Invasive Species Emergency Response Simulation

Participants of the simulation exercise.

A simulation exercise to test Samoa’s new Invasive Species Emergency Response Plan (SISERP) was conducted on Friday June 26, 2015 at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) Crop Research Centre at Nu’u. The simulation was led jointly by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and MAF and was attended by 20 government staff and civil society participants.

The purpose of the simulation was to test the relevance, practicality and effectiveness of the SISERP to deal with pest emergencies as well as to build the capacity of response agencies to deal with such emergencies. The development of the SISERP was funded under the Global Environment Facility-Pacific Alliance for Sustainability (GEF-PAS) “Prevention, control and management of invasive alien species in the Pacific Islands” project which is executed by SPREP and MNRE and implemented by UNEP.

Invasive species are one of the biggest threats to Samoa’s native biodiversity and also have significant economic and social impacts. In recent years the impacts of invasive species pests on the environment and people’s livelihoods in Samoa have become more and more serious. The Taro Leaf Blight, Giant African Snail, Myna Birds and Rhinoceros Beetle are just a few examples of the many invasive species pests that have become established in Samoa at great environmental and economic cost in some cases totalling many millions of tala. Concern about the impact of invasive species pests has led to great improvements by MAF in our first line of defence, namely our bio security and quarantine measures, to keep invasives’ out of Samoa.  

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However, no quarantine or bio security system, no matter how good, can be 100% effective at keeping out all non-native species and therefore there is a need to detect and respond rapidly to a bio security breach.

The simulation followed the process that would be conducted should Samoa be invaded by the Little Fire Ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*). The Little Fire Ant is a South American ant that is currently spreading across the Pacific and is a real and potential threat to Samoa. The LFA can deliver a painful sting, blind animals, and reduce biodiversity. If the LFA invades Samoa it will impact on our ability to grow our own food, enjoy our gardens, and hike through the forest. Ground nesting seabirds and sea turtle hatchlings will be attacked, along with many of our rare insect species. Once Little Fire Ant is established, there is little hope of eradication.

The simulation exercise successfully allowed participants to understand the SISERP, its linkages with related Government policies and plans such as National Disaster Management Plan, and in particular to provide constructive feedback on it so that it can be made most effective, appropriate and relevant to Samoa. MAF and MNRE with the guidance of the Disaster Management Office (DMO), plan further training and preparedness exercises in the near future so that Samoa is well prepared should we suffer another pest incursion.

Under the guidance of experienced practitioners, trainers and academics, the training workshop was aimed at assisting Pacific Island women, particularly those from foreign or environment ministries with limited representational experience, to develop the negotiation, communication and leadership knowledge and skills essential to effective diplomacy. Workshop activities were also designed to assist participants in understanding the importance of gender-sensitive climate policies and programs.

The Government of Samoa through the DMO and its agencies and the US Government through the USAID/C-CAP Project in partnership with the Nuanua o le Alofa, a disability advocacy organisation worked together to develop village response plans at selected villages at Savaii and Upolu. The CDCRM Program aimed at standardising the delivery of any disaster risk management and climate change adaptation program at the village level to prevent inconsistencies in disaster planning and language. The program looks at delivering to all villages in Samoa.

A workshop sponsored by the Australian National University was held in Suva, Fiji from the 22nd – 26th June 2015 and was attended by Miss Josephina Chan Ting of the DRR section within the Disaster Management Office together with Miss Olive Vaai of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other country representatives from around the Pacific. The main purpose of the training workshop was to encourage female country representatives to be involved in and be exposed to decision making scenarios at high level meetings and most especially in meetings where Gender and Climate Change policies are discussed. The workshop comes also as a mechanism in mainstreaming Gender issues into Climate Change policies. As 2015 is a critical year in climate negotiations, Climate change is a complex policy challenge that touches on the vital national and regional interests of many countries. A country’s ability to negotiate effectively is essential to the successful prosecution of its interest. Pacific Island nations, in particular have an urgent need to bring their voices to regional and multilateral discussions on climate change.
Since the commencement of the New Year, the Disaster Management Office has been running Internal Educational Seminars for the Ministry through the support of their Australian Volunteer for International Development placement. A number of these informal training sessions have been undertaken to date, covering topics such as Risk Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation, Engineering Cost Estimation, and Geological Hazards.

These sessions have been well received and aid in providing basic introductions to the topics and useful tips and tricks for implementing them into daily tasks and projects run by the various Ministry Divisions. The DMO will be re-offering the divisions the opportunity to re-undertake any of these training session should they have missed the earlier opportunities. Further sessions are proposed prior to departure of the volunteer at the completion of their assignment in September.

The Disaster Advisory Committee held its first meeting for this quarter on Wednesday 24 June 2015. The members were updated with information on the progress of implementation of activities set out in the Disaster Risk Management National Action Plan 2011-2016. The Disaster Management Office as Secretariat reported under the four thematic areas of this Action Plan including programs funded under projects.

At the inaugural meeting of the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA) in Wellington, New Zealand in September 2014, it was agreed that there is a need to develop and strengthen the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability of countries in the Pacific. The New Zealand Fire Service kindly offered to provide PIEMA representatives from Pacific Island countries with the opportunity to strengthen understanding and awareness of USAR.

The PIEMA representatives were able to observe a large scale field exercise on the deployment of a Heavy USAR Team to a disaster scenario. The field exercise provided PIEMA members with a better understanding of the range of activities that are involved in a USAR operation and types of skills that needed to be developed.

During the visit the SPC took the opportunity to conduct further consultation with PIEMA members on the draft PIEMA Strategic Directions 2015 – 2020 document which has been developed based on the contributions made at the inaugural PIEMA meeting in Wellington, NZ. The purpose of the consultation is to enable members to provide comments on the draft document noting that the intention is to finalise by July 2015.

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Ms. Molly Nielsen, Principal Disaster Management Officer participated with Assistant Commissioner for Operations of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority. The Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) was initiated to establish an upgraded disaster and climate risk information platform and enhance the capacity of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to use it, as well as to develop an associated series of risk assessment applications to support risk adjusted development planning and investments and risk financing decisions.

Following the Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance Workshop that was held in March 2015, the Pacific Catastrophe Risk and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) held the PCRAFI Disaster Risk Assessment Workshop in Suva from the 9 – 12 June 2015 which was attended by Titimanu Simi, Senior Disaster Risk Reduction Officer of DMO. This workshop was aimed at building on the outcomes of the March workshop, with a particular focus on enhancing the capacity of member countries to use and apply the risk modelling and assessment tools for better informed Disaster Risk Management.

The workshop comprised of two main components: (1) Risk Modelling to provide a deeper understanding of the risk modelling methodology which enables personnel to project the potential impacts of likely scenarios of future disaster events and (2) PacRIS Training which focused on the Pacific Risk Information System (PacRIS) and its uses. The PacRIS is an information system which stores geospatial data of population, agriculture, infrastructure and loss estimates and was designed to be an interactive information provider for member countries of the region. The workshop proved to be an invaluable capacity building opportunity which provided vital knowledge and tools for improving the services provided by DMO and its partners, particularly with regards to acquiring and processing relevant disaster risk information for risk reduction/mitigation purposes as well as efficient disaster response. The effective application of the acquired tools from this workshop will also further strengthen the partnerships with member countries which emphasize the importance of regional collaboration.

The district of Fagaloa is located about 30 km from the capital of Apia in a remote area and is geographically and geologically vulnerable to all common high risk disasters in Samoa as identified in the National Management Plan (NDMP). Such disasters include tsunami, tropical cyclones, earthquake, volcanic eruption, storm surge as well as landslide and river flooding.

Due to its remoteness and vulnerabilities, Fagaloa has become a first priority for this inspection program for this year. An inspection team under the DAC Sub-Committee for Welfare and Internal Displaced Persons has completed assessing these four Government Primary Schools in the district and will be conducting the same inspection for Government and Private Schools in Savaii for the same purpose.

As part of ongoing professional development within the Disaster Risk Reduction Section, Continues on next page...
the team undertook a field trip to learn practical onsite skills in relation to identifying and understanding hazards, performing risk assessments in the field, and monitoring and evaluating completed works. The field trip, held on Friday 22nd May, was attended by the DRR team of Toai, Titi, and Josie, and supported by their volunteer Patrick.

As part of the field study trip, the DRR team inspected a number of the risk reduction projects which were implemented last year, including the Vaisigano River dredging, Lauli’i Rock wall, and the Mulivai Flood Wall. During these inspections, the team learnt techniques for undertaking monitoring and evaluation of implemented works, such as assessing the condition of infrastructure and identifying changes in conditions over time, and discussed what type of monitoring systems may be useful for aiding in future monitoring programs.

The team additionally undertook an inspection near the village of Samusu, where they were able to further apply their developing skills in hazard identification and risk assessment for an area at risk from coastal erosion and storm surge. Discussion on possible risk mitigation and hazard reduction activities, their benefits, and suitability for implementation was also held to further develop the risk assessment process.

The purpose of the deployment was to assist the review of the National Disaster Management Plan, framework and systems as well as to provide surge support in the event of a disaster. Mr. Hardy has supported disaster planning capacity building for key response agencies and review of existing response agency and national hazard contingency plans.

Apart from contributing in a range of ways to support preparedness of the DMO, he has also initiated two cross cutting policies on gender and disability, and facilitated consultations with key stakeholders on these policies. The CEO acknowledges the Australian government for Mr. Ross Hardy’s deployment, ACEO and staff of DMO do wish him all the best with future endeavours.

ROSS HARDY

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Farewell Ross Hardy!

Ross Hardy a Disaster Risk Management Specialist was deployed to the Disaster Management Office for seven months (24 October 2014 – 12 June 2015). Mr. Hardy’s position was the first Australian Civilian Corps (ACC) full-time deployment to the DMO in Samoa.

The team undertook a field trip to learn practical onsite skills in relation to identifying and understanding hazards, performing risk assessments in the field, and monitoring and evaluating completed works. The field trip, held on Friday 22nd May, was attended by the DRR team of Toai, Titi, and Josie, and supported by their volunteer Patrick.

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Siren Network Update

in pictures.

Monthly maintenance work from Aleipata – Mulifanua

Tafagamanu Site: Installing Air flow system to keep control box dry & cool

Gagaifo Site: Removal of rust from the control box

Mulifanua Site- Installing Air flow system

Mulifanua Site- Installing Air flow system

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NEW RECRUITS!

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