Climate change, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands

Kate Higgins and Josiah Maesua

Summary

This paper considers the conflict impacts of climate change and outlines potential opportunities for peacebuilding in Solomon Islands, a small independent state in the region of Oceania. Climate change is not viewed here as a standalone issue but as an embedded dimension of contemporary environmental, political, social, economic, and cosmological/spiritual settings.

While care must be taken not to make direct links between climate change and conflict in Solomon Islands, this paper identifies three potential climate change-related conflict issues:

1. Climate change is impacting upon the environment in which people's identity and sense of well-being is centred. Identity and place-based histories are deeply connected to local geographical spaces and mechanisms which maintain continuity through time and which prevent or resolve conflict. Environmental impacts of climate change are likely to *exacerbate existing conflict drivers* and impact upon the capacity of communities to manage localised forms of conflict.

2. External forms of project intervention at community level are a common cause of conflict. There is a risk that climate change adaptation projects are having, or will have, the same effect. The paper points to the need for *conflict sensitive climate-change adaptation* strategies which understand localised power-relations, take the time to work with local capacities while avoiding creating dependency on outside 'experts'.

3. There is the potential for climate change to contribute to the *displacement and relocation of people from their island homes.* This is a dynamic which may increase conflict over the longer-term, particularly in urban informal and 'illegal' settlements.

The overarching recommendation of this paper is that any meaningful engagement with the challenges of climate change and conflict in Solomon Islands must be firmly grounded

within localised Solomon Islands worldviews which encompass people's physical, economic, political, social, and cosmological worlds while paying attention to local understandings and ways of building peace.

This paper also recommends working with existing formal and informal institutions, developing conflict-sensitive climate-change adaptation approaches, identifying places where dislocation and resettlement is occurring and conducting participatory conflict analysis, and focusing on the problematic relationship between the state and communities when addressing conflict so as to centre peacebuilding approaches in community understandings of what constitutes peace and justice.

Introduction

Solomon Islands is an archipelago made up of almost 1000 islands in the South-Western Pacific Ocean. Around eighty percent of the estimated population of 611,000 people live in small-scale rural settlements (World Bank 2018; UNDESA 2017), although Solomon Islands is experiencing rapid rates of urbanisation (Keen et al. 2017: 13).

The physical environment of Solomon Islands continues to change rapidly. Solomon Islands is experiencing the effects of climate change, including higher temperatures, fluctuations in rainfall, and more frequent El Nino weather patterns (Birk and Rasmussen 2014: 2). Sea surface temperatures are increasing, and ocean acidification and rising sea levels are contributing to declining fish stocks through the destruction of coastal habitats and reefs (Day et al. 2016: 1-2). Increased soil salinity and erosion from rising sea levels affects food gardens (Asugeni et al. 2017: 1-2). Climate change is intensifying natural disasters, such as floods and cyclones, as well as weather patterns which cause prolonged droughts and heat waves (Birk and Rasmussen 2014: 2).

Stress on the physical environment is therefore likely to impact upon existing community capacities to manage complex social relations which are centred on land and resources – social relations which have emerged over long periods of time through interaction with the natural environment.

It is important to recognise the ways in which many island communities continue to draw upon indigenous and introduced practices to adapt to the immense environmental, social and political changes, changes which have been occurring for centuries. It is crucial to take these local adaptive capacities seriously as well as to recognise the ways in which local leaders employ "everyday peacebuilding" mechanisms within communities (see MacGinty and Richmond 2013; also Boege et al. 2008). These include local governance and justice mechanisms, most of which operate outside the limited authority of the state.

The Solomon Islands Government has recognised the challenge that climate change poses. For example, the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) policy understands climate change as a threat to existing resilience and as a barrier to development. The policy seeks "a resilient, secure and sustainable Solomon Islands responding to climate change" (MECDM 2012: 13). The policy lists adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mitigation capacity as key in achieving "increased resilience" and "sustainable development" goals (ibid.).

