

Kelman, I. 2004. "Responsibility to Pacific Island Risk Management?". RiskPost: The Newsletter of the New Zealand Society for Risk Management, issue 4, no. 2 (August), pp. 8-9.

Full Text:

New Zealand's fascinating, beautiful, and dynamic physical geography produces an ideal setting for investigating and understanding how humanity's decisions and behaviour create disasters from normal environmental phenomena such as earthquakes, rivers overflowing, volcanic activity, rainfall, and fog. The consequences include internationally-renowned research, policy, and practice in New Zealand related to living sustainably with nature.

As well, New Zealand's position in the South Pacific, plus being a country comprising relatively small islands, leads to strong links with and interests in the international island community. Aside from New Zealand's history of involvement in Pacific island affairs, two island countries, the Cook Islands and Niue, are self-governing territories in free association with New Zealand, while Tokelau is a self-administering territory moving towards self-governance in free association with New Zealand.

New Zealand contributes extensively to programmes for managing risks on Pacific islands, not only through emergency relief aid and peace-keeping, but also in terms of vulnerability reduction programmes, longterm development, and education. NZAID <http://www.nzaid.govt.nz> provides more than one-third of the core budget of SOPAC <http://www.sopac.org>, which is the lead Pacific island agency for disaster and risk management, in addition to funds for activities outside the normal budget. Similarly, many Pacific islanders travel to New Zealand for secondary and tertiary education, often supported by programmes funded by New Zealand's government.

The links are clear, as are the historical and geographical reasons for these links. Does an additional factor exist, that of responsibility?

Does a moral imperative exist for New Zealand's involvement in Pacific small island risk management, most likely due to history and proximity? It is perhaps unfair, inappropriate, and going too far to suggest that the Pacific islands have a fundamental right to assistance from New Zealand for risk management. But how far does NZAID's motto "towards a safe and just world" permit the interpretation that obligations, not simply voluntary opportunities, exist for New Zealand (beyond NZAID and MFAT) to be involved in increasing safety and justice in the Pacific region?

Of course, the impetus for being extensively involved in small island risk management could be selfish. Safe and stable neighbours naturally enhance New Zealand's safety and stability, even considering the large distances between Pacific states. Little fault could be found with implementing appropriate disaster and development aid out of self-interest.

Nonetheless, in today's global village, less affluent states are increasingly making demands on more affluent states for equity and justice—followed by demands for resources and support to achieve equity and justice. New Zealand frequently obliges and is respected for doing so. Are New Zealand's contributions due to only internal, generous choice or is New Zealand required to do so from an obligation to Pacific island risk management? If that responsibility does not exist, should it exist and be made explicit?

Ilan Kelman
<http://www.ilankelman.org>