Case Study: Child Centered Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) in the Pacific Islands

Summary

The ‘Child-Centered Climate Change Adaptation (4CA)’ Program supported communities in six Pacific Island Countries to adapt to the risks and challenges of climate change. The program’s focus, unique to the region, fostered the capacity of children and young people in building resilience. Part of a wider initiative by Plan International (PIA), an international child rights organization, 4CA aimed to address the urgent threat posed by climate change to children’s survival, development and protection. Between 2011 and 2015, the program was delivered by a network of civil society organizations working under the umbrella of Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPi).

The 4CA program has been highlighted by Equity for Children (1) as one of the few significant initiatives by international child rights organizations to put young people at the centre of climate change adaptation and disaster risk management. While most recognize the growing threat of climate change to children’s well-being, efforts to create child-sensitive approaches and programs have been limited.

In addition, 4CA’s targeting of the most vulnerable children and communities, and empowering them through information and resources, provides a model grounded in equity and rights.
“Although climate related disasters often have disproportionate impacts on children and serious implications on child rights, very few opportunities are available for them to be involved in planning, decision making and in the design and implementation of adaptation and risk activities.” (2) Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific Islands

**Actions and Impact**

1) **Awareness and capacity of children, youth and communities**

Education and awareness-raising on child-centred climate change adaptation (4CA) was carried out in six Pacific Island countries using a range of methods, from the formal to informal. Two age groups were targeted, children in primary schools (six to 12 years old), and out-of-school youth, (generally 15-24 years old). At the outset, Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys were conducted with 1,600 children and youth to gauge their initial level of awareness. In the Solomon Islands, 90% of the communities were not aware of climate change’s link to disasters even though they were experiencing the impacts.

Using the results of the survey, education materials, appropriate to the local cultures and contexts, and attractive to children, were developed for schools and communities in all six countries. (Later, they were officially adopted by education systems in Kiribati and Tonga and integrated into national curricula). The school-based curricula were designed to be integrated with classroom learning, while materials for communities and youth used inter-active and media-based platforms. The materials were accompanied by training for 80 teachers and 30 community members in the six countries. The trainees, in turn, engaged over 5,000 girls and boys in awareness lessons and campaigns. An equal number of adults were reached through community outreach. In all the sites 4CA worked there was an evident increase in children’s and communities’ awareness and understanding. And children put their knowledge into action by being advocates for CCA (Climate Change Adaptation) actions, as described by a child in Fiji: “We tell our parents what we learn in school…our parents are now planting lots of trees and flowers." (3) A noted strength of the approach was the way the science of climate change was integrated with hands-on, outdoor activities for the children, a novel approach for many of the schools. For example, tree-planting was done after learning about coastal erosion, reinforcing the learning for children. For adult community members, the tying of often abstract climate science with specific, local impacts was particularly helpful. “Now we are able to know what to do before, during and after disasters. Also the changes we have seen with the local weather patterns – now we know why.” (4). A special effort was made to address the specific needs of children with disabilities.

2) **Locally designed, climate smart solutions**

Through 4CA, young people and their communities were able to assess climate and disaster risk and develop locally appropriate ‘smart’ solutions. At the outset, inclusive Village Disaster Committees were established, providing an essential entry point for working with local leaders. Specific roles and responsibilities were articulated for children and youth, and other groups such as women and the disabled, often left out from mainstream adaptation projects. In collaboration with National Disaster Management Offices (NDMO), 38 committees received training on how to undertake vulnerability analysis. In turn, they created adaption plans linked to existing Village Development Plans. Children were actively engaged in identifying adaptation priorities for their communities.

Seed money was provided through 4CA for solutions developed by schools and the committees with children’s participation. The 58 small projects included tree planting, mangrove restoration, erosion protection and rain water harvesting. In Papua New Guinea, young people created an income-generating initiative with local farms to provide manure for drought resistant crops. Village disaster committees were established, simulation exercises carried out and early warning systems established.

Teachers attending in- service training with 4CA team

Children in the Solomon Islands using the 4CA toolkit
Through these solutions, 4CA was able to successfully demonstrate that by putting children at the centre of adaptation, broader community resilience can be achieved. A number of initiatives were taken to local government and donors for their support. In Fiji and Tonga, the committees used their plans to mobilize donor funding for emergency kits and water tanks. Also in Fiji, a community established a Marine Protected Area with government support. Moreover, by actively involving NDMOs, the Village Disaster Management Plans developed as part of 4CA met national standards and were officially endorsed.

