



IUR - SIDS INTEGRATED URBAN RESILIENCE IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES AND COASTAL CITIES

NATIONAL AND CITY 'STATE OF PLAY'
NUKU'ALOFA, TONGA



ABOUT IUR - SIDS

The Integrated Urban Resilience in Small Island Developing States and Coastal Cities (IUR-SIDS) is a Joint global Programme by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) processed through a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for urban risk reduction and resilience building action. The Joint global Programme will unfold during a 2023-2025 first phase reaching 10 countries/cities, which will lay the foundation for potential scaling-up and scaling-out of the approach to support more cities and countries in a second phase from 2026 to 2030. The overall goal of the IUR-SIDS programme is that, by 2030, at least 100 small and medium-sized cities are supported to develop risk-informed urban development plans and implement urban resilience building interventions addressing all resilience dimensions viz. physical, environmental and socio-economic -- while strengthening urban governance informed by a systems' thinking to secure resilient development outcomes. Through delivering as One, the two UN agencies will maximize synergies of action, opens opportunities and provide coherent results in SIDS and coastal cities.

About UNDP

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat supports national and local governments, academia, civil society and the private sector, with the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and SDG11, which aims for sustainable cities and communities. We support processes of institutional capacity-building regarding sustainable urbanization and knowledge-transfer between regional counterparts, in particular through key initiatives like National Urban Policies, the City Prosperity Initiatives, Urban Integrated Solutions and others.

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01.

CONTEXT FOR RISK-INFORMED URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE-BUILDING

I. National / City policies and strategies – Priorities for action (sustainable development, climate action, urban/town planning, DRR, NAPs, etc.)

The Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025: A more progressive Tonga: Enhancing Our Inheritance (TDSF II) provides an overarching framework for the long term development of Tonga. Launched in 2025, it establishes Tonga's national development objectives and provides a planning and budgeting system. The framework consists of a national impact linked to national outcomes and organisational outcomes, that will guide the development of the Kingdom to 2025. As a strategic document, the Framework guides the direction of infrastructure planning and development through National Infrastructure Investment Plans to link the TDSF objectives with infrastructure development projects and conduct a cross-sector prioritization of those investments based on the economic, social and environmental criteria.

The Tonga Climate Change Policy: A Resilient Tonga by 2035 seeks to provide a clear vision, goal, and objectives to respond to climate change and guide disaster risk reduction efforts. The policy, and the associated revised Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management, provide an overarching context and guiding framework with policy objectives requiring multi-sector coordination. It recognises Climate Change as the single biggest issue that will determine the future of Tonga over coming decades, and will require a 'whole of Tonga' level of cooperation and coordination. The Policy was developed in 2016 with the assistance from the European Union through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

The Joint National Action Plan 2 (JNAP II) on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2018-2028 has the mission, aligned with the Tonga Climate Change Policy, to develop a Resilient Tonga by 2035 through an inclusive, participatory approach that is based on good governance, knowledge building, proactive communities, and supports a strong, sustainable development pathway. It sets out six policy objectives and targets and an implementation strategy for the country to achieve its vision. Its objectives are 1) Mainstreaming for a Resilient Tonga; 2) Implement a coordinated approach



UNDP/ Pacific - Tonga, Vavua

to research, monitoring and management of data and information; 3) Resilience-building response capacity; 4) resilience building actions; 5) finance; and 6) Regional and international cooperation.

The Tonga: Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021 – 2025 seeks to provide strategic guidance and direction for the Government of Tonga to reduce the economic and fiscal impact of disasters by combining instruments that address various identified risks. Building on the existing legal and policy framework for disaster and disaster-related financial risk management, the Strategy brings together various ongoing and planned efforts from different sectors to quantify, reduce, and mitigate disaster-related financial risk. It provides a framework for coordination between key stakeholders when implementing concrete activities with a common objective: to strengthen the financial resilience of the Tongan government, households, and businesses to disasters.

