

## **Climate Change and Conflict in the Pacific: Prevention, Management and the Enhancement of Community Resilience**

### **Summary Report**

**Auckland, New Zealand  
28-30 September 2018**

#### **Introduction**

The Toda Peace Institute and the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (University of Otago, New Zealand) organised an international workshop, “Climate Change and Conflict in the Pacific: Prevention, Management and the Enhancement of Community Resilience” in Auckland, New Zealand, from 28 to 30 September 2018. The workshop brought together international experts on climate change, security policymakers and local peacebuilding practitioners and civil society actors in the Pacific. The workshop was attended by 34 men and women from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. During a three-day conversation they addressed the local and international challenges and potential conflict linkages posed by climatic uncertainty in Oceania. The key goal of the workshop was to set a framework for research that informs policy, promotes both vertical and horizontal dialogue between researchers, governments and social agencies and people in the region, and produces real-world initiatives to address one of the region’s most pressing issues—climate change.

The objectives of the workshop can be summarised as follows:

- 1) To build on and stimulate cooperation between state actors, community members, church leaders, academics and civil society organisations to share current research data and regional and international expertise and experiences.
- 2) To offer research with context that is sensitive to the region’s traditional forms of knowledge-building, while acknowledging the importance of and challenges to indigenous knowledge, and to add stories to the current scientific approach and security analysis of the climate change-conflict nexus.

3) To shed light on the overwhelming challenges of climate change in Oceania, for Pacific peoples in particular, and the multidimensionality of the problems– technical, political material, as well as spiritual, emotional, and psychological.

The workshop addressed the following specific issues:

- 1) Fragile States and the effects of state fragility on climate change adaptation and mitigation
- 2) Migration, displacement, and relocation induced by climate change and its effects
- 3) Vulnerability and adaptation
- 4) Kinship and community networks and their importance for resilience.

### **Session 1: What do international peace and conflict studies say about the Climate Change-Conflict link?**

The first session of the workshop was devoted to understanding how the international peace and conflict studies community frames the question of climate change in relation to the emergence and escalation of conflict. There was an agreement by the participants that the local level is often disregarded in policy decision-making, and that more conversations need to occur between the peacebuilding and climate change communities in order to have a much clearer understanding of the complex nature of the climate change-conflict nexus.

The session was introduced by two academics from outside the Pacific region ('internationals' as they were called for the purposes of the workshop). They presented the state of the art of the international debate about the climate change–conflict nexus.

The first 'international' presenter offered a fragility lens as it applies to State-Society relations, and the contemporary ability of states to deliver adequate services to its citizens, against the background of climate change and its various conflict-prone effects. In particular, seven risk factors were identified, which together help to explain the complexity of the climate change-conflict nexus:

- 1) **Competition over resources:** An increasing global population entails that competition over natural resources could intensify, increasing the likelihood of conflict emerging.
- 2) **Livelihood, security and migration:** As economic, political and environmental dynamics motivate the movement of people within countries and across political borders, questions emerge in terms of the viability of host communities and displaced populations, their relationship and interactions, including competition for finite economic opportunities, and tensions over identity (e.g. with regard to ethnicity, race and/or religion).
- 3) **Disasters:** Climate change impacts the scope and severity of weather patterns and episodes; states' ability to pre-empt and/or minimise the effects of destructive natural disasters becomes

questioned, and thus leaves gaps related to the future implementation of relief efforts, and the overall preparedness of states in view of these disruptions.

4) **Food Security:** Climate change alters the quantity and quality of freshwater and arable land, and reduces favourable harvesting conditions, local and export-oriented food production become challenged, potentially leading to increased food prices, and societies being unable to satisfy their own food security needs.

5) **Transboundary water management:** States are required to strike agreements to ensure that water use and abstraction by one actor does not imperil the water requirements of another. The effects of climate change lead to the intensification and further dissemination of problems regarding water management.

6) **Rising sea levels:** The rise of sea levels is a major effect of climate change; more frequent and intense weather episodes such as typhoons, hurricanes, and cyclones add to the problem, resulting in loss of land, coastal erosion, salt water intrusion and salinization, destruction of crops, and the displacement of coastal populations.

7) **Unintended responses/consequences:** Some climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, while benign in design, along with poorly designed and implemented climate change adaptation and mitigation measures can cause unexpected conflict. What is needed are conflict-sensitive approaches that take into account locals' most pressing needs, and that respect their cultural, religious and historical legacies. Communities on the ground have to be included in planning and implementation of adaptation and mitigation; they can give a reality check to policy decision-makers, researchers, planners and analysts.

It was further proposed that climate change adaptation programmes need to be more holistic in design, and must strive to be peace-sensitive, which encompasses accounting for gender dynamics, and engaging with and promoting the concerns of youth.

