

## Assessing China's Climate Change Aid to the Pacific

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Climate change is the single greatest challenge faced by Pacific Island countries (PICs) (PIF Secretariat 2018:10). Unsurprisingly, the battle against climate change has been placed at the heart of PICs' national policies. As Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Dame Meg Taylor [stated](#), 'the highest priority for our region is climate change mitigation and adaptation'. Climate change has become a thorny issue in Australia-Pacific relations as PICs [accuse](#) their largest donor of falling short of the region's expectations on addressing climate change. In contrast, the Pacific's second largest donor — China — has seemingly been under less pressure, although it remains the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Given these circumstances, this In Brief discusses China's climate change aid to the Pacific and highlights that China's various forms of commitments are set to continue, although they are not the highest priority for the government.

The China International Development Cooperation Agency, established in April 2018, coordinates China's climate change aid. Other actors such as the ministries of science and technology, agriculture, water resources, forestry, ecology and environment deliver climate change aid in their respective sectors. Compared with traditional donors, China links climate change aid more closely to its humanitarian and development assistance, focusing on climate change-related infrastructure and capacity-building. However, China's investment in humanitarian and climate change aid is marginal compared with other major players such as Australia, the European Union and the Green Climate Fund.<sup>1</sup>

### Climate change aid to PICs

Climate change has become an increasingly important part of China-Pacific relations in recent years and now features prominently in high-level visits between the two sides. At the first China-Pacific Islands Economic Development and Cooperation Forum in 2006, China pledged to support PICs in responding to natural disasters. The second Forum in 2013 was deliberately designed to coincide with the China International Show on Green Innovative Products and Technologies, where China promised more support for PICs in environmental protection

and natural disaster prevention and mitigation. In October 2019, climate change was at the top of the agenda for the third Forum and a separate panel was organised for the first time on environmental protection and climate change.

China's climate change aid to the Pacific falls into three categories, although the breakdown of aid by country and sector is unavailable. The first category comprises donations of funds and climate change mitigation-related materials, especially in the wake of natural disasters (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Examples of China's donations**

Recipient	Year	Donation
Tonga	2018	US\$500,000, US\$100,000 and 40,000 Pa'anga (US\$19,360) donated by the Chinese government, the Red Cross Society of China and the Chinese embassy respectively after Cyclone Gita.
Fiji	2018	A well-equipped hydrographic survey vessel donated by the People's Liberation Army Navy.
Fiji	2016	US\$1.1 million in funds and FJ\$15 million (US\$6.9 million) in supplies donated by the Chinese government; US\$100,000 donation from the Red Cross Society of China after Cyclone Winston.
Tonga	2015	Supplies to the value of 5 million Pa'anga (US\$2.2 million), including over 500 Haier air conditioning systems, 27,561 LED lamp lights and 1500 solar LED street light systems.
Samoa	2015	2500 sets of solar LED street light systems.

Source: Compiled by author

In the second category, China has assisted PICs in constructing climate change-related infrastructure. This form of cooperation was clearly set out in China's 2011 [white paper](#) on foreign aid. Between September 2013 and March 2017, a hydropower plant (annual power output of 700 kilowatts) in Fiji's Somosomo village was built by China's Hunan Construction Engineering Group and [financed](#) by Chinese grants to the

value of US\$7 million (RMB50 million).<sup>2</sup> In May 2018, the China Dongfang Electric Corporation, another state-owned enterprise, was awarded the contract to construct the US\$1.1 million Lake Hargy hydropower plant in Papua New Guinea's New Britain island province. The Chinese government also provided US\$14 million in grant aid to establish the Maritime Training and Marine Research Ocean Campus of the National University of Samoa in November 2015, which is [expected](#) to provide improved facilities for Samoan climate-change related marine research. Chinese private companies are also involved in renewable energy. Zhuhai Singyes Green Building Technology Corporation's US\$4.4 million [development](#) of the Matatua solar generation farm in Tonga was commissioned by King Tupou VI in October 2017.

The third type of climate change aid to PICs is capacity training through government scholarships and short-term training programs. These courses span a broad range of areas. In November–December 2019, the Department of Climate Change at China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment organised a South-South cooperation [training course](#) in Beijing on climate change, and green and low-carbon development. Representatives from Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea attended the program, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative on climate change. In May 2017, China's Ministry of Science and Technology, Yunnan Provincial Academy of Sciences and the University of Papua New Guinea co-hosted a training program on new renewable energy technology for the Pacific in Kunming, Yunnan. To cope with the large amount of training pledged by China since 2006, the Economic and Commercial Counsellor's offices at Chinese embassies in the Pacific have had to assign one staff member from their already overstretched team of 2–4 people to manage these programs.

It is worth noting that Beijing has also [highlighted](#) how ecological agriculture<sup>3</sup> can assist PICs in tackling climate change, although the link is arguably weak. China has established agricultural demonstration [farms](#) in all the PICs that have diplomatic relations with China, except for Solomon Islands and Kiribati, which only switched diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China in September 2019. These farms focus largely on demonstrating China's skills in ecological agriculture to local farmers. For example, established in Pohnpei in 1998 and managed by China's Hunan International Engineering Construction Corporation, the [demonstration farm](#) in the Federated States of Micronesia demonstrates skills in the ecology cycle of vegetable farming, piggy operations and biogas production.

## Conclusion

Broadly speaking, China's climate aid to the Pacific serves two main purposes: to promote China's image as a responsible donor and rising superpower, and to reduce PICs' pressure in multilateral forums given China's position as the world's largest

emitter of carbon dioxide and its opposition to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a goal keenly sought by PICs.

The Chinese government has employed two tactics to achieve these goals. It has persistently underscored the argument that both China and PICs are developing countries and face similar challenges in addressing climate change, and that therefore they should support each other. During Chinese President Xi Jinping's meeting in October 2019 with visiting Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare — the first visit after the Pacific state switched from Taiwan to China — Xi called on the two countries to work together 'to address climate change and other challenges and safeguard the common interests of developing countries' (quoted in Xinhua 9/10/2019). The second tactic adopted by China is to continually promote its understanding of PICs' concerns on climate change and pledge climate aid, whether during high-level visits or PIF dialogues. These dual tactics have also been [proposed](#) by some Chinese scholars and to date they seem to be working. While Pacific leaders, such as Dame Meg Taylor and Vanuatu's Foreign Minister Ralph Regenvanu, demand more action from China on climate change, their [language](#) is restrained.

Looking into the future, it is highly likely that Chinese climate change aid to the Pacific will continue. There are funding opportunities available to PICs, such as the 100 ecological and climate change projects for developing countries and the RMB20 billion South-South Climate Change Fund pledged by China in 2015. However, as PICs are not the highest priorities in China's diplomacy towards developing countries, the proportion of this aid allocated to PICs could be small.

## Author notes

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## Endnotes

1. This point was kindly suggested by an anonymous reviewer.
2. Another similar project in Fiji is the US\$150 million Nadarivatu hydropower station commissioned in 2012.
3. China uses the term 'ecocycle clean agricultural mode' (生态循环清洁农业生产模式).

## References

- Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat. 2018. [Forty-Ninth Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué](#). Suva: PIF Secretariat.
- Xinhua. 9/10/2019. Chinese President Meets Solomon Islands PM, Pledging Closer Cooperation.