The Tonga Strategic Roadmap for Emergency and Disaster Risk Management 2021 - 2023 is a joint effort of the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) and National Emergency stakeholders. It aims to build safer communities through excellence in emergency and disaster risk management, with a focus on strengthening the foundations of trust, leadership and teamwork across the emergency and disaster risk management sector. The Roadmap supports the implementation of the Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025, especially Outcome F: a more inclusive, sustainable and effective land and environment management, with resilience to climate change and risk.

II. Administrative / Political structure, electoral cycle and next elections (National government; city nodal authority)

The Kingdom of Tonga is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral Legislative Assembly. The King is the Head of State and the Prime Minister is the Head of Government. There is a unicameral Legislative Assembly, the *Fale Alea*, which has 26 members, 9 of whom are elected by and from among the country's 33 Noble title holders, and 17 on the basis of universal suffrage by Tongans aged 21 or over. The monarch appoints a Prime Minister on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly, and then the Ministers recommended by the Prime Minister, among the elected members of the Legislative Assembly. The Prime Minister has the power under the Constitution to nominate up to 4 from outside the elected members. There is also two Governors appointed for the Vava'u and Ha'apai divisions. The Cabinet is responsible for the overall administration of Government at both national and local levels. General elections must take place at least every 4 years, with the latest held in 2021.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs consolidates policies relevant to social and community development. It complements the efforts of other Ministries in promoting strong inclusive communities. Through its Local Government Division, it supports the development of local governance capacity and engagement, and the management of District Development Committees. All matters of urban planning falls into the Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources.

Regarding disaster risk management, the National Disaster Council (Cabinet) is the supreme governing body established with three national level committees to provide disaster governance support in Tonga, namely the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC), the National Emergency Operation Committee (NEOC), and the National Emergency Recovery Committee (NERC). The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) serves as a secretariat for emergency committees together with the Emergency Management Act 2007. District Emergency Management Committee and Village Emergency Committee (VEC) are established in Tonga to develop and implement effective emergency management at the district and village levels.



UNDP/ Pacific - Tonga NEMO 2021.

Tonga has a centralized system of government. At a local level, the country has a form of local government which features district and town officers elected every three years in local elections, and report directly to the Central Government, or the Governors in the case of Ha'apai and Vava'u divisions, who are responsible for local administration. Local government is provided for by the Fonos Act 1988 and the District and Town Officers Act 1988, and not by the Constitution. District and town officers have no local authority for local development.

III. Local competencies and jurisdictions (relevant to interventions; key sectors and stakeholders)

Regarding Nuku'alofa, town officers are required by law to submit regular reports to the Central Government on activities, and to organise town meetings. They are also tasked with attending official and ceremonial government functions. The Central Government is the only authority able to collect any form of tax and local level budgets and operations are all funded by it. Community development plans also reflect the principles of the Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025: A more progressive Tonga: Enhancing Our Inheritance (TDSF II). Community development planning follows the multi-sectoral consultation at the national level to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the country's development agenda.

As part of the Tonga: Nuku'alofa Urban Development Sector Project, the Asian Development Bank supported Tonga improve urban planning and management and the delivery of sustainable urban services in the capital, Nuku'alofa. Originally the proposals also included support for the establishment of a municipal government in Nuku'alofa.

IV. Revenue and financing streams – national budgeting for city level planning, development and implementation, etc.

In Tonga, the total expenditure budget for FY 2023 is \$764.7 million of which \$437.0 million is recurrent (57.1%) and \$327.7 million for development (42.9%). The majority of the recurrent budget is allocated to the 'Quality and Accessible to Government Services' including the Public Sector System Reform (32.3%); followed by Health under the social sector (13.0%) and economic sector (12.0%). The economic sector includes Trade & Economic Development, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Tourism. A total of \$31.4 million from Development Partners is allocated for COVID-19 pandemic recovery activities.