The second 'international' presenter introduced a focus on vulnerability as it relates to the climate change-conflict nexus. He argued that in view of any adverse climatic episode, there are two pathways societies can choose: on the one hand, a conflict path leads to greater competition and crisis; on the other hand, a peacebuilding path leads to positive interactions with mutually beneficial outcomes creating a cycle of cooperation.

The presenter argued that globally, there are more natural disaster deaths than battle-related ones, a finding robust enough to motivate a greater focus on the former, and its causality. He also pointed out that not enough attention is paid to the linkages between climate change and (the potential for) cooperation (= the peacebuilding path).

While there are good reasons to hypothesize that climate change leads to conflict, and conflict then leads to more vulnerability to climate change, he cautioned that the causal relationship between climate change and conflict needs to be analysed beyond existing linear modes of analysis, that would attribute causality to one variable. He also made the point that it is more likely that the effects of climate change will lead to low-intensity conflicts in the local context than to

large-scale internal or interstate wars. These types of violent conflict, however, remain under the radar of large-N quantitative studies. Finally, the presenter recommended that greater focus should be given to Oceania, which bears the greatest climate-related risks.

There was agreement that overall, the scientific community needs to mobilise more resources to understand the climate change-conflict relationship and also address types of violence and violent conflicts which usually are not captured by current research.

After the presentations of the ‘international’ academics, colleagues from the Pacific offered comments. They strengthened the importance of community cooperation as being at the heart of climate change adaptation strategies. Participants were cautioned not to over-rely on the concept of vulnerability as used in Western academic circles; what communities in the Pacific often contend with in view of climate change is vulnerability not only in the physical/material dimension, but also in the emotional dimension. Physical fragility relates to the tangible impacts of climate change such as destruction and physical displacement. Emotional fragility relates to less perceivable climate change impacts, such as identity, historical belonging and spirituality.

The condition of the region’s fisheries, crucial for Food security, is also threatened by the actions of other states, causing a proliferation of plastics in oceans, effecting marine food chains. The long-term viability of the otherwise robust local food procurement systems of people in Pacific Island Countries is thus challenged by climate change in combination with other factors, and this can lead to insecurity and conflict.

Another Pacific commentator introduced a legal perspective to the conversation and discussed risk perceptions. She argued that the dominant narrative of “drowning island nations” in the Pacific, driven by rising sea levels, storm surges and floods, dismisses other more imminent effects of climate change such as temperature rise (heat waves) and freshwater scarcity as possible causes for ecosystem damage and population displacement. The migration/displacement problem arises today because islands become increasingly uninhabitable due to water scarcity and unbearable heat. The presenter also pointed out the institutional framework within Micronesia, specifically the Compacts of Free Association (COFA), agreements between the US and the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. These agreements were negotiated in the late 1970s and early 80s and lack provisions for climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as climate change induced migration. However, historic migrations due to nuclear testing in this region also illustrate that when discussing the connections of climate change, migration and conflict one has to take into account not only the conditions in the places of out-migration, but also in the sites of in-migration.

## **Session 2: How do Pacific thinkers approach the topic? What can local/indigenous knowledge contribute to conflict-sensitive adaptation and conflict prevention?**

The conference then moved into conversations and exchanges over existing and ongoing efforts to address the question of climate change in the Pacific. To this effect the first presenter introduced a theological-relational perspective to climate change and explained where the philosophical origins of the conversation are rooted. In particular, he stressed that the human cannot be detached from the natural, and thus both must be regarded in unison. This also holds true to the impacts of climate change on local ecosystems and human infrastructures and institutions. The presenter introduced to the participants the concept of Pacific relationality in order to explore the complex relations and interactions at play in the climate change field. He highlighted three elements of the concept:

1) **Spiritual Relationality:** Relates to the emotional attachments that bond humans and nature together, with climate change operating as the disruptor of harmony. In order to address climate change holistically a paradigm shift is needed: from the capitalist/neoliberal 'more is better' to the communal/relational 'less, yet more'. This shift allows for understanding human beings as part of a wider all-encompassing natural and cosmological whole.

2) **Ambiguous Relationality:** Reflects the mysterious and rationally less explainable side of life, which is often expressed through the form of symbols (if written) and metaphors (if spoken). Ambiguous relationality embraces and balances individualism and collectivism. It cautions against the false dichotomy of individuality in the West and communality in the Pacific; rather a relational understanding needs dialogue between the two. Pacific diasporas in Western countries (New Zealand, USA, Australia, etc.) can be bridge-builders.

