

# Disaster governance and prospects of inter-regional partnership in the Asia-Pacific

Cook, Alistair David Blair; Chen, Christopher Zhiming

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## **Disaster Governance and the Prospect of Inter-Regional Partnership in the Asia-Pacific?**

### **Abstract**

The Southwest Pacific is considered one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to natural hazards. Five of the Pacific Island States (PIS) rank among the top 20 most-at risk countries in the World Risk Index, with Vanuatu and Tonga ranking first and second respectively. The Southwest Pacific neighbours Southeast Asia and both regions are exposed to a variety of natural hazards, resulting in significant damage and loss of lives annually. Similar exposure to climate-induced hazards raises the potential to create a coalition of affected states from the Asia-Pacific to share knowledge of disaster governance in areas where niche capabilities have been developed and shape the global debate on the effects of natural hazards and climate-induced disasters. This article argues that inter-regional partnership on disaster governance is the next step in the Asia-Pacific to respond to a collective action problem affecting two sub-regions - Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. Through the conduct of desk research and interviews, this article first presents findings and observations on the disaster governance landscape and future developments in the Pacific. It then discusses disaster management frameworks and initiatives that ASEAN has institutionalised, and how work in the two sub-regions can complement one another and provide a platform to help shape the global agenda on disaster governance and climate change.

## Introduction

Non-traditional security threats such as climate change, pandemics and climate-induced disasters are becoming more prevalent. This necessitates greater collective action as individual nation states are often unable to address such threats alone. To this end, this article argues for greater inter-regional partnership between two regions that are inordinately exposed to non-traditional security threats – Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. In both regions, countries have built trusting partnerships through regional organisation. Through these regional organisations, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and their respective component and linked parts, have identified natural hazards and climate change as threats to regional peace and security. It is through these regional organisations that the issues have been framed as a common interest to member states. The regional organisations have therefore been identified as the site for and significant actor of regional partnership in addressing this common interest. However, while the role of issue framer is significant it is not a sufficient condition (Cook, 2018a, p.337).

This article navigates the different stakeholders involved in the domain of disaster governance in ASEAN and the PIF to assess the levels of compatibility between the two organisations and the prospects for inter-regional partnership between the two to address a mutually identified issue of common interest. To do this, the article answers two central questions to make this assessment. What is the current disaster management landscape in the Southwest Pacific? To what extent is there room for partnership between the two regions, and what form should this engagement take? To answer these questions, it first explores disaster governance in two Southwest Pacific Island States: Fiji and Tonga, highlighting the disaster management structures, mechanisms, and arrangements in place. Tonga was chosen as the first Pacific Island State to develop and approve a Joint National Action Plan for the integration of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (SPREP, 2015). Fiji was chosen as the home to the headquarters of regional organisations and is therefore the centre of regional cooperation in the Southwest Pacific. For the purpose of this article, we use the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) definition of disaster management, that is, the “organisation and management of resources and responsibilities for dealing with all humanitarian aspects of emergencies, in particular preparedness, response and recovery in order to lessen the impact of disasters” (IFRC, n.d.). The article is based on desk research and in-depth semi-structured interviews with humanitarian practitioners and academics in Fiji and Tonga. For desk research, the authors conducted a literature review of academic writing, institutional reports, press releases, and government policy documents on disaster management in Fiji and Tonga. Further, 36 in-depth semi-structured interviews -21 in Fiji, 15 in Tonga- were conducted during fieldwork in Suva, Fiji and Nuku’alofa, Tonga from 23<sup>rd</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Interview participants included government and military personnel, High Commissions, humanitarian workers from international and local humanitarian organisations, delegates from regional bodies, and members of faith-based organisations, and academia. The interviews were conducted on a non-attributable basis, and interviewees were provided with consent forms to sign, which guaranteed anonymity in line with university regulations.<sup>1</sup> The following guiding questions were posed to the participants throughout the interviews:

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<sup>1</sup> This research is administered by Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board project number IRB-2019-04-018.

- (i) Who are the disaster management actors in Fiji/Tonga and how do they coordinate with one another?
- (ii) What is the role of the military in emergency response efforts?
- (iii) What are some of the operational challenges to disaster management in Fiji/Tonga?
- (iv) What are some of the lessons learnt from previous disasters, and how much have they informed current disaster management strategies?
- (v) What is the level of regional/international cooperation in terms of disaster risk management in the Pacific?

These questions provided the authors with a degree of flexibility to explore different trajectories in the conversation whenever appropriate. Where applicable, sector-specific questions were also posed to participants. The aim was to identify Fiji and Tonga's disaster risk context and understand their disaster management frameworks and structures to assess the potential for inter-regional partnership with Southeast Asia.

Secondly, this article discusses and assesses the disaster management frameworks and initiatives that the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) has institutionalised, and whether they can complement the work of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Countries in the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia face similar vulnerabilities and disaster governance challenges. For instance, both regions are afflicted by similar types of disasters such as storm surges and cyclones. They are also susceptible to the effects of climate change. A recent report indicated that, by the year 2050, rising sea levels could affect over 300 million people living along coastal areas, which include most Southeast Asian states and the Pacific Islands States (Climate Central, 2019). With this common challenge, there are important opportunities for inter-regional partnership in disaster management and climate security, collectively referred to as disaster governance.

Regional declarations from ASEAN and PIF relating to disaster management and climate change highlight many overlapping concepts. A discourse analysis of ASEAN's *Declaration on Institutionalising the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and Peoples to Disasters and Climate Change* and the Pacific's *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* will be presented in a later part of this article, which will highlight similarities between the two regional approaches. Furthermore, both regions see human security concerns as a basis for regional partnership. These developments bode well for inter-regional partnership between ASEAN and the Southwest Pacific, and it is the aim of this article to explore this possibility. This article argues that inter-regional partnership on disaster management is the next step in the Asia-Pacific as countries with similar exposure to natural hazards and climate-induced disasters need to draw on collective action efforts to adapt, mitigate and respond to disasters. While states generally accept the utility of regional organisations, inter-regional coordination and collaboration on disaster governance is still woefully underdeveloped and this article aims to contribute research to fill this gap.

### **Disaster Risk Context in Fiji and Tonga**

The Southwest Pacific is home to 15 small island states and approximately 2.7 million people (Magee et al., 2016, p. 1091). Due to a combination of geographical location (low-lying coastal islands) and socio-economic factors (dependence on subsistence farming, internal migration to peri-urban areas), states in this region are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and extreme weather events (Johnston, 2015, p. 212). Many of them are located close

to the Cyclone Belt (Edmonds & Noy, 2018, p. 478). As such, they are exposed to a high frequency of tropical cyclones, and are especially susceptible to flooding and storm damage. The economic realities of these island states in particular make it harder for them to prepare for and recover from the impact of large-scale disasters, which might slow-down or even regress socio-economic progress in a country for generations.

The Pacific Island States (PIS) are known as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The SIDS are particularly vulnerable to disasters and the effects of climate change (see Table 1). On average, disasters in the region result in 14 percent damage to GDP and affects 11 percent of a country’s population (Lee et al., 2018).

**Table 1: Factors Determining Vulnerability in Small Island Developing States**

<b>Small size</b>	Spatial concentration of productive assets and key installations; limited natural resources.
<b>Insularity and remoteness</b>	Limited access to external goods; delays in information flows; high transportation costs.
<b>Environmental factors</b>	Large coastal zones.
<b>Disaster mitigation capability</b>	Limited hazard forecasting capabilities; limited insurance coverage.
<b>Demographic factors</b>	Small population; population concentrated in coastal zones.
<b>Economic factors</b>	Small economies; dependence on external finance; small domestic markets; highly specialised production.

