

## How Should States Manage Climate Mobilities And Planned Relocations? Early Lessons From Fiji And Vanuatu

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'Pacific Governments are leading proactive policies for climate-related migration worldwide.'<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

In November 2023, Pacific leaders converged on the Cook Islands for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Islands Leaders Forum. One of the key items on the agenda was the adoption of a regional agreement on climate mobilities. It is high time that policymakers globally turned their attention to substantive questions of how to manage situations of climate mobilities, both within and between their respective states. Until recently, however, the glaring reality was that no individual state had adopted specific policies to manage climate-related mobilities within their borders. It was only in 2018 that two Pacific states stepped forward in this area – Fiji with their Planned Relocation Guidelines and Vanuatu with their National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (NPCCDID). While these policies focus

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsay, Rebekah Beatrice et al., "Local Responses to Climate Change and Disaster-Related Migration in Solomon Islands," Social Dimensions of Climate Change: Pacific Series (World Bank, March 2023), 27.

fairly narrowly on planned relocations, elements of the NPCCDID and Fiji's subsequent set of Displacement Guidelines give some insight into how these early principles can be applied in a broader set of circumstances.

Looking at drafts of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility,<sup>2</sup> its success will depend on individual states taking the initiative to develop and implement their own policies. While the draft outlines key principles to guide actions on climate mobility in the region, it is very high level and lacks directly implementable elements. One form of mobility it does mention is planned relocations. It calls for the development of regional planned relocation guidelines and to 'strengthen regional mechanisms for capturing and sharing lessons learned from past relocations.'<sup>3</sup> Following this call, I argue it is essential we learn not just from past experiences of implementing relocations, but also from the policies that have been developed to date. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of these early policies has implications for how states with policies move forward with policy implementation and evolution, for how other states facing similar issues develop their responses, and for the analogous lessons that can be used to inform the development and evolution of regional climate mobilities instruments

Currently, these policies mainly focus on state-led community-level mobility within states. Significant gaps remain around individual-level mobility, autonomous mobility, urbanisation, mobility in informal settlements, and the ever-present question of cross-border mobility. Despite this, the principles and lessons around managing planned relocations are likely to form the starting point for future domestic and regional instruments that address elements of other forms of climate mobilities as well. This is why we need to turn our attention towards what we can glean from the development and implementation of these policies. To draw out these lessons I make my case in three sections. The first briefly looks at the guidance that exists in international law and principles and how this could apply to instances of climate mobilities. I argue that it shows that individuals do have rights and states do have protection obligations – what is contested and uncertain is when exactly these come into force and in what ways. Secondly, I unpack the climate mobilities policies of Fiji and Vanuatu. Here I focus on the constitutive elements of the policies and what they say about their development. Finally, I draw out the lessons that can be learnt from these policies and attempts at their implementation. These can be categorised in three key areas, I argue: first, there must be adequate funding available; second, mobilities solutions must be community-led; and third, these solutions must be forward-looking and pre-emptive. Approaches to managing climate mobilities that address these three issues adequately are unlikely to be perfect, but they are much more likely to uphold rights and produce durable solutions than those that do not.

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<sup>2</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, "Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (Draft 2.6)," March 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, 5.

## The Problem(s) of Climate Mobilities

First, we need to reconsider the normative connotations often attached to instances of mobility or immobility – neither are inherently positive or negative. Humans have always used migration and mobility as a strategy to adapt to change and remove themselves from dangerous circumstances.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true in the Pacific, where mobility has long been key to maintaining livelihoods, increasing disaster resilience, and managing the vagaries of climate, empire, and globalisation.<sup>5</sup> Everyday mobilities range in scale from movements of metres and days, to cross-border voyages that last lifetimes or across generations.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, though, experience shows that communities almost always want to stay where they are,<sup>7</sup> and ‘in general, people do not want to leave their homes.’<sup>8</sup> While all communities are internally variegated and individuals and households will have their own voices and beliefs, generally, most climate-vulnerable coastal communities in the Pacific do not want to move; they would prefer to explore any alternative to migration or relocation, at least in the short term. Permanent movement is almost always the least preferred adaptation option, with communities preferencing in-situ adaptation strategies that allow them to remain in their homes for as long as possible. For most of these groups, the choice to move will be made only when all alternative options for sustainable futures have first been exhausted.

### Conceptual difficulties

Therefore, there are instances where people will choose to move and choose to stay. There will also be instances where people will want to move or stay, but will need assistance to do so. This is why I argue we need to take a holistic approach to the management of climate mobilities. Following the lead of other key voices in the field, I use the term mobilities here as it better captures the diversity of the ‘multiple forms, directions and multiplicities of human movement in the context of climate change,’<sup>9</sup> including immobility, relocation, and

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<sup>4</sup> Jane McAdam, “Swimming against the Tide: Why a Climate Change Displacement Treaty Is Not the Answer,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 23, no. 1 (March 2011): 2; Camillo Boano, Roger Zetter, and Tim Morris, “Environmental Displaced People: Understanding the Linkages between Environmental Change, Livelihoods and Forced Migration,” *Forced Migration Policy Briefing* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Refugee Studies Centre, 2008), 5; K. Warner et al., “Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration,” *Natural Hazards* 55, no. 3 (December 2010): 691, doi:10.1007/s11069-009-9419-7.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Barnett and Celia McMichael, “The Effects of Climate Change on the Geography and Timing of Human Mobility,” *Population and Environment* 39, no. 4 (June 2018): 342, doi:10.1007/s11111-018-0295-5.

