

Pacific Islands Regional Climate Forum

Themes and Recommendations

Forum Overview

In December 2012 organizations and individuals involved with the Pacific Islands Regional Climate Assessment (PIRCA), sector leaders, and other interested individuals came together to share information on the state of knowledge as it pertains to climate change, climate change impacts, and climate change adaptation, as well as:

- ❖ Disseminate PIRCA findings & recommendations.
- ❖ Evaluate value of the PIRCA product (report) and the process, and identify gaps to be addressed in next iteration.
- ❖ Dialogue on how to improve the assessment process, particularly with regard to how decision makers will utilize the PIRCA report to identify and overcome barriers to adaptation.

More than 100 people participated in the two-day forum that opened with a half-day public session followed by a one-and-a-half day working session that featured breakout sessions and large-group dialogues. The first day's breakout sessions were along sector groupings:

- ❖ water resources & food security;
- ❖ ecosystems & biodiversity;
- ❖ disaster risk reduction & infrastructure; and
- ❖ livelihoods, human health & culture.

The second day's breakout sessions utilized case studies to (a) explore questions about the transferability of adaptation lessons focusing on case studies 1 & 2 from the PIRCA report ("Managing vulnerable water resources in atoll nations" and "Using climate forecasts to save money and protect human health") and (b) explore how case studies might inform adaptation planning processes, focusing on case studies 4 & 8 from the PIRCA report ("A combination of processes creates extreme water levels and contributes to flooding and erosion" and "Pacific coral reef management in a changing climate"). The forum closed with a large group discussion about sustaining the assessment process over time. Following is a summary of the themes and recommendations that emerged.

The PIRCA is a collaborative effort aimed at assessing the state of climate knowledge, impacts, and adaptive capacity in Hawai'i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands. The PIRCA engages federal, state, and local government agencies, non-government organizations, businesses, and community groups to inform and prioritize their activities in the face of a changing climate. More than 100 individuals have been involved in the PIRCA since its inception in 2011. The first PIRCA output is a report titled *Climate Change and Pacific Islands: Indicators and Impacts* that was published in December 2012 and can be downloaded in PDF format from www.EastWestCenter.org/PIRCA or www.cakex.org.

Themes

The need for more engagement between Hawai'i and other Pacific Islands

Both in terms of information provided, and communities addressed, there is a need for better communication between Hawaii and the Pacific Islands that the PIRCA may be able to meet. For example, for those Pacific Island nations that have Joint National Action Plans on climate change and disaster risk reduction (JNAPs), PIRCA representatives could meet with national climate change coordinators for feedback on how useful the information is for national or island-scale climate adaptation planning and implementation.

Importance of outreach to the wider community

A dominant theme during breakout discussions on both days of the forum was the need to engage more community representatives in the PIRCA and provide climate relevant information to the general public. More community-level engagement would provide more relevant information on impacts, potentially identify information needs of decision makers at multiple levels, and identify appropriate formats for conveying information (e.g., reports, dialogues, video, etc.).

Know your audience

Content and format of information needed on climate change differs among parties in question – engineers, decision makers, legislators, and community leaders. Timeframes (i.e., season, year, decade, century) and technical level of conversation depend on the specific audience, as do the type of data that is most helpful (probabilities, statistics, non-technical, etc.).

Communication & Trust

There are some common barriers to communicating climate science to non-scientists, as well as a need to translate climate information into local languages. For example, words like “uncertainty” and “likelihood” cause confusion outside of the scientific realm and can unintentionally be barriers to incorporating climate change adaptation into management. Resources like the PIRCA case studies are useful because they make the science accessible by connecting scientific understanding with “real world” impacts and adaptation actions.

Participants generally agreed that there still is a disconnect between what assessments provide (science) and what decision makers need (context considerations) – conversations between the science and decision realms can help, but a third partner is often needed to complete the connection/serve as translator (both because of trust issues and limits on what assessments can do). The importance of trust, for example by identifying and utilizing local “champions”, in conveying information that people will actually listen to and act on was highlighted in several breakout session.

