

# **Sustainable Development in Pacific Island Countries**

## **Main Challenges and Possible Solutions**

### **A Pacific Viewpoint**

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# Outline of Presentation

- Context of the Pacific Islands: smallness, remoteness, scattered, ecological fragility, prone to disasters, extreme vulnerability, victims of actions of others
- Centrality of sustainability: Pacific Leaders' Commitments



# Outline of Presentation

- Main challenges: commonality with differentiation (shared vulnerability in a diverse region)
- Possible paths forward: common and some specific challenges based on size and circumstances
- Sustainability is a joint responsibility of PICs and the international community, in addition to funding and technology; about shared political commitment between the rich and powerful and those on the margins

# Centrality of Sustainability

- Started with the Stockholm Conference in 1972-- the first UN Conference on the State of the Human Environment
- The Rio Conference in 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 reinforced the importance of sustainable development
- The Rio+20 Conference in 2012 provided the latest impetus to how important sustainability is to human future
- SIDS Conference in Samoa 1-4 September will bring this closer to home for Pacific Islands

# Centrality of Sustainability

- Despite disagreement on how to address the major issues, there is consensus internationally on the importance of sustainable development
- Agreement that we all share the vulnerabilities of global warming, increasing disasters, increasing pressure on resources and our environment
- Agreement on the three pillars: social, environment and economy
- Need to RE-THINK the development agenda and mainstream in national development plans

# The PICs Context

- Small land areas, micro states
- Vast ocean and sea of islands (Hau'ofa)
- Small economies, largely dependent on one or two sectors, with large subsistence sectors
- High aid dependency
- Low levels of human resource development: very low levels of tertiary education participation
- High transportation costs

# President Anote Tong of Kiribati

“Well, I think what's important here to understand is the geography of atoll islands. Atolls are very small islands, barely two meters above sea level. And so, unlike most countries, if the sea level rises, we don't have anywhere to move back toward, we don't have any high ground to move toward. And so we're so vulnerable”.



**Appearing on Fareed  
Zakaria GPS, 8 June 2014**

# The PICs Context: Low Lying Atolls



# The PICs Context: Kiribati

**Narrow islands: waves  
wash over to the other side  
of the island**

19 01 2014



# Kiribati: Water Levels Already Affecting Houses

Kiribati Communications Unit



Majuro,  
Republic of the Marshall Islands—Impact of King tide



# Pacific Leaders' Commitment to Sustainability



- Historically, the Pacific societies have always been sustainable
- Pacific Plan firmly committed to sustainable development (next slide)
- The most committed region in the world to sustainable development?
- Centrality of concern about climate change and its implications for the survival and prosperity of PICs
- Climate change poses huge costs to PICs

# Pacific Leaders' Commitment to Sustainability



“Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity ... We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values and for its defense and promotion of human rights. We seek partnerships with our neighbors and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all.”

(Pacific Plan, p.3,

[http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific\\_Plan\\_Nov\\_2007\\_version.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific_Plan_Nov_2007_version.pdf))

# Main Challenges to Sustainability

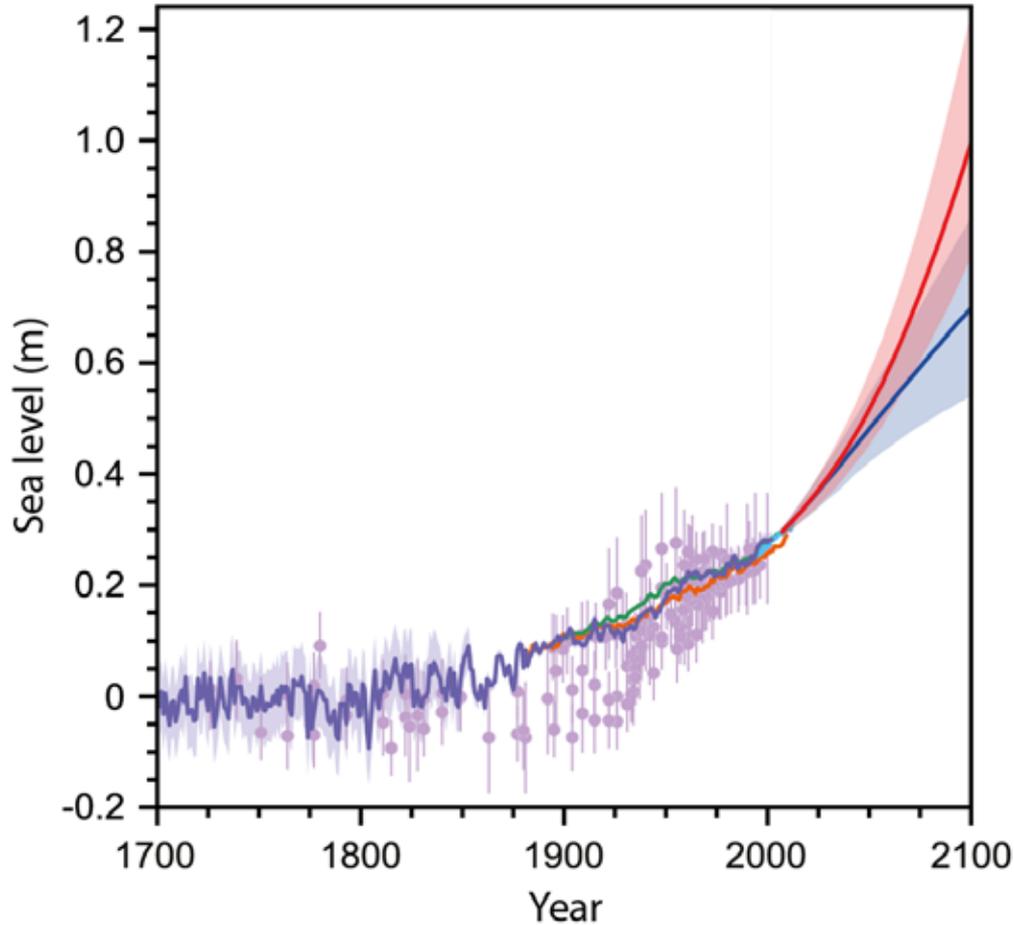
- Smallness and Isolation make sustainable development difficult: no economies of scale; not adequately connected; not competitive except for tourism and some niche areas
- Very low levels of tertiary education: participation rates typically around 4-6 percent in Melanesian countries; some higher but well below international levels regarded as necessary to compete internationally
- Limited capacity to influence the global political and economic agenda

