

Sustainable development through early warning systems and forecasting

Written by Zarin Khan

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The Pacific Community (SPC) remains committed to assist Pacific Island countries with strengthening their early warning systems and weather forecasting mechanisms for sustainable development. As part of this effort, SPC is developing a coastal inundation forecasting tool for the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) Coastal Inundation Forecasting Demonstration Project (CIFPD) in Fiji.

This tool will be demonstrated in the Coral Coast before being replicated in other areas within Fiji including the Nadi River catchment.

This project has been established at the request of the Fiji Meteorological Service (FMS) and made possible with donor funding from the Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA) in 2017.

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The Fiji Meteorology Service Director, Ravind Kumar said, “Ultimately, we want to ensure resilience and sustainability for coastal communities. This tool will contribute towards saving lives, coastal infrastructure and assist with decision and policy making, especially with regards to infrastructure in coastal areas.”

It has been noted that the livelihoods of people living in low lying coastal areas and infrastructure are at risk due to increasing coastal inundations. Coastal inundation is the flooding of normally dry, low-lying coastal land caused by severe weather events.

The CIFDP aims to build a multi-hazard early warning operational forecasting system – using oceanographic and hydrological evidence – to provide flood forecasts for areas at risk of inundation from both ocean and river sources.

SPC’s role will see the development and integration of storm surge, tides, and sea surface height anomalies to assist the early warning forecasts. This will no doubt allow countries to sustainably respond to ocean and climate changes for improved and progressive economic growth.

SPC has previously worked with partners on the Changing Waves and Coasts in the Pacific (WACOP) Project which utilised latest research tools to assess baseline wave climate and its variability as well as the predicted changes in wave climate in the Pacific region.

Acting Director for SPC’s Geoscience Division Akuila Tawake said that understanding the wave climate in the Pacific region is important for climate change adaptation and risk reduction. While WACOP provided an important baseline, SPC is now in a position to develop reliable coastal inundation forecasting in partnership with the Fiji Meteorological Service.

The project will also provide specialised training for disaster managers and forecasters.

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CIFDP is also being developed for use by national meteorological services in other countries including Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Dominican Republic.

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Fiji Meteorological Service