Adapted from: Mark Pelling and Juha I. Uitto, “Small Island Developing States: Natural Disaster Vulnerability and Global Change” *Global Environmental Change Part B: Environmental Hazards* 3 (2001), No. 2: 49-62 (p. 53).

## **Fiji**

Fiji is an archipelagic country, made up of more than 320 islands. Its land mass spans over 18,000 km square, and is a mix of mountainous and volcanic terrain (Johnston, 2015, p. 212). Situated in the South Pacific, Fiji has a population of 883,483, of which 56.248 per cent of the population resides in urban areas (World Bank, 2018). The majority of the population live on the two largest islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. After Papua New Guinea, Fiji is the second largest country in the region. It is also one of the wealthier countries in the Pacific, and is geographically and culturally the centre of the Pacific. Hence, it has historically served as the regional hub for banking services, communications, flights, and shipping to other Pacific nations (Government of Fiji, 2016). Its economy is predominantly reliant on agriculture and tourism. At the sub-national level, Fiji is divided into four administrative divisions: Northern, Southern, Western, and Central (Winterford & Gero, 2018). Divisional commissioners are responsible for coordinating government services and development activities (Winterford & Gero, 2018). Local government in Fiji remains under-resourced and calls remain for an urgent need to revise and update the legal frameworks in this regard as there is no formal policy of ‘revenue-sharing’ between national and local government (Hassall & Tipu, 2008, p. 13).

Despite its larger size and relatively more developed status, Fiji is still vulnerable to the impacts of external shocks and natural disasters, ranking 10<sup>th</sup> out of 172 countries on the World Risk Index 2018 (Heintze et al., 2018). It is widely exposed to natural hazards, particularly tropical cyclones. Fiji is affected by an average of 12 to 15 tropical cyclones every decade (Bryant-Tokalau & Campbell, 2014). These are usually accompanied by high-intensity rainfall, which results in widespread flooding. On average, it is expected to incur about US\$85 million a year in losses due to disasters (Government of Fiji, 2016). Fiji would therefore benefit from the sharing of experience with countries similarly affected by natural hazards and climate change in building resilient infrastructure and processes to reduce its population's exposure to such phenomena.

### ***Cyclone Winston 2016***

On 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston hit Fiji's main island of Viti Levu. TC Winston struck the Eastern Division first, and reached peak strength just before hitting Viti Levu. The Category 5 cyclone was the most severe cyclone ever to make landfall in Fiji. Maximum average wind speeds reached 233km/h and they peaked at around 306km/h. This meant that TC Winston was one of the most powerful cyclones ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere.

Tables 2 and 3 provide a breakdown of the number of people affected by Tropical Cyclone Winston, as well as the value and number of residential houses damaged or destroyed. The Western division was the most affected by Cyclone Winston, with the most number of people affected and the most damages to infrastructure. This is not surprising, given that 40 percent of the total national population reside there. The region also contributes to 70 per cent of Fiji's GDP (Winterford & Gero, 2018). In total, approximately 540,400 people, or 62 percent of the population, were affected by the cyclone. Across all four administrative divisions, there were 44 confirmed fatalities, with 117 injured. 30,369 houses, 495 schools, and 88 health clinics and medical facilities were damaged or destroyed.

**Table 2: Population affected by Tropical Cyclone Winston**

Division	Deaths	Missing	Hospitalised	Injured	Number of people affected due to loss of livelihood of main bread winner	Number of people displaced	Total number of people affected
Central	6		2	24	162,698	5245	167,975
Eastern	22	1	3	59	30,222	7595	37,902
Northern	3		5	10	93,488	10210	103,716
Western	13		17	24	198,622	32145	230,821
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>485,030</b>	<b>55,195</b>	<b>540,414</b>

Source: Estimates based on Government of Fiji data.

Source: Government of Fiji, 2016

**Table 3: Value and Number of Houses Destroyed or Damaged by Division**

Division	Number of Houses Destroyed or damaged	Disaster Effects (F\$ million)						Total
		Destroyed	Major damage	Minor damage	Sub-total	Household goods	Wet block	
Central	2,573	37.6	12.0	6.3	55.8	5.1	3.8	64.7
Eastern	2,235	63.0	6.2	2.7	71.9	7.4	4.6	83.9
Northern	7,670	78.7	44.7	22.3	145.6	10.0	7.5	163.1
Western	17,891	252.8	89.7	45.1	387.6	31.3	20.4	439.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,369</b>	<b>432.1</b>	<b>152.6</b>	<b>76.4</b>	<b>660.9</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>751.0</b>

Source: Government of Fiji, 2016

The estimated value of disaster effects in Fiji stemming from TC Winston totalled F\$1.99 billion (US\$0.9 billion) (Government of Fiji, 2016). This included F\$1.29 billion (US\$0.6 billion) in damages and F\$0.71 billion (US\$0.3 billion) in losses.<sup>2</sup> The most significant impacts were felt by the productive and social sectors. The agriculture sector suffered F\$460.7 million in losses, while the housing sector incurred damages of about F\$751 million.

**Table 4: Summary of Disaster Effects by Sector**

	Disaster Effects (F\$ million)			Share of Disaster Effects* (%)	
	Damage	Losses	Total	Public	Private
<b>Productive Sectors</b>	<b>241.8</b>	<b>594.5</b>	<b>836.3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>88</b>
Agriculture	81.3	460.7	542.0	7	93
Commerce and Manufacturing	72.9	69.9	142.8	49	51
Tourism	76.1	43.9	120.0		100
Mining	11.5	20.0	31.5		100
<b>Social Sectors</b>	<b>827.9</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>867.9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>88</b>
Education	69.2	7.4	76.6	100	
Health	7.7	6.2	13.9	100	
Housing	751.0	26.4	777.4	2	98
<b>Infrastructure Sectors</b>	<b>208.2</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>248.6</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>16</b>
Transport	127.1	2.4	129.5	98	2
Water and Sanitation	16.9	7.9	24.8	100	
Electricity	33.0	8.1	41.1	100	
Communications	31.2	22.0	53.2	30	70
<b>Cross-Cutting Issues</b>	<b>239.6</b>	<b>660.1</b>	<b>899.7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>96</b>
Environment <sup>b</sup>	232.5	629.8	862.3		100
Culture and Heritage	5.1	0.8	5.9	23	77
Disaster Risk Management	2.0	29.5	31.5	100	
Total (Excluding Environment <sup>b</sup> )	1,285.0	705.2	1,990.2	78	22
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,517.5</b>	<b>1,335.0</b>	<b>2,852.5</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>16</b>

Source: Government of Fiji, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Destroyed assets and disruptions in goods and services

## **Tonga**

Tonga is a small kingdom that consists of 172 islands, of which 36 are inhabited. The country stretches over a distance of 800 km from North to South, and has a land mass of about 747 km square (Government of Tonga, 2018). The islands are clustered – Tongatapu and ‘Eau in the South, Ha’apai in the middle, Vava’u in the North, and Niuafo’ou and Niua Toputapu in the far North (Johnston, 2015, p. 212). Tonga has a population of 103,197, of which 23 per cent resides in urban areas (World Bank, 2018). The majority of the population live on the main island of Tongatapu, which is where the country’s capital, Nuku’alofa, is located. Even with its relatively small population size, Tonga has a higher population density than Fiji. This is largely due to the small land masses of the inhabited islands. As a Small Island Developing State, Tonga’s trade potential is severely hampered by its remoteness and insularity. Its economy is predominantly based on agriculture and fishing, with tourism gradually becoming an important source of income. The economy is also heavily reliant on overseas aid and remittances sent by migrant Tongans (Wallis, 2008, p. 410). Tonga was the first Pacific Island State to develop a Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management 2010 – 2015. Although policy documents and planning are in place, in-country capacity and relevant information remain major constraints (Bijay et al., 2013, p. 59).