As for the area of Tongatapu, the main island where Nuku'alofa is located, the major ongoing projects are the Tonga Renewable Energy Project (TREP), Nuku'alofa Network Upgrade Project (NNUP), Tonga Climate Resilience Transport Project (TCRTP), Nuku'alofa Port Upgrade, Fanga'uta Lagoon Bridge, and Tonga Rural Innovation Project - Phase II (TRIP II) project. An estimated total of \$105.0 million is projected to be spent in FY 2023 through these projects.

V. Regional and international partners' engagement and investments – development investments by IFIs, regional or other entities, etc.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been supporting Tonga since 1972 focusing on preparing for and responding to shocks, delivering sustainable services, and supporting inclusive growth. To date, ADB has committed 128 public sector loans, grants, and technical assistance totalling US\$403.25 million to Tonga assisting with health and aged care, transport infrastructure, climate resilience, disaster recovery, renewable energy, urban development, and public sector management. ADB is currently financing various projects in Tonga related to energy, such as the Tonga Renewable Energy Project (TREP) to expand renewable energy generation and install battery storage systems, and the Nuku'alofa Network Upgrade Project with a US\$7.2-million grant committed in December 2022 to help restore reliable access to the electricity supply network and make it more resilient to extreme weather and disasters. To boost resilience to risks from disasters and climate change, ADB committed a \$45-million grant in December 2020 to upgrade the Nuku'alofa International Wharf, with implementation commencing in October 2022. The Integrated Urban Resilience Sector Project, supported by a grant of \$18.3 million, is improving urban infrastructure and services in Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa, with a focus on building disaster and climate change resilience.

The World Bank's (WB) long-term support to Tonga is focused on improving transport and infrastructure, strengthening resilience, creating jobs and improving labour mobility, and providing better digital services. Together with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank is currently supporting 12 projects in Tonga totalling US\$ 253 million. One of these projects is the Tonga Climate Resilient Transport Project, where the World Bank is investing a total of US\$26.02 million to support climate-resilient road, maritime and air transport infrastructure projects in Tonga and provides technical assistance and emergency support in the event of a natural disaster.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is providing assistance to the Kingdom of Tonga with a focus on environment, climate change measures, and disaster preparedness projects. JICA also promotes the introduction of renewable energy, strengthens monitoring and warning capacity, and provides assistance to form an island community recycle-based society through the Japanese Technical Cooperation Project for Promotion of Regional Initiative on Solid Waste Management in Pacific Island Countries Phase II (J-PRISM II). The Project for the Introduction of the Nationwide Early Warning System (NEWS) and Strengthening Disaster Communication in the Kingdom of Tonga aims to reduce the damages and prevent the loss of lives caused by natural disasters by promptly transferring information about disaster warning and safety to the people and organisations across Tonga, and developing facilities and equipment needed for expanding the scope of information transfer.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is currently active in Tonga with two projects. The Tonga Renewable Energy Project, 2018-2023, has for main objective to shift electricity production in Tonga to a low-carbon, climate resilient path, with the GCF funding up to 62.8% of the project with an amount of US\$ 29.9 millions. The second project, the Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Investment Program, seeks to shift energy production to renewal sources in seven Small Island Developing States (SIDS) including Tonga. In March 2023, the Strengthening Resilience of the Water Resources Sector to the Impacts of Climate Change in Tonga's Readiness proposal was approved to strengthen and increase the resilience of the water sector by providing quality data collection methods and a more strategic

framework to inform better decision-making and access to climate change finance towards a climate-resilient water resources sector in Tonga.

The collective response of the UN system to the development priorities of 14 Pacific Island countries and territories, including Tonga, was achieved through the United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) 2018-2022, a five-year strategic framework to support governments and peoples in the Pacific to advance a localised response to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UNPS has been localized in each country through an individual Joint Country Action Plan. The UNPS complements the Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025: “A More Progressive Tonga: Enhancing Our Inheritance”, particularly in the areas of environment and natural resource management, infrastructure and technology, and social, economic and political institutions.