Providing accurate/consolidated information

There is no “one stop shop” or easy process for managers when to identify and find climate change information for planning and decision-making. The PIRCA partners/organizers should consider developing a process to link managers to the information they need. There also are very few sources of information on the cost-benefit of climate change adaptation measures (versus non-action).

Need for government mandate

Some breakout groups raised issues around the need for a framework (policy/regulatory) to guide planning process and require climate change information be incorporated into planning decisions. It was suggested that understanding how to overcome “status quo” barriers to incorporating climate information into government deliberations and institutional decision making will increase the adaptive capacity of these institutions and their decisions.

Other themes include:

- ❖ natural disasters make people think about climate change
- ❖ the importance of no-regrets/win-win planning (manage for threats, resilience, and recovery potential)
- ❖ the importance of long-term monitoring

Concrete recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the breakout groups and the larger group discussions.

For future iterations of the PIRCA report:

- ❖ Work with economists to assign value (monetary or otherwise) to all resources within the human, natural, and cultural landscapes that will be impacted by climate change.
- ❖ Local communities have very important observations about their local environments such as fishing grounds, crop yields, etc. Next time it would be good to include those observations as well, to make linkage more explicit between “scientific” observations of change and information collected through other means.
- ❖ Include a greater emphasis on food security, fisheries, agriculture, human health, and water quality.
- ❖ Identify where the Pacific remote island areas fit into the subregions, if they do at all.
- ❖ Identify the future impacts that we will be able to adapt to, and what impacts are beyond our current adaptation capacity.
- ❖ Emphasize need for more research on terrestrial ecosystems.

- ❖ Case studies could be improved by structuring them in a more uniform way with comparable extractable information, clarifying the spatial and temporal scale of the specific event(s) that underlies the case study, include more examples that highlight the consequences of “no action”, and provide more cross-sectoral examples of adaptive responses to climate variability.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:

- ❖ If the PIRCA steering committee garners robust participation from more sectors – including military, emergency response (e.g., FEMA), education, local governments, communities, and those who work the land and sea (e.g., farmers and fishers) – the greater the likelihood of fostering cross-sector collaboration.

Communication, Education and Outreach:

- ❖ Briefings for elected officials and other policy-makers.
- ❖ The PIRCA may be able to foster more active communication between physical and social scientists working on climate change.
- ❖ The PIRCA should consider creating a regional climate change clearinghouse with “quality control” measures in place so that people searching for up-to-date climate information know they can find it at one trusted source.
- ❖ Active engagement (e.g., social media) would be better than passive (e.g., website).
- ❖ The PIRCA could link with education efforts to increase climate literacy in the region, which should be place-based because Pacific Islanders are shaped by their respective geographies.

Research Activities:

- ❖ Compile a group to develop recommendations for monitoring to gather climate data. What gauges do you need, where should they be? Identify where the gaps are, what areas aren't being covered, how can we sync our efforts to gather comparable data that can be integrated? [Day 1 Ecosystems & Biodiversity].

Policy or Regulatory Recommendations:

- ❖ There needs to be greater coordination between the science generated, the decisions being made, and the donors who provide funding.
- ❖ The PIRCA should recommend reinstating the Hawai'i state climate change task force.

Closing Thoughts

At the close of the forum, participants discussed what a successful PIRCA would look like in four years' time. Some participants felt that a successful, sustained assessment process must bridge the gap between knowledge and action [science→actionable information→changing behavior]. It was

suggested that, in order to establish this type of iterative and integrated decision making as the new “business as usual” model, this requires an understanding of how decisions are made under a range of uncertainty. Finally, in order to achieve the PIRCA’s stated goal of assessing the state of knowledge and informing prioritized activities in the face of a changing climate, this requires all involved to be willing to align goals and incentives at the institutional as well as individual levels.