As with other Pacific Island States, Tonga is also affected by rising sea-levels and tropical cyclones. It ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> on the World Risk Index 2018 (Heintze, 2018). On average, it is expected to incur about US\$15.5 million a year in losses due to earthquakes and tropical cyclones (Government of Tonga, 2018). This figure could increase if the impact of climate change is considered. Therefore, sharing experiences of disaster management with countries similarly affected by natural hazards and climate change would offer an important avenue to address the major constraints Tonga faces.

### ***Cyclone Gita 2018***

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Gita passed over Tongatapu and ‘Eua Island. Nuku’alofa sustained constant winds and was hit by the strongest section of the cyclone’s eyewall. With average wind speeds of 130 km/h and gusts of up to 195km/h, TC Gita was the strongest tropical cyclone to affect Tonga since 1982. There was also an accompanying storm surge, with 200mm of rainfall falling over a 24-hour period, resulting in localised flooding.

The estimated value of disaster effects in Tonga stemming from TC Gita totalled T\$356.1 million (US\$164.1 million), which is equivalent to 37.8 percent of the nominal GDP in Tonga (Government of Tonga, 2018). The most significant impacts were felt by the agriculture and housing sectors. TC Gita destroyed vast amounts of infrastructure including the airport, power lines, schools, public buildings, and houses, resulting in T\$111.60 million worth of damages. Over 800 houses were destroyed, with a further 4000 damaged. It also destroyed large amounts of crops, which contributed to the agriculture sector suffering T\$193.35 million in losses.

### **Table 5: Summary of Disaster Effects by Sector**

	DAMAGE	LOSSES	TOTAL
<b>Productive Sectors</b>	<b>54.88</b>	<b>138.47</b>	<b>193.35</b>
Agriculture	5.10	92.38	97.48
Commerce and Industry	23.48	31.79	55.27
Tourism	26.30	14.30	40.60
<b>Social Sectors</b>	<b>131.48</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>134.22</b>
Housing	111.60	0.02	111.62
Education	19.78	2.17	21.95
Health	0.10	0.55	0.65
<b>Infrastructure Sectors</b>	<b>22.46</b>	<b>6.08</b>	<b>28.54</b>
Energy	13.41	3.73	17.14
Public Buildings	5.47	1.00	6.47
Transport	2.32	0.76	3.08
Water and Sanitation	1.26	0.59	1.85
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>208.82</b>	<b>147.29</b>	<b>356.11</b>

Source: Government of Tonga, 2018

In terms of casualties, no lives were lost due to TC Gita. This was likely a result of early warnings and preparedness measures that were put in place in Tonga prior to the cyclone hitting. Based on available meteorological information and recommendations from the director of Tonga Meteorological Services and the National Emergency Management Committee, then acting Prime Minister, Hon. Semisi Sika, declared a State of Emergency for the whole of Tonga at 10am on February 12, 2018 (Government of Tonga, 2018). Following this declaration, the police imposed a curfew within the central business district of Nuku'alofa from 9pm to 8am, while Tonga Power temporarily shut down electricity 3 hours before the cyclone hit. About 4000 people also self-evacuated to evacuation centres. TC Gita also marked the first time that the cluster system was utilised in Tonga in support of disaster response.

### **Disaster Management Landscape in Fiji and Tonga**

Apart from their respective national civilian organisations that manage disasters, the governments of Fiji and Tonga are supported in disaster management by traditional humanitarian actors like the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and domestic NGOs. Non-traditional humanitarian actors such as regional bodies, faith-based organisations and national militaries further contribute to the system.

### **Government**

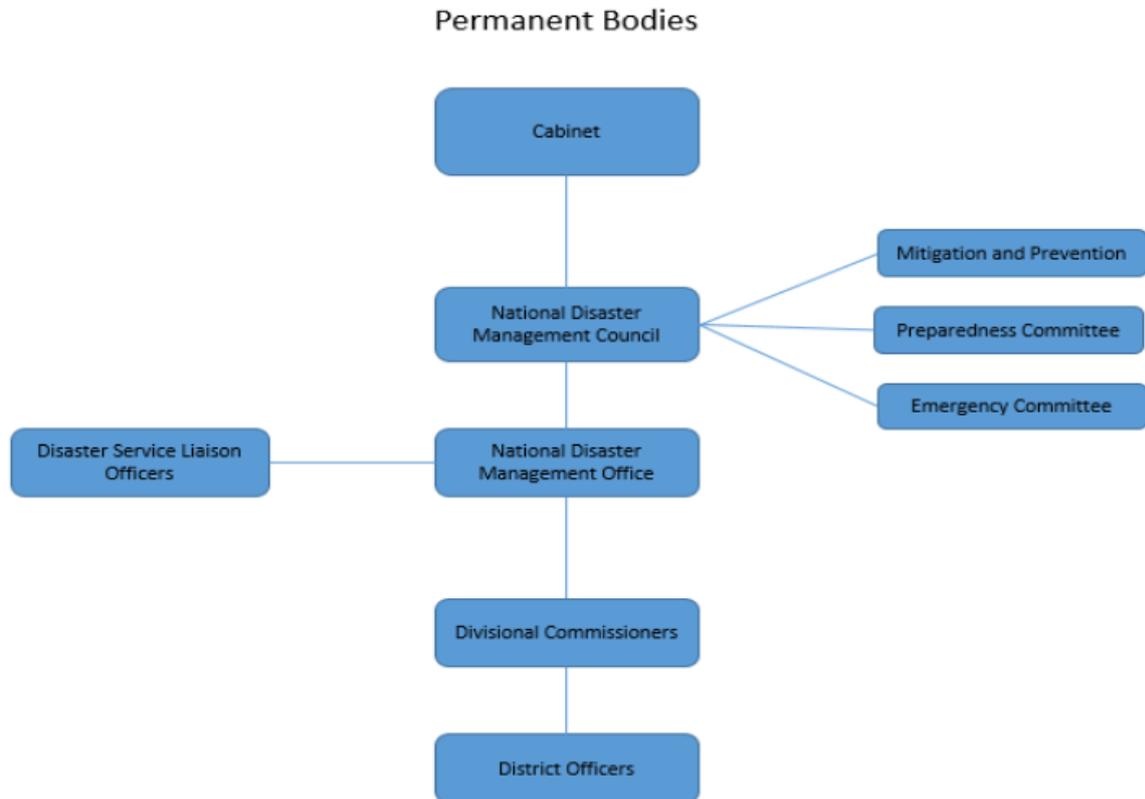
#### *(i) Fiji*

The main disaster management legal and policy framework in Fiji is provided by the National Disaster Management Act 1998. This, along with the National Disaster Management Plan 1995, serves to guide and frame Fiji's national disaster management strategy.

The National Disaster Management Plan 1995 outlines the organisational structure and the roles and responsibilities of government bodies in Fiji that are responsible for disaster management (see Figures 1(i) and 1(ii)).