On December 7, 2022, the Kingdom of Tonga became the first Pacific Islands Country under the United Nations (UN) Multi-Country Office (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) to officially sign the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027. This Framework lays the blueprint of the work of the UN in Tonga over the next five years, representing the first ever implementation planning that articulates the UN actions and deliverables to support realization of the key national development priorities of the Country. It ensures that all interventions are aligned with Tonga’s national development priorities, including UN and Tonga’s shared priorities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an integrated manner, with a commitment to leave no one behind. The UN has been present in Tonga since 2011, with 16 agencies implementing programmes: FAO, ILO, IOM, UNDP, UNCDF, UN Environment, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNISDR, UNOCHA, UN Women, WFP, WHO and WMO.



Flickr/ Boris Johnson - Neiafu

Australia and Tonga are working together to support a shared vision of a prosperous and stable Tonga, committed to shaping a strong COVID-19 recovery and building resilience in the face of natural disasters. The Government of Australia approved AU\$3 million for the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’api volcanic eruption, tsunami and COVID-19 pandemic, as well as AU\$3.5 million for the Tonga Renewable Energy Project (TREP), complementing fundings by ADB.



FlickrR/ Sarah Kelemen Garber - Tonga

VI. Development challenges and gaps

Tonga is highly vulnerable to various hazards, including tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, coastal floods, and volcanic activity. The country’s geography and geology make it particularly susceptible to climate change and rising sea levels. Tonga faces natural hazards such as earthquakes, storms, floods, droughts, and sea level rise, and climate change is expected to worsen these vulnerabilities. It ranks as the second most at-risk country due to exposure to extreme events and sea-level rise. Tonga’s location along the Pacific “Ring of Fire” and within the subduction zone where the Australian and Pacific Tectonic plates meet contributes to frequent seismic activity and the potential for large earthquakes and tsunamis. The country also experiences frequent tropical cyclones, which cause significant damage.

Tonga’s small land area and large marine territory, along with fragmented markets, long distances and remoteness from overseas markets, pose economic challenges. The country’s heavy reliance on fossil fuels presents energy-related difficulties. The economy is largely based on the service and agriculture sectors, which are highly susceptible to disasters and climate change. Skill shortages contribute to higher operational costs and low productivity. While Tonga has successfully prevented COVID-19 infections, the closure of borders, national lockdown, and global economic challenges have impacted its economy.

Although there are villages with locally elected leaders or councils established to oversee the provision of certain services, the level of coordination with national government policies and programmes is not clear, making the enforcement of policies with relevant impact in the different and often far located communities difficult. A lack of spatial planning in legislation has resulted in uncontrolled, unplanned urban development and uncoordinated responsibilities of agencies involved in the delivery of services and infrastructure. Community and infrastructure are concentrated in low-lying coastal areas, including Nukualofa, Tonga's capital and centre of economic activity. Migration to Nuku'alofa from Tonga's outer islands is significant. Urban growth in Tonga is a relatively recent phenomenon and has not been matched by the provision of, or improvement in the delivery of, urban services.

Development pressure in Nuku'alofa is increasing due to population growth. Land for urban expansion of Nuku'alofa is limited due to peripheral agricultural and ecologically sensitive areas such as Sopu and Popua, which are low lying, subject to frequent flooding during periods of heavy rain and storm surge, and have significant numbers of poor households. The existing urban infrastructure is barely capable of meeting the demands from the current urban population. Living conditions for many of Nuku'alofa residents are deteriorating and demand for improved urban infrastructure is increasing. Upgrading of existing infrastructure is being undertaken through various projects such as the Nuku'alofa Urban Development Sector Project. However, the scope of these projects is limited and do not meet all immediate infrastructure needs. Further investment in urban infrastructure is urgently required.



UNDP/ Pacific - Tonga: Nomuka island months after the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

02.

I. Global policy frameworks and positioning

The participation of Tonga in climate-related actions, initiative and events has increased significantly in recent years.. Representatives from Tonga have participated in the annual COP meetings to expose the impacts of climate change on SIDS, and the importance of international support and financing. The country also participated in the Global Climate Action Summit.