3) Sharing best practices and the 4CA approach

As a novel approach to climate adaptation, a goal for 4CA, from the beginning, was to develop and share good practices and conduct advocacy for child-centered methods. This was done by closely involving national and local stakeholders. In some countries, the project steering committees included representatives from Ministries of Education, Environment, and Agriculture together with National Disaster/Emergency Management Offices (NDMO/NEMO) and Climate Change Units. At the regional level, FSPI and PIA took the lead in developing a regional toolkit- and sharing the 4CA experience.

Across the six countries, an appreciation for children’s role in contributing to resilience was achieved. As one NDMO representative stated “We see children as the best medium to communicate these issues. The community is more responsive to warnings as a result of the engagement with children. They are more resilient.” Governments and community leaders recognized children as having a right to be heard and to participate. Some saw this within the frame of children as future leaders, and for others the right to participate here and now was also valued. This is all the more remarkable given the cultural context in the Pacific, in which children do not traditionally have a voice. International and regional organizations working on climate change and DRM (Disaster Risk Management) have also begun to pay more attention to children as agents of change.

History

The Pacific region is especially vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate. Atoll countries, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, rise only a few feet above sea level, and could become uninhabitable within coming decades. Other island nations face an increased threat more frequent and severe of natural hazards: cyclones, flooding and drought. In early 2015, Vanuatu was devastated by Cyclone Pam, a category 5 Tropical Storm, and more devastating events are expected without urgent action to reduce carbon emissions and global warming. The risk due to the islands’ geography and global warming. The risk due to the islands’ geography is compounded by limited resources for adaptation at national and local levels. Most of the Pacific Island Countries (PIC) are categorized as lesser developed or middle-income, and struggle with limited financial and human resources.

As in other parts of the world, children are at a heightened risk to climate change.

A study commissioned by UNICEF in 2011 highlighted the potential for detrimental impacts on Pacific Island children’s health, nutrition and overall well-being due to changes in extreme weather and sea-level rise. The greatest impact will be on youngest children, who are physiologically most at risk.

In Papua New Guinea, child participants in 4CA documented coastal erosion in their community, and using pictures and stories successfully advocated with the District Office for funds to build a sea wall. Previous attempts by adult members of the community to mobilize local government resources had been repeatedly rejected.

“I invited the Heads of Departments to a workshop – they didn’t know my facilitators were children...It really touched them. Many people came to shake my hand – it’s the first time they have seen children have this role” (Interviewee, Tuvalu, Evaluation of 4CA) (5).
But unlike other parts of the world, the uncertain future faced on the atoll countries, can have its strongest impact on adolescents. The study also highlighted the limited progress made in the consideration of children in climate change policies and studies in the region (6).

In response to growing awareness of the impact of climate change, especially climate-related disasters on children, Plan International (7) developed 4CA for the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on countries considered at greatest risk. The 4CA program “aims to build the awareness of children and their communities about climate change and to empower them to be active participants in adaptation efforts. This involves the translation of relatively new and complex climate science concepts into real life practice using the tools, techniques and knowledge of local communities.” (8). Initial funding was provided by the Australian Government and Plan International, and 4CA was first rolled-out in four Asian countries: Laos, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Given the Pacific Islands’ intense vulnerability to the effects of climate change, the management in Plan International Australia (PIA) felt it was important to extend 4CA there. However, PIA had no offices or other programs in place in the region, and so chose to partner with a well-established civil society organization, Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International (9). FSPI brought to the partnership a strong network of national affiliates and previous experience in community-based climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Six countries were included in the initial three-year program, Kiribati, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu. In selecting locations within countries for 4CA, FSPI’s affiliates consulted with NDMOs to identify areas considered most ‘at-risk’. Targeted communities in the atoll countries of Kiribati and Tuvalu, as well as in Tonga, lived in dense, urban settlements with limited access to clean water and sanitation, and further strain on water supplies due to salt water intrusion caused by sea level rise. In Papua New Guinea, Solomon Island and Fiji, the communities were situated mostly in remote, coastal areas, facing increased risk from storms and coastal erosion, and with limited access to resources and information, without which adaptation is difficult.

A major barrier at the outset of the project was a lack of experience in child-led approaches. While staff from FSPI had worked previously with children as part of community-based projects, it had been on an ad hoc basis. Moreover, the idea of children or youth leading their own initiatives – or working on an equal footing with adults - was new to the region. Across the Pacific Islands, local cultures provide little or no space for young people to be involved in decision-making, in the home or the community. Internally, FSPI sought technical assistance from PIA on child-led approaches, and externally, they introduced the approach in a culturally-sensitive manner.