## Lack of Scientific Research and R&D



- Lack of adequate high level human resources and scientific capacity for research and development seriously handicaps the Pacific countries—from basic data on key elements to R&D and adaptation of technologies and systems
- Too highly dependent on foreign research and high level capacity

# Climate Change, Sea Level Rise



Total Sea level rise to date globally since 1850:  
**20 cm**

Total Sea Level rise to come by 2100: **50-120 cm**  
by 2300: as much as **300 cm (3m)** if atmospheric carbon dioxide exceeds 500 ppm, now 400 ppm

Since Rio/UNFCCC in 1992  
Global sea level has risen:  
**5.5 cm**

# Main Challenges to Sustainability

- Climate change concerns: threatening the existence of some low lying countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, RMI, to name a few
- Rising sea levels threaten drinking water
- Lack of adequate resources to mitigate and adapt, although some being provided
- Many PICs have not mainstreamed sustainability in development plans but some making headway (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa)
- Fiji's Prime Minister's Green Growth Summit (June 2014)

# Main Challenges to Sustainability

- Population growth a major challenge in Melanesia and density in Micronesia
- Outmigration is another issue although remittances reduce its impact
- Rapid urbanization and lack of adequate and effective planning are major problems
- Low levels of educational access in Melanesian countries and quality across the PICs are major issues in sustainability
- Adverse impact on coral reefs with consequent impact on fisheries
- Food security issues and NCDs

## **Unscrupulous foreign investment**

- Foreign investors take undue advantage of poor institutional safeguards and policies
- Corruption a major factor in decisions that threaten sustainability, especially in forestry, mining and fisheries
- Small scale means foreign investment is not attracted on a large scale

# Main Challenges to Sustainability

- **Natural disasters:** increasing intensity and damage
- Tsunami in PNG, Tonga, Samoa and Solomon Islands
- Recent devastating floods in Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands
- Huge rehabilitation costs that set countries back in their development

# Disasters in the Pacific Islands



“Pacific Island countries rank among the most vulnerable in the world to natural disasters. Since 1950, natural disasters have directly affected more than 3.4 million people and led to more than 1,700 reported deaths in the region (outside of Papua New Guinea). In the 1990s alone, reported natural disasters cost the Pacific Island Countries US\$2.8 billion in real 2004 value.”

(World Bank,

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPRISKMGMT/0,,contentMDK:22240983~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:4077908,00.html>)

# Natural Disasters: Recent Floods in Solomon Islands



# Issues of Waste Disposal

- Waste disposal a severe problem in small, low lying island countries—no land for waste disposal
- National waste disposal systems do not incentivize conservation and sustainability
- Human waste threatens water supply and general health
- Inadequate systems for disposal of e-waste

# Issues of Waste Disposal: Kiribati



# Way Forward

- PICs taking “ownership of sustainability” and mainstreaming it in their development plans
- Significant internal action to be taken in changing mindsets, developing/modifying policies towards sustainability
- From firm national development agenda, negotiating with the international community and development partners
- Solutions will differ depending on size and circumstances

# Way Forward

- Building human resource capacity in critically important areas such as negotiations, project management, policy development and implementation
- Significant enhancement of the research and development capability of the Pacific Islands region—both through institutions like the University of the South Pacific and by building national research and development capabilities

# Way Forward

- Capacity building through research: Pacific Islands Universities' Research Network (PIURN) now operational
- Promotion of research networks and collaboration between Pacific Island universities and developed country universities both for data gathering, analysis, policy implications and policy monitoring and for adaptation of systems and hardware for the Pacific Islands

# Way Forward

- Addressing issues of population growth and urbanization and equalizing development opportunities spatially to avoid rural “push” factors
- Drawing on traditional knowledge systems that have sustained Pacific societies for thousands of years
- Need for sustainable consumption and avoidance of unthinking adoption of Western food and consumption
- Adequate response to NCDs
- More renewable energy investments
- Empowerment of communities for sustainability
- Increased connectivity

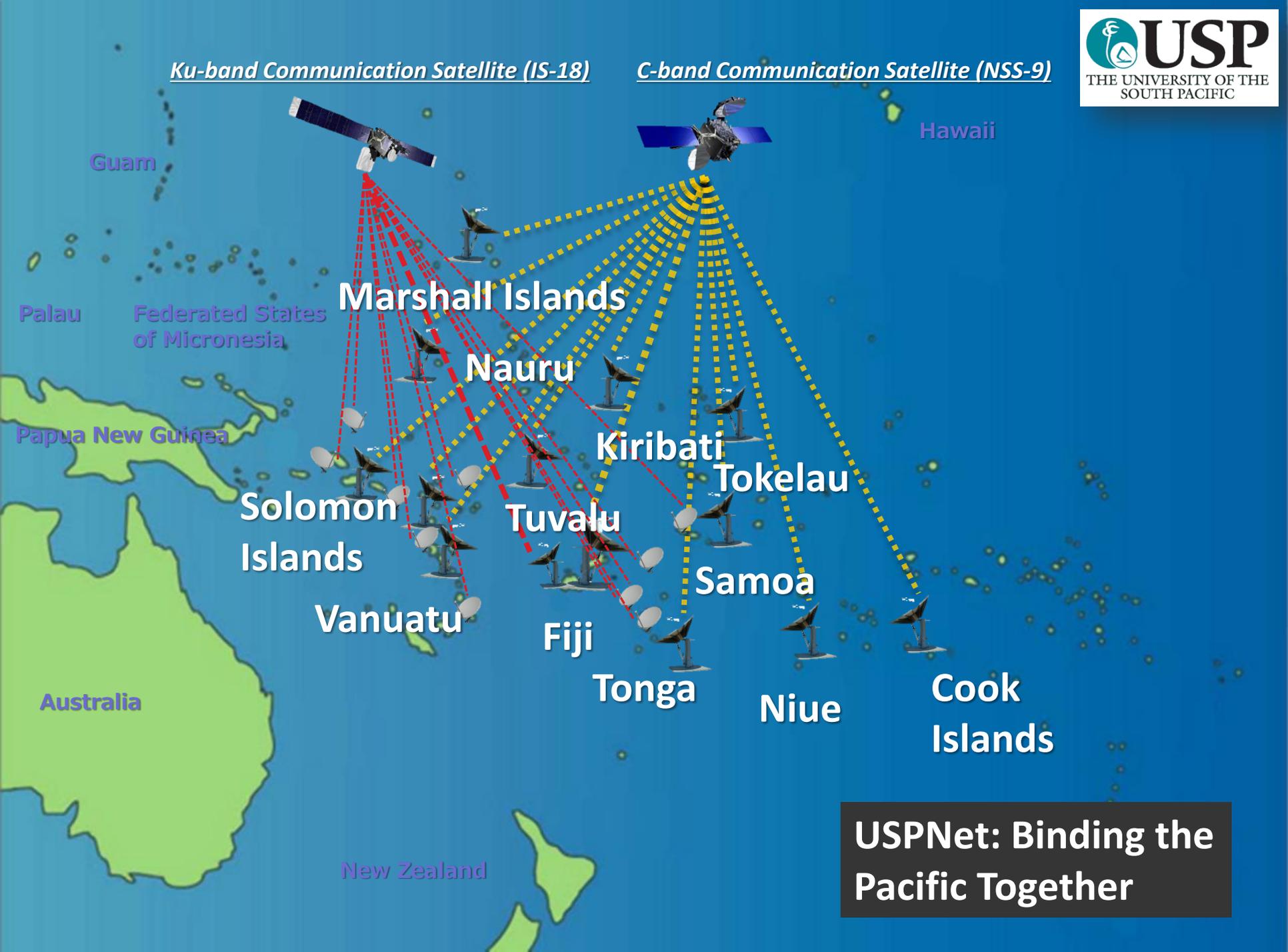
# University of the South Pacific: Ideal Partner



- International University with 12 member countries
- 14 campuses and 11 Centers spread over 33 million km<sup>2</sup> of the Pacific Ocean
- Over 25,000 students
- Excellent telecommunications umbrella over the USP area providing full internet, video, telephony and learning system support
- Already engaged extensively with overseas universities and institutions

Ku-band Communication Satellite (IS-18)

C-band Communication Satellite (NSS-9)



**USPNet: Binding the Pacific Together**

# Concluding Statements

- Pacific societies already committed to sustainable development—that is in their DNA
- The existence of some PICs and better development of others threatened by actions of others
- SIDS in Samoa from 1-4 September this year will outline further steps and actions
- Contributing to sustainability is a partnership between the PICs and the international community

Domo Arigatou  
Gozaimasu

Vinaka Vaka Levu

Thank You