

# APCUS -SP

THE REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION RESEARCH  
NETWORK ON **ACADEMIC-PRACTITIONER  
COLLABORATION FOR URBAN SETTLEMENTS,  
SOUTH PACIFIC**

**Workshop 1 Report**  
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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“I have all this knowledge. What I want out of APCUS is for my life’s work to be useful and used.” —Monical Minnegal, Anthropologist, University of Melbourne

“We don't always have time to access current academic research/thought in the midst of a crisis, so a network like this could provide a unique tool to help ensure that responses are informed by the best evidence/research available..” — Mark Gossage, RedR Australia

### The APCUS-SP Value Proposition

This report summarises the outcomes of a workshop which brought together academics and humanitarian and development practitioners to articulate the value each can bring to the other’s work. The main conclusion from the workshop is articulated by Monica Minnegal and Mark Gossage above: that humanitarian and development practice would improve if we found ways to link the deep knowledge and time available for community engagement of academics, with the implementation expertise and multi-year experience of those on the front lines of humanitarian and development practice.

In the remainder of this report, we will argue that there are moments of opportunity before, during, and after humanitarian emergencies in which academic inputs can enable — and have in the past enabled — governments to make better decisions, humanitarian responders to respond more effectively, and civil-society organisations to better advocate for their stakeholders. Some of these moments have been seized; many more are missed.

There are many ad-hoc networks that exist between universities and those at coalface of humanitarian response. However, these are often structured personally, not strategically. Not knowing the right people prevents the most-relevant information from being produced for decision-makers. Providing these strategic links is the value proposition of the Academic-Practitioner Collaboration for Urban Settlements, South Pacific (APCUS-SP).

### The APCUS-SP Network

APCUS is a network of academics and practitioners that aims to bridge the practice-research divide across the whole of the humanitarian disaster management cycle: from preparedness and response, to recovery and development. Find out more about us at <http://apcus.cdmps.org.au/>.

APCUS seeks to develop channels for sharing knowledge between academic experts, governments, humanitarian emergency responders, recovery personnel, and development actors. These groups hold different bodies of knowledge that are rarely shared. A shared body of knowledge has the potential to improve all phases of humanitarian and development aid.

The APCUS network focuses particularly on urban shelter and settlements. Most knowledge has been developed for rural areas. New, multi-sector, area-based approaches for managing emergencies are needed for cities.

APCUS focuses in the first instance on the South Pacific because of the region’s emerging urban experience and vulnerability to disasters. However, it is open to any region in which current and future members express interest.

## Working Proposals

In this report, we make a series of propositions about the value of APCUS-SP. We will test these propositions in an upcoming series of workshops with these stakeholders. The propositions are:

1. There are significant, missed moments of advocacy and opportunity during crises
2. Academics can contribute across the disaster management cycle
3. Humanitarians can help academics engage with and urgent social problems, and produce research with social impact
4. Existing academic-humanitarian and academic-development networks are ad hoc and, thus, less effective than they could be
5. Urban areas are often overlooked during humanitarian crises
6. Academics can help humanitarians and development actors to localise humanitarian response and development aid
7. The alliance of humanitarians and academics can help governments achieve stronger leadership and sovereignty in the uncertain aftermaths of humanitarian crises.

## The Origins of APCUS-SP

The special need for an urban response network like APCUS-SP was born out of the experience of convenors Jennifer Day and Tom Bamforth during their engagement in the emergency response to Tropical Cyclone Pam, which struck the South Pacific in March 2015. Jennifer is an academic who happened to be in Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, during the emergency response. Tom at the time was the Shelter Cluster Coordinator for the emergency response. The Shelter Cluster is a voluntary association of NGOs organised by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), IFRC, and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR). The Shelter Cluster is an association of emergency responders that coordinates emergency shelter assistance to ensure a fair and efficient distribution of aid.

One month after the cyclone, Jennifer documented that more than 6,000 people located within a 10-minute drive of the National Disaster Management Office of Vanuatu, in the peri-urban areas of Port Vila, had not received emergency shelter and food distributions. This was despite an active Shelter Cluster, more than 25 NGOs, and at least five country militaries (Australia, New Zealand, the USA, China, and Russia) offering emergency assistance and aid. The peri-urban communities of Blacksands and Manples had been overlooked by aid agencies and government. Many people had eaten nothing but stored rice for the past month and were still sleeping under leaky roofs in heavy rains. Consequently, Tom organised for 1,500 households to receive tarpaulins, building materials, and food. Part of the problem for Blacksands and Manples was that the Census estimates of population were outdated and inaccurate. The Shelter Cluster was working with population estimates for these peri-urban areas that enumerated the population at about one-third of the actual population.