<sup>6</sup> Georgina Cundill et al., “Toward a Climate Mobilities Research Agenda: Intersectionality, Immobility, and Policy Responses,” *Global Environmental Change* 69 (July 2021): 102315, doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102315.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Leckie and Ezekiel Simperingham, “Focusing on Climate-Related Internal Displacement,” *Forced Migration Review*, no. 49 (May 2015): 35.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Ferris, “Planned Relocations, Disasters, and Climate Change,” in *Legal and Policy Responses* (Conference on Climate Change and Migration in the Asia-Pacific, Sydney, Australia: Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, 2011), 4, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1110\\_relocation\\_disasters\\_cc\\_ferris.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1110_relocation_disasters_cc_ferris.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ingrid Boas et al., “Climate Migration Myths,” *Nature Climate Change* 9, no. 12 (December 2019): 901, doi:10.1038/s41558-019-0633-3.

alternative forms of circular, recurrent, and seasonal mobilities.<sup>10</sup> This adds depth and detail to our understanding of issues surrounding climate mobilities and the possible solutions. It also highlights how the uncertainty around climate-related losses and harms transcends the boundaries of any one legal or governance regime.<sup>11</sup> For the relocation-focused policies examined here, this position allows us to look at all forms of mobility, immobility, and early intervention as potential solutions to manage the risks posed by the climate crisis.

Establishing who qualifies as affected by climate mobilities is not a straightforward task, unfortunately. Climate change on its own does not displace people.<sup>12</sup> It overlays pre-existing pressures, adding weight to the factors already incentivising people to move.<sup>13</sup> Non-climate drivers like government policy, population growth, and community-level resilience to hazards are key to understanding how a given population may be affected by climate-related hazards.<sup>14</sup> This speaks to the notion that hazards alone do not cause disasters; rather, disasters are products of the larger social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they occur.<sup>15</sup>

When people choose to move is also a conceptually tricky point in definitions of who falls under the coverage of certain protection umbrellas. Traditionally, migration has been seen as a voluntary process based on individual, family, or community preference and decision-making, while forced displacement is a result of immediate risk or harm. Whether this is a useful distinction to apply to cases of climate mobilities though is questionable.<sup>16</sup> Particularly in the case of climate mobilities, the line between voluntary and forced movement is extremely blurry and many choices will involve a delicate and unique mix of both.<sup>17</sup>

If we want to design policies and solutions around climate mobilities, however, we cannot focus solely on the facilitation of voluntary movement or the prevention of involuntary movements. Rather we should look at the *management* of climate mobilities in all its diverse

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<sup>10</sup> Ingrid Boas et al., "Climate Mobilities: Migration, Im/Mobilities and Mobility Regimes in a Changing Climate," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, May 2022, 2, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2022.2066264.

<sup>11</sup> Rina Kuusipalo, "Exiled by Emissions - Climate Change Related Displacement and Migration in International Law: Gaps in Global Governance and the Role of the UN Climate Convention," *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law* 18 (2017): 615.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Kälin, "Displacement Caused by the Effects of Climate Change: Who Will Be Affected and What Are the Gaps in the Normative Framework for Their Protection?," in *Climate Change and Displacement Reader*, ed. Scott Leckie, Ezekiel Simperingham, and Jordan Bakker (New York: Earthscan, 2012), 135.

<sup>13</sup> McAdam, "Swimming against the Tide," 13; Jane McAdam, "Conceptualizing Climate Change-Related Movement," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 106 (2012): 434.

<sup>14</sup> Oli Brown, "Migration and Climate Change" (Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2008), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Karen O'Brien et al., "Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Human Security: A Commissioned Report for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs," in *Climate Change and Displacement Reader*, ed. Scott Leckie, Ezekiel Simperingham, and Jordan Bakker (New York: Earthscan, 2012), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Marino and Heather Lazrus, "Migration or Forced Displacement?: The Complex Choices of Climate Change and Disaster Migrants in Shishmaref, Alaska and Nanumea, Tuvalu," *Human Organization* 74 (November 2015): 342, doi:10.17730/0018-7259-74.4.341.

<sup>17</sup> Jane McAdam, *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 28; Jane McAdam, ed., *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Hart Publishing, 2010), 2.

forms. Shifting the focus broadly to managing climate mobilities allows us to adopt a protection lens and broadly apply it across all stages of mobility and immobility – including displacement, relocation, migration, voluntary immobility, forced immobility, evacuations, temporary or cyclical migration, and even instances where these mobilities are anticipated to happen in the future. Specifically for planned relocation policies, this means the conversations need to begin early and consider all potential solutions without assuming mobility as the inevitable endpoint.

This is not just a theoretical debate. A recent wide-ranging survey found that studies had been conducted on over 400 communities in more than 78 states and territories that had been involved in some form of relocation due to hazards, disasters, and climate change worldwide.<sup>18</sup> These are only the examples that have been researched and published on – there are inevitably innumerable more overlooked communities, households, and individuals that have faced migration, displacement, and relocation as a result of climate-related circumstances. When we consider the increasing numbers of people internally displaced by hazards and disasters each year, it becomes clear that finding solutions to avoid or better manage instances of climate mobilities is a policy problem of the utmost importance and urgency.<sup>19</sup>

### **Jurisprudence and state obligations**

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted that in contexts like climate-related displacement, relocation, and mobilities, ‘individuals rely first and foremost on their own states for the protection of their human rights.’<sup>20</sup> States have an obligation to take preventative action to protect rights and assist when rights are violated or at risk of violation.<sup>21</sup> In disasters specifically, states are responsible for protecting the rights of their populations through all phases of disasters, including disaster preparedness, emergency response, and long-term recovery.<sup>22</sup> Jurisprudence from the European Court of Human Rights,<sup>23</sup> the United States,<sup>24</sup> and the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee have

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<sup>18</sup> Erica Bower and Sanjula Weerasinghe, “Leaving Place, Restoring Home: Enhancing the Evidence Base of Planned Relocation Cases in the Context of Hazards, Disasters, and Climate Change” (Platform on Disaster Displacement and Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023” (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023); Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022” (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022); Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021: Internal Displacement in a Changing Climate” (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Relationship Between Climate Change and Human Rights,” in *Climate Change and Displacement Reader*, ed. Scott Leckie, Ezekiel Simperingham, and Jordan Bakker (New York: Earthscan, 2012), 226.

<sup>21</sup> Jane McAdam and Elizabeth Ferris, “Planned Relocations in the Context of Climate Change: Unpacking the Legal and Conceptual Issues,” *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law* 4, no. 1 (2015): 158.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 212.

<sup>23</sup> Case of Öneriyildiz v. Turkey, No. 48939/99 (European Court of Human Rights November 30, 2004); Case of Budayeva and Others v. Russia, No. 15339/02, 21166/02, 20058/02, 11673/02 and 15343/02 (European Court of Human Rights March 20, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> There is also precedent in the United States in regards to ‘monumental negligence’ on part of the government during Hurricane Katrina. Bruce Burson et al., “The Duty to Move People Out of Harm’s Way in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 384,

shown directly that states do have an obligation to protect people and prevent them from coming to harm as a result of foreseeable climate and environmental hazards.<sup>25</sup> Where the uncertainty had remained until recently, though, is in what this responsibility looked like in practice, including when it comes into force in the context of slow-onset hazards and climate mobility.

## Regional moves

The draft Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility offers an extremely broad overview of the issue.<sup>26</sup> It acknowledges the long history of mobility in the region as well as the deep connections to land and ocean that Pacific communities have. Against this backdrop, the framework seeks to guide actors in the Pacific to ensure that climate mobilities are addressed in a rights-based and people-centred manner. Four key principles are outlined to ensure this. The first is leadership and collaboration. This looks to ensure an inclusive approach that values genuine consultation and partnership with affected communities, traditional leaders, civil society organisations, and international and regional organisations, among others. The second principle is human rights, human security, and protection. Within this, the need to address the differing impacts of climate change and mobility on different groups, especially around gender equality, is highlighted. Third, the framework emphasises the need to protect culture, cultural heritage, identity, and dignity. Valuing traditional knowledge is a core part of this principle, as is safeguarding cultural heritage in the face of climate mobilities. Finally, the fourth principle is to preserve statehood, nationality, and associated rights. The framework strongly asserts that Pacific states will ‘preserve our formal ties to home and sovereign jurisdiction over maritime zones and resources.’<sup>27</sup> While these are good foundational principles to have, there is little to articulate how they should be interpreted and transferred into policy and practice.

Similarly, five modalities of movement are identified in the framework, including staying in place, planned relocations, migration, displacement, and stranded migrants. Beyond acknowledging and defining these concepts, however, there is little detail on how states should prepare for or respond to these issues in practice. A comprehensive implementation and monitoring plan is proposed, but the lack of detail means that it is unlikely that states will be using this framework alone to develop national-level policies on climate mobilities.

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doi:10.1093/rsq/hdy015; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Relationship Between Climate Change and Human Rights,” 226; Roberta Cohen and Megan Bradley, “Disasters and Displacement: Gaps in Protection,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2010): 126; Elizabeth Ferris, “Humanitarian Perspectives on ‘Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters’” (Roundtable on “Canada and International Law,” Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2009), <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/humanitarian-perspectives-on-protection-of-persons-in-the-event-of-disasters/>; Case of Öneriyıldız v. Turkey.

<sup>25</sup> Michelle Foster and Jane McAdam, “Analysis of ‘Imminence’ in International Protection Claims: Teitiota v New Zealand and Beyond,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (October 2022): 975–982, doi:10.1017/S0020589322000367; Human Rights Committee, “Views Adopted by the Committee under Article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, Concerning Communication No. 2728/2016” (Geneva: United Nations Human Rights Committee, July 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, “Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (Draft 2.6).”

<sup>27</sup> Pacific Islands Forum.

What is more likely is that states will look to other early adopters, including the two states with climate mobilities policies cited by the framework – Fiji and Vanuatu.<sup>28</sup>

## Fiji's Policy on Relocation and Displacement

Arguably the most influential actor in the climate mobilities space in recent years has been Fiji. Fiji gained significant international attention from reports that it carried out the first state-sponsored planned relocation because of climate change and developed one of the first two specific climate mobilities policies in the world alongside Vanuatu. The suite of climate mobilities policies in Fiji now includes the 2018 Planned Relocation Guidelines,<sup>29</sup> the 2019 Displacement Guidelines in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters,<sup>30</sup> the 2019 Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples Trust Fund for Communities and Infrastructure,<sup>31</sup> the 2021 Climate Change Act,<sup>32</sup> and the 2023 Standard Operating Procedures for the Planned Relocation Guidelines (SOPs).<sup>33</sup>

The first of these, the Planned Relocation Guidelines, was recognised as the first national policy for state-supported relocation of communities associated with climate change. As Fiji's Ambassador to the UN noted in 2017, developing these policies was challenging as 'there was no international experience to build upon.'<sup>34</sup> However, that is not to say that there were no international frameworks that applied to the context of climate mobilities or that the policy was not built from elements of established protections.

At a broad level, the Planned Relocation Guidelines note the importance of principles contained within the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and multiple human rights conventions.<sup>35</sup> The influence of these key international agreements, principles, and declarations is further emphasised by the government's stated commitment to observing 'all international norms and standards available' regarding relocations and other forms of

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<sup>28</sup> Pacific Islands Forum.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Economy, "Planned Relocation Guidelines" (Suva, Fiji: Republic of Fiji, December 2018), <http://www.economy.gov.fj/images/phocadownload/Planned%20Relocation%20Guidelines.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Economy, "Displacement Guidelines: In the Context of Climate Change and Disasters" (Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Economy, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> "Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act," Pub. L. No. 21 (2019), <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Bill-21%E2%80%94Climate-Relocation-of-Communities-Trust-Fund.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Environment, "Climate Change Act 2022," Pub. L. No. 37, C2022A00037 (2022), <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2022A00037/Html/Text>, <http://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2022A00037>.

<sup>33</sup> Climate Change Division, "Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in the Republic of Fiji" (Suva: Office of the Prime Minister, March 2023), <https://fijiclimatechangeportal.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Standard-Operating-Procedures-for-Planned-Relocation-in-the-Republic-of-Fiji-1.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Nazhat Shameem Khan, "UNHCR Executive Committee Meeting: General Debate Wednesday 4 October 2017" (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017), <https://www.unhcr.org/59d531fa7.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, "Fiji's Relocation Guideline (Draft)" (Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2015), 4, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b72a0c14.html>.

‘rights-based’ responses to climate change.<sup>36</sup> The guidelines explicitly recognise that the state has the ‘primary duty and responsibility to provide minimum standard protection and assistance to people at risk of, or affected by, disasters and environmental change.’<sup>37</sup> To do this, the policy takes an explicitly human rights-based approach to designing and implementing mobility solutions. This draws on foundational human rights documents like the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights but contextualises them for instances of climate mobilities by referencing the Paris Agreement and the environmental obligations this entails in the same sentence.<sup>38</sup> Marginalised groups and the differentiated needs they may have are also recognised, with women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities referenced specifically as groups that must be meaningfully engaged with to ensure their needs are met and their rights are upheld.<sup>39</sup> In 2022, Fiji published its SOPs, which are designed to ‘support the successful operationalisation’ of the Planned Relocation Guidelines and provide ‘structure and detail’ to the processes it sets out. The construction of these policies shows that policies that address planned relocation and other forms of climate mobilities are very likely to be constructed out of elements of existing rights and protection regimes.

The subsequent set of Displacement Guidelines recognises a broader range of displacement and solutions. It acknowledges the distinct but interlinked challenges of rapid and slow-onset hazards, that there are multiple forms of temporary, recurrent, and permanent displacement, and that climate-related displacement is inherently a complex and sensitive issue.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the purpose of the Displacement Guidelines is to ‘provide complementary support to the existing Fijian policies’ and ‘promote institutional frameworks at local, national and regional levels to build up resilience of the communities taking climate change and disasters.’<sup>41</sup> In this policy, we see the important recognition that climate mobilities cannot be addressed in isolation. Planned relocations are only one possible solution to communities facing the prospect of climate-related displacement or mobility.

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<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Economy, “Planned Relocation Guidelines,” 5; Liam Moore, “Planning for the Worst: The Normative Significance of Fiji’s Planned Relocation Guidelines for the Protection and Rights of Climate IDPs in the Pacific,” *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 8, no. 1 (August 2019): 46–51.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Economy, “Planned Relocation Guidelines,” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Economy, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Economy, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Lund, “Navigating Slow-Onset Risks through Foresight and Flexibility in Fiji: Emerging Recommendations for the Planned Relocation of Climate-Vulnerable Communities,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 50 (June 2021): 14, doi:10.1016/j.cosust.2020.12.004; Ministry of Economy, “Displacement Guidelines: In the Context of Climate Change and Disasters.”

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Economy, “Displacement Guidelines: In the Context of Climate Change and Disasters,” 3.



## Vanuatu's National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement

Vanuatu published its key climate mobility policy, the NPCCDID a few months before Fiji in 2018.<sup>42</sup> It is a broader policy than Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines, aimed at exploring a range of durable solutions to displacement. These include planned relocation alongside returning to homes or remaining in situ and sustainable integration in places where people have taken refuge.<sup>43</sup> While climate mobilities had been on the agenda of the ni-Vanuatu government since 2012,<sup>44</sup> it was the devastating effects of Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 that pushed policymakers towards developing specific policies to address climate-related displacement and mobilities. At the time, it was the most powerful recorded cyclone to hit the nation, affecting more than half of the population of around 300,000 and damaging or destroying around eighty per cent of the national housing stock.<sup>45</sup>

The resulting policy self-describes Vanuatu as:

one of the first countries regionally and globally to prepare a comprehensive policy on internal displacement stemming from disasters and climate change which includes recommended actions on return and reintegration, local integration and planned relocation, as well as integrating human mobility into development planning across government.<sup>46</sup>

Again, despite the leading nature of the policy, it was not created from scratch. The policy includes specific references to international frameworks including the UNFCCC, Sendai Framework, Sustainable Development Goals, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons. It has been described as 'exhaustive in its efforts to integrate displacement and mobility considerations across key systems.'<sup>47</sup> The explicit goal of the document is to draw 'on the principles included in these

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<sup>42</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, "National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018" (Port Vila, Vanuatu: Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, 2018); Elizabeth Ferris, "Climate Change, Migration, Law, and Global Governance," *North Carolina Journal of International Law* 44, no. 3 (2019): 437; Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh and Tess Van Geelen, "Protection of Climate Displaced Persons under International Law: A Case Study from Mataso Island, Vanuatu," *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 19 (2018): 17, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3325937.

<sup>43</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, "National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018," 16.

<sup>44</sup> Nacanieli Bolo et al., "Sudden-Onset Hazards and the Risk of Future Displacement in Vanuatu," Risk Profile (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, July 2021), 8, [https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/21\\_0907\\_IDMCMVanuatuRiskprofile.pdf](https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/21_0907_IDMCMVanuatuRiskprofile.pdf); Joshua Hallwright and John Handmer, "Progressing the Integration of Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management in Vanuatu and Beyond," *Climate Risk Management* 31 (January 2021): 7, doi:10.1016/j.crm.2020.100269.

<sup>45</sup> Bolo et al., "Sudden-Onset Hazards and the Risk of Future Displacement in Vanuatu," 11.

<sup>46</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, "National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018," 13.

<sup>47</sup> Carol Farbotko, "Best Practices for Addressing the Legal and Policy Challenges of Climate Mobility," Climate Mobility and Children: A Virtual Symposium (New York: UNICEF and IOM, November 2020), 8.

global, regional and national frameworks to respond to needs of local communities in Vanuatu.<sup>48</sup>

We can see how different elements are incorporated together in how the policy defines displacement. Displacement is broadly defined as:

a process whereby individuals and communities are obliged to move either temporarily or permanently, because they are no longer able to reside on the land on which they live or lose access to land and natural resources upon which their livelihoods depend.<sup>49</sup>

Notably, though, this is not a reproduction of a definition from existing guidance like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.<sup>50</sup> Instead, elements of land rights and livelihood preservation are woven in from Human Rights law and the definition is tailored to the specific context that Vanuatu is facing. Similar to the Fijian policy, this shows us that the future of climate mobilities policies—whether they are located at the state or regional level—is one that looks to the past. As Jane McAdam has argued, all the principles required to develop climate mobilities protections already exist within international law.<sup>51</sup> What is novel about the Fijian and ni-Vanuatu approaches is that they exemplify how these existing principles and protections can be adapted and applied in the context of climate mobilities and planned relocations.

## Policy Principles and Problems in Practice: From Ideals to Implementation

While having policies in place to manage climate mobilities is an important development, it is no use to just have these policies ‘sitting in a drawer;’ they must be ‘taken by the people on the ground and implemented.’<sup>52</sup> With the Pacific Leaders Forum approaching and the high likelihood of a broad Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility being adopted there, it is critical that policymakers around the Pacific and the world consider what climate mobilities policies should look like in practice and what we can learn from those who have put them in place.

There are three key lessons we can learn from the cases of Fiji and Vanuatu about how these policies should be implemented in the future – both in these states and abroad. The first is that more steps need to be taken by states and the international community to ensure there is adequate funding available to prevent harm, assist communities to adapt or move, respond to disasters when they occur, and provide compensation when loss and damage is

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<sup>48</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, “National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018,” 7.

<sup>49</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, 9; Siobhan McDonnell, “The Importance of Attention to Customary Tenure Solutions: Slow Onset Risks and the Limits of Vanuatu’s Climate Change and Resettlement Policy,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 50 (June 2021): 284, doi:10.1016/j.cosust.2021.06.008.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Kälin, “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement Annotations,” *Studies in Transnational Legal Policy*, no. 38 (2008): 189.

<sup>51</sup> McAdam, “Swimming against the Tide,” 17.

<sup>52</sup> Cosmin Corendea: academic and consultant, Interviewed by Liam Moore, October 2022.

unavoidable. The second is that solutions around climate mobilities—whether they are focused on relocation, in situ adaptation, or other forms of mobility—must be led by those affected. Decisions need to be made by affected communities and they must be able to meaningfully participate in the processes of designing and implementing solutions. Finally, the third lesson speaks to the difficulties inherent in the first two points. Implementing community-led solutions around climate mobilities is extremely expensive and time-consuming. To effectively implement as many effective solutions as possible, states and other implementing partners must take a proactive, pre-emptive, and forward-looking approach to identifying and working with potentially climate-vulnerable communities and households. Displacement from slow-onset and recurrent climate-related hazards is one of the few instances in which authorities and communities can plan and act before displacement occurs – and this is an opportunity that must be taken. If those in charge of developing and implementing climate mobilities policies marry these lessons with the examples set by Fiji and Vanuatu, it is likely those faced with the prospect of climate mobilities will be much better off.

### **Adequate funding**

A key issue with developing and implementing climate mobilities policies is that they tend to be extremely expensive. This is illustrated by examples of climate-related relocations that have been carried out in Fiji. As of 2023, Fiji has completed six full or partial state-led relocations, with three ongoing, and 42 other communities who have requested immediate assistance.<sup>53</sup> In each instance of completed or ongoing relocations, the government was constrained by financial limitations – which is especially daunting when you consider the number of communities in need that have not begun the relocation process.

It must be noted that when a community does request assistance, all other avenues apart from relocation are explored first – so it is not certain that all these communities will move. For example, the village of Nabukadra was identified by the government for relocation after Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016. However, after a protracted and fractured decision-making process and a lack of investment from implementing partners, the majority of the community chose not to move. Those who did move did so autonomously within the boundaries of their village lands.<sup>54</sup>

The relocation of Vunidogoloa was publicised as the first climate-related state-led relocation, not just in Fiji, but the world.<sup>55</sup> Despite its status as the government's flagship

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<sup>53</sup> The six relocations include the initial relocation of Vunidogoloa, alongside Vunisavisavi, Denimanu, Nagasauva, Narikoso, and Tukuraki. Both interviewees from the Climate Change Division confirmed the number of around 40 communities who require assistance, though another interviewee suggested that this list is not as fixed or freely available as the frequent quoting of this figure suggests. Kreetika Kumar, "More than 40 Communities to Be Relocated," *Fiji Broadcasting Corporation*, April 2021, <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/more-than-40-communities-to-be-relocated/>; Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore, September 2023; Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore, January 2023; Interviewee 1, Interviewed by Liam Moore, March 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Alexandra Nichols, "Climate Change, Natural Hazards, and Relocation: Insights from Nabukadra and Navuniivi Villages in Fiji," *Climatic Change*, August 2019, 264–265, doi:10.1007/s10584-019-02531-5.

<sup>55</sup> Alister Doyle, "Fiji to Move More than 40 Villages Inland as Seas Rise," *Reuters*, November 2017, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/climatechange-accord-fiji-idINKBN1DH1FI>; Loes Witschge, "In Fiji,

relocation project, community members claim they were forced to self-fund over 60 per cent of the project themselves. Despite this, the government still spent more than three times more on the project than they budgeted for and the finished houses did not include kitchens.<sup>56</sup> Another early relocation of the community of Narikoso was only able to be completed after European Union funding, funnelled through the German Development Fund, was acquired.<sup>57</sup> More recently, the relocation of Cogea in Wainunu, Bua, had to be outsourced to the Fijian Council of Social Services backed by financial support from the German not-for-profit Bread of the World, as the government did not have the means to finance the relocation itself.<sup>58</sup> Another project due to occur in 2023—the relocation of the community of Wailotua—has been significantly delayed due to difficulties in finding finance.<sup>59</sup> Currently, officials estimate the cost of these projects to be around FJ\$1 to 4 million each (AUD\$ 700,000 to 2.7 million),<sup>60</sup> with projects completed within 18 to 24 months in best-case scenarios.<sup>61</sup>

The scale of the financing issue is acknowledged by the government. In 2020, the Attorney-General said that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Fiji's economy had turned the job of climate-proofing the nation from one that was daunting, to a 'herculean task.'<sup>62</sup> In policy, the Displacement Guidelines note that mobility policies will need to be supported by 'durable financial solutions,' and suggest the development of a relocation trust fund.<sup>63</sup> This materialised as Fiji's Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples Trust Fund in 2019.<sup>64</sup> Described as a mini loss and damage fund for Fiji,<sup>65</sup> it is financed partially through their

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Villages Need to Move Due to Climate Change," *Al Jazeera*, February 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/2/14/in-fiji-villages-need-to-move-due-to-climate-change>; Coral Davenport, "Rising Seas," *The New York Times*, March 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/03/27/world/climate-rising-seas.html>; David R. Boyd, "Statement of United Nations Special Rapporteur David R. Boyd on the Conclusion of His Mission to Fiji" (Suva, Fiji: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23964&LangID=E>.

<sup>56</sup> Clothilde Tronquet, "From Vunidogoloa to Kenani: An Insight into Successful Relocation," *The State of Environmental Migration 2015*, 2015, 121–142; Karen E. McNamara and Helene Jacot des Combes, "Planning for Community Relocations Due to Climate Change in Fiji," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science* 6, no. 3 (September 2015): 315–319; Annah E. Piggott-McKellar et al., "Moving People in a Changing Climate: Lessons from Two Case Studies in Fiji," *Social Sciences* 8, no. 5 (May 2019): 140, doi:10.3390/socsci8050133.

<sup>57</sup> Ovin Ralulu, "Project Design Document: Planned Relocation of Narikoso Village and Waciwaci District School Currently Being Impacted by Climate Change" (Suva, 2016), [http://acsepacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FJ4\\_PDD\\_final\\_signed\\_81202072.pdf](http://acsepacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FJ4_PDD_final_signed_81202072.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Arieta Vakasukawaqa, "'SOPs a Step in Right Direction,'" *The Fiji Times*, April 2023, <https://www.fijitimes.com/sops-a-step-in-right-direction/>; Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>59</sup> Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>60</sup> Christine Fung, Interviewed by Liam Moore, January 2023; Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore. Christine Fung estimated between FJ\$ 2 and 4 million, with Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka saying the government was currently budgeting for around FJ\$1 million for a standard relocation.

<sup>61</sup> Christine Fung, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>62</sup> Litia Cava, "Climate Vulnerability Assessment- \$9.3b to Protect Fiji – A-G," *FijiTimes*, November 2022AD, <https://www.fijitimes.com/climate-vulnerability-assessment-9-3b-to-protect-fiji-a-g/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Economy, "Displacement Guidelines: In the Context of Climate Change and Disasters," 3.

<sup>64</sup> Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore; Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act.

<sup>65</sup> Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy and partly through voluntary donations.<sup>66</sup> The primary goal of the fund is to provide the financial resources required to relocate communities; however, these resources are also able to be re-purposed to provide emergency assistance in the case of acute-onset displacement events.<sup>67</sup> New Zealand was the first state to interact with the fund, pledging \$US2 million in 2020, as part of a broader \$150 million package of climate change assistance.<sup>68</sup> One condition of the New Zealand pledge was the finalisation of the SOPs.<sup>69</sup> With clear procedures now in place for the minute details of how a relocation is considered, planned, enacted, and funded, it is hoped that donors will be reassured that Fiji is not looking for a ‘blank check,’ but has ‘a very advanced structure for using funding for loss and damage.’<sup>70</sup> Still, though, there are doubts—from external and internal sources—over whether this mini loss and damage fund will be able to solve the financial barriers to policy implementation on its own.<sup>71</sup>

Similar issues are plaguing the ni-Vanuatu approach to climate mobilities management as well. An interviewee working in the Vanuatu Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Aid Coordination, based out of the Prime Minister’s Office, noted that due to a lack of coordination between government departments, as well as a lack of physical infrastructure, human resources, and finances, the ‘policy hasn’t been functioning,’ and ‘we haven’t done much work on it, in terms of its implementation.’<sup>72</sup> Despite this, the policy has served as an important promotional tool and negotiating point, especially during Vanuatu’s long-running campaign for the establishment of a financial loss and damage mechanism.<sup>73</sup>

Vanuatu first tabled a call for a ‘collective loss-sharing scheme to compensate the victims of sea-level rise’ on behalf of the Association of Small Island States during negotiations to establish the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1991.<sup>74</sup> After 30 years of campaigning, COP27 in 2022 finally saw an international agreement reached on the need to establish an international fund to pay for climate-related loss and damage.<sup>75</sup> The large

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<sup>66</sup> Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act Clause 12.

<sup>67</sup> Lund, “Navigating Slow-Onset Risks through Foresight and Flexibility in Fiji,” 14.

<sup>68</sup> Laurie Goering, “New Zealand Makes First Donation to Fiji Climate Relocation Fund,” *Reuters*, February 2020, sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-fiji-newzealand-trfn-idUSKCN20L04K>.

<sup>69</sup> Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore; Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore; Daniel Lund: Special Advisor to the Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore, August 2022; Christine Fung, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Lund: Special Advisor to the Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>71</sup> Filimone Ralogaivau: Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>72</sup> Zoe Ayong: National Disaster Management Office, Government of Vanuatu, Interviewed by Liam Moore, January 2023.

<sup>73</sup> Zoe Ayong: National Disaster Management Office, Government of Vanuatu.

<sup>74</sup> Government of Vanuatu, “Elements for a Framework Convention on Climate Change: Proposed by Vanuatu on Behalf of States Members of the United Nations and of the Specialized Agencies That Are Members of The Alliance of Small Island States” (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, April 1991), <https://aosis-chair.sharepoint.com/sites/aosiscontentpublishing/Published%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Faosiscontentpublishing%2FPublished%20Documents%2F1991%2E6%2E4%20%2D%20Submission%20%2D%20Elements%20for%20a%20Framework%5FWebsite%20User%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Faosiscontentpublishing%2FPublished%20Documents&p=true&ga=1>.

<sup>75</sup> Matt McDonald, “COP27: One Big Breakthrough but Ultimately an Inadequate Response to the Climate Cri-

caveat here is that significant questions remain about what form the fund will take, the amount of funds required, who will pay into the fund, whether contributions will be voluntary or mandatory, who is entitled to claim compensation from the fund, and what even counts as loss and damage in this context.<sup>76</sup> Disagreement particularly over who should oversee the fund, and whether or not it should be the World Bank, led to negotiations stalling in October 2023 and uncertainty about what—if anything—would be achieved at COP28 in Dubai in November.<sup>77</sup>

An alternative to both loss and damage or a trust fund has been pioneered by both Fiji and Vanuatu – partnerships with external actors, including international organisations, development agencies, and other states. Fiji’s policies have all been written in collaboration with GIZ, the German Development Fund, while Vanuatu and now Solomon Islands have both worked very closely with IOM to develop their approaches. For Fiji’s SOPs, New Zealand was a key financier and partner, perhaps signalling their willingness to help other neighbouring states in their region with climate mobilities policy development as well. To date, New Zealand is the only state to contribute to Fiji’s trust fund; however, it is hoped that the formalisation of the SOPs will encourage other traditional donors in the region to support the fund as well.<sup>78</sup>

What is clear from these examples is that there is no one solution to the barrier of capacity and in particular financial capacity. The process of finding and securing funding has been described as a ‘no stone unturned’ approach in Vanuatu, a model that other states seem to be adopting now as well.<sup>79</sup> It is clear though that these states need to find something under one of the stones they turn over, as without adequate funding it will be almost impossible to effectively implement their path-leading policies.

### Active community participation

For climate mobilities, though, money is not everything. A recent study found that one of the best indicators that a relocation would be more successful is when the movement is initiated and driven by the community and its members.<sup>80</sup> State support is important, but outside of times when a catastrophic trigger event leaves people unable to remain or return to their homes, communities and households need to make the decisions to move themselves. This is why consultative and participatory approaches are so important. People

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sis,” *The Conversation*, November 2022, <http://theconversation.com/cop27-one-big-breakthrough-but-ultimately-an-inadequate-response-to-the-climate-crisis-194056>; Alexandre Lillo et al., “COP27 ‘loss and Damage’ Fund: A Historic Decision amid Discouraging Results,” *The Conversation*, November 2022, <http://theconversation.com/cop27-loss-and-damage-fund-a-historic-decision-amid-discouraging-results-195186>.

<sup>76</sup> Paul G. Harris, “COP27: From Preventing Dangerous Climate Change to Salving Loss and Damage,” ed. Jamie Males, *PLOS Climate* 2, no. 1 (January 2023), doi:10.1371/journal.pclm.0000150; McDonald, “COP27.”

<sup>77</sup> Valerie Volcovici, “Countries Deadlocked on ‘loss and Damage’ Fund as UN Climate Summit Nears,” *Reuters*, October 2023, sec. COP28, <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/cop/countries-deadlocked-loss-damage-fund-un-climate-summit-nears-2023-10-23/>.

<sup>78</sup> Interviewee 1, Interviewed by Liam Moore.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Bartlett: Special Advisor to the Government of Vanuatu, Interviewed by Liam Moore, December 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Erica R. Bower et al., “Enabling Pathways for Sustainable Livelihoods in Planned Relocation,” *Nature Climate Change* 13, no. 9 (September 2023): 919–926, doi:10.1038/s41558-023-01753-x.

need to have ownership of the processes surrounding the decision to move, where to move, when to move, and how to move.

The Fijian SOPs give us some idea of how to operationalise this in practice. The SOPs state not just that communities must request relocation, but that there must be 90% consensus from eligible voting community members. Within this, the 90% consensus threshold must also be passed for women, men, young people, elderly people, LGBTIQI-identifying people, and people living with disabilities and special needs. This is not the only checkpoint, however; in turn, 60% of the community and all the groups listed above then need to agree to proceed with measures suggested by scoping studies: on new sites and housing plans identified, again to relocate; on community obligations and contributions to relocation; and a detailed plan on exactly how the relocation activities and mobility will proceed. The goal of this is to ensure ‘culturally appropriate consultative, participatory, and inclusive structures... to enable all sectors of a community to make informed choices.’<sup>81</sup> This ensures there is a high level of consent and consultation within communities, while also allowing those with dissenting views to have their voices heard.

