

Marshall Islands begins drought-related Post Disaster Needs Assessment

Written by

Friday, 19 August 2016 08:24 -



05 August 2016

Severe drought in the Marshall Islands associated with the strong El Nino, led to the call for a Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA).

The assessment is not only the first for the Marshall Islands, it's also the first for the Northern Pacific and the first assessment of an atoll country worldwide and will involve a lot of learning for the nation, the Pacific and the world.

The PDNA is being led by the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in collaboration with the European Union, the Pacific Community (SPC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. The official opening of the PDNA on Monday 01 August by the Chief Secretary of the RMI Government Justina Langidrik commenced the schedule of activities and was followed by a three-day refresher training program for RMI sector specialists.

RMI Minister of Finance, Brenson Wase, reflecting on the PDNA, stated that resilience is the keyword in the PDNA, and the assessment will in effect enable the Government to know, if not the exact, a very accurate cost of economic loss to the people of RMI.

"Effective contingency planning will depend on the availability of reliable data," said Wase.

"This PDNA is critical in informing the national budgetary process."

According to Wase, Cabinet had established a disaster fund for the national and local Governments to enable future disaster preparedness and response.

The Minister of Finance adds that non-government organizations play an important role in the

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drought recovery process and the cooperation between national entities and that non-government organisations should be encouraged to work with local governments.

Chief Secretary of the RMI Government, Justina Langidrik said, “The PDNA is the beginning for us. We must commit our time and effort to fully inform the national development process.

“We now have the unique opportunity to assess and analyse all the social and economic sectors that were affected by the drought. That, in turn, will help us to articulate and prioritize drought recovery actions, fine-tune national planning and provide guidance on financing.”

The national PDNA exercise has come at an opportune time for RMI, as it takes place immediately after the national consultations on the Sustainable Development Goals in collaboration with the UN. Local participants identified data collection and management as a critical component of meeting the SDG targets, including national targets on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation.

“Sustainable development must be risk-informed; recovery follows sustainable development principles and must be informed by social and economic assessments of the impacts of this drought. This will be critical as the country strengthens its capacities to prepare for and respond to such shocks in future and increase resilience,” said Langidrik.

The three-week period following the training event will involve in-country specialists from the sectors affected by the drought, together with overseas experts to analyse the social and economic impacts of the 2015-2016 drought. The PDNA will conclude with a Strategic Plan, developed as part of the process, and will be presented to the Government by early next month.

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