From this experience, Jennifer and Tom imagined better links between academics and practitioners. Day, an academic researcher with knowledge about peri-urban communities but without humanitarian experience, struggled for some time to find a receptive agency to act on her information. Tom, unsure about the conditions in the peri-urban communities and busy managing a humanitarian response, was largely office-bound and reliant on information coming from other NGOs, government, and other humanitarians. Jennifer and Tom imagined a platform where he could have reached out to a network of academics for information on the population, tenure, and needs of Blacksands and Manples. They conceived APCUS from that experience.

## Positioning among Existing Initiatives

APCUS-SP does not seek to reproduce significant and emerging urban work in the Pacific. Our particular goal is to better align and connect academic work to humanitarian response in Pacific cities. One goal of our workshops is to generate feedback from network members and potential members about whether we are seeking to provide a suite of services that is already being provided elsewhere. Our desktop research thus far suggests that APCUS fills a need, and the workshop findings presented in the next section corroborates the existence of that need. In this section, we describe some of the related initiatives and describe how APCUS-SP is positioned among them.

A number of organisations are already seeking to facilitate knowledge sharing for improved humanitarian response. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC), for instance, “was established to bring together the different actors who can help to improve crisis preparedness and response in our increasingly urban world” ([urbancrises.org](http://urbancrises.org)). Like APCUS, GAUC was conceived to bring together actors that do not frequently or systematically work together. Unlike APCUS, however, GAUC’s approach is to recruit institutional members, e.g., NGOs, intergovernmental agencies, and universities that then sign its charter and commit to working toward its goals and vision. APCUS, on the other hand, is a network of individuals. Those individuals may be affiliated with universities, but their membership and use of APCUS is not dependent on those affiliations. We note that APCUS is currently querying its membership to join GAUC.

There are other networks that seek to generate learning platforms and environments in which individuals can participate. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) “is a global network of organizational and institutional NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises” ([www.alnap.org](http://www.alnap.org)). The Urban Response Community of Practice is an active network of individual humanitarians and organisations, and it provides the Urban Humanitarian Response Portal for network members to share knowledge on urban humanitarian crises (<http://www.urban-response.org/>). Both of these communities of practice have active listservs, like APCUS – and both allow academics to be members of the network. However, a key difference is that APCUS is particularly dedicated to facilitate better links between academics and humanitarians, governments, and civil-society organisations.

There are a number of humanitarian-focused research institutes based at universities, which are also working indirectly on facilitating better links between the academy and those organisations leading humanitarian responses. For instance, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) is a research centre that both provides training to humanitarians and research on humanitarian crises. Deakin University’s Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CfHL) is a similar research and training institute that focuses on leadership in the humanitarian sector. APCUS is connected with both of these initiatives but does not aspire to training humanitarians or supporting research. Rather, we aspire to connect relevant academic knowledge to the appropriate stakeholders, assembling knowledge on-demand when required. The HHI does have a unit that assembles academic teams to conduct research during emergency responses, but it currently does not provide a platform for humanitarians to reach out to academics for information during humanitarian events. We see APCUS as a partner – not a competitor – to organisations like HHI and CfHL.

Think tanks and intergovernmental actors are also seeking to make links with academic institutions. The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) seeks to generate policy-relevant research and academic engagement with the humanitarian sector. Its “aim is to inform and inspire principled humanitarian policy and practice and enhance the effectiveness of



humanitarian action in saving lives and alleviating suffering” (<https://odihpn.org/event-report/improving-humanitarian-action-in-urban-areas-an-action-oriented-roundtable/>).

Notably, neither HPG nor any of the organisations listed above is focused on the Pacific. There are, however, Pacific-focused initiatives seeking to develop resilient cities and improve capacity in humanitarian crises. UN-ESCAP is currently working toward its 2019 *The Future of Asia and Pacific Cities 2019 Report: Thematic consultation on Smart Cities in Asia and the Pacific*. This report will be geared toward supporting national and local governments in planning for and resilient and inclusive cities. The Department of Public Affairs at the Australian National University is a research centre focused on applied research on state, society, and governance in the Pacific. DPA holds the annual conference, the *Pacific Update*, and publishes a series of periodicals including the *Development Bulletin*, a publication focused on Pacific development issues. Neither of these institutions is focused particularly linkages with academics to provide support across the humanitarian cycle, as is APCUS.

Perhaps most closely-aligned with APCUS’ mission is the the Social Science in Humanitarian Action platform (<http://www.socialscienceinaction.org/about/>). Launched in early 2017, SSHA “aims to establish networks of social scientists with regional and subject expertise to rapidly provide insight, analysis and advice, tailored to demand and in accessible forms, to better design and implement the social and communication dimensions of emergency responses.” Its Platform is a partnership between [UNICEF](#) and [Institute of Development Studies](#) at the University of Sussex, and it “will focus on developing orientation and capacity building of local researchers and partners to conduct rapid research and support field deployments.” SSHA is also a new initiative, and is also not focused particularly on the Pacific. APCUS will seek to link with this new program and to involve its stakeholders in APCUS.

In summary, then, APCUS-SP is distinguished from other organisations in its composition and foci. Our research network:

1. Is focused on academic linkages with other actors in humanitarian response
2. Is academy-led and comprised of individuals rather than organisations
3. Aspires to provide on-demand information across the humanitarian response cycle
4. Is focused on the Pacific
5. Is focused on cities.

### **An Urban Focus**

APCUS focuses particularly on urban informal settlements – an area of humanitarian response and academic query where there is much to be gained from collaboration. Urban emergency response is complex, and the above example of poor information is common. Emergency responders and recovery personnel are highly-trained practitioner-experts who do sometimes-dangerous and critical humanitarian work, but who often lack the information they need to target lifesaving assistance and help put the urban population on a path of long-term recovery. Their work is complicated by complex custom land tenure systems that are often the product of oral tradition and customary practices (Bonnemaison, 1985; Jones, 2016) overlaid with a common law legal system – and rapid urbanisation. Urban growth outpaces rural growth in all eight countries except Samoa. This produces informal settlements that in some cases – Vanuatu, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands – can exceed the densities in Hong Kong, but without the high-rise apartment buildings, and with very limited services. These informal settlements host a large portion of the urban population, yet most countries in the South Pacific do not have government ministries dedicated to urban development (Keen and Barbara, 2015). Also, while the training of aid workers is changing, the bulk of training

and delivery models are still largely rural-focused – which means that aid workers do not often have an up-to-date working knowledge about how urban areas function during emergencies and as communities recover.

### Starting Locally: Why the South Pacific?

We focus on the South Pacific as our place to prove the concept of APCUS-SP, for a number of reasons. The first reason is that the Network is crucial here. These vulnerable countries lack critical emergency-response capacity and yet are among the most vulnerable. Faced with climate change and increasingly-extreme weather events – and the usual earthquakes and volcanic eruptions – the Pacific is home to the two countries most vulnerable to natural disasters: Vanuatu and Tonga, according to the United Nations University *World Risk Report 2016* (Garschagen, Hagenlocher, Comes et al., 2016), with Oceania noted as a global hotspot.

The second reason we start in the South Pacific is that we already have significant expertise and links at the ready. The Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute has a network platform ready that it uses for another network that it hosts, the Pacific Constitutions Research Network ([www.paclii.org/pcn](http://www.paclii.org/pcn)). Regarding expertise, Australia and New Zealand are the first high-income-country responders during emergencies in the region. There is a large amount of capacity among antipodean academics that is currently not being leveraged by NGOs and governments undertaking emergency responses.

### The First Workshop

This document reports on the first in a series of at least four workshops that are designed to bring stakeholders together to imagine and *coproduce* a process to leverage the knowledge of academics in crisis situations. Through these workshops, we are seeking to generate *coproduction capacities* (van Kerkhoff and Lebel, 2015) modelled on those sought at the interface of science and government, where knowledge and capabilities are generated collaboratively by stakeholders in a process of imagining and forming social change. That is, the first objective of our network will be to create a network of experience and trust that will compel emergency responders to reach out to academics for assistance during emergency response.

The inaugural workshop was held on 29 May 2018, 9:30am-3:15pm. Dahlgaard's exhibition was about thinking creatively and differently about climate change. This was a perfect setting for a group trying to think creatively and differently about urban shelter and collaboration. Our workshop included an artist-led tour of the exhibition and a photograph by the artist at the end of the workshop. The workshop plan is attached in Appendix A. In the lead-up to this workshop, we actively consulted other NGO and inter-governmental stakeholders. Jennifer Day presented and led focus group discussions at Plan International and the Australian Red Cross to generate feedback on APCUS-SP. She also engaged in email and phone discussions with representatives of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), Save the Children, RedR Australia, Oxfam, and other organisations with humanitarian arms.

The goals of the workshop were to:

1. Begin assembling the interested parties who will compose APCUS-SP.
2. Collaborate on the mission statement of APCUS-SP (original and revised versions provided in Appendices B and C)
3. Explore how academic contributions to emergency response could be made more useful to NGOs and government.

Twenty-two participants attended the workshop. This included seven representatives of six NGOs with active humanitarian and development programs, one representative of the IFRC, and 15 academics. NGOs represented were RedR Australia, Compass Housing, and Climates. Climates is a registered charity that works alongside communities responding to climate impacts, and hosts events that provide people across Australia and the Pacific Islands with an opportunity to explore the causes, impacts and solutions to climate change. Their experience and collaboration will be useful as we vision APCUS-SP. Academic institutions represented included the University of Melbourne, RMIT University, and Deakin University.

The outcomes reported in Sections 2 and 3 represent the results of those discussions and the inaugural workshop.

In the workshop, participants engaged in two sessions. The first was a storytelling session, wherein participants were encouraged to tell stories about harnessed and missed opportunities to engage academics across the humanitarian intervention cycle. We used an Open Space Approach wherein participants circulated across five topics according to their preferences. Participants engaged in conversations about each topic:

1. **Before.** Preparedness, contingency, and resilience
2. **After.** Relief and recovery, and transition
3. **Urban.** Humanitarian action in urban settings
4. **Academic Culture.** Academic culture and its problems/incentives for collaboration in humanitarian response
5. **NGO Culture.** NGO culture and its problems/incentives for collaboration in humanitarian response

A rapporteur in each group recorded group and individual observations. Rapporteurs also noted the name and organisation of the person making the observation. Rapporteurs recorded narratives, successes, challenges, and recommendations.

In a second session consisted of a reading and discussion of the Mission and Goals statement, and participants gave feedback.



## 2 WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

This section describes the outcomes of the workshop and pre-workshop discussions. We organise this section of the report with the outcomes of the consultations, rather than with the five Open Space content areas (before, after, urban, academic culture, and NGO culture). We do this because the overlapping nature of the discussions would lead to much duplication of content were it organised according to the five Open Space themes. We also wish to highlight the lessons from the workshop and consultations rather than the organisational structure of the workshops. We describe the organisational structure of the workshops above in order to make clear the process by which we arrived at the conclusions we draw here. The original Mission & Goals statement is attached as Appendix B of this document; the revised statement is attached as Appendix C. The major conclusions were:

- The network should focus more broadly on settlements, rather than narrowly on shelter
- An academic-practitioner network can contribute across the humanitarian cycle
- Current Networks are Ad-Hoc
- Current Information and Practice is Outdated
- Localisation is critical
- We must respect sovereignty
- Cities and towns should be considered explicitly

### From Shelter to Settlements: An Urban Focus

We began the workshop with a different acronym: the Academic-Practitioner Collaboration for Urban *Shelter*, South Pacific. Out of the workshop, the proposal arose that we change the title of the network to include the word, settlements, rather than, shelter. This is consistent with the urban focus of APCUS and the general call for multi-sectoral, area-based urban response.

### An Academic-Practitioner Network Can Contribute Across the Humanitarian Cycle

The workshop participants agree that there is a place for academics at each stage of the humanitarian process – from pre-planning to emergency to recovery and back to development. Not all of the actors saw a role for academics at each stage of their workflow. Some expressed hesitation at the idea that academics might be involved at the earliest, life-saving moments of an emergency. Others, however, saw the possibilities for academic intervention at this stage. As a group, we agreed that APCUS-SP should offer its members for planning and research across the range of a humanitarian crisis.

Most participants agree that there is not enough work done in community risk assessment prior to emergencies. Preparedness, it was universally agreed, is a place where academics should be more engaged. Once the disaster happens, collaboration becomes difficult. Shelter clusters spend weeks and months on the design of the shelter after the disaster. If that process were frontloaded, with designs approved by governments and local communities, response could be more immediate after an event. Then, we can begin reconstruction on Day 1 not after weeks and months.

Once the emergency has begun, it was much more difficult for our participants to agree on how academia can play a role. Some of our participants stressed that remotely collecting data does not work – that those assessing the needs of communities have to be there in the field, talk to local organizations, understand power structures and specific needs of vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities, and ask local people for input. APCUS does not exist in conflict with this localised approach. We agree that field assessments are critical, and we do not challenge the need

for humanitarian staff to conduct these kinds of assessments.

A minority of our NGO participants believed that academics could play a significant role in information assembly even once a crisis has begun. For instance, one participant pointed out that information assembly across disasters is inconsistent. Designs for responses get lost, and there are a lot of them out there. This is a possible role for academia: understanding the available options and advising shelter humanitarians and governments on the existing models. Another role our participants noted was in expertise on urban planning. Pacific governments are reluctant to invest in urban planning and thus do not generally have large, competent staffs or even urban plans to guide sustainable and equitable reconstruction. Academic urban planners can provide such guidance.

### **Current Networks are Ad-Hoc**

“Compass Housing doesn’t want to stumble around the Pacific. We want to partner with experienced practitioners and researchers.” – Larry O’Brien, Compass Housing

“Having worked on the Ebola response in West Africa, there were academic institutions that had data that was needed, but nobody in the field thought to ask.” – Professor Michele Acuto, University of Melbourne

Participants agreed that the current practice of knowledge exchange is based on existing relationships. While producing some fantastic work, these relationships do not always serve the communities. While many academics are willing to engage in emergency response efforts, the networks to engage them are haphazard and held in personnel-specific links between individuals rather than in some common platform. The converse relationship is also true: practitioners often have better access to communities, local initiatives, on-the-ground challenges, and data which could enrich the knowledge base were it shared with academics for documentation and study.

Professor Michele Acuto noted times when a lack of a direct link to university knowledge holders could have saved lives in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Larry O’Brien noted that, for an NGO seeking to expand operations in the Pacific, a lack of existing networks makes their work harder.

In summary, many of the interactions that humanitarians have with academics are based on a personal relationship; they are not needs-based or based on strategic partnerships. Our participants agree that collaboration has to be engineered strategically, not just left to luck and informal relationships.

### **Current Information and Practice is Outdated**

“We are continuously repeating the past because we have not yet imagined another way.” -- Tom Bamforth, IFRC

Attendees acknowledged that there is a value in information assembly because all information needs constant updating. Tom Bamforth noted the constant reversion to practices of the past because information shortages prevents humanitarians from creating new solutions. He noted in particular the application of rural, camp-based strategies to humanitarian crises in cities because of the way that humanitarians are trained. RedR Australia representatives agreed that they are attempting to work differently in cities but that they often lack information to develop new strategies.

## Localisation is Critical

We are not listening to the local people. It is a challenge to achieve this in an early stage after disasters. – Anonymous Humanitarian Participant, paraphrased

How can Pacific Islanders could be involved in these activities? How to work on building capacities? – Anonymous Humanitarian Participant, paraphrased

Our participants agreed that localisation of humanitarian and development efforts is critical. This means engaged governments, and also engaged communities that are at the centre of decisions that impact them. The goal of localisation is articulated in *New Urban Agenda* produced by UN Habitat out of the Habitat III conference in Quito in 2016, and *Agenda 2030*, which also articulates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our participants agreed that the Mission and Goals statement should be more engaged with communities. The versions of the M&G statement we presented to the workshop did not include reference to community. We agreed that this was an oversight that should be corrected in the revised M&G statement. The old language read,

We are a network of academics and practitioners that aims to bridge the practice-research divide across humanitarian emergency management – from preparedness to response, recovery, and back to development. We enable knowledge exchange between academic experts and governments, humanitarian emergency responders, recovery personnel, and development actors.

There was a significant discussion about the best ways to engage community. Should we aim to broaden the scope of APCUS-SP to also include direct community engagement? Or do we engage with communities via with civil-society organisations? From this came a significant discussion about the value of academic knowledge about communities. Some academics have long-standing relationships with communities. Professor Monica Minnegal described how she has been working in communities in Papua New Guinea for years, and those communities have recently experienced a devastating series of earthquakes. Senior Lecturers Jennifer Day and Deborah McDougall described similar experiences in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

We decided as a group that CSO engagement should be added to the M&G statement but that direct community engagement will be a product of the existing relationships between academics and communities, and humanitarians and development actors and communities. In future workshops, including the upcoming workshop in Suva on 04 July 2018, CSOs will be represented.

The new language in the M&G statement now reads,

We are a network of academics and practitioners that aims to bridge the practice-research divide across humanitarian emergency management – from preparedness to response, recovery, and back to development. We enable knowledge exchange between academic experts and governments, civil society organisations, humanitarian emergency responders, recovery personnel, and development actors.

## We Must Respect Sovereignty

“People see local actors and think, ‘no capacity.’” – David Week, Assai Consult

Our participants agree that information produced about a country should be vetted by country governments. Country governments lead humanitarian responses. Humanitarians assist governments in the short-term, and development actors work to assist with recovery and long-term development. This is why engagement with government is an important feature of our M&G statement. Part of our goal is to acknowledge the leadership, knowledge and capacity of governments, and to be a resource for these governments as they lead their recoveries.