3) **Multidimensional Relationality:** Accounts for multiple factors in relationship-building. When an individual becomes displaced because of climate change, detachment occurs at several levels beyond the physical, and these need to be accounted for in conversation over climate-induced relocation. The 'ecological' is all-encompassing, including human beings; it overcomes the nature-society divide to include not only nature, but the cosmos as well, and it overcomes the anthropocentric approach to climate change. This kind of indigenous wisdom is often ignored or even suppressed by outside actors, which bring their own concepts, agendas and measures and thus replace existing local agency. In this context, the climate change discourse/the 'vulnerability' discourse can have disempowering effects. Instead, empowerment builds on the strength and resilience of the communities.

Vulnerability in this context can even be seen as a (neo-)colonial concept that may lead to the disempowerment of local communities, and further dependence on aid programmes. He further posited that Pacific people's ability to cope with the impacts of adverse climate episodes precedes conversations over climate change adaptation and mitigation, and this knowledge should form the base upon which newer science and knowledge-creation should occur. He stressed that telling the communities what to do does not work, instead existing cultural groups, such as fishing and farming guilds, have to be engaged with.

The second presenter focused on the loss of indigenous or traditional knowledge in the Pacific. Traditional Knowledge is grounded in a relational worldview: It recognises that everything and all beings are related, with responsibilities toward each other. The land/people connection is at the heart of this worldview. Challenges arise as a result of modernity, including the loss of oral traditions, storytelling and transfer of knowledge, all of which have been crucial for the understanding of different environmental indicators, which alert communities of different types of weather episodes. Climate change preparedness is therefore compromised by the loss of indigenous knowledge. Any climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy must come accompanied by re-educating youth by combining indigenous traditions with modern scientific findings. Traditional Knowledge is also lost due to migration of people from their home islands and villages to the cities or even overseas. Finally, the presenter introduced the concept of Vanua Sauvi, which places restrictions on the use of natural resources in specific areas over specific time periods, as a form of adaptation based on Indigenous Knowledge which is context-specific and conflict-sensitive. She demanded that donors and other outside actors show 'respect' to this and other forms of adaptation and management which are already in place in the Pacific, instead of imposing their own agendas. Otherwise people in the communities will 'resist'.

The final speaker presented indigenous knowledge as a collection of practices and concepts that are relational and holistic by design, and include communicating with plants, animals, winds, seas, the spirits of the ancestors. Indigenous knowledge has been disregarded as 'unscientific' and 'uncivilised' by Western traditions. At the same time, traditional knowledge is hijacked/stolen by outsiders and used without the permission of the knowledge holders in the communities in totally different contexts (e.g. in research publications). Some climate change-related challenges are rooted in locals' understandings of Christianity as taught by some missionaries and still taught by some churches today. There are voices who frame climate change and natural disasters as divine punishment by a judgmental God, targeting the 'sinners.' A counter-narrative would be to frame climate change as a man-made problem endangering God's creation, with a relational and compassionate God on the side of the people and creation. Churches have a critical responsibility, given their enormous influence in Pacific Island Countries.

In the discussion the issue was raised how to counter the loss of important traditional knowledge, how to maintain and document it under changing circumstances and how to teach the younger generations about it, and how to engage the youth in climate change policies and practice. The metaphor of weaving a mat was used to describe the need to bring together indigenous traditional knowledge and modern science. And the issue was raised how to translate traditional knowledge into the sphere of international law, e.g. with reference to the 'rights of nature'. It was generally acknowledged that climate change – vulnerability – resilience – conflict discourse has to encompass the emotional/spiritual dimension and has to be infused with the Pacific relationality approach.

### **Session 3: What do Pacific people at different levels (regional, national, local) do to address the challenges; initiatives of regional organisations, governments, and civil society organisations?**

The first presenter introduced the climate change related work of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), a regional group of Pacific member States, each holding equal voting rights. The organisation's main focus is on building resilience, by focusing on food and water security, climate-smart agriculture, selective crop use and fisheries sustainability. SPC also supports relocation plans of governments in the Pacific. The presenter stressed the importance of creating a broad coalition of various actors working on conservation, development and policymaking, to better tackle the challenges posed by climate change in the region. She does however acknowledge the difficulties of achieving collaborative work in the Pacific, which stems not least from the reduced availability of funding opportunities, encouraging more competition and less cooperation. The main challenge is to link and coordinate all programs and policies. A major obstacle for such an integrated approach is the way Western scientists think: they think 'in boxes'.

