed to address slow onset events. New financial instruments should be developed. GIZ talked about how insurance can be magical for households and can make people feel empowered. MCII, an insurance company, noted that insurance works for sudden, foreseeable events, but is generally not appropriate to protect people or enterprises from slow onset events. Several spoke of the difficulty of the poor, the young, and the disabled to pay insurance premiums even if insurance were available.

Slow onset events raise questions about making decisions in the face of uncertainty. How do SOE injuries differ from extreme weather events? How can planning compensate for lack of accurate local data, or for future conditions that are likely to differ from those in the past? How should economic and non-economic losses be evaluated? Must all options be quantified to allow comparative analysis of costs and benefits? How can possible negative impacts of climate actions be identified and minimized?

Current institutions may not be optimally designed to manage slow onset events. Different ministries often handle different aspects of events such as drought or sea level rise, with little coordination between them. Speakers called for an integrated approach, with coordination across ministries, levels, and sectors to improve planning, implementation, and accountability. New management centers may be needed to handle comprehensive risk management. Climate change needs to be incorporated into existing planning programs.

Several UNFCCC constituted bodies were mentioned as possible sources for support. In addition to the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) Executive Committee (Excom), speakers mentioned the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN) for technology support; the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB) for capacity building; the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) for expertise; and the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for financial support. One speaker suggested that the WIM Excom develop additional guidance on comprehensive risk management planning to help countries develop plans to support requests for financing.

Support also should be sought beyond the UNFCCC. MCII said the insurance industry is willing to share extensive databases and risk models that can simulate conditions and events and help identify and assess future risks. The African Adaptation Initiative is helping with mapping risk locations. Germany reported that the G20 will be bringing together finance ministers and climate people to increase awareness. Shipping and aviation need to reduce emissions, and the IMO recently took steps to do so. Public/private partnerships would help to mobilize industry action.

Slow onset events due to climate change are of deep concern. The Suva Expert Dialogue provided an excellent opportunity to begin discussing SOE issues. Much more discussion, collaboration, support, planning, and action will be required to build resilience and protect vulnerable people and ecosystems from the adverse impacts of slow onset events.