

BUILDING A DISASTER RISK REDUCTION CONSORTIUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

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ABSTRACT

The University of Hawaii at Manoa provides a logical focal point for the development of an Asia Pacific disaster risk reduction research and capacity-building consortium. The choice of Hawaii as venue for a research, education and training consortium is appropriate for a number of reasons. There is a growing recognition that at-risk communities themselves offer valuable lessons in disaster mitigation and preparedness. Hawaii's experience with extreme events, including tsunamis, hurricanes/cyclones, storm surges, volcanic eruptions and drought has much in common with the Asian Pacific region's exposure to natural disasters. A tropical island environment, Hawaii's weather, soils and marine/coastal processes and influences are unique in the United States, and are similar to those in the region's most vulnerable countries.

However, Hawaii is far advanced in terms of existing emergency infrastructure, has an active professional disaster mitigation community, and hosts a research and doctoral program intensive university with an extraordinarily broad disciplinary skill-set which has influenced the local adaptation of standard disaster management modalities to the tropical environment. This combination of risk factors and advanced preparedness infrastructure create a living case study which readily illustrates the indispensable linkages between the scientific analysis and monitoring of hazards, a ubiquitous public warning system, the public administration of emergency infrastructure and broad-based community disaster awareness. In the months following the Indian Ocean tsunami, a number of internationally active organizations, including UN/ISDR, UNESCO/IOC, APEC, NOAA, USAID and others have sponsored short tours and meetings in Hawaii in order to take advantage of its disaster management experience, technical best practices, accessible case studies, and relevant subject matter expertise.

A working group of faculty focused on hazards and disaster is developing a consensus-based framework for promoting a Disaster Risk Reduction Consortium at the University of Hawaii. This paper discusses that process, and illustrates an approach to realizing the synergy available to further the goal of disaster risk reduction through research, education and service, the University's primary roles.