The second presenter spoke about the work of the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN), a regional alliance of social movements, non-governmental organisations, civil society and policymakers. Some of the organisation's work has been devoted to bringing awareness to the role of Australian industries in the growth of coal production, its negative impacts on climatic change, and holding them accountable. Accordingly, the need for 'systems change' is highlighted by PICAN. The organisation has also worked on preparation for meetings such as the Conference of the Parties, where it was active in identifying priorities to discuss, including mitigation strategies, loss and damage, gender, and human rights. There are local organisations already doing the work on the ground and leading by example. PICAN also seeks to change the on-going power dynamics globally by empowering Pacific states in their pursuit for better climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. They show that climate change is not just objective 'impacts' and helpless victims, but instead 'large ocean states and warriors!'

The questions raised were, 'How do we move from what we know to actual transformative action? We do not need so much more knowledge, but instead a conversion in the way we have been living. How can we use knowledge to make this conversion happen?'

The third presenter works for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, a faith-based organisation whose objective is to tackle poverty and injustice. Caritas currently works, for example, in Fiji, where in the context of climate change adaptation it supports projects related to organic farming, water supply, electricity generation and relationship-building, always including traditional knowledge. In New Zealand, the organisation promotes land use that is better attuned to Maori values and traditions, and actively tries to 'listen to the peoples of the lands and seas'.

The fourth presenter shared her work on education as a tool to address climate change. She works for the Pacific Centre for Environmental and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD) at the University of the South Pacific, where she conducts research on sustainable development, capacity-building, community-engagement and disaster risk assessment. She stressed 'the people are at the centre' and the importance of empowering her students to become voices of hope.

She also pointed out the need to infuse more indigenous knowledge into the curriculum rather than Western forms of information sharing. In particular she highlighted the power of Talanoa story-telling as an oral tradition. Story-telling is better suited to preserving traditional forms of relating to nature. She argued that in order to fully empower communities, there needs to be a decentralising of information to make it more accessible to individuals and groups who need it most.

In the discussion, the ‘culture of competition’ (among academic institutions, NGOs etc.) was presented as a problem, the importance of ‘respect’ (for local communities, traditional knowledge) was highlighted, and the question raised how to build mutuality across difference. It was said that the norm of reciprocity has to be incorporated into our work, that dignity and acknowledgement in our relationships is crucial.

#### **Session 4 and 5: Community relocation and other adaptations—conflict-prone and/or conflict sensitive? Selected cases from Oceania**

Sessions 4 and 5 introduced specific case studies of climate change-induced relocation in Oceania. The first speaker presented the work he currently does with communities in the Solomon Islands to mitigate or adapt to the impacts of climate change. One effort where the government played a minimal role was devoted to the case of relocation from the island of Walande, where king tides forced its population of 2,000 people to relocate to the island of Malaita. The traditional processes facilitating the relocation were explained, along with the difficulties and tensions for both the host communities and those displaced. Frustration is growing, community cohesion is under stress, and some people now are ‘just doing things for themselves- not working as a community’, thus causing disputes. Moreover, some displaced people have moved on to the capital city of Honiara, where they live in informal squatter settlements which are violence and conflict-prone. He made the point that this case of relocation was relatively easy because of a shared cultural background of Melanesian host and resettlement communities. Relocations of Polynesian and Micronesians to Melanesian-inhabited islands of the Solomons would be much more difficult.

The second presenter introduced the work currently underway in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea with regard to the resettlement of people from the Carterets atoll to mainland Bougainville. The current relocation project which is carried out by a local NGO (Tulele Peisa – meaning ‘Sailing the Waves on Our Own’ in the local language), so far has been relatively successful. This can be largely attributed to a well thought-through integrated relocation strategy, which included and educated both the relocated and host communities during the entire process. The relocation process has not been finished yet; land has to be found for more relocatees, and this is extremely difficult.

The third presenter introduced her work on climate change-induced relocation in Tuvalu, Kiribati, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. She explained the different types of climate change adaptation strategies that were currently underway, which in the case of Tuvalu included reclamation of land, raising the level of islands. This last strategy does not come without its share of implementation problems. She presented planned relocation as an adaptation strategy of last resort. She referred also to the purchase of Anglican church-owned land on the island of Vanua Levu



by the government of Kiribati. This land in the future can potentially be used for the relocation of I-Kiribati to Fiji. However, with a change of government in Fiji, the focus is on adaptation and development in Kiribati in the hope that this will make it possible for people to stay on their home islands. The situation regarding the land purchased from the Anglican church is complex because of ongoing disputes over these lands (between current settlers, previous customary owners and other stakeholders). In comparison, another resettlement project in Fiji (Vunidogoloa village) is relatively easy, because people can resettle on their own land. Even this, however, is not without problems (not least emotional and spiritual problems). The speaker also talked about the relocation guidelines being developed by the Fijian government. She made the point that a lot of climate induced migration today is still individual migration (rather than community relocation). Climate induced migration and relocation will complicate already existing Fijian land disputes further. Despite there being a will to work on these issues, the speaker also suggested that challenges, such as information-sharing, need to be accounted for in relocation projects, because many grassroots movements do not have sufficient data at their disposal to inform their operations or the local people.

