



THE STATE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC:

A REPORT ON VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION IN A TIME OF RAPID CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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FOREWORD

Pacific Island countries (PICs) are facing enormous challenges related to profound changes underway across their societies and economies. Climate change, migration, monetization, slow and volatile economic growth and the transition from traditional subsistence-based economies to market-based ones, together with the erosion of natural and social capital, and the diminution of traditional social structures are among some of the factors shaping new ways of life in the Pacific. Despite the fact that most PICs are middle-income countries, and are ranked as having medium-to high human development, and are among the highest per capita aid recipients in the world, progress on achieving the MDGs is mixed, and only two PICs - Niue and Cook Islands - are on track to achieve all of the MDGs by 2015.

This report provides an updated picture on the state of human development in the Pacific, drawn from new data and analysis from Household Income and Expenditure (HIES) surveys conducted in various PICs, as well as other recent research. While UNDP's Pacific Centre has led the production of this report, many UN agencies, and other development partners working in the Pacific have also made substantial contributions to its content and analysis. UNDP is grateful to all these agencies and partners for their support in helping to produce this report. The report examines the dimensions and drivers of economic exclusion (income poverty and inequality) and the causes and characteristics of social exclusion and vulnerability in the Pacific from a human development perspective. Much of the data and analysis presented in the report particularly relating to social exclusion has not been previously considered from a regional perspective, and the report therefore adds value in the context of a renewed interest in the social dimensions of sustainable development in the Pacific.

The report shows that poverty (hardship), vulnerability, inequality and exclusion are on the rise in many PICs, and that the most vulnerable people are likely to be women, youth, the disabled and the elderly, as well as those living in the outer islands and rural areas. Dealing with the challenge of reversing this rising tide of vulnerability and exclusion while also providing safety nets and social protection for those at risk will require Pacific governments to adopt new policy approaches and make some difficult choices. This report also provides policy options and insights for decision-makers, development partners and communities on how to foster more inclusive and sustainable human development in the Pacific during a time of change.

The findings presented in this report also come at an appropriate time. As a result of the recent Pacific Plan review process, regional leaders have reaffirmed that the culture and values of the Pacific translate naturally into the idea of sustainable development, and that Pacific Islanders have a richer more multidimensional view of poverty and development that goes beyond measuring income and reflects the value they place on protecting and promoting culture, family, social cohesion, and the environment, upon which all Islanders depend.

In September 2014, the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States will be held in Apia, Samoa. The fact that the conference is being held in the Pacific will focus global attention on the multiple development challenges confronting PICs, while at the same time allowing Pacific countries to make inputs into the post-2015 global development agenda that reflect their specific concerns in terms of addressing issues of poverty, vulnerability, exclusion and sustainable development. At the same time, the 2014 Human Development Report (HDR) focuses on the topic of 'Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience', thus complementing, and providing a global perspective, on the findings of this regional report. The HDR introduces the idea of life cycle vulnerabilities, and explores in some detail those risk factors that make people vulnerable, and what can be done to mitigate these risks. It also urges governments to commit to the universal provision of basic social services and social protection to build resilience, especially for the poor and the vulnerable.

The twin issues of poverty and inequality are at the heart of UNDP's new strategic plan for the period 2014-2017. The organization remains committed to helping countries, including in the Pacific, to achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and a significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion.

As the Pacific region seeks to address these challenges of vulnerability and exclusion in a time of profound change, I hope that the analysis as well as the recommendations from this report will be useful to all decision makers, not only in the countries of the Pacific, but also to their many development partners. For it is only by addressing vulnerability and exclusion that human development can become more equitable and sustainable.



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INTRODUCTION

This report examines the state of human development in the Pacific during a time of rapid change. Economies are shifting from traditional systems built on the exchange of own products to market-led cash-based ones. Young people are migrating from their villages to find jobs in cities and abroad, changing the demographics and leaving dependents behind. Traditional family and community social protection systems are increasingly under strain. Climate change is threatening agricultural production and traditional livelihoods; and intensifying the ferocity and volatility of natural disasters. In recent years, Pacific Island Countries (PICs) have also felt the impact of global economic shocks, which are still being transmitted to the Pacific.

In this context, new data and analysis presented in this report suggests that in many PICs, poverty, vulnerability and exclusion are on the rise. In terms of basic-needs poverty – where people lack income to meet their daily needs – it is now estimated that on average one in four people in the Pacific are now living below their national (basic-needs) poverty lines.

At the same time, limited access to basic social services to scattered small populations living on outer islands or in rural areas, means that many Pacific Islanders are missing out on adequate education, health and other human development opportunities. Those most vulnerable to poverty and exclusion are children and youth, women, the elderly and disabled, as well as people living in rural areas and outer islands.