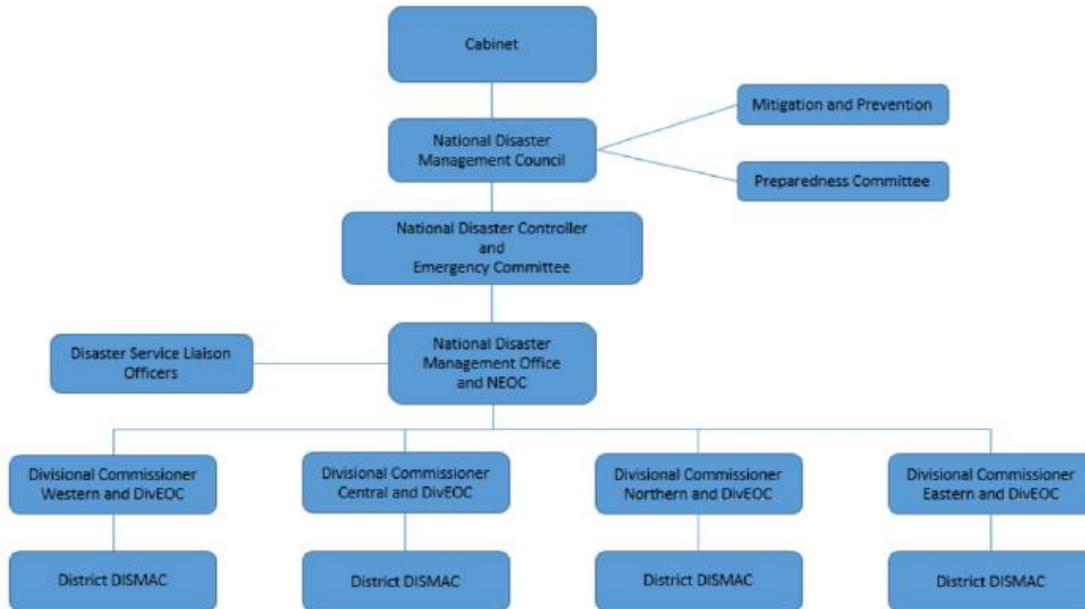
**Figure 1: Fiji’s Disaster Management Structure**

**(i) Permanent Bodies of the Disaster Management Structure**



**(ii) Disaster Management Structure during Emergency Operations**

### During Emergency Operations

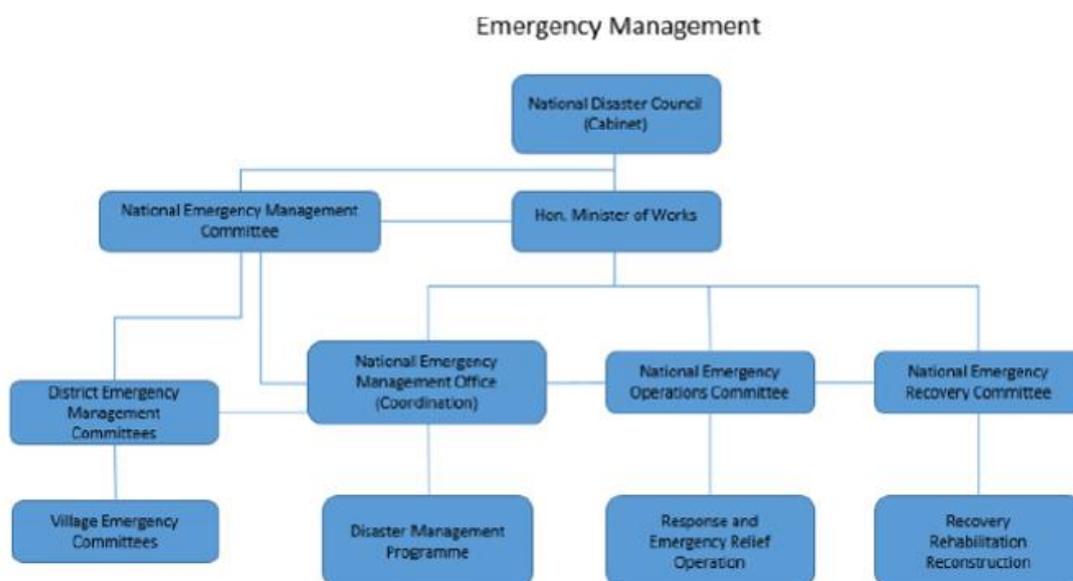


Adapted from: National Disaster Management Council, “Fiji National Disaster Management Plan”, 1995, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/FJI\\_%20N\\_DM\\_Plan\\_1995.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/FJI_%20N_DM_Plan_1995.pdf).

#### (ii) Tonga

Tonga’s National Emergency Management Plan provides the framework for whole-of-government emergency management (see Figure 2). The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) is the lead agency responsible for coordinating immediate operational responses to disasters while the Ministry of Infrastructure oversees long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. In Tonga, the Tonga Meteorological Service is currently working with the World Bank to establish a multi-hazards early warning system. The designs were scheduled to be finalised by the end of October 2019. Once operational, the system aims to provide more efficient and accurate forecasting of both seismic and climate-related hazards.

**Figure 2: The Structure of Emergency Management in Tonga**



Adapted from: National Emergency Management Committee, “Kingdom of Tonga National Emergency Management Plan”, 2009, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/TON\\_National%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%202009.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/TON_National%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%202009.pdf).

Fiji and Tonga are reviewing their respective national disaster management acts, and, as such, would benefit from sharing experiences with similarly exposed countries to build in-country capacity and processes. The reviews seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of various actors, strengthen the disaster risk reduction component of the legislation, and standardise protocols on international assistance. They will also look to incorporate a Pacific version of the 2007 “IDRL Guidelines”, a set of internationally endorsed guidelines meant to help governments become better prepared for legal problems commonly encountered in international disaster relief.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to move away from reactive disaster governance towards more proactive strategies and to ensure that legislative frameworks are able to respond to present and future needs in disaster management (SPC, 2018).

### **UN Agencies, INGOs and NGOs**

UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement participate actively in disaster response efforts in the Pacific. During peacetime, most of these organisations implement development programmes in the region. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Pacific Sub-Regional Office, UN Women Multi-Country Office, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Pacific, and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific are all based in Suva.

In Tonga, the UN presence consists of a United Nations Joint Presence Office (UNJPO) in Nuku’alofa. UNJPOs usually consist of a single national UN Country Coordination Officer.

<sup>3</sup> The long form of “IDRL Guidelines” is “Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance”.

Therefore, in the event of a disaster, UN capacity in the affected state might be overwhelmed. While UN agencies can provide much needed support, it is often reliant on surge capacity from outside the region in the event of a disaster due to the UN's limited longer-term presence in the region. It is therefore critical to look beyond reliance and surge capacity of international organisations and share experience with other regions similarly exposed to natural hazards and climate change.

### **Pacific Humanitarian Team**

The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) is a network of humanitarian organisations that work together to assist PIS in disaster preparedness and response. Apart from NGOs and humanitarian organisations, core members of the network include UN agencies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The wider network includes national governments, regional faith-based civil society organisations, donor agencies, the private sector, and academia (Pacific Humanitarian Team, 2018).

In recent years, countries in the Southwest Pacific have established their own national cluster systems. The PHT provides support to these national clusters as well as to governments. For example, in the immediate aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gita in Tonga, upon government request, the PHT in Suva mobilised to provide technical assistance and coordination support. The PHT strives to facilitate international humanitarian assistance in support of response efforts at the national, sub-national and community levels.

An issue raised during interviews in Tonga was the suitability of the current national cluster system. There are currently 10 clusters<sup>4</sup> in Tonga, a situation which, given the country's relatively small size, results in overlapping responsibilities of organisations and agencies. This is problematic when the cluster system is activated. For instance, in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gita, a UN staffer was asked to attend three concurrent cluster meetings. Calls have been made for a reassessment of the viability of having so many clusters in the PIS, where capacity and manpower are often limited. It would therefore benefit from sharing experience with countries in Southeast Asia who have moved to adapt the cluster system to the local context such as found in the Philippines (Abaya et al., 2019).

### **Regional bodies**

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is the region's main political and economic policy organisation (PIFS, n.d.). It fosters cooperation between regional governments and promotes collaboration with international partners. Climate change and disaster risk management are PIF priorities. The Pacific Community (SPC) is the main scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific with a focus on major cross-cutting issues, such as climate change, disaster risk management, food security, gender equality, human rights, non-communicable diseases and youth employment (SPC, n.d.). It has the mandate to coordinate disaster risk management initiatives in the Pacific. This can range from brokering discussions between NDMOs in the region to the disbursement of project funds to countries.

Established in 2014 as part of the Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific (BSRP) project, the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA) works with key national and

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<sup>4</sup> These are: Logistics, Food Security, Communications, Health and Sanitation, Safety and Protection, Education, Essential Services, Shelter, Economic and Social Recovery, and Reconstruction.

regional disaster response agencies such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), the Pacific Islands Fire and Emergency Services Association (PIFESA), ambulance services, and National Disaster Management Offices (SPC, 2016). It helps to coordinate emergency services and strengthen the capacity of key national response agencies in the Pacific. In doing so, it aims to facilitate cooperation amongst these agencies so that Pacific Island States can prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters more effectively.

During fieldwork, the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management* (FRDP) was identified as a key regional document. It was developed by Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Pacific Community (SPC), and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) with the support of the UN, EU, Australia, Sweden, USAID, and the World Meteorological Organisation (SPC, 2016). It aims to provide high-level strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development (SPC, 2016). It is seen as a forward-thinking and progressive platform to combine action on disaster governance and climate change. The *Framework* is one of the first in the world to combine these two areas which the signatories are committed to implementing it (Leslie and Wild, 2018, 32). It does appear that this platform is a ‘game-changer’, however, ownership is key to implementation and results. Extensive consultation and ‘ownership-building’ with relevant government officials and other stakeholders in-country is likely to be necessary for implementation and results (Leslie and Wild, 2018, 33). This will need the participation of the major stakeholders identified earlier – local as well as national government officials, NGOs, faith-based groups, private sector, UN Agencies and the Red Cross Movement.

Another significant document identified was the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*. Endorsed by Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2018, the *Boe Declaration* calls for recognizing climate change as the “single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific” and acknowledges an “expanded concept of security” that includes human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change (PIFS, 2018). Further to this, the *Boe Declaration Action Plan* was also formulated. This aims to provide a framework to help members implement aspects of the *Boe Declaration*. These documents were respectively launched in 2016 and 2018, almost a decade after the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response came into effect in 2009. Over the past decade Southeast Asia has implemented the agreement through the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre of Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) as its operational component and the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, its component working groups and the ASEAN Secretariat offering its strategic guidance and policy development. There are sufficient overlaps in approach in both regions which provides a firm basis for the sharing of knowledge in terms of effective implementation and the challenges faced during this period.

### **Civil-Military-Police Relations**

Apart from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga are the only countries in the Pacific with militaries. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and His Majesty’s Armed Forces (HMAF) of Tonga are very active in disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts. Both

militaries generally enjoy positive community perception owing to their peacetime involvement in rural and community development projects. For example, the RFMF’s engineer unit is heavily involved in construction and building projects throughout Fiji. Fiji’s participation in international peacekeeping efforts also helps to give its military gravitas. In terms of regional assistance, the RFMF offers aid to other Pacific countries in times of need.

Both militaries want to expand their operations, specifically in terms of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). The RFMF has a Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) and are in the process of assessment for it to be internationally recognised. In Tonga, the HMAF are planning to establish a medical corps. They are also seeking to participate as military observers in international peacekeeping or HADR exercises. As it stands, there are quite a few joint HADR exercises in the Pacific region (see Table 5). Over the past decade, ASEAN has sought to develop regional coordinating mechanisms instructive in this regard including the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meetings and its component expert group on HADR, the civil-military interactions through mechanisms such as the Joint Taskforce for HADR, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management, and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting. Further, the development of regional tools over the past decade such as the regional funds, exercises, logistics support framework, standard operating procedures, ASEAN Emergency Response Assessment Team (ERAT), ASEAN Militaries Ready Group and ASEAN Center for Military Medicine will also be instructive in the available options for greater partnership across the civilian and military and police sectors.

In Fiji, a new camp, tentatively named Camp Black Rock, is currently under construction in Nadi for use as a regional peacekeeping and HADR training centre for the Southwest Pacific, as well as a warehouse for relief supplies. Australia is financing its construction while New Zealand supports the development of its training syllabus. With a target operational date of December 2020, the facility will have the capacity to train around 300 people. The RFMF also plan to extend the training programmes to police forces in the region in the future. Interviewees from both militaries noted that they often rely on training offers from partners. The imminent opening of Camp Black Rock provides a timely opportunity for inter-regional partnership, specifically in terms of knowledge sharing and training.

**Table 5: Notable Joint Exercises in the Pacific Region**

Exercise	Type	Frequency	Last Held	Participating Countries/Organisations in Last Exercise	Area of Focus
Long Reach (Fiji)	Bilateral	Biennial	2017	Australian Defence Force, RFMF, Fiji Police Force, Salvation Army, Various NGOs	HADR — Planning and Preparedness
Long Reach (Tonga)	Bilateral	Biennial	2018	Australian Defence Force, HMAF, NEMO, Cluster Focal Points	HADR — Fostering interoperability of plans

Tava Kula	Multinational	Annual	2018	HMAF, Armed forces from Australia, New Zealand, France and USA, Nevada National Guard <sup>5</sup>	HADR and Emergencies
Tropic Twilight	Multinational	Annual	2016	HMAF, Armed forces from Australia, New Zealand, USA, China,	HADR with a specific focus on improving water storage, sanitation, and medical assistance
Pacific Endeavour — Multinational Communications Interoperability Programme (MCIP)	Multinational	Annual	2018	Australia, Bangladesh, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, USA	HADR with a specific focus on compatibility and interoperability of communication systems
Kurukuru	Regional	Biennial	2018	Pacific Islands Forum members, Dialogue partners	Maritime surveillance exercise involving Pacific patrol boats together with naval forces from Australia, New Zealand, USA, and France
Pacific Angel	Regional	Annual	2018	US Pacific Command, Pacific Countries	HADR and Civil–military operations

### Faith-based organisations

Our fieldwork also revealed that Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) play a very important role in disaster governance in the Pacific. Some 90 per cent of Tongans and 65 per cent of Fijians are affiliated to a Christian denomination. The largest Christian denominations are the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Seventh-day Adventist Church also have notable presence in both countries. Churches in Fiji and Tonga are generally well funded and possess solid infrastructure capable of withstanding strong winds and rainfall. As such, church halls are often designated as evacuation centres. Churches and FBOs are also seen as the gatekeepers of the community and enjoy a high degree of trust and legitimacy. Similar to the Humanitarian Forum Indonesia, platforms such as the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CANDO) exist in the Pacific to facilitate and coordinate FBO engagement in humanitarian

<sup>5</sup> The Nevada National Guard (USA) established a formal partnership with the Tongan military in 2014, which includes joint training exercises and exchanges in Tonga and Nevada.

affairs. These national level coordination bodies in the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia also offer an opportunity to share their experiences in disaster governance to further build capacities in both regions.