The final speaker introduced some ideas in relation to the colonial vestiges in the Pacific, and their impact on land ownership and belonging. He argued that connection to the land bears an emotional dimension, and a physical one, both of which cannot be detached. In view of climate-driven relocation, however, these aspects of one's connection to the land become lost. He further argued that relocation increases the likelihood of inevitable conflict between landowners and the displaced communities. Displaced populations have additional problems, such as trauma leaving their land behind and re-learning livelihood and survival skills in a new environment. However, island elders are self-reliant with agency of their own, and can engage with host communities to relocate as a whole community, not as individuals, often with little support from the government due to the fragility of state institutions.

For Peace and Conflict scholars, an analysis of how climate change may exacerbate existing social, economic and political tensions (or create new ones) is a challenge. These tensions and conflicts are often low-scale, low-intensity - conflicts under the threshold for violent conflicts as measured in large-N studies. Climate change policies, adaptation and mitigation strategies require 'conflict sensitivity' frameworks, with a 'tripod' approach suggested - including churches, communities (the 'vanua'), and state institutions. Ultimately, the people on the ground must decide, but the state institutions have to come to the table.

In the discussion it became clear that there is a tension between the desire of the people to stay on their home islands and in their home villages (given their deep cultural and spiritual connections to the land), and the insight that climate change induced relocation is underway and will increase. Hence one has to plan for conflict-sensitive relocation now, even if one at the same time should try everything possible to allow people to stay on their own land.

## Session 6: 'Reality Check'—Policymakers and practitioners comment on the discussions

Session 6 commenced with a recap of the previous day's discussions. The focus was on the interface of commonalities and peculiarities of the climate change threat in Oceania in comparison to other regions of the world. For political intervention and practice it is necessary to identify the specifics, including the specifics of conflict-prone problems and the specifics of the conduct of conflicts. Climate change challenges have to be broken down and addressed according to local conditions. Climate change comes on top of already existing frictions and tensions; it often is a threat multiplier. The task is to identify the peculiarities of the threat in the Pacific context to be able to develop appropriate strategies of climate-sensitive conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Against this background, two presentations discussed the New Zealand government's ongoing engagement in the Pacific area, and how it is contributing to climate change policies and projects. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's recent message to the United Nations General Assembly, which argued that rising sea level is the single biggest challenge in the Pacific region, was the starting point for the first presenter. To respond to region-specific challenges, he put forward a vision for the Pacific which included the following vectors:

- Development of understanding of the region
- Empathy, respect and friendship
- Solutions and collective actions
- Collective ambition based on shared understanding
- Sustainability and resilience.

The values of New Zealand's Climate Action Plan hinge upon three key dimensions: livelihood continuity for the people(s) of the Pacific, self-determination, and Pacific-led responses to climate change. These are values that echo several of the conversations held the previous day and that inform New Zealand's climate migration policy. He concluded by stressing the New Zealand government's desire to move away from conventional donor models, and adopt partnership frameworks with Pacific states, which inevitably requires the use and infusion of local expertise and knowledge.

The second presenter, from New Zealand's Ministry of Defence, elaborated on the Ministry's views on the connection between climate change and security (which is a rather new field for Defence). While the direct connection is not always evident in research, the negative impact of climate change on other issues can contribute in different ways to the emergence and intensification of (violent or violent-prone) conflict. She expressed the Ministry's need to access more case study research that documents country- and community-specific challenges as they relate to climate change. She also stressed the point that New Zealand is committed to address the climate change – security issue in close regional cooperation with Pacific partner countries.

In the conversation the tension between national security and human security approaches to climate change was brought up. The difference between these approaches is of major political importance, for it carries significant legal and budgetary implications. The Ministry of Defence representative said that human security was at the heart of the Ministry's decision-making process, and concerns over military build-up do not hold ground. The Ministry's main goal is to safeguard the multilateral character of the Pacific regional system.

The third presenter commented from a Pacific perspective, welcoming the New Zealand approach which is remarkably different from the stance of the USA where there are strong tendencies to present climate change as a threat to national security, leading to increased efforts in border protection (to keep 'climate migrants' out) and military build-up. This shows how important the framing of the issue is.

Another comment from a Pacific perspective put the focus again on relocation as a significant trigger for conflict in the Pacific due to its antagonising potential for traditional land use, and the volatile status of relocated communities in their host environments. He also made the point that most people move to informal settlements in the urban centres, which causes problems and conflicts there. He stressed the key role of the churches, given their presence and influence everywhere in Pacific countries and communities. In comparison, state institutions have far less presence and influence; often 'the state' is only visible in urban areas. In most places most of the time the state in Pacific societies is just a 'guest' – often perceived as just 'another NGO' that comes and goes. This impacts on the role of state institutions in climate change adaptation and relocation. More often than not they are more of a problem than a solution. Corruption is also a major issue in this context.

The inputs in this session triggered a discussion about the roles of various actors at various levels. Coordination of and collaboration between state institutions, regional organisations, external governments, churches and other civil society organisations and communities/community-based organisations in order to tackle climate change and its effects in a conflict-sensitive way is obviously a big challenge.

### **Toda Peace Institute and Conciliation Resources Project**

The session started by echoing key reflections for climate change and conflict-related praxis and research:

1) Causation: Research and practice require an acknowledgement of the multiple causal drivers of changing climatic conditions, as well as how these conditions in turn affect the likelihood and intensity of conflict.

2) Role of the state: Fragility and robustness of state institutions do play a role, but one has to look beyond the state—engaging with non-state actors such as Church groups, local organisations and communities is important; in this way the on-going governance problems in the region could be circumvented. On the other hand, one should not totally dismiss the state. State institutions have a responsibility – do not let the state off the hook.

3) Funding frameworks: How can external actors (so-called donors) engage in ways that reconcile seemingly antagonistic views of economic development and environmental conservation?

The international peacebuilding NGO, Conciliation Resources, in collaboration with the Toda Peace Institute and partner organisations Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding and Transcend Oceania (both based in Fiji) is developing a peacebuilding pilot project focusing on on-going climate change-induced relocation processes in the Pacific, aiming to build knowledge locally, by applying research methodologies that adequately capture local stories. The project will have three key components:

1) Action research: This will allow communities to have a say and express the challenges in their relocation (listening methodology).

2) Conflict analysis: By applying a conflict-sensitive approach, the project seeks to identify potential sources of conflict with regard to community relocations.

3) Mediation and Conflict Prevention: Use the data and findings to inform decision-making processes at various levels (from local to national and regional), to help create conflict-sensitive strategies for adaptation and relocation.

The pilot project most probably will focus on the case of the Kiribati-purchased site in Fiji (see above) and relocation from outer islands to informal settlements in Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

### Takeaways from the Workshop

The participants discussed various possible ways to continue these conversations, and the space within which they should occur. In an effort to transcend what several participants regarded as an overly Western-based, state-centric approach, it was agreed that any future research and policy effort on the climate change-conflict nexus will require bringing together different areas of expertise, including international experts, representatives of Pacific communities, Pacific academics, civil society, state agencies and churches. It was also agreed that greater awareness over the challenges faced in the Pacific needs to be raised internationally. A 'Declaration on Climate Change, Peace and Security in Oceania' was seen as a potentially powerful instrument to serve these purposes, and it was agreed to draft such a Declaration.

### Key Takeaways:

- Address climate change in a 'conflict sensitive' manner.
- Coordinate activities at church, civil society and community levels with policymakers through climate change action that is both bottom up *and* top down
- Include more young people.
- Indigenous epistemologies can encourage communities to re-embrace Indigenous Knowledge.
- Indigenous/traditional/local knowledge and Western/scientific/social science knowledge needs to be integrated and woven together.

- Look for commonality while paying attention to distinctive differences.
- Pacific people take the lead in bringing the issues to the fore that are not usually addressed by policymakers and Western academics – emotions, spiritual connections – and bring the message across that this also matters to prevent conflict.
- Relocation is not a ‘project’, but it is a long-term process.
- Research and policymaking require an overtness to be self-reflective, open to mutual learning across cultural difference, calling into question mainstream Western models of knowledge-building that continue to inform decision-making over climate change.
- Education (including education regarding Traditional/Indigenous Knowledge) is crucial for conflict-sensitive mitigation, adaptation, relocation.
- ‘Backdraft’ matters – more attention has to be paid to the (unintentional) potentially conflict-prone effects of mitigation and adaptation measures.
- Respect desire (and sovereignty) to stay as well as the need to plan for relocation.
- The connection of Pacific people to the land is not just technical, but deeply spiritual.
- Water is a crucial issue for understanding the connections between climate change, conflict and peace.
- The need for ongoing decolonisation – of education, language, theology, philosophy, churches, the arts, of ‘ourselves’ (as Pacific Islanders; colonialism not only ‘out there’, but ‘within us’).
- The decolonisation of climate change language, the terms ‘love’ and ‘care’ have to have a place in the discourse on climate change.
- The decolonisation of the dominant notion of land ‘stewardship’: It is more than ‘humans taking care of the environment’ – how can we take care of the land if we are not part of the land? This position challenges euro-centred approaches to ‘rights’; instead, it begins with connections and relations, followed by rights. The current legal system is not adequate to properly address this.
- The inclusion of storytelling by Pacific people(s) and researchers.
- Churches as the most influential civil society organisations in Pacific Island Countries have a special responsibility and a special part to play regarding climate change and conflict.
- Regional dialogue and dialogue across difference is needed for conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation.

### **Future policy-relevant research and practical programmes**

From a research standpoint, the Toda Peace Institute seeks to serve as an epistemological and methodological bridge between Western and non-Western spaces of knowledge creation. Based on feedback by the participants, it was agreed that more case study research is required to better understand the national and in particular the sub-national dynamics of the climate change-conflict nexus, which would in turn, help to develop better climate change adaptation and mitigation policies. Along with a greater need for case study research, it was also agreed that more Pacific-oriented, macro-level mapping research is required, in order to comprehend the compounded regional impacts of climate change, in particular with regard to conflict. This would inform ongoing regional efforts to coordinate adaptation, mitigation and disaster relief

efforts. Researchers from the region also need to be better represented in academic and policy debates, at a point where not enough local research is accessible.

Toda Peace Institute is committed to:

- Provide a safe space, platform, workshop structure for a continued dialogue of international and Pacific experts, academics, policymakers, and practitioners.
- Offer opportunities for understanding diverse perspectives and voices, to network and connect, to contribute to and provide support for future collaborations.
- Produce policy briefs and then translate the academic language to adapt them into blog posts for a wider audience.
- Take stock, together with Pacific partners, of cases of climate-related conflicts in Oceania.
- Conduct, in cooperation with Pacific partners, a meta-analysis of current research to-date, beginning with the digital abstracts of theses from the University of the South Pacific.
- Continue to support the telling of and the inclusion of Pacific stories in the wider international context and discourse—put Oceania on the map.
- Organise follow-up workshops over the coming years.
- Produce, in collaboration with Pacific partners, edited volumes on the topic of climate change and conflict in the Pacific.
- Participate in the Conciliation Resources-led project, together with Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding and Transcend Oceania.
- Accompany and inform the policy debate in New Zealand (and other countries) and international/regional organisations.
- Form a **Steering Committee** to further discuss and implement action plans.
- Draft a Declaration on Climate Change, Peace and Security in Oceania.

**\*This report was compiled by Volker Boege, Sylvia C. Frain and Adan E. Suazo**

**To download Toda Peace Institute's policy briefs on climate change and conflict, go to:**  
[http://www.toda.org/policy\\_briefs/policy\\_briefs.html](http://www.toda.org/policy_briefs/policy_briefs.html)

- 1) Volker Boege "Climate Change and Conflict in Oceania: Challenges, Responses, and Suggestions for a Policy-Relevant Agenda (PB No. 17)
- 2) Halvard Buhaug "Global Security Challenges of Climate Change" (PB No. 18)
- 3) Matt McDonald "The Climate Change-Security Nexus: A Critical Security Studies Perspective" (PB No. 19)
- 4) Bob Lloyd "Climate Change in Pacific Island Countries: A Review (PB No. 20)

## ANNEX

### CONCEPT NOTE

The Toda Peace Institute is embarking on a new programme on climate change and conflict in Oceania. As with other Toda projects, the aim is to provide policy-relevant research and to explore how research findings can be translated into practical policies and peacebuilding practice.

The interrelationships between climate change, conflict, security and peace have gained increased attention both in academia and politics over the last years. With this new program, the Toda Peace Institute will make a specific contribution to both the scholarly debate and policies in this emerging field of research and practice. It will bring together researchers from climate change studies, peace and conflict studies, and security studies as well as other relevant disciplines. The primary connecting link will be policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners with an interest in the climate change—conflict—peace nexus.

The programme's regional focus is Oceania. It is generally acknowledged that islands and coastal regions will be most severely impacted by the effects of climate change. This holds true first and foremost for the Pacific Island Countries (PIC). Oceania is a climate change hotspot. Many PIC are particularly vulnerable due to their extreme exposure and the constrained options they have for adaptation. Sea level rise, the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones and storm surges, floods and droughts, coastal erosion, salt water intrusion and salinization in addition to other natural hazards challenge island economies and habitats as well as the livelihoods of people in the region.

Food, land and water security everywhere are under pressure, and a broad spectrum of newly arising economic, social and cultural problems can be attributed to the effects of climate change. In some cases, communities have been forced to relocate, and climate change induced migration will become a growing concern, given that many islands and including small island states are under threat of becoming uninhabitable or even submerged by rising seas. All this poses significant problems for politics and governance, because of challenges to human security, the prevention and transformation of deadly conflict, sustainable development, and peacebuilding.

The economic, social, cultural and other effects of climate change can drive conflicts. Conflicts over land and scarce natural resources, conflicts due to climate change—climate-induced migration, or conflicts arising from poor environmental governance or poorly designed and implemented climate change adaptation and mitigation responses are cases in point.

This also holds true for Oceania. While there is quite comprehensive research on 'climate change and conflict' and 'climate change and security' at a global level and with specific regional foci on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel Zone and the Middle East, Oceania so far has attracted far less attention. This is somewhat surprising, given the above-mentioned specific vulnerability of the region to the conflict-driving effects of climate change.

The new Toda Peace Institute programme seeks to address this gap. Practitioners and policy-makers in Oceania need more input from the academic realm so that they can develop well-informed policies, strategies, governance and adaptation measures. Climate change related policy and practice has to be conflict-sensitive. It has to encompass conflict prevention and resolution and, where possible, should contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable peace. Our programme will explore how this can be done. For example, it will explore how to establish and maintain peaceful and mutually beneficial relations between recipient communities and people who had to relocate due to the effects of climate change. There are already examples of conflicts between such host communities and newcomers; and such conflicts over land, water and other natural resources as well as employment opportunities or religious and cultural differences (e.g., conflicts of interest and identity conflicts) can easily escalate under conditions of extreme scarcity and perceptions of inequality. Experience in the Pacific so far shows that such conflict escalation takes place in fragile post-conflict environments such as the Solomon Islands or Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, or in situations where institutions of governance lack capacity, effectiveness and legitimacy.

In order to grasp the connections between climate change, its social effects—such as forced migration—governance and conflict, research will have to place an emphasis on the local environmental, social, political and cultural context. This is in our view of major significance for the analysis of the climate change—conflict nexus. Fine-grained ethnographic research which pays attention to the complexity and hybridity of local context can fill current gaps in knowledge and can provide locally specific recommendations for policy and practice. Research will not only address the conflict-prone effects of climate change, but also the conflict potential of climate change adaptation and mitigation policies and technologies. This approach will also enable us to include dimensions of the climate change-conflict nexus which so far have been widely ignored or underestimated, such as cultural and spiritual aspects, indigenous knowledge and indigenous ways of climate change adaptation, of conflict transformation and of peacebuilding.

People and researchers in Oceania have a lot to share with the rest of the world in this regard, grounded in their own cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies. We are convinced that non-Western, non-anthropocentric, relational concepts are of major policy relevance for addressing the field of climate change-conflict. So far, however, different cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies in the exploration of climate change and its effects, have not been given much attention in the international discourse. Pacific perspectives can change this. They may even provide avenues for the development and implementation of climate change programs that can support peacebuilding in innovative ways.

At the same time, our programme will link Pacific approaches and the locally focused research to the broader international debates in the climate change-conflict-security research community, engaging with concepts that currently have major traction in these debates, such as resilience, environmental or ecological security, relationality, hybridity, post-liberal peacebuilding and beyond. These issues will be explored in the Oceania context in order to generate new insights for both the global and Pacific discourses on these themes. Furthermore, this programme will aim to fill knowledge gaps of Pacific actors and institutions and address their capacity needs with regard to their own work on climate change and conflict. Hence this program will create



safe spaces and opportunities for increased dialogue and policy engagement at local and national levels in Oceania in order to develop conflict-sensitive policies and strategies for grappling with the negative impacts of climate change.

A core element of the programme will be a series of workshops which will bring together leading international academics with scholars, practitioners, policymakers and peacebuilders from Oceania. These workshops will be conducted in collaboration with Conciliation Resources, an internationally renowned peacebuilding NGO with long-standing working experience in Oceania which currently conducts a regional peacebuilding comparative learning programme in the Pacific. Other partners are being explored and will join the project in the future.

### **Toda Peace Institute**

The **Toda Peace Institute** is an independent, nonpartisan institute committed to advancing a more just and peaceful world through policy-oriented peace research and practice. The Toda Peace Institute commissions evidence-based research, convenes multi-track and multi-disciplinary problem-solving workshops and seminars, and promotes dialogue across ethnic, cultural, religious and political divides. It catalyzes practical, policy-oriented conversations between theoretical experts, practitioners, policymakers and civil society leaders in order to discern innovative and creative solutions to the major problems confronting the world in the twenty-first century (see [www.toda.org](http://www.toda.org) for more information). The Toda Peace Institute provided funding for this policy brief series and works in collaboration with the Alliance for Peacebuilding.

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