Tonga has joined global initiatives to protect marine life and to raise awareness and find solutions for a more sustainable sea life and blue economy. The country participated in the United Nations Ocean Conference in Lisbon 2022, and in the 8th Our Ocean Conference of 2023 in Panama.

Taking into account that migration and migrants have become central to the economic and social fabric of contemporary Tongan society, Tonga has participated in the 2022 International Migration Review Forum, with a review plan in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

II. Agenda 2030

VNR: Voluntary National Review 2019

NDC: Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) released in 2015; Tonga's Second Nationally Determined Contribution released in 2020.

NAP: Tonga's Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP 2) 2018–2028 serves as its NAP. Although released in 2018 to replace Tonga's first Joint National Action Plan (JNAP 1), it was only communicated to the UNFCCC in 2021.

NUA national report: Not available.

III. National / local engagement (networks, MCR2030, inter-regional forums, etc.)

Tonga is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), among other international forums and groups.

03 ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES IN DRR, CC-CCA, RESILIENCE

The Tonga : Nuku'alofa Urban Development Sector Project was a project designed and implemented by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) between 2011 to 2020 to improve urban planning and management and the delivery of sustainable urban services in the capital, Nuku'alofa. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a grant of US\$6.06 million from the Asian Development Fund and the administration of a grant of US\$8.47 million from the Government of Australia. The project was designed to provide high priority urban infrastructure identified in the Urban Infrastructure Development Plan (UIDP) for Nuku'alofa, particularly reliable and sustainable urban water supply and sanitation services. The project had six outputs: (i) strengthened policy environment for delivery of urban services; (ii) effective, efficient, and sustainable water supply services; (iii) sustainable solid waste services; (iv) improvements in other municipal services; (v) raised community awareness of municipal services; and (vi) effective project management.

The Tonga: Integrated Urban Resilience Sector Project, is a project from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), implemented from 2019 to 2026, and supported by a grant of US\$18.3 million from the Asian Development Fund grant. The Project focuses on the development of Nuku'alofa based on the improvement of living standards (urban water supply, sanitation, and institutional and capacity development) and the resilience to existing extreme natural events and the threads of climate change (urban flood protections and long-term resilience in front of sea level rise). It is aligned with the following impacts: 1) living standards in Nuku'alofa improved, and 2) resilience to existing extreme natural events and to the threat of climate change increased.



FlickrR/ lirneasia - Downtown Nuku'alofa

The Multi Hazard Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment was commissioned in 2020 by the Government of Tonga and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to better understand and prepare for disaster risks and the impacts of climate change. Implemented as part of the broader Pacific Disaster Resilience Program, the Assessment analysed thousands of buildings, roads, power and water assets in the island of Tongatapu where the capital Nuku'alofa is located. A risk index was developed from the assessment, which showed areas in Tongatapu that are at high risk to the impacts of climate change and will be subject to frequent or permanent flooding. The report also showed relatively safe areas that can be developed into resilient communities.

The Disaster Risk Reduction in the Kingdom of Tonga: Status Report 2022 provides a snapshot of the state of disaster risk reduction in the Kingdom of Tonga under the four priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. It also highlights progress and challenges associated with ensuring coherence with key global frameworks and provides recommendations for strengthening disaster risk management governance by government institutions and stakeholders at national and local levels. The Report was prepared in 2022 by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) with support from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and Tonkin + Taylor through country consultations and a desk review of key documents, including legal instruments and disaster risk reduction frameworks, policies, strategies, and plans.

ADDITIONAL PARTNERS TO CONSIDER FOR ENGAGEMENT

04.

The Center for Asia-Pacific Resilience and Innovation (CAPRI) is a nongovernmental, nonpartisan, international organisation founded in 2022 to enhance global resilience and promote innovative governance by drawing on the experience of the Asia-Pacific region through comparative public policy research.

The Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC) is a regional centre of excellence for climate change information, research and innovation, hosted at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The Pacific Climate Change Centre is a partnership between the Governments of Japan and Samoa. It is funded under grant aid through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for Samoa as the host country of SPREP.



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GET IN TOUCH

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