

Tuvalu and Samoa

In 2005 the small Pacific islands Tuvalu and Samoa volunteered for a pilot project on climate change managed by the IFRC. Both countries have reason to be concerned. Samoa has a meteorological history which is one of the oldest in the Pacific. It shows a steady temperature rise and a simultaneous decrease in rainfall. Communities support this observation anecdotally and identify water scarcity as a large and increasing problem. The government likewise.

Tuvalu in turn is one of the smallest countries in the world and consists of nine remote atolls spread over 500 kilometres in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. In recent years, it experienced increased media attention due to its unique vulnerability to climate change – its highest elevation is just five metres above sea level. With accelerated melting of the ice sheets, Tuvalu is threatened by the Pacific. The country has already lost one metre of land around the circumference of the largest atoll. And there was not much to spare: at its widest point Tuvalu only spans about 200 metres.

The climate-change adaptation pilot aims to build the capacity of the local Red Cross in dealing with the impacts of climate change, in raising awareness among inhabitants and helping them prepare for disaster.

As a result the Tuvalu Red Cross in 2006 joined existing climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives set up by the Tuvalu National Disaster Management Office and the meteorological office. Together they have conducted workshops on risk reduction in primary schools in the country's capital Funafuti. More workshops were given on every island, targeting different communities. At the same time radio programmes were broadcast ahead of the cyclone season, raising awareness and informing people about how to protect themselves.

The Samoa Red Cross has been building networks as well –as a way of gathering scientific and policy information on climate change as much as anything else – to educate its own staff and volunteers. It established contacts with the government departments of meteorology, health and the environment, with the National Disaster Management Office, the water authority and non-governmental organizations.

Looking at its own strengths and weaknesses, the Samoa Red Cross also analysed how and where it could be most effective in addressing climate change. It is experienced in first aid, disaster preparedness and response, and providing clean water. It has many (young) volunteers willing to get involved in reducing climate risks. The organization sees specific challenges and opportunities in the areas of water availability and countering the health impacts of disasters.

The Climate Centre's contribution

The Red Cross societies of Tuvalu and Samoa, through the regional office of the IFRC in Fiji, received the Climate Centre's help in gathering local and regional information on climate change and its effects. They got support in identifying national stakeholders and possible partners, and in setting up contacts. The Centre provided substantial input on how to integrate climate change into regular disaster management activities and tools, and helped to draw up the project outline.

Donors Japanese Red Cross, Australian Youth Volunteer Programme
Partner organizations Samoa Red Cross, Tuvalu Red Cross