FSPI has worked in the Pacific since 1965, when it was established by a pioneering ‘Hollywood humanitarian’, Elizabeth ‘Betty’ Silverstein, who was deeply concerned by the lingering impact of World War II on the people of the Pacific Islands. In ensuing years, the foundation grew into a full-fledged non-governmental organization (NGO) funding and managing community projects throughout the region – and eventually evolving into a network of nationally led NGOs. Outside the Pacific region, FSPI became Counterpart International, an international aid and humanitarian organization working in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. FSPI and Counterpart International continue to work together in the Pacific (10).

Acceptance of the 4CA program by stakeholders took time. FSPI proactively engaged community leaders, who initially wondered “What is the value? What can the kids do?” After seeing the creative solutions and new ideas generated by the young people, adult stakeholders gave their backing and encouraged the continuation of 4CA. In Tuvalu, a senior stakeholder noted, “I saw my grandchild and he was able to explain so many things (about climate change). I wish other children could participate.” Moreover, according to Roshni Chand, the 4CA Program Manager, children were able to “innocently challenge the mindsets of the adults in the communities and are great communicators of climate change.” (11)

FSPI became visible advocates not only for children’s role in adaptation and resilience, but for all excluded and vulnerable groups. 4CA promoted equal participation by women and men and girls and boys. In addition, the inclusive approach opened doors to children and adults living with a disability. In Kiribati, a relationship was developed with the disability group, Tetoa Matao, with the group learning about CCA and then performing a drama for public audiences to raise awareness. In Tonga, engagement with an NGO for people with disabilities, ‘Fusi Alofa’ led to the government’s agreeing to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Fiji and Tonga, partnerships with advocates for the disabled led to their active involvement in drills and other practical activities to prepare
for disaster.

Speakers from FSPI took to the stage with national leaders, representatives from the United Nations and regional intergovernmental bodies at the Joint Meeting of the 2013 Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management and Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (12), presenting the experience of working with children.

Participation in that event led to recognition of children’s specific concerns and capacity to contribute in the region’s first integrated strategy for DRM and Climate Change (to be effective from 2016). In 2014, 4CA’s work was recognized with the Public Innovation and Leadership for Resilience (PILAR) award from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (13).

Management and Young Leadership

Overall, at national and regional-level, children and youth had a limited role in the management of the 4CA program. This is a challenge frequently faced by international organizations with multi-level bureaucracies. While international child rights organizations such as Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and others promote children’s participation in their local environments, they all too frequently do not have the space for children to take on leadership and management responsibilities at national and international levels. Experience shows that it is smaller, community-based initiatives that more often have the flexibility to accommodate young people in leadership and decision-making (14).

FSPI was selected by PIA due in part to their ‘people-centred approach’. However, the country-level NGOs implementing the approach had limited experience with ‘child-centred’. Some capacity building was provided by PIA for country coordinators, but it was not enough to strongly foster initiatives ‘run by children for children’ across all the countries. A lesson learned was that previous knowledge and experience of child-led approaches, among the program staff and partners in schools and communities, made a significant difference to the level of children and young people’s leadership.

Despite the initial lack of understanding and subsequent challenges along the way, FSPI and its national partners’ have embraced the role of young people, not only in climate change adaptation, but in broader community development. FSPI country coordinators have incorporated 4CA approaches in other programs. In Tonga, the government included children during a community consultation on land use planning. Moreover, plans were made for increasing young people’s leadership in 4CA at national and regional level during a planned second phase and increasing their voice in forums on climate change.
Sustainability

From the outset, 4CA aimed for sustainability through alignment with national climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk management (DRM) priorities and close cooperation with governments. This aspect of the project was appreciated by the partner Ministries and NDMOs, who have limited staff and resources and rely on civil society organizations to reach communities. In both Fiji and Tonga, the NDMOs are now working more closely with the Ministries of Education, promising a long-term collaboration on child-centred approaches. However, it is not clear if the government partners in each country have sufficient skills to continue implementing a child-centered approach, or the resources to replicate it in other at-risk communities. Long-term sustainability requires a greater investment in transferring ownership to government.