### **Cities and Towns Must be Considered Explicitly**

Our participants agreed that cities present problems that are only recently being considered in humanitarian response, though development actors have paid attention to cities for a much longer time. There is precedent for considering cities differently in humanitarian response. Our workshop participants pointed out some relevant models for APCUS. In India, there is an organization (Owner Driven Reconstruction Consortium –ODRC) that partnered with UNDP, academics government officials, the Asia Housing Coalition, civil society organizations and private sector to provide owner driven reconstruction. When emergency comes and government needs assistance they invite this consortium as advocates and they represent views and advise the government and the decision making in the early phase – getting views and data from different perspectives and stakeholders of the ODRC. Local sharing information - they do mapping on local level, what are the social networks, are there NGOs working on certain issues and can we mobilize them, it acts as a conduit between government and community - two way info sharing.

There are also other models for working in urban humanitarian settings. The international humanitarian and development communities have taken steps to begin addressing the particular problems of cities in climate-induced and human-created crises. ALNAP, a global network of NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, and donors seeking to improve humanitarian response, has set up its Urban Response Community of Practice in acknowledgement that “Urban areas and needs in crises differ in important ways from rural contexts, and force the humanitarian community to fundamentally rethink the way they can prepare for, and respond to, disasters and conflict in cities”<sup>1</sup>. In very recent years, various humanitarian and development agencies have produced urban-specific toolkits like the Urban Context Analysis Toolkit (International Rescue Committee, 2017), which provides a guide for governments and humanitarians in providing assistance for IDPs and the cities where they settle, temporarily or permanently. APCUS-SP must engage with these existing efforts and not duplicate them.

Despite these precedents, in the Pacific, our participants stress that both humanitarians and governments are reluctant to engage with cities.

### **Academic Knowledge is Not Assembled for Emergencies**

There is an endless flow of academic information and reports about climate change. But is that changing anything? – Anonymous Participant, paraphrased

The way practitioners work is simple, we just do what we are supposed to do. We don't really need a theoretical framework. – Anonymous Humanitarian Participant, paraphrased

Research has to help us achieve our objectives humanitarian objectives. It can't just be an exploration. – Anonymous Humanitarian Participant, paraphrased

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/urban-response>

In its current form, much academic knowledge is not usable by humanitarians and governments in humanitarian response. Humanitarians noted a resistance by academics to engagement with practice, a focus on theory to the exclusion of practice, a dismissal by academics of practical knowledge, and a focus on debate with other academics through journals. Academic articles, they note, are often not timely, relating to dated events. They are also difficult to read for practitioners, and so it is difficult for practitioners to generate systematic searches for particular geographies or other problems that they face in the field. Practitioners noted that research papers tend to be publication-focused rather than needs-focused. They also note that that academic knowledge can be “phenomenal” in relevance and depth, but it is not accessible to them. Their volume is also formidable and prohibitive for use by humanitarians.

Academics largely agreed with this sentiment, though they note clear opportunities to repackage academic work to be more applicable to humanitarian settings. Humanitarians have few opportunities for sustained reflection about the values underlying their work or about the effectiveness of the practices they routinely employ. One academic described how he spent years as part of a community effort to get vegetable production going on the Maldives. The Maldives imports every food item except tuna and coconuts. In this highly-urbanised country, a UN project of \$10m which built greenhouses that were too hot – but the UN implementers never talked to the community organisation.

Also, as the second paraphrased sentiment above suggests, there is much misunderstanding about the role of theory and academic rigour in applied work. This humanitarian mistakenly believes that no guiding theory is in place when they work. In actuality, a guiding framework is in place with any thought – whether or not it is identified and acknowledged in everyday humanitarian practice. This is an opportunity for academic contributions, and we have added language to our Mission & Goals statements to reflect this possible contribution of academics:

Our goal is to link academic knowledge with humanitarian and government actors toward: .... 3. On-demand assistance to develop and critique humanitarian strategies as emergencies develop

Most of our humanitarians did note both willingness and interest in working with academics. A few noted that they have developed linkages with a PhD student to work on longer-term questions. They note that academia might be better-positioned to assist with thinking about systemic challenges.

### 3 NEXT STEPS

This section outlines APCUS-SP's next actions and the current articulation of our vision that frames those actions.

#### Goals and Challenges

From the inaugural workshop and our other consultations, we go forward with the following goal:

Our goal is to link academic knowledge with humanitarian and government actors toward:

1. Pre-disaster planning for urban shelter and settlements, emergency preparedness, and recovery
2. On-demand assembly of information about good practice and the urban context during humanitarian emergencies
3. On-demand assistance to develop and critique humanitarian strategies as emergencies develop
4. Stronger community engagement in crafting recovery and development strategies
5. Better-informed academic research agendas that deliver results relevant to practitioner experience
6. Improved access to information and actors for academics researching humanitarian emergency management.

