

The challenges to disaster risk reduction education in the South Pacific

- By *Timote M. Vaioleti, IMPAECT/University of Waikato, New Zealand; and ASPBAE Executive Council member representing the South Pacific*

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014 (IPCC) report confirms its 1990 research that a 30-50cm sea level rise projected by 2050 will threaten low lying islands, and that a 1m rise by 2100 'would render some island countries uninhabitable'. This article addresses the challenges to disaster risk reduction education, how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can respond to these challenges, and share initiatives to address disaster education and ESD in the South Pacific.

CHALLENGES TO DISASTER RISK REDUCTION EDUCATION

There is seemingly a Cartesian and fatalistic position taken by Pacific people when it comes to disasters. There is an acceptance that nature is a separate but an integral entity in a (super) natural relationship with humankind. Abundance, famine, tsunami, or typhoon can be a reward or retribution. From another perspective, western education brought reason and universality which came to dominate content and pedagogies over local ways resulting in disconnection with local contexts and needs. References to rising sea levels and intensification of weather conditions, which are the most likely cause of disasters for low-lying nations are almost non-existent

in their school curriculum. In an exercise carried out for UNESCO and the Kiribati Ministry of Education (MOE) to identify climate change (CC) topics in the Kiribati curriculum, the following emerged:

In mapping the national curriculum, a tick was given to every topic that teach awareness of CC, adaptation to CC, mitigation against CC, and related issues to CC. The surprise omission was the absence of topics taught on adaptation.

WHAT SHOULD EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD) COVER IN THE REGION?

There are three pillars of ESD - society, environment, and economy. The essential driver of these pillars is culture, its survival, and continuity. Thaman's (2010) solution to these issues is to hold on to local philosophies and cultures, especially in terms of resilience strategies.

Thaman suggests that Pacific ancestors had survived over thousands of years through awareness and adaptation. Future communities' continuity will come from appropriate formal and non-formal education that develop

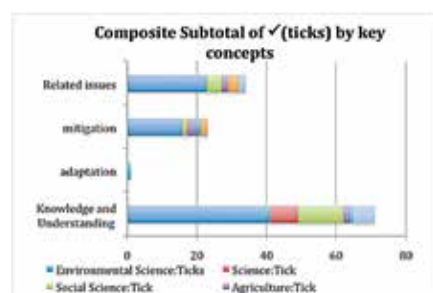
culture, sports, contextualise tourism, and other businesses unique to the region, a type of differentiation that takes advantage of their geography and history.

SOME INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS DISASTER EDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Working closely, the Kiribati Curriculum Development and Resource Centre (CDRC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) developed a book called 'Children take action - A Climate Change Story' to improve literacy skills and the basics of climate change, which is available in schools.

The Australian International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative funded the printing of the book and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)/Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have since translated it into te-Kiribati.

Climate change is an international issue and international collaborative efforts are being made to educate people in the Pacific on ESD.



Adapted from Vaioleti et. al (2011, p. 46)