The other pillar of sustainability was through local buy-in, working with community leaders through Village Disaster Committees. This close cooperation was essential for appropriate design and effective implementation, but also fostered ownership that should hopefully long outlive the project duration—particularly by the children who contributed to their design and realization.

“In Tonga, a tree-planting site for 4CA was destroyed to put in place an oil facility. The children who planted the trees brought the issue to the 4CA coordinator’s attention. This issue was then taken up to the District Town Office, who was not aware of the development. The approval had come from the main island. A petition and letter were drafted and handed to the Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA), who immediately stopped the development. The children replanted the shoreline trees in the now protected area.” (15)

Funding for a first phase of 4CA was provided primarily by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), previously AusAid, through a ‘basket’ grant to Plan International Australia. This initial phase of funding ended at in 2014. Phase 2, planned at the outset was initiated, but will be phased out ahead of schedule due to funding cuts by DFAT. Since 2013, Australia has cut overall foreign aid by 33 percent, and placed the priority on economic development and poverty reduction (16). The slashing of Australian aid to Plan International Australia has led to the premature closing of 13 of their programs around the globe, including 4CA.

Fundraising is actively underway by PIA and FSPI to continue 4CA. Both organizations believe deeply in the value of the program—and have been able to document the impact on strengthening overall community resilience to a changing climate. However, what makes 4CA unique, its child-centered approach, can also make it difficult to fundraise for, particularly as the political agenda of the major donors in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand, has shifted away from social change and social movements towards economic development and private sector growth.
Partnerships

The strength of the partnerships 4CA built with Pacific governments and communities contributed deeply to the outcomes and sustainability in each location. Moreover, through the relationship, FSPI and its national affiliates were able to strengthen civil society’s voice. In five countries, FSPI coordinated community level reviews of the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005-2015, the global DRM framework. In doing so, FSPI was facilitating participation not only for children, but also other vulnerable groups often excluded from adaptation and resilience initiatives, particularly the disabled and elderly. A close partnership has been established with the Pacific Disability Forum, also an umbrella group for civil society organizations, on disability-inclusive adaption.

Connections were made with international and regional organizations working in the areas of CCA and DRM, but they were not as strong. Major players in the region are the two inter-governmental bodies, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP). Closer working relations with these partners was sought, but the demanding pace of implementing large multi-country projects and keeping to strict timelines often made it a challenge to find time for collaboration.

Future Goals and Plans

Building on the success of the first three years of 4CA, a second phase was initiated in the Pacific in 2014, expanding the number of communities covered in each country, facilitating youth leadership at national and regional levels, and strengthening government capacity to continue implementing the child-centred approach. In Asia, PIA expanded the program to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and the Philippines with support of the Oak Foundation and COFRA. However, cuts in funding from the Australian government to PIA have put a number of initiatives on hold.

Despite the cuts, considerable momentum has been achieved and maintained. Across the Pacific, 4CA has demonstrated that a child-centred approach is feasible, and lifts the knowledge and resilience, not only of children, but of the entire community. Hopes are high from FSPI and Plan International that 4CA will be continued.

About Equity for Children:
Equity for Children (EFC) operates in the United States, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil, and exists to improve the living conditions of poor, marginalized and underserved children around the world. Its knowledge portal is delivered in English, Spanish and Portuguese. EFC advances an agenda of social justice for children and strengthens the impact of programs and policies connected to child wellbeing, creating and disseminating knowledge to stimulate critical and innovative thinking about child poverty and inequality. It is housed at the Studley Graduate Program in International Affairs at The New School in New York City.

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This case study would not have been possible without the support of Ms. Roshni Chand, DRM Programme Manager with FSPI, who generously shared her time and experiences. Vinaka vaka levu.
End Notes

(1) http://www.equityforchildren.org
(2) 2014 Pilar Application, FSPI, Unpublished document
(3) ibid.

(4) Final Project Evaluation of Climate Centered Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) Project, Institute for Sustainable Futures for Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI) and Plan International Australia (PIA), June 2014, University of Technology Sydney
(5) ibid.

(6) Burton, D, Mustelin, J. and Urich, P., Climate change impacts on children in the Pacific: Kiribati and Vanuatu technical report, commissioned by UNICEF, Bangkok, 2011

(7) https://plan-international.org

(8) Plan International, Australian Aid, Act to Adapt: The next generation leads the way, June 2015

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(10) http://pacificdisasterclimatemeeting2013.net/index.php/about/joint-meeting


(12) Chand, Roshni, August 19 2015 and FSPI unpublished documents

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