We acknowledge these challenges in operationalizing our efforts:

1. Existing knowledge and knowledge sources are not effectively catalogued or understood in many settings
2. Academic knowledge is often not presented in a way that is humanitarians can readily use.
3. There are narrow windows for information assembly in humanitarian situations.
4. Academics may work differently and use different vocabulary than development and humanitarian actors.
5. Funding models and response procedures are rural-focused and reflect entrenched interests.
6. Governments must lead humanitarian efforts; humanitarians must not create parallel systems.

#### Continue to Engage Stakeholders: Short-term activities

In 2018, APCUS-SP will perform two activities:

1. We will begin to grow our base with a mailing list where members can exchange information and seek partnerships
2. We will continue to consult our stakeholders for their input on the organization Mission & Goals, activities, and resourcing.

Our upcoming events are:

1. Suva Roundtable at the Pacific Update, UNESCAP (04 July 2018)
2. Melbourne Roundtable, hosted by the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Administration (24 Sept 2018)
3. Vanuatu Workshop (October/November 2018, TBD)
4. Canberra Roundtable Looking to the Future; Building Network Alliances (August 2019).

#### Grow, Deliver, and Test: Medium-term aims and ambitions



Ultimately, according to NGOs we have consulted in this process, a network like APCUS-SP could find value globally. Our organisers have ambitions to generate a worldwide support network linking academics to humanitarian emergency responders. We will use the South Pacific as a proof-of-concept with a view to expanding the network in future. We will build on the RSA Network grant to generate more funds to support APCUS-SP. We plan to leverage APCUS-SP to demonstrate the concept and apply for grant or government funding to establish longer-term funding for the Network. The name of the network itself is designed to be modular: We have already spoken to colleagues in China and Afghanistan who would like to start APCUS-East Asia and APCUS-Central Asia branches. A logical next partnership would be with the Pacific Disaster Center at the University of Hawaii – an agency to which we already have links.

Given the possible need outside the Pacific, a major point of debate among APCUS-SP organisers was in how we should start and how we should plan to grow. In addition to the current proposed format that is geographically-focused on the South Pacific, we also considered starting with a global platform first, but focusing on South Pacific academic institutions as partners. We decided instead to focus our efforts on the South Pacific and expand the network later to other universities and other geographies. Our culminating event in Canberra will showcase the successes of APCUS-SP, galvanise potential supporting agencies, and assemble partnerships and funding to expand the network across the globe to other regions and other universities. We will draw a speaker to who can inspire our community of academics and practitioners.

#### 4 ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A. Inaugural Workshop Plan
- Appendix B. Original Mission and Goals Statement
- Appendix C. Updated Mission and Goals Statement

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## APPENDIX A. Workshop Plan

# APCUS-SP / MSSI STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

## FINAL Agenda and Plan, 29 May 2018

**Prior Circulation.** If possible, please read prior to the workshop:

- APCUS-SP mission statement and objectives
- Workshop Agenda and Plan.

**9:30-10:00am.** Social Breakfast

**10:00-10:20am.** Welcome and Workshop Objectives

- Jennie Day – Objectives and outcomes, funding and ethics disclosure (10 min)
- Don Henry – Big picture (10 min)

**10:20-10:35am.** Play: Introduction to the Exhibition (Soren Dahlgaard)

**10:35am-12:05. Session 1** (facilitated by Jennie Day). Storytelling – Lessons and Critical Gaps from Past Disasters

- Tom Bamforth - critical collaborations and gaps in each Logic Model area (10 min)
- Other ideas that we should cover (10 min)
- Group discussion and note-taking with Open Space Approach (60 min)
- Finish and hand in notes (10 min)

Open Space Approach

- Participants circulate across five topics as per their preferences. Participants should feel free to engage in storytelling about each topic:
  - 1) **Before.** Preparedness, contingency, and resilience
  - 2) **After.** Relief and recovery, and transition
  - 3) **Urban.** Humanitarian action in urban settings
  - 4) **Academic Culture.** Academic culture and its problems/incentives for collaboration in humanitarian response
  - 5) **NGO Culture.** NGO culture and its problems/incentives for collaboration in humanitarian response
- A rapporteur in each group will record group and individual observations. Rapporteurs also note the name and organisation of the person making the observation. Where the observation is shared, record multiple identities if possible.
  - Rapporteurs follow the mini-narrative, successes, challenges, recommendations format

**12:05pm-1:20pm.** Lunch and Tour of the Exhibition (Soren Dahlgaard)

**1:20-2:30pm: Session 2** (facilitated by Jennie Day and David Week). Discussion of APCUS mission statement and objectives

- David Week - Logic Model (10 min)
- Open discussion (60 min)

**2:30-3:15pm:** Wrap-up and Art Engagement (facilitated by Jennie Day; photo by Soren Dahlgaard).

- Jennie Day – Summary statements, future events, and next steps; query next steps from the group (10 min)
- Soren Dahlgaard – Group photo and some artistic play (20 min).

## APPENDIX B. Original Mission and Goals Statement



THE REGIONAL STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION RESEARCH NETWORK ON  
**ACADEMIC-PRACTITIONER COLLABORATION  
FOR URBAN SHELTER, SOUTH PACIFIC**

**We are a network of academics and practitioners that aims to bridge the practice-research divide across humanitarian emergency management – in preparedness and response, and from recovery to development.** We seek to develop channels for sharing knowledge between academic experts, governments, humanitarian emergency responders, recovery personnel, and development actors. Linking these groups is vital because they hold different bodies of knowledge that are rarely shared. Producing a shared body of knowledge will impact all phases of humanitarian and development aid. Our network focuses particularly on urban shelter and settlements because new ways of managing emergencies are urgently needed in cities. We focus on the South Pacific because of the region’s emerging urban experience and vulnerability to disasters.

**We aim to break the organizational silos and provide for generative, interdisciplinary, and inter-sector urban humanitarian response where all actors rely on evidence, seek new knowledge, and fearlessly reflect on their practice – so that cities thrive.**

#### Goal

Our goal is to link academic knowledge with humanitarian and government actors toward:

1. Pre-disaster planning for urban shelter and settlements, emergency preparedness, and recovery
2. On-demand assembly of information about good practice, and the urban situation and context, during humanitarian emergencies
3. On-demand assistance to develop and critique humanitarian strategies as emergencies develop
4. Collaboration on recovery and development strategies to imagine and coproduce better cities
5. Better-informed academic research agendas that deliver results relevant to practitioner experience
6. Improved access to information and actors for academics researching humanitarian emergency management.

#### Challenges

We face certain challenges in operationalizing our efforts. These include:

1. Existing knowledge and knowledge sources are not effectively catalogued or understood in many settings
2. Academic knowledge is often not constructed or presented in a way that is conducive to the conditions that humanitarians face.
3. There are narrow windows for information assembly in humanitarian situations.
4. Academics do not understand humanitarian jargon and operating models
5. Funding models and response procedures are rural-focused and reflect entrenched interests.
6. Governments must lead humanitarian efforts; humanitarians must not create parallel systems.



## APPENDIX C. Updated Mission and Goals Statement



THE REGIONAL STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION RESEARCH NETWORK ON  
**ACADEMIC-PRACTITIONER COLLABORATION  
FOR URBAN SHELTER, SOUTH PACIFIC**

**We are a network of academics and practitioners that aims to bridge the practice-research divide across humanitarian emergency management – from preparedness to response, recovery, and back to development.** We enable knowledge exchange between academic experts and governments, civil society organisations, humanitarian emergency responders, recovery personnel, and development actors. Linking these groups is vital because they hold different bodies of knowledge that are rarely shared. Producing a shared body of knowledge will impact all phases of humanitarian and development aid. Our network focuses particularly on urban shelter and settlements because new ways of managing emergencies are urgently needed in cities. We focus on the South Pacific because of the region’s emerging urban experience and vulnerability to disasters.

**We aim to break the organizational silos and provide for generative, localised, consultative, interdisciplinary, and inter-sector urban humanitarian response where all actors rely on evidence, seek new knowledge, and fearlessly reflect on their practice – so that cities thrive.**

#### Goal

Our goal is to link academic knowledge with humanitarian and government actors toward:

1. Pre-disaster planning for urban shelter and settlements, emergency preparedness, and recovery
2. On-demand assembly of information about good practice and the urban context during humanitarian emergencies
3. On-demand assistance to develop and critique humanitarian strategies as emergencies develop
4. Stronger community engagement in crafting recovery and development strategies
5. Better-informed academic research agendas that deliver results relevant to practitioner experience
6. Improved access to information and actors for academics researching humanitarian emergency management.

#### Challenges

We face certain challenges in operationalizing our efforts. These include:

1. Existing knowledge and knowledge sources are not effectively catalogued or understood in many settings
2. Academic knowledge is often not presented in a way that is humanitarians can readily use.
3. There are narrow windows for information assembly in humanitarian situations.
4. Academics may work differently and use different vocabulary than development and humanitarian actors.
5. Funding models and response procedures are rural-focused and reflect entrenched interests.
6. Governments must lead humanitarian efforts; humanitarians must not create parallel systems.