### **Private sector**

In terms of disaster risk management and response, government agencies and NGOs in Fiji and Tonga have very limited engagement with the private sector. No formal ties and arrangements have been established thus far. Most of the private sector contributions involved ad-hoc funding and participation during disaster response. One explanation for this is that the private sector is less developed in the PIS than elsewhere, and the government remains the main service provider. As such, there is room for increased engagement with the private sector in multi-stakeholder forums to discuss the role of businesses in longer-term disaster risk reduction initiatives. In Southeast Asia, the Philippines has developed a national level coordination mechanism for the private sector. The Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF) strengthens joint efforts in private sector involvement in disaster risk reduction and management. This experience provides a further point for knowledge sharing to build local capacity in the Southwest Pacific.

Insurance penetration is also relatively low in Fiji and Tonga. This is due to the small size of their economies, their limited borrowing capacity and reliance on external aid. Not many insurers and reinsurers operate in the region, and the few that are available are unwilling to extend coverage to natural disasters. There is also a lack of awareness about insurance mechanisms at the community level. The sharing of perspectives on private sector engagement in disaster management in Southeast Asia could offer insights into how to activate this relationship in the Southwest Pacific. Efforts can also be made to share experiences of the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) and the Southeast Asia Disaster Risk Insurance Facility (SEADRIF). In this regard, the relatively longer experience in the Southwest Pacific would benefit Southeast Asia as it seeks to further develop its own regional disaster risk insurance mechanism.

### **ASEAN's Role in Disaster Management**

In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plays a significant role in disaster management and governance (Simm, 2018, p. 120). Founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, it was formed as an organisation to promote regional cooperation (ASEAN, n.d.). Five other Southeast Asian states have also become members, namely Brunei Darussalem, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Since its inception, ASEAN has recognised the need for mutual assistance to address the threats and effects of disasters. With the exception of Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, ASEAN Member States have had to deal with a variety of natural hazards, which include earthquakes, droughts, cyclones, typhoons, floods, and volcanic activity (di Floristella, 2016, p. 292). These are often exacerbated by structural inequalities and climate change.

In response to these challenges, ASEAN has incorporated numerous initiatives over the years in relation to disaster management. Three key initiatives that stand out are the *2005 Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response* (AADMER), the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre), and the *ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response*.

## ***Declarations and Agreements***

Signed by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN in July 2005, AADMER came into force on 24 December 2009 once it was ratified by all ASEAN Member States. The legal document endeavours to provide a proactive regional framework for the strategic and joint management of disasters in the region (ASEAN, n.d.). The expansive and ambitious agreement included provisions for “setting up an ASEAN disaster relief fund, mobilising relief assistance, expediting customs and immigration clearance, utilising military and civilian personnel in disaster relief, and establishing a centre to coordinate the regional disaster response” (Thuzar, 2013, p. 301). In 2008, AADMER was invoked to provide an avenue of cooperation and to negotiate access to affected communities in response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Cook, 2018a, p.348).

The *ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as one in the Region and Outside the Region* is an important development in the Southeast Asian region, especially in the context of this article. The declaration envisions ASEAN responding to disasters in the region and outside the region as one, with as many relevant stakeholders as needed (AHA Centre, n.d.). It is meant to be an inclusive doctrine, and in its final iteration, it has aspirations for the AHA Centre to be able to coordinate an ASEAN response outside of the Southeast Asian region (Cook, 2018b, p. 368). ASEAN has been at the forefront of bringing together key humanitarian responders to develop an effective and coordinated response firstly within Southeast Asia but with the aim of driving partnership in the wider Asia-Pacific (Cook, 2018b, p. 362).

### ***ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)***

Part of operationalising and institutionalising AADMER involved the establishment of the AHA Centre in 2011. Headquartered in Jakarta, Indonesia, the AHA Centre is the main ASEAN regional coordinating agency on disaster management and emergency response (AHA Centre, n.d.). Reporting to the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), it facilitates cooperation and coordination amongst ASEAN Member States in times of disasters and acts as the focal point for all HADR missions in the region. While it primarily works with the National Disaster Management Organisations (NDMOs) of the Member States, it also engages with international organisations, the United Nations, private sector, and civil society organisations (AHA Centre, n.d.). As such, it can be considered a platform for regional humanitarian partnership.

Since its inception, the AHA Centre has constantly tried to establish itself as the main broker and clearing house of disaster management in the region (di Floristella, 2016, p. 297). The AHA Centre is referred to as the full-time “operational engine” to turn political commitment, policies and decisions into action (Said, 2018). While it still faces notable limitations in terms of capacity and resource mobilisation, it has endeavoured to establish linkages with multiple stakeholders, ranging from external powers to the private sector (di Floristella, 2016, p. 298; AHA Centre, n.d.). In terms of operational robustness, the quality of the AHA Centre’s responses to major disasters in the region since its inception is still widely debated (Hughes, 2015). Nevertheless, we can observe its evolution by comparing responses to Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and the 2018 Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami.

Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 was arguably a watershed moment for ASEAN and the AHA Centre. It tested ASEAN's collective response capabilities as well as the AHA Centre's capacity to coordinate a response to a large-scale disaster (AHA Centre, 2018, p. 7). There were many positives during the response. The AHA Centre was one of the first humanitarian agencies to field personnel in Tacloban, even before the Typhoon made landfall (AHA Centre, 2014, p. 39). The consensus was also that the AHA Centre collaborated very well with the Government of Philippines in terms of organising the delivery of aid items. However, the disaster exposed some limitations of the ASEAN disaster management system. Particular attention was drawn to the inability of the AHA Centre to coordinate international efforts and to share information effectively among the various stakeholders (AHA Centre, 2014, p. 48). This was mainly because there was no coordination centre set up in the field – in Tacloban – or at the operational level – in Manila, as well as a lack of interface across various information management platforms. This was recognised as causing 'visibility damage' to the AHA Centre because it focused its efforts on working with the Philippines national disaster management office and was not seen as an active player in the field (Cook, 2018b, p.368).

Lessons learnt from the response inspired and laid the foundation for the idea of One ASEAN One Response, which advocates for the mobilisation of relevant sectors and stakeholders from within and outside ASEAN institutions to provide collective response to disasters (AHA Centre, 2018, p. 21). With more experience under its belt, the AHA Centre has endeavoured to increase its maximum capacity and potential to respond to large-scale disasters. This was evident in the more recent 2018 Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami, when the AHA Centre was assigned a central coordinating role by the Indonesian government and supported most of the country's engagement with the broader humanitarian community. ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Teams (ASEAN-ERAT) assisted the Indonesian National Disaster Management Authority (BNPB) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in setting up the Joint Operations and Coordination Center for International Assistance (JOCCIA), which helped Indonesia manage incoming offers of international assistance (AHA Centre, 2018). This was the first time that a regional body was assigned to coordinate offers of non-governmental and international assistance during a disaster response, and the consensus was that the AHA Centre and ASEAN 2.0 had proven themselves to be operational (Trias & Cook, 2019). All of these contribute significantly towards realising the AHA Centre's goal of becoming the central coordinating agency for disaster management and emergency response in the region, and is a clear indication that it is making headway in terms of improving its operational and coordination capacity

### **Inter-Regional Partnership on Disaster Governance**

The Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world. While individual countries face varying levels of disaster risk, most of the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asian states are vulnerable to similar effects of climate change and climate-related hazards (UNESCAP, 2019). This shared vulnerability raises the possibility of fostering inter-regional partnership between the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia, in the realm of disaster governance. This article argues that this stems from the need for collective action to address these shared vulnerabilities.

#### ***Collective Action***

Shared vulnerabilities provide the push needed for collective action between Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asian states. Inter-regional partnership thus plays a functional role in terms of

ensuring regional and human security. States are motivated to set up regional organisations because of a rational desire to decrease the economic and human costs of future disasters (Hollis, 2015, p. 10). These organisations and institutions are instrumental in providing a platform for stakeholders, policy makers, and technical practitioners to congregate and share expertise and viewpoints (Jeggle, 2015, p. 256). Moreover, they serve as a “repository for documented experience, data acquisition and analysis, and learning experience that provides essential recall and advance for future generations” (Jeggle, 2015, p. 256). Caballero-Anthony (2010, p. 2) argues that the transnational nature of non-traditional security challenges, which include disasters and climate change, is far too expansive for national and domestic institutions to handle.

Regional and international partnership stem from the need to deal with collective action problems. In this regard, institutions are viewed as the solution to these problems (Hurrell, 1995, p. 350). While oftentimes global and regional level governance are often seen in competition, the reality is that during a crisis these levels of governance negotiate their relative positions of responsibility. Any number of different circumstances can determine the direction of the relationship but timing is always a critical factor in influencing it (Herr, 1994, 261). Strategic interactions at the regional level on issues such as disaster governance can help to create opportunities for cooperation. As seen in the case of Southeast Asia, regional governance and oversight appear to be *de rigueur* in the sphere of disaster management in recent years. This rational institutionalist logic can be applied to inter-regional partnership as well. Cross-regional engagement allows parties involved to capitalise on collaborative relationships and leverage on core competencies in disaster management. For instance, Fiji, Tonga and most ASEAN Member States share largely similar views regarding the use of the military as a first responder in disaster situations. Other Pacific Island States, on the other hand, rely on civilian institutions such as the police to provide disaster response. In the recent regional meeting of the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination in the Asia-Pacific in December 2019, there was a noticeable shift from conceptualising partnerships solely through civil-military relations to one viewed through a civilian-military-police lens to include broader engagement from Pacific Island States. The RCG provides a platform for engagement across the different sub-regions of the Asia-Pacific. However, the relatively low participation of Pacific Island States remains a concern. The RCG established a Pacific working group in an attempt to address this issue; but to date, this has had limited results. Therefore a more localised inter-regional platform between ASEAN and Pacific Island States as neighbouring regions offers a pathway for closer proximate engagement and a potentially higher order humanitarian civil-military partnership (Cook & Yogendran, 2020). Civil-military forums and exercises could thus be potential entry points to further develop inter-regional engagements between ASEAN Member States and Pacific Island States. Both regions can share field experience of disaster management and identify practices that they can adapt to their own context. Such interactions would enhance the ability of states in the respective regions to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

### *Normative Impetus*

Apart from rational and functional motivations for inter-regional partnership, there is also evidence that normative conditions in both the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia are favourable for such an endeavour. As Tarte (2014, p. 314) argues, regional institutions and frameworks play a key role in the maintenance of regional order in the Pacific as they help

Pacific Island States assert their sovereign identities and rights. The most obvious manifestation of this can be seen in articulations of a common regional identity, dubbed ‘the Pacific Way’, which emphasises moderation, respect, consensual dialogue and inclusiveness (Huffer, 2006, p. 47). Hence, countries in the Pacific have demonstrated a “strong historical commitment to regional cooperation, consensus decision making and environmental sensitivity” (Jeggle, 2015, p. 267). At face value, this seems consistent with the ASEAN Way, which favours consensus-based decision-making and a “process of regional cooperation and interaction based on discretion, informality, consensus-building and non-confrontational bargaining styles” (Acharya, 2001, p. 64). These common regional norms offer a conducive environment to develop a relationship between countries in the two regions.

A comparison of recent regional Declarations from ASEAN and PIF relating to disaster management and climate change also reveal many overlapping concepts (See Table 6). By using the same DRM terminology and referent points, as well as aspiring towards similar goals, these declarations, and by extension the regional organisations that they are derived from, become “conduit[s] for global norms” (Hollis, 2015, p. 78). In the case of ASEAN and PIF, common themes in the Declarations revolve around combatting the effects of climate change and impacts of natural hazards, striving for peace and prosperity, and strengthening knowledge sharing processes. These common themes and norms arguably provide the impetus for inter-regional partnership. Despite the different local customs, traditions and political systems of both the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia, the similarity in terms of goals, language and disaster governance structures establishes an environment that is conducive for fostering inter-regional partnership.

Constructivist approaches in International Relations argue that normative logic drives regional processes. For instance, Rum (2016) asserts that the diffusion of norms and concepts of disaster governance, specifically from international organisations such as the UN, drive regional cooperation on disaster management. Hollis (2015) applies world society theory to regional disaster risk management efforts, arguing that global norms push regional organisations to develop humanitarian capacities. While these theories are often applied at the state and (singular) regional level, we argue that this applies to inter-regional partnership as well. What’s more is that given the respective regional organisations have so far limited influence within wider global debates developing a strategic partnership between the two would go some way to bolster their influence in key areas notably on disaster governance (natural hazards and climate change). The benefits of global governance for Small Island States have been overstated. While participation in International Organisations can raise their profile, facilitate networking, and raise awareness of particular concerns, the ability of leaders to steer these concerns have been constrained by capacity constraints (Corbett and Connell, 2015, p. 454). ASEAN’s One ASEAN One Response doctrine, for instance, can be interpreted as ASEAN’s normative push towards cooperation with other regional bodies, specifically in the field of disaster management. In this context, partnership between the two regions on disaster management is the logical next step.

### **Table 6: Comparison of Regional Declarations**

	<b>Declaration on Institutionalising the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and Peoples to Disasters and Climate Change (2015)<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018)<sup>7</sup></b>
On climate change	<i>“Commit to forge a more resilient future by reducing existing disaster and climate-related risks, preventing the generation of new risks and adapting to a changing climate through the implementation of economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental measures which address exposure and vulnerability, and thus strengthen resilience”</i>	<i>“We reaffirm that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement”</i>
On cooperation with external stakeholders	Not present in this particular Declaration but can be found in <i>ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response<sup>8</sup></i>	<i>“engage and cooperate, where appropriate, with international organisations, partners and other relevant stakeholders”</i>
On the pursuit of common goals	<i>“where peoples and communities thrive in peace and prosperity as envisioned in the ASEAN Community’s Post-2015 Vision and its attendant documents”</i>	<i>“Recalling our vision and values for the Pacific under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, as a region of ‘peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives’”</i>
On respect for sovereignty	Not present in this particular Declaration but is an underlying principle of ASEAN	<i>“We respect and assert the sovereign right of every Member to conduct its national affairs free of external interference and coercion”</i>
On the need for knowledge sharing and dialogue	<i>“Continue sharing and dissemination of risk and climate information to support ongoing and future efforts on research and development in disaster risk management and climate change adaptation”</i>	<i>“facilitate open dialogue and strengthened information sharing”</i>

<sup>6</sup> ASEAN, “Declaration on Institutionalising the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and Peoples to Disasters and Climate Change”, 2015, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/26th-DECLARATION-ON-INSTITUTIONALISING-Final.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, “Boe Declaration on Regional Security”, 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

<sup>8</sup> ASEAN, “ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response”, 2016, <https://asean.org/storage/2016/09/Declaration-on-One-ASEAN-One-Response.pdf>.

<p>On the need for developing national/local/regional capacity</p>	<p><i>“Strengthen the capacities of national and regional institutions to monitor and reduce risk as well as enhance their adaptive capacities through the promotion of education on climate change and disaster risk management and exchange of innovative practices and learning experiences, among others”</i></p>	<p><i>“strengthening national security capacity including through training”</i></p>
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Moreover, states seem to be more willing to cooperate on disaster management. Referring to the expedited negotiation process of AADMER in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Di Floristella (2016, p. 296) argues that cooperation on disaster management “appears to more easily overcome the ASEAN states’ long standing mutual suspicions, and moves it away from its usual processes which have circumvented any form of institutionalisation” in the past. This is perhaps due to a common understanding among governments regarding the shared vulnerabilities of their respective societies to natural hazards and climate-induced disasters. Furthermore, as some scholars assert, disasters can catalyse diplomatic action, and create opportunities to build frameworks of cooperation (Wati et al., 2018, p. 63; Kelman, 2012). There has also been an historical precedent of bilateral engagements between Southeast Asian states and Pacific Island States. In 2015, Indonesia sent US\$2 million worth of humanitarian aid to Vanuatu, which was devastated and economically crippled by Cyclone Pam. In addition, a team of 19 experts was also sent to help Vanuatu with the reconstruction and rehabilitation process (The Jakarta Post, 2015). More recently, in the aftermath of Cyclone Harold, Indonesia also sent 12.9 tons of in-kind humanitarian aid to Fiji (Antara News, 2020). Hence, the stage seems well set up for more sustained engagement between states from both regions, which bodes well for future inter-regional partnership.

## Conclusion

The findings presented in this article suggest that partnership between ASEAN Member States and Pacific Island States is a distinct possibility. A close reading of the text of two recent regional Declarations- *Declaration on Institutionalising the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and Peoples to Disasters and Climate Change* and *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*- reveals many similarities in terms of policy direction and priorities in disaster governance. Along with their shared vulnerabilities and challenges, there is room to consider the viability of inter-regional partnership between the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia as well as what form this collaboration should take. For instance, ASEAN’s One ASEAN One Response vision of responding to disasters as one inside and outside the region could apply to the Southwest Pacific as an important region to explore how this can be realised. The ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management - which charts the strategic direction of ASEAN’s disaster management mechanisms – also lays out the importance of forming stronger “traditional and non-traditional partnerships” (ASEAN, 2016, p. 22). More broadly, the ASEAN Community offers numerous entry points to engage with the Southwest Pacific on disaster governance. For example, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) offers an operational avenue to engage Fiji’s emerging regional organisation.

In order to expedite inter-regional cooperation, it is important to first establish bilateral links prior to establishing regional partnerships on a more operational footing. More interaction is necessary across a wider range of Southeast Asian states with Pacific Island States to further progress inter-regional partnership on disaster governance. To this end, the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC) in Singapore, which is also run by a military, is a potential partner to the RFMF for exchanging information and experience in HADR covering a region with exposure to natural hazards. As one of the world’s top financial and innovation hubs, Singapore can also share lessons on disaster risk financing and ex-ante risk management initiatives. Singapore is currently hosting SEADRIF – the Southeast Asian region’s first catastrophe risk facility - and providing technical capacity building, reinsurance capacity, modelling support, and financial support to the initiative (Monetary Authority of Singapore, 2019). Its National Catastrophe Data Analytics Exchange (NatCatDAX) project uses remote sensing technologies to collect building images and extrapolate them to calculate potential economic exposure and losses from the effects of natural hazards. This data is then used to inform stakeholders and policymakers from both the public and the insurance sectors to create sustainable, robust solutions to address the disaster protection gap (Chen, Foo & Sembiring, 2018). These initiatives dovetail with PCRAFI in the Pacific, which aims to provide Pacific Island States with disaster risk modeling and assessment tools (PCRAFI, n.d.). Table 7 below lists some ways in which ASEAN and PIF could focus on enhancing inter-regional partnership.

**Table 7: Opportunities for Inter-Regional Partnership**

Normative	<p>Develop an inter-regional ASEAN-PIF climate change and resilience agreement to act as the overarching framework for the shared challenges faced by the two regions.</p> <p>Identify knowledge sharing opportunities and develop institutional capacity by encouraging joint simulated exercises for disaster management, capacity building training programmes, and government-to-government exchanges.</p> <p>Build bilateral ties between countries which experience similar hazards so that transferable state-led emergency coordination and local governance mechanisms can help improve country capacity.</p> <p>Establish an inter-regional network of ASEAN-PIS countries for sharing of experiences and joint capacity-building.</p>
Operational	<p>Supplement capacity at the national level by establishing a roster of technical experts and disaster management specialists who can be deployed around the region. Once implemented, it can gradually evolve into a joint ASEAN-PIF roster.</p>

	<p>Encourage ASEAN to extend access to its disaster management training programmes to offer participation opportunities to personnel from Pacific Island States.</p> <p>Enhance multi-hazard disaster risk monitoring and early warning capacity by developing partnerships with regional bodies with relevant technical expertise such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (RHCC).</p> <p>Explore partnerships between Camp Black Rock in Fiji and similar bodies in Southeast Asia (such as the RHCC in Singapore) by identifying overlapping areas of interest.</p>
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Overall, this article examined the disaster management landscape of two Pacific Island States -Fiji and Tonga- and by extension, the Southwest Pacific. In doing so, it identified disaster governance as an area of potential partnership between the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia. The article also shows that top-down, bottom-up, and normative developments in both regions indicate favourable conditions for inter-regional partnership.

As with any new partnership, one can foresee obstacles in the initial stages. One challenge lies in determining the extent of inter-regional partnership and what form it should take. While the two regional blocs do have aligned interests, their members have vastly different capabilities. The prospects of an equal-footing partnership versus that of a patron-client relationship would undoubtedly be a point of contention. Moreover, both regions have established regional organisations, with their own mechanisms, structures, and best practices in place. Introducing another actor, albeit one with many similarities, could potentially create more inefficiencies. Another challenge lies in ASEAN's preoccupation with sovereignty and non-interference (Fan & Krebs, 2014). Some scholars have argued that ASEAN's stance towards disaster management remains primarily state-centric. National governments tend to take centre-stage when disasters hit. While this is not an unwelcome situation, it does raise questions surrounding partnership with external entities, particularly with parties outside the region. A caveat to intra-regional partnerships lies in the requirement for ASEAN members to agree on a proposed external partnership of any kind before any ASEAN body can proceed with the move. Hence, there could be a significant "gestation period" before partnerships can get off the ground. Disasters, however, can provide the most visible impetus to accelerating such partnerships. Last but not least, the question also remains as to whether declarations generate significant normative changes which can be turned into tangible action. Without political buy-in from all the member states, it would be tough to envision any significant collaboration between both regional blocs.

To this end, we view knowledge-sharing as a first step that can be undertaken to jumpstart this relationship. This can then be gradually scaled up to encompass joint training programmes and exercises. There is growing potential for ASEAN and PIF to leverage on each other's perspectives, technical expertise, and institutional processes. Relative geographical proximity and shared vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change lend credence to the argument for advancing inter-regional partnership on disaster management. At the national and local levels, the building of bridges between stakeholders in the two regions will also have an impact on the efficacy of future disaster responses. As disasters continue to affect the Asia-Pacific region, the challenge is to understand how the various actors can cooperate in order to produce more effective disaster management practices. In the current environment, regional organisations already play vital roles in shaping and determining regional dynamics and norms. In line with the AHA Centre's aspirations of coordinating a disaster response outside of the region in the future, it is perhaps time to explore the possibilities and mechanics of inter-regional partnership between Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. As Caballero-Anthony (2010, p. 2) states, policymakers should strive to "re-think existing regional modalities" to address threats that originate from disasters and climate change.

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