This report examines the complex (and often interlinked) nature of poverty, vulnerability, inequality and exclusion in the Pacific. It reviews the most recently available information and data from Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES), and other relevant data, to identify the broad causes and characteristics of vulnerability and exclusion from a human development perspective. It acknowledges that these conditions are not caused by any single factor.

The recently launched UNDP 2014 Global Human Development Report (HDR) on 'Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience' takes a broader approach, and applies the human development perspective to assess vulnerability. The HDR introduces the concepts of life cycle vulnerabilities and structural vulnerabilities. Life cycle vulnerabilities refer to threats that individuals face across different stages of their life, whereas structural vulnerabilities are often the manifestation of poverty and inequalities among the various social groups. The poor, women, minorities, indigenous people, people living in areas, among others, tend to face comparatively higher barriers. The HDR therefore urges governments to commit to the universal provision of basic social services and strengthen social protection to build resilience, especially for the poor and vulnerable groups. The HDR also highlights that lack of decent, well paid jobs especially for youth is a major challenge in Asia and the Pacific. In this regard, the HDR urges governments to fast track education reform policies and to accelerate broad based economic growth to create decent and well paid jobs that are essential to improving living standards.

Defining Hardship and Poverty in the Pacific

The widely accepted definition of hardship, poverty and exclusion in the Pacific takes account of the diversity of PICs and is defined as an inadequate level of sustainable human development, often manifested by the following:

- a lack of access to basic services (e.g. Education, Health, Transport and Communications);
- a lack of opportunities to participate fully in the socio-economic life of the community (e.g. employment, other economic activity); and
- a lack of adequate resources (including cash) to meet the basic needs of the household and/or customary obligations to the extended family, village community and/or the church.

Source: Hardship & Poverty in the Pacific; Abbott, D & Pollard S, ADB Pacific Studies Series 2004

Identifying the Vulnerable and Excluded

The Participatory Assessment of Hardship (PAH), conducted focus groups in various communities of nine PICs a decade ago and identified the following set of characteristics that define the vulnerable and excluded in the Pacific.

- Lack of jobs and other ways to earn cash - this factor was seen as the most critical issue for all communities in both urban and rural areas
- Poor quality and/or the lack of access to basic or essential public services, including education and health services, was seen to be an important cause of hardship for many communities.
- Families with too many dependents and/or children, who struggled to earn sufficient cash to meet basic-needs.
- Limited access to land for subsistence or cash-based farming, especially for migrants from rural to urban areas.
- High cost of goods and services.
- Burdensome family, church, and community obligations.
- Poor health and/or having family members living with a disability, including the elderly.
- Poor family budgeting.
- Increased individualism of the educated youth.
- Migration of youth and adults to urban areas and/or overseas, leaving behind the elderly in rural areas with additional responsibility of taking care of their young children.
- Poor relocation sites for squatter communities or those hit by calamities was also said to contribute to hardship, vulnerability and exclusion, primarily in urban areas.

The recent global My World survey sponsored by the United Nations generally validated the PAH findings by identifying education, jobs and health services as the three most critical issues for poor families in the Pacific.

The Economic and Social Dimensions of Vulnerability and Exclusion in the Pacific

Increasing numbers of people in PICs are struggling to meet their basic needs. The proportion of the poor falling below the (basic-needs) poverty line varies widely across the PICs, from 13 percent in Vanuatu to 35 percent in Fiji and 39 percent in PNG. While the proportion of poor people has declined in Fiji and Vanuatu over the last ten years, it has increased in Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu and remained generally at the same level in the rest of the region. In most cases, though, the national incidence of basic-needs poverty masks considerable disparities prevailing within a country. For example, rising rates of urban basic-needs poverty are evident in Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, while rural populations have been left behind in Fiji, Palau, Samoa and Tonga.

Moreover, basic-needs poverty rates are significantly higher in households with more children. As children constitute a high share of the population across the region (43 percent on average), and fertility rates remain relatively high in most PICs, large numbers of children will continue to grow up in poverty. Across a sample of four countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Vanuatu and Tuvalu), the poverty rate among households with three or more children was found to be 27 to 63 percent higher than the national average.

Analysis of recent HIES data shows that income inequality in the Pacific is more pronounced than had been previously thought. It is observed that wealth in the region is distributed more unequally than in many parts of Asia. The countries in the Pacific that have the highest levels of inequality also tend to have the highest levels of basic-needs poverty. However, the case of Fiji is an exception where the degree of inequality has risen, despite a reduction in poverty levels. The trend of rising poverty and inequality is occurring in spite of the high value placed on redistribution and equality.

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