Despite the existence of both government policy and significant interest in climate change adaptation and resilience from the international development community, questions remain as to how rural and urban communities can best be assisted to meet uncertainty related to both climate change, and to potential conflict impacts, both now and into the future. Assisting with the prevention and mitigation of conflict is particularly challenging given current ambiguities in the relationship between the small-scale communities scattered throughout the island archipelago and the highly centralised state institutions and external development actors who tend to be based in Honiara, the capital (White 2007). A key question is: how do governments, civil society, policy makers, and external actors assist with prevention and mitigation of conflict in ways which a) are driven by and embedded in the worlds of community members, b) draw upon local adaptive capacities and c) avoid creating aid dependency?

The potential of climate change to exacerbate existing conflict drivers

It would be a fallacy to make direct links between current conflict drivers in Solomon Islands, including post-conflict legacies, and the impacts of climate change (see Boege 2018: 6). However, it is also a mistake to ignore how rapidly changing physical environments in Solomon Islands will impact upon peace and stability in community life. What happens when water becomes scarcer? Or if the land available for growing food and cash crops is reduced? What happens when the increased salinity of soil reduces the quality of agriculture land? What happens to the health of people as proteins found in fish become harder to acquire (Dey et al. 2016; Albert et al. 2015)? Finally, what happens to the socio-spiritual, psychological and relational worlds of communities – connected to landscapes and seascapes – as environments change around them?

These are not easy questions to answer. However, what is now clear is that climate change must be understood as a critical feature of the Solomon Islands conflict context, and it is therefore necessary to understand the potential of climate change to *exacerbate existing drivers of conflict* across the country. These existing conflict drivers include the management of land and relations, resource management, changes in population and demographic make-up, state-community relations, and conflict legacies and intergenerational trauma.

The centrality of land to identity and local capacities for peace

As in other contexts in Oceania, questions of land in Solomon Islands are highly complex. Land should not be understood only in economic terms, nor as the physical location in which people live, but rather must also be understood in terms of its social, relational and cosmological or spiritual dimensions. Local cosmological worldviews are crucial to people's identity and sense of wellbeing and consequently their ability to participate in, and willingness to maintain, the 'social harmony' upon which local understandings of peace are constructed. In this context, 'cosmology' refers to the ways in which people understand the universe they inhabit – its origins and futures – and incorporates stories of ancestors, narratives of the coming of Christianity, and place-based histories which retell of the people who have come and gone, leaving their mark on the landscape and seascape.

Land underpins a sense of identity and belonging which links present generations to the ancestors of the past while safeguarding it for those yet to come (Ballard 2014; see also

Kempf et al. 2014). One's home organises one's social relations (that is, one's '*wantok*'[1]), not only within a village or island, but also within the nation-state and beyond (see Bolton 2003: 70). How these social structures – and the power-relations embedded within them – are negotiated and governed is thus crucial in the capacity to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict within rapidly changing physical environments (Boege 2018: 8).

Most rural settlements are semi-subsistent, relying on small-scale agriculture for food production, as well as on cash crops such as copra and cocoa. Eighty-seven percent of land in Solomon Islands is customarily held by kinship groups (McDonnell et al. 2017: 13). Customary land arrangements differ significantly across the country. Arrangements are generated and maintained through diverse practices including through lineage structures, marriage and adoption practices, and customary forms of transfers and payments (ibid.).

There are pushes to register land through state-legal mechanisms, with the hopes this will create conditions for economic development. However, registering land is not necessarily a prerequisite to economic activity (McDonnell et al. 2017) and widespread land and resource disputes – the most significant form of localised conflicts – occur on both 'registered' and 'unregistered' land. Local justice and governance mechanisms which seek to produce peaceful relations – regardless of whether they are 'statutory' or 'customary', or, as is often the case, a mix of both – are largely focused on maintaining relations around land. With land at the centre of many related conflict issues, the potential loss of land and place creates conditions for increased forms of conflict.

Resource management and resource conflict

Related to the above are the ways in which natural resources are managed. The increase in the need for cash for school fees, transport, imported foods such as rice, alcohol, medicines and so on has led to the development of cash-cropping over many decades, disrupting cycles of intergenerational land inheritance (McDonnell et al. 2017: 18, 19). Conflict over land increases when economic benefits are at stake (Allen et al. 2013: 18).

More significantly, high levels of resource extraction by foreign companies, most of which is both legally and ethically questionable, is a significant driver of conflict in Solomon Islands. The unsustainable forestry industry has generated economic and political challenges to the stability of the Solomon Islands state for decades. Logging is deeