

Climate Change-Induced Community Relocation in Fiji: Challenges and Ways Forward

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Introduction

The Pacific region is a climate change hotspot. The effects of climate change, such as sea level rise, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, ocean warming, increase of extreme weather events (droughts and floods) challenge the lives and livelihoods of the people of the ocean states of the region. Food and water security are at risk, natural resources become degraded and scarce. Against the backdrop of the climate emergency, climate change induced human mobility—in the form of migration, relocation, and displacement—is becoming a more and more pressing issue in the Pacific (and elsewhere). In this context, Pacific Island Countries' (PICs) climate change policies conceptualise planned relocation as an adaptation measure or as an option of last resort if other adaptation attempts fail or are no longer available. In several PICs, planned relocation of entire climate change-affected communities, or parts of communities, has been already carried out or is on the policy agenda.

Planned relocation, however, comes with a variety of—conflict-prone—problems. If not carried out in a conflict-sensitive manner, it can add to the plight of affected people instead of improving their living conditions. Conflicts between relocating and recipient communities, within communities, and between communities and external agencies can cause relocation to fail, not to speak of the traumatic effects that relocation can have on people whose identity and wellbeing is closely connected to their place, their land. Conflict-prone issues in the relationship between communities and external agents—government

and state institutions, donors and development agencies—can be traced back to fundamentally different worldviews and value systems. Only if communities' worldviews and value systems, which are grounded in the land–people connection, are prioritised, can conflicts be prevented. Building relationships and trust, respect and dialogue, deep listening and engaging with communities not as passive objects of external programmes and agendas, but as resilient and capable agents, is essential for successful relocation. This requires fundamental shifts in the approaches of external actors, e.g. with regard to time frames, structures and procedures of engagement, modes of interaction, and reflection on one's own positionality.

This report addresses the challenges of planned relocation, looking at cases in Fiji, and it presents a specific promising community engagement approach that is pursued by the peacebuilding NGO Transcend Oceania in its work with Fijian communities. Transcend Oceania's approach encourages a shift away from the conventional 'victimhood' discourse; affected communities see themselves as active agents rather than entirely dependent on external assistance. We are confident that this approach offers some insights that can provide guidance for other relocation endeavours in the Pacific and more generally.

The report is in four parts. Firstly, we give a very brief overview of human mobility as a response to the environmental effects of climate change. Secondly, this is followed by a discussion of major issues of community relocation, with a focus on Fiji, and drawing upon TO's engagement in communities facing dislocation and relocation. Thirdly, Transcend Oceania's JustPeace Community Engagement Approach is presented as a way to address these issues. Finally, the report ends with some conclusions and recommendations.

Climate Change and Human Mobility in the Pacific

PICs are severely affected by the climate emergency (Nurse et al. 2014; Mycoo et al. 2022), and its environmental effects threaten land security, food and water security, livelihood security and habitat security, as well as health and infrastructure (Campbell 2014; Campbell 2022a; Connell 2023; World Vision 2023). Most people in rural areas of PICs depend on subsistence agriculture, often supplemented by some cash cropping, as the foundation of their livelihoods and way of life. For them, pressure is growing as yields from food gardens and freshwater supplies decline, or land is eaten away by coastal and riverbed erosion or inundated in the course of cyclones, storm surges and floods (Campbell 2022a; The World Bank 2021). Consequently, the regional organisation for the Pacific, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), in its Regional Security Declaration of 2018 (the Boe Declaration) stated that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific" (Pacific Islands Forum 2018).

People are finding ways to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In addition to in situ adaptation, moving to locations that are less exposed to the effects of climate change is presented and discussed as the better—or even the only—option of long-term sustainable adaptation in certain cases. In fact, climate change-induced mobility has become an issue of major concern for research, policy and practice (Flavell et al. 2020a; Sturridge & Holloway 2022). Various differentiations are made: between forms of mobility—migration, relocation,

evacuation and displacement—, between forced, induced and voluntary mobility, between internal and international mobility, and between permanent, temporary or circular mobility (Campbell 2022a; Flavell et al. 2020a).

Individual or family migration within a country (mostly from outer islands or rural areas to urban centres) can be induced by certain environmental effects of climate change, e.g. coastal erosion or salt water intrusion. These affect land and water security so that people decide to move, expecting that the situation at home will worsen in the future – and hoping for a better life in the city. This also includes the expectation of better access to services, such as education or health, or employment opportunities in the formal sector of the economy. Such migration is not forced, but it is also not entirely voluntary; it is induced by the effects of climate change (as push factors), but also has other aspects to it (pull factors of life in the city) (Campbell 2022b).

International labour migration to countries like New Zealand or Australia is temporary or circular. This can be seen as voluntary. However, deteriorating living conditions at home due to certain effects of climate change might have contributed to the decision to go overseas. The remittances sent home can be used to improve life there, and this might also include contributing to in situ climate change adaptation measures. Another form of international mobility is permanent migration to another country. This is mostly caused by a combination by various push and pull factors, of which climate change might be one (Campbell 2022b; Connell and Petrou 2023; The World Bank 2021).

Displacement in the aftermath of a devastating tropical cyclone is a completely different case altogether. It is forced, it is mostly internal, and it is temporary – people usually return to their original place of residence once houses and infrastructure etc. have been repaired or rebuilt. There is a growing trend, however, for people to stay in places to which they had been displaced, and this leads to the expansion of informal settlements at the fringes of urban centres (Naidu et al. 2015; Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding 2023).

Finally, there is planned relocation of entire communities, or significant parts of communities.¹ Planned relocation is presented as a form of adaptation, in order to avoid forced displacement later, and with the additional benefit of improving the livelihoods of relocated people (Bower & Weerasinghe 2021, 13; Bengé & Neef 2021).² “In contrast to displacement which is regarded as falling closer to the forced end of the forced-voluntary continuum, and migration which is regarded as falling closer to the voluntary end, planned relocation has been noted as a form of human mobility that could be forced or voluntary” (Bower & Weerasinghe 2021, 44-45), depending on “preponderance of choice” or “the level of coercion” (ibid.).

¹ Planned relocation can be defined as “the planned, permanent movement of a group of people from identifiable origin(s) to identifiable destination(s), predominantly in association with one or more hydrometeorological, geophysical/geological, or environmental hazard(s)” (Bower & Weerasinghe 2021, 8 and 22).

² Bengé & Neef (2021) are highly critical of this “framing of planned relocation as a form of adaptation and tool for development” (208), arguing that by “couching planned relocation in the language of climate change ‘adaptation’ and development ‘opportunity’, relocation is made to appear ‘voluntary’ [which] has the effect of placing responsibility upon communities and thus concealing global political accountabilities” (208). By contrast, they see relocation in the context of loss and damage.

The number of communities which have relocated, are relocating, or are planning to relocate, is growing in PICs. This type of climate mobility today is internal, mostly short distance, on the community's own lands or to the lands of neighbouring communities or to freehold (commonly state or church) land. It might be forced if the home area has become uninhabitable or even totally inundated, but more often it is induced, with the community having experienced or experiencing serious negative effects of climate change and expecting aggravating problems in the future so that, when weighing the pros and cons of staying or moving, the decision is taken to relocate (Campbell 2022 b). Of course, the means to do so (financial, technical etc.) have to be available. If they are not, the community will be forced to stay despite the climate change related dangers, and despite the willingness to relocate. This then is forced immobility (Flavell et al. 2020b). Not to forget, however, that immobility can also be voluntary: people do not want to leave their homes even in the face of severe and aggravating negative effects of climate change (Farbotko and Campbell 2022; Suliman et al. 2019; Yee 2022; Flavell et al. 2020b).

Resistance to relocation, the desire to stay put even if material conditions worsen, stems from interconnectedness of land and people in Pacific worldviews. *Vanua* in Fiji or *fenua* in Tuvalu, for example, mean both 'land' and 'people' – land is an extension of the people, and the people are an extension of the land (Benge & Neef 2021, 199; Yates et al. 2021; Yamamoto 2020; Singh et al. 2020). "Vanua is a relational concept that encompasses physical, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions that nurture and bind place and people to the past, present, and future" (Yee et al. 2022, 11). Land cannot be understood merely as the physical location where people live, or as an economic asset, but has to be understood in terms of its social, relational, cosmological and spiritual dimensions (Vaai 2019).

People have responsibilities as caretakers of the spirits of the ancestors, as stewards of sacred sites, sites of historical or spiritual significance (Yates et al. 2021), 12). Retaining a physical presence on land is necessary to anchor deeper spiritual, cultural, ancestral connections, to tie people together and to provide ongoing guardianship of sacred sites (Yee et al. 2022, 9; Yates et al. 2021, 12). This is why it has been said that burial sites are the biggest obstacle to relocation in the Pacific – people are not willing to abandon the burial sites of their ancestors (Lyons 2022). For them, their village home is a site not only of personal, but also of ancestral, intergenerational and spiritual belonging (McMichael & Katonivualiku 2020, 289; Farbotko & Campbell 2022; Tiatia-Seath, Tupou & Fookes 2020). Hence "considering culture, identity and place as key aspects of a secure livelihood" is of utmost importance (Neef et al. 2018, 135). This amounts to a form of ontological security (Boege 2022), grounded in spiritual meanings of land/people relations. Hence, "there is no security without spiritual security" (Vaai 2019, 7).

At the same time, human mobility has been a key feature of Pacific life-worlds over the centuries (Farbotko 2019, 259). Close connections to land and such mobility are not contradictory in Pacific ways of being in and understanding of the world (Taylor 2017). Rather, they are two complementary sides of Pacific identity. 'Roots' and 'routes' (Farbotko et al. 2018, 395), stasis and mobility, go together. Those who stay and those who move can support each other. The immobile community members who stay in their ancestral homes provide the connection to place, also for those who choose to leave, while those who migrate

provide different forms of support (e.g., remittances) from abroad for the communities at home (Kupferberg 2021; Weber, Kissoon & Koto 2019).

The fundamentally new situation which comes with the climate emergency is that the option of returning home is under threat or vanishes entirely (Suliman et al. 2019).³ One cannot go back home to a sunken island or a coastal area which has become uninhabitable. This poses the ultimate challenge to emplaced ontological relational security: the prospect of being forced to leave the space one belongs to in an all-encompassing relational way, without the option of going back. Jon Barnett and Celia McMichael therefore fear that “given the inseparable bond between Pacific peoples and their lands and seas – from which they derive not just their livelihoods but also their identity and cosmology – such forced movements would have catastrophic psycho-social consequences” (Barnett & McMichael 2018, 340), or—in other words—would fundamentally shatter their ontological, relational security (Resilience and Social Cohesion 2023, 9; Yates et al. 2021; Yamamoto 2020).

It is against this background that policies and practices of planned relocation in PICs pose serious challenges for all stakeholders involved: communities, governments and state institutions, donors and development agencies, community-based organisations and NGOs.

The Challenges of Planned Relocation in Fiji

In several PICs, relocation of communities negatively affected by the climate emergency has already been carried out or is planned for the near future. Some governments have developed policies and guidelines for relocation, (e.g., Government of the Republic of Vanuatu et al. 2018; Solomon Islands Government 2022) or are organising relocations. Relocations are also being planned and conducted by non-state societal actors in several places, such as through existing kinship networks, e.g., in Solomon Islands (Monson & Fitzpatrick 2015) or community-based organisations and NGOs, e.g., in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (Boege & Rakova 2019).

The Government of Fiji (GoF) is at the forefront of developing plans, policies and even legislation—in the form of the *Climate Change Act 2021*—to address climate change impacts. Policies, guidelines and procedures for planned relocation of communities include the *Planned Relocation Guidelines* (Fiji Ministry of Economy 2018) and *Displacement Guidelines* (Fiji Ministry of Economy 2019). The GoF has established a *Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples Trust Fund* in 2019, and also elaborated *Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in the Republic of Fiji* (hereafter, *SOPs*) (Office of the Prime Minister 2023). Planned relocation is defined as a “state-led” process, and the GoF has identified 48 communities which will need to relocate in the near future, and more than 800 communities in the long-term – although this number is contested (Kupferberg 2021; Moore 2023; Lyons 2022). Several communities have been fully or partially relocated over the last years already;

³ “While migration as a result of environmental change is in itself not new, the scale and extent of displacement as a result of slow and sudden-onset climate change events and necessary resettlements required in its wake now and in the future is” (Kupferberg 2021, 1808).

some are currently in the process of relocating, and others are preparing for relocation (Swamy & Raileqe 2023).

The *Planned Relocation Guidelines* emphasise voluntary pre-emptive action to avoid humanitarian crises through participatory processes consistent with a human rights approach. Additionally, the *Guidelines* propose a focus on livelihoods as well as a “human centred” approach, noting that for the Fiji context this requires a community “bottom-up” process (Fiji Ministry of Economy 2018, 8). While the *Guidelines* makes mention of the importance of indigenous knowledge, multicultural and faith values, as a form of ‘policy speak’, remaining questions such as to how to translate principles and values into practice have proved to be challenging. So far, for *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijian) communities, several issues have arisen around adequate understanding of the relocation process, around how new settlements should be constructed to maintain existing governance arrangements and daily community “rhythms”, lack of fit of houses for the size of a Fijian family / extended family, lack of infrastructure (such as kitchens), time delays, environmental damage caused as part of building new settlements, and incomplete resettlements which result in dividing communities into those who relocate and those who stay (Anisi 2020). There are a multitude of reasons for these issues – not least that these forms of climate-induced state-led planned relocation of Indigenous communities are new.

The *SOPs*, released in 2023, are informed by the practical experiences of actual relocations, and they are intended to steer future relocations. They are presented as a living document, embedded in an iterative learning process and open to adaptations based on further experiences (Moore 2023). Thus, the *SOPs* seek to overcome the challenges faced in previous relocation efforts. They are sensitive to many community concerns raised so far and seek to heavily involve communities in planning processes. Yet, fundamental differences still remain between the perspectives held by communities and those of the state which will continue to challenge how relocations led by the state take place.

As noted above, at the heart of these differences, for *iTaukei* people, is the *vanua*. While the *SOPs* make mention of the need to accommodate “emotional and/or sentimental attachments” to the existing settlement (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023: 13), this fails to recognise fundamentally different perspectives on relocation which communities hold. Likewise, the “human centred approach”, while designed to uphold community consent, participation and rights, does not sit easily with community worldviews where the human is not the centre, but the *vanua*—that is the inherent relationship that embraces people and place—is the centre. Accordingly, “[f]or the majority of Indigenous Fijians, abandoning one’s Vanua is akin to giving up one’s life” (Yee et al. 2022, 14). Addressing “emotion” and “sentimentality” therefore does not adequately describe the loss associated with displacement, and potential subsequent change to social structure, livelihoods and governance which accompanies displacement, given that the *vanua* is “the human embodiment of the profound relationship between *iTaukei* people and the natural and spirit world – including the land, sea, sky and everything in them” (Transcend Oceania 2022, 6).

This spiritual dimension, which is notoriously underestimated by Western ‘enlightened’ approaches, is of major importance in a Pacific Islands cultural context (Campbell 2022b, 25). This does not mean, however, that community members are not concerned with scientific, technical, livelihoods or funding challenges associated with relocation – rather that these priorities do not resonate well with how communities understand and experience dislocation, and this must be addressed and needs time and effort to navigate.

Different worldviews – voluntary immobility

The case of one community that Transcend Oceania is supporting as it navigates these challenges demonstrates the complex and complicated nature of the problem.⁴ The community is home to less than 100 people yet it holds extreme historical and cultural significance as the original home of the first *Tui Cakau*, the title given to one of the four paramount chiefs of the Tovata Confederacy in Fiji. For each *Tui Cakau*, it is their responsibility to guard this sacred site and home of the son of a powerful demigod and High Chief. Based on that cultural belief and true to their traditional obligation to the *vanua*, the core members of the tribe will not abandon this important ancestral site and treat seriously their responsibility to guard the site—a site which has been negatively impacted by sea level rise—as sacred. Hence it is a case of voluntary immobility (for some community members at least) in the face of serious negative climate change effects. With rising sea levels and king tides, the community is constantly experiencing flooding and threats to livelihoods. This is exacerbated by recent cyclones and erratic weather events.

The effects of climate change are intensely experienced by women who hold responsibility for overseeing the household’s needs in addition to providing emotional support for their husbands affected by climate change-induced stress and trauma. Due to the negative impact of sea level rise on food security, the women have adopted a survival mentality to meet the needs of their families; their time is now occupied with alternative income generation initiatives as original land and marine sources of income in the community have increasingly dwindled. Extreme weather conditions resulting in excessive rainfalls and flash flooding continue to put pressure on the community’s only safe water source from a nearby creek. For days and weeks, the community members are denied clean and safe drinking, cooking, washing and bathing water. Women struggle to find alternative sources of safe water as the nearest municipal water authority does not service distant rural villages like this one. Food gardens and farms around the limited community-owned land are becoming infertile due to overwhelming saltwater inundation. Men are forced to travel long distances inland on horseback in search of fertile farming ground that needs approval of neighbouring land-owning units (Transcend Oceania 2020).

⁴ Transcend Oceania’s support for Vunisavisavi, an iTaukei community affected by rising sea level, began with the “Building Justpeace Communities in Changing Climates and Environments” project in 2020. With a deep sense of cultural responsibility towards the safeguarding of the sacred ground “Lalagavesi”, and despite the serious impacts of sea level on the sacred ground, the members of this tribe have committed to a voluntary immobility and are working on adaptation measures for their community.

While outside stakeholders might declare the location of this community to be uninhabitable, Transcend Oceania remains an impartial facilitator, respecting voluntary immobility while focused on long-term relationship building, support for community advocacy, and generating alternatives. This is in line with a community-led rather than a state-led process. As an NGO based in Fiji, with *iTaukei* members of staff, Transcend Oceania brings its own fundamental understandings of *vanua* to its approach. However, as a “stakeholder” outside of the *vanua* governance system and grounded in governance principles that also promote ‘*vanua-centred*’ approaches, it cannot assume legitimacy over decision-making, and sees the process as one which should be community-led and state-assisted. Transcend Oceania’s approach is ‘*vanua-centred*’, conflict-sensitive, trauma-informed and community-led and aims to walk alongside the community. Transcend Oceania, through peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity approaches, has enabled the community to understand the broader relocation context and understand the politics and agendas which different stakeholders may hold. Transcend Oceania members have created inclusive safe spaces within the community to address the diverse and distinct gender and generational needs and concerns of community members, and they have provided support and knowledge of advocacy – including making space for community members to confidently talk to national policy makers on their own terms. They have also created comparative learning space for communities to interact with other communities facing dislocation and relocation based on the Indigenous Fijian value of *solesolevaki* - an *iTaukei* approach drawing on social capital that entails indigenous values and the ethos of community cooperation in times of need, voluntarily bringing the little things people have to collectively address an issue for the common good of the whole, without expectation of a return.

State–Community relations

The relationship between communities facing relocation and state institutions poses fundamental challenges in “state-led” planned relocation processes. State agencies have an important role to play; however, there is an unequal power relationship with a largely silenced presence embedded in this relationship. The *SOPs* do include guidance on reflective practice undertaken as part of field visits; this includes debriefing to assess community dynamics, which is of course important Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Fiji 2023, Section III, 32). However, it is generally assumed that government agencies (as well as international partners) are neutral actors. Yet relocation is occurring within broader historical and political postcolonial contexts. A *vanua* may have existed for a long time (although settlement has certainly been shaped significantly by colonialism and missionisation), yet Fiji as an Independent Nation has existed only since 1970 and has had a turbulent history since the first military coup in 1987. The 2022 election was the first democratic transition of power after a history of coups; after 2013, there was a perceived erosion of Indigenous land rights and the *iTaukei* traditional governance system under the former government. While the new government is so far receiving support, given the political history of Fiji, this creates a context where there is at least some distrust—or questions asked—of the agenda of the government. The implied neutrality of a “state-led” process, without acknowledging the historical and contemporary power relations which exist between centralised state agencies and communities, creates significant barriers for meaningful participation or “bottom-up” approaches.

This has been clearly visible with regard to communities in which Transcend Oceania has been engaging.⁵ Community members have questioned the different ‘pictures’ of the GoF in its international and domestic ‘side’. Internationally, presentations in international forums such as COP have been sceptically viewed by some community members as part of a “fundraising strategy” for the government, while domestically the support is not perceived as reaching the grassroots in the way it is being presented internationally. In recent history, this has been exacerbated by lack of transparency by the former government. Government agendas are perceived with suspicion by communities, with questions raised about how the money flows to the ground, given histories of corruption—real and perceived—in Fiji and other PICs. In one relocation case, deep misunderstandings emerged on issues of ‘community contributions’ versus external contributions, leading to difficulty in implementation and even conflict. As a result, the relocation site was built without kitchens. Overall, it is important for state actors to understand themselves as part of the context in which they are operating, and this requires a different form of interaction and consultation, one which involves building mutual understanding and relationships rather than insistence on presenting the state as an “objective outsider”.

State–Community interactions in practice

Emerging from the above, another fundamental difference between community and state perspectives lies in how interactions occur in practice. Differences in worldview and questions around the relationship between communities and the state underpin how the interactions within the relocation process actually occur. Underpinned by assumptions of neutrality, governments and other external stakeholders are constrained by planning and implementation processes defined by legal bureaucracy. Additionally, government actors are often significantly constrained by the worldviews and expectations that international donors bring – being objective and detached, neutral, and non-relational and therefore non-biased, and achieving accountability and transparency. These, however, are not values which underpin the ways in which communities engage in decision-making and governance. Community processes have evolved through oral and relational interactions, not bureaucratic and detached ones.

In the case of one community (Vunidogoloa), for example, which Transcend Oceania had been engaging with after it had been already fully relocated, it became clear that the process between the community, the government, and the international donors and other external actors—including international media—had been, at times, tense. Had a different natured process occurred, some (although not all) issues could have been prevented or mitigated. For example, the design of the new settlement was a complete change from their traditional set up and ignored questions around what it meant to disrupt the *vanua*. The change to the spatial lay out of kinship groups (e.g., *mataqali* and *tokatoka*, or ‘clans’ and family units) now displaced outside of the *vanua* has affected how community leadership functions. How space is constructed contributes to how community peace is maintained, particularly

⁵ Transcend Oceania’s engagements particularly with Vunidogoloa, the first fully relocated community in Fiji, and Naviavia, home of blackbirding descendants of Solomon Islanders, commenced in 2020. 5,500 acres of Anglican Church land surrounding Naviavia was sold to the Government of Kiribati in 2014 for the purpose of relocating climate change affected I-Kiribati to Fiji.

through how the daily rhythms of life occur and where people are in relation to each other. As Transcend Oceania explains, “The *Vanua* can be understood as the relationship between *iTaukei*. It is central to governance and decision-making, including how government institutions and outside partners engage with communities” (Transcend Oceania 2022, 6). Governance “travels” to the new site (Boege & Hunt 2020; Darwish 2023), and is reproduced in new ways in the process, with both challenges and opportunities in how the community reshapes how it governs itself. This includes greater inclusion of women, given that Indigenous systems are flexible and evolve overtime and through outside influences (Brigg et al. 2022). These issues could have been discussed and prepared for—of course not completely ‘solved’—during the relocation planning, together with the community. But this had not happened and therefore has led to tensions and problems in the aftermath of relocation.

How interactions occur is therefore crucial. The *SOPs* are very detailed in order to have inbuilt accountability mechanisms for government agencies and external stakeholders. This is to ensure participation in planning and informed consent. However, given the details and complexity of each case, how applicable these guidelines will be among competing pressures, logistics, budgets and tight timeframes, and the number of communities facing relocation, remains questionable. There remain ambiguities in what is meant by “consultation” – the most used buzzword with regard to community participation. In one community, members reported to Transcend Oceania that consultation meant a meeting which lasted a few hours and involved being informed about what was going to happen, followed by a ‘question and answer’ time at the end. This is at odds with the *talanoa* approach—an Indigenous form of dialogue—with which communities are more readily able to engage. Often the ‘real meeting’ will occur around the kava bowl once the formal meeting—characterised by a culture of silence and ‘head-nodding’ as demonstrations of respect, not consent—has ended.

There are, of course, inclusion issues associated with informal meetings in terms of how representative they are beyond male dominated leadership. However, counting quotas of female, young, disabled or LBGTQI community members as attendees at meetings is not the same as meaningful inclusion in a process. Meaningful two-way dialogue and inclusion involves bringing together the two different perspectives—community and outside stakeholders—in interactions, in ways that take power relations into account. To do this also means acknowledging that community processes occur within a different concept of time – the time taken to have these interactions in a deliberate and respectful way, the time taken for the frequency of interactions needed as part of a relational approach, the time taken with different community members to be included, the time to go back in a relocation process (which is not a simple linear exercise) and revisit issues and regain consent, the time to explore alternatives and dynamics which have emerged in the process of interactions and dialogue. Finally, the timeframe for a relocation does not end with the community moving to a new site, but extends to the months and years after, as governance is reestablished, livelihoods are re-arranged and people process and (hopefully) move through the trauma they have experienced.

Reflecting on the problems of state-led planned relocation presented so far, one can conclude that all these issues can be traced back to fundamentally different value systems and worldviews of people in communities and of external actors, as well as to external actors' lack of respect for, or understanding of, local Indigenous knowledge and customary governance structures and procedures. There is a tendency for external actors to pursue relocation as a technical problem that can be solved in a linear manner, based on climate science, and top-down approaches. Such an approach clashes with the lifeworld and worldview of communities, and the peoples' holistic understanding of 'environment' and 'community' which does not separate 'nature' and 'society', and which encompasses both human and other-than-human beings (including the spirits of the ancestors and unborn generations), and the traditional indigenous knowledge that comes with it (Yates et al. 2021; Farbotko & Campbell 2022). Inclusion of and consultation with communities all too often remains shallow and tokenistic, not really engaging with the communities' way of understanding and doing things. External relocation projects are

designed and premised from the intervenor's society – one that is invariably non-communal and secular and which unquestioningly privileges (Western) science and the written word. In sharp contrast, many target communities are those where communal decision-making is usual; where decisions are invariably parsed through spiritual filters (...) and influenced more by spiritual than secular authorities (...) and where orality is more common than literacy as a way of communicating or reviewing important information (Nunn and McNamara 2019, 26).

A Conflict-Sensitive Community Engagement Approach

In order to assist government agencies and external stakeholders, Transcend Oceania has documented the ways in which it goes about engaging with communities. The guide *A JustPeace Vanua Engagement: Peacebuilding Approaches to Climate Change in Fijian Communities* (Transcend Oceania, 2022) was produced through interaction with international peacebuilding organisations, drawing upon collective knowledge produced through a Pacific regional peacebuilding network, *Climate change and Conflict in Oceania*. Primarily, however, it was based on years of experience of engaging with *iTaukei* communities in Fiji. This guide has great potential to be employed in conjunction with the GoF's *SOPs* in order to increase conflict sensitivity. There are, however, fundamental differences between this guide and its *vanua*-centred approach and the *SOP's* approach: while the *SOPs* conceptualise relocation as 'state-led', TO's guide sees relocation as a community-led social process so as to ensure that outcomes are more conflict-sensitive and sustainable.

The guide invites those external to communities to begin with community worldviews—a *vanua*-centred context—rather than begin with "relocation outcomes". It provides a set of principles to orientate interveners and a loosely organised and non-linear process for engagement. Many of the technical aspects outlined in the *SOPs* could fit within this framework. The process emphasises relationship building – where external actors become part of the context rather than objective outsiders "delivering" relocation. It emphasises joint analysis of all the issues in ways which align the scientific and technical with

Indigenous knowledge, with histories of environment and settlement, including understanding of (but not necessarily resolving) existing land disputes. Analysis of power relations, both internally and externally, of different perspectives within the community, and of how governance works, as well as opportunities for change, are part of this. Employing methods such as *talanoa*, listening and storytelling and sense-making to help communities work through the issues themselves is key. In the process, the community takes ownership and leads activities with assistance from external stakeholders (which will be needed), and there is follow up beyond relocation itself.

The principles laid out in the guide suggest that outside stakeholders “take time to form a foundational respect for people’s worldviews...employing a value-based approach” (Transcend Oceania 2022, 5). This involves respect for community members’ “agency and understanding”, to avoid victimising and creating dependencies, instead enabling community members to be active agents in their own change. The guide suggests dialogue and analysis to understand the tensions and conflicts which are both the context in which relocations take place and which will emerge as part of the relocation process. It speaks to adaptive and non-linear action that may need to return to previous issues, regain understandings and consent, and address other (seemingly not related to relocation) issues as they arise as part of the process. It embeds relational approaches where power divides are acknowledged and addressed, and as part of this relational process, understanding scale and how connections across scale work – including relationships with donors and other external actors, and having them understand community expectations. Connecting with other communities experiencing relocation, generating solidarity and potential solutions by hearing about the successes and challenges of other communities, and potentially working through trauma experiences through sharing and learning are important. The guide emphasises inclusive approaches: more than just recording gender and other identity characteristics, it recommends allowing time for different groups to come together and build collective consensus. These principles are designed to ensure conflict sensitivity and provide psychological safety.

There are several examples of Transcend Oceania undertaking this work in practice, including those mentioned in the previous section. Specific requests from communities have resulted in a range of activities, including for example trauma healing and humanitarian assistance as tropical cyclones have affected these communities. Another example is providing mediation support to communities over the phone during COVID-19 lockdowns. Furthermore, communities have requested space for structured dialogue (often labelled “training” in donor reports) on leadership and governance which are fundamentally altered as part of dislocation. Other communities have requested assistance with advocacy to government and external stakeholders, seeking to understand how the government world works, but have also asked for spaces to have their stories heard. Transcend Oceania has drawn upon the traditional practice of *solesolevake* (see p.8) to bring different affected communities together to share and also to jointly advocate to government. Supporting and mentoring people to speak, to let them understand that they are not passive objects of external agents, but have agency and solutions of their own, is important for successful completion of relocation processes and for addressing the trauma created through dislocation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Experiences with planned relocation are mixed. There can be gaps between the promise of improved environmental security and of improved livelihoods at relocation sites and the reality with which relocated people are confronted: problems with the suitability of the site, with housing and infrastructure, loss of traditional economic activities (e.g. fishing when moving from the coast inland) and most importantly loss of connection to ancestral land. People who relocate can be worse off after relocation, both materially and mentally (Swamy & Railege 2023).

Community relocation is conflict-prone, with conflicts between communities and state institutions (and donors financing relocation) with regard to planning, decision-making, implementation and follow-up. It poses a tremendous challenge for the affected communities, state institutions and civil society organisations, as well as external actors who intend to assist in relocation efforts (Nichols 2019; McMichael et al. 2019). It is highly complex, entailing a broad spectrum of interlinked challenges: technical, financial, logistical, political, economic, social, cultural, psychological and spiritual. Accordingly, there cannot be a standardised one-size-fits-all solution for relocation, and it would be a serious mistake to approach it as merely a technical issue. Rather, approaches have to be highly flexible and context-specific. They have to address the interlinked problems in an integrative and holistic manner. Experience so far shows, however, that often a technical approach dominates, while social, cultural or spiritual aspects are underestimated or neglected (Yates et al. 2021, 12). Flowing from this assessment, the following recommendations can be made:

- 1. Engage with the whole spectrum of stakeholders across multiple scales.** Community relocation necessitates the coordination and cooperation of a variety of actors across multiple scales. Although carried out locally, it is not just a 'local' endeavour. Non-local actors, such as state institutions, civil society organisations, and external donors, exert immense influence on relocation decisions. Moreover, the 'local' is home to a variety of actors with diverse views, interests and needs related to relocation, whether it be differences between men and women, or young and old.
- 2. Acknowledge differences in time frames and take a long-term approach beyond 'project cycles'.** A fundamental impediment for collaboration is the vastly different time frames of stakeholders. Schedules are often pre-determined by external actors, and often there is tension between tight externally-imposed timeframes and the need for a long-term approach that acknowledges local needs and ways of doing things (Campbell 2022b, 25). Relocations need time well beyond the time spans of two or three years that are typical of externally funded projects. This 'project approach' with its 'project cycles' is a severe conflict-prone problem in itself. Relocations need a staged step-by-step approach; trying to jump steps leads to failure, to frustration of communities and conflicts between communities and external actors.
- 3. Take time to build relationships and trust.** Longer time frames are also essential for building relationships and trust among the various actors. Only after relationships and trust are built, can meaningful community participation beyond mere tokenism become possible. Today there is general agreement among stakeholders that community participation in, and ownership of, a relocation project is essential;

however, often these in-principle commitments are not translated into actual practice (McMichael et al. 2019). All too often, people in communities become the passive recipients of outsiders' plans and agendas (see, for example, the case of Narikoso village; Anisi 2020). Issues like disagreement over relocation sites can very well lead to conflicts between locals and external actors.

4. **Engage in meaningful culturally appropriate two-way exchanges beyond formalistic and tokenistic 'consultations'.** 'Consultations' put people in the communities into the role of recipients of expertise generated, and decisions made, by others elsewhere. Moreover, communities are forced into formats of 'consultation' and 'participation' that are unfamiliar to them; and at the same time, they are overburdened by the demands of external actors, e.g., demands for people's time and the obligation to provide food for outsiders while there is food insecurity in the community.
5. **Be aware of power imbalances and deal with them in an open and transparent manner.** Conflict prone issues are often driven by the unaddressed problem of power imbalances and power dynamics. Different stakeholders have different resources at their disposal, and they differ in their political clout, their ability and capacity to impose their views and ways of doing things. Donors with the money or state institutions with decision-making authority clearly have power advantages, while locals have less power. However, they are not entirely powerless. If they are not happy with the relocation exercise, they have the means to resist and even undermine the process, e.g. through deliberate or tacit non-participation or passive resistance; or they can try to gain power by linking with non-local supporters, e.g. INGOs, or with a peacebuilding organisation like Transcend Oceania.
6. **Acknowledge the importance of non-state ('traditional', 'customary') actors and governance institutions and work together with them.** Power imbalances and power dynamics have to be properly acknowledged and addressed in order to deal with conflicts in a constructive manner and to establish and sustain cooperation which is imperative for successful relocation. In this context, engaging with local legitimate governance actors beyond the realm of state institutions is a must. In Pacific societies traditional authorities, like chiefs and elders, are of major importance for the governance of everyday life in the communities; they regulate resource use and solve disputes (not least disputes over land and other natural resources that come under pressure due to the climate emergency) according to local custom. The resilience and adaptive capacity of communities rest with these governance structures and the underlying densely knit networks of support and reciprocity (Darwish 2023). Hence such customary actors and institutions have to play an important role in community relocation. In PICs, this also includes the churches as by far the most important civil society institutions. They have the capacity to engage with the spiritual dimension of the issues at hand, which is of utmost importance in the Pacific cultural context with its centrality of the land/people interconnectedness. Finally, the importance of "bridging organisation(s)" (Petzold & Ratter 2015, 40), such as Transcend Oceania, cannot be overestimated. As both insiders and outsiders, they have the capacity to connect local customary life-worlds and the world of state institutions and international actors.

The strength of Transcend Oceania's Community Engagement Approach lies in its understanding of local context and its capability to engage with affected people, not as victims and objects of external plans, but as adaptive agents, accompanying them on their own terms and according to their own ways of doing things: taking time, following local customary protocols, providing space for storytelling, listening, and trying to translate climate science (which in its Western format can be offensive to communities) into the vernacular and to bring together such science and mainstream climate/relocation policies on the one hand and local traditional knowledge and worldviews on the other.

Major differences between scientific understandings of climate change and its impacts on the one hand and the relational and spiritual ontologies of communities on the other have to be addressed without prejudice. This requires clear and humble explanations of the 'science' (scientific understandings) of climate change in relation to the place concerned and listening with respect to local understandings (Campbell 2022b, 25).

In other words: what is needed is dialogue across cultural difference and co-production of knowledge, grounded in humility, respect and continuous self-reflection, acknowledging that there are ways of knowing and doing beyond the mainstream international ('Western') discourse which still shape climate/relocation policies and practices across scales, from the global through the national to the level of specific relocation projects (Yates et al. 2021). The experiences and the practices presented in this report demonstrate that there is need for, and that there actually are, alternatives which can serve people better: inclusive, holistic, relational.

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