There is also an endowment that while consent is a necessary precursor to consultation and participation, it is not enough on its own. Participation implies a deeper type of engagement than consultation; while consultation involves policymakers soliciting and listening to the opinions and perceptions of those who will be affected by the policy, participatory processes require that affected populations have a greater degree of control over making decisions that may affect them both now and in the future.<sup>82</sup> One way the SOPs try to ensure active and meaningful participation is through including community representatives within their formal decision-making processes. These representatives are people selected from and by the community to be crucial players at multiple stages of the decision-making, planning, and implementation process.<sup>83</sup> To ensure a greater likelihood of success, people need to be deeply and genuinely involved in making the decisions and crafting the solutions for their situations.<sup>84</sup>

### **Pre-emptive actions and forward-looking solutions**

Problematically, these processes are labour-intensive and time-consuming. When catastrophic disasters occur and people are immediately displaced, it is unlikely this type of consultation can occur. However, when planning for mobilities in the case of slower-onset hazards, recurrent, or seasonal displacement, there is ‘a rare opportunity to plan for

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<sup>81</sup> Climate Change Division, “Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in the Republic of Fiji,” sec. 2, page 5–6.

<sup>82</sup> Jane McAdam, “Historical Cross-Border Relocations in the Pacific: Lessons for Planned Relocations in the Context of Climate Change,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 3 (July 2014): 300–301, doi:10.1080/00223344.2014.953317; McAdam and Ferris, “Planned Relocations in the Context of Climate Change,” 146.

<sup>83</sup> Climate Change Division, “Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in the Republic of Fiji,” sec. 3, page 6–8.

<sup>84</sup> McAdam, “Historical Cross-Border Relocations in the Pacific,” 300–301; McAdam and Ferris, “Planned Relocations in the Context of Climate Change,” 146.

response.<sup>85</sup> Problematically, the humanitarian system in its current form—at a state and international level—is very good at providing assistance, but is less adept at reducing threats or strengthening capacity.<sup>86</sup> This trend is exacerbated in the Pacific by the constant need to respond to regular and recurring hazards, which stretches resources and limits the amount of preventative and pre-emptive work that can be done.<sup>87</sup> Then Vanuatu Minister for Climate Change Ralph Regenvanu said in his high-level statement to COP24, that the effects of climate change have put Vanuatu into a ‘constant state of emergency.’<sup>88</sup>

Both the policies of Fiji and Vanuatu explicitly look at how to pre-empt or prepare for displacement – whether through mitigation, in situ adaptation, or planned adaptive mobilities like planned relocations. Fiji has a pre-emptive approach that is present in both guidelines and the SOPs, while Vanuatu specifically includes people ‘at risk of’ displacement as a distinct group that their policy includes under its protection umbrella.<sup>89</sup> The question that remains, however, is how to effectively implement these policies, turning them into meaningful practices that reduce risks, minimise harm, and preserve lives and livelihoods.

## Conclusion

When asked why the first states in the world to develop policy to address climate mobilities and displacement were from the Pacific, Professor Jane McAdam said, ‘It’s because they have to.’<sup>90</sup> This mentality is reflected in both the path-leading policies developed by Pacific states, and in the range of ways they have tried to secure the funding and capacity to be able to implement them. There are lessons in these policies and practices of which policymakers should take heed.

For one, through the actions of these Pacific states, and in particular Fiji, there are now examples of not just principles but detailed policies on how states should manage climate mobilities within their borders. These are policies that as recently as 2018 did not exist anywhere in the world. This offers other states a jumping-off point and touchstone to develop their own approaches, avoiding the struggles that Fiji and Vanuatu had in developing policies from near to nothing.

I suggest three lessons states developing climate mobilities policies can take from these early cases of policy and practice. The first is the need to **have adequate funding available**. The second is the importance of **active and ongoing participation and meaningful consultation** throughout all stages of planning and implementation. Finally, the third lesson is that it is key to **start moving early** to increase the time for solutions to be

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<sup>85</sup> McAdam, “Swimming against the Tide,” 4–5.

<sup>86</sup> Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action*, 273.

<sup>87</sup> Wewerinke-Singh and Van Geelen, “Protection of Climate Displaced Persons under International Law,” 27.

<sup>88</sup> Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh and Diana Hinge Salili, “Between Negotiations and Litigation: Vanuatu’s Perspective on Loss and Damage from Climate Change,” *Climate Policy*, June 2019, 3, doi:10.1080/14693062.2019.1623166.

<sup>89</sup> Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office, “National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018,” 19.

<sup>90</sup> Jane McAdam: academic and consultant, Interviewed by Liam Moore, September 2022.



implemented and ensure rights can be protected and upheld. Policies must be put in place to ensure there are pathways for communities to follow to gain assistance with adaptation and risk reduction at the earliest opportunity – reducing risks may allow more communities to adapt in situ and stay where they are. When mobility is required and requested, earlier interventions can increase the time to plan, find land, craft solutions, and come to terms with the challenging process of relocation.

As Pacific states move towards adopting a regional framework on climate mobilities, it is clear it is these small island states—or rather large ocean states—are leading the way on how states should manage the interactions between climate change and human mobility. Solomon Islands has followed in the footsteps of Fiji and Vanuatu in developing their own Planned Relocation Guidelines,<sup>91</sup> and New Zealand is likely to have its own policy addressing internal relocations or ‘community-led retreat’ in the near future as well.<sup>92</sup> Now not just other states in the Pacific, but states around the world who have climate-vulnerable populations need to take note and begin to develop their own context-specific approaches. Luckily for these policymakers though, they no longer have to start from scratch.

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<sup>91</sup> Solomon Islands Government, “Planned Relocation Guidelines” (Honiara: Solomon Islands Government and IOM, 2022), <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/2023-03/Solomon%20Islands%20Planned%20Relocation%20Guidelines.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Ministry for the Environment, “Community-Led Retreat,” New Zealand Government, Ministry for the Environment, August 2023, <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/climate-change/adapting-to-climate-change/community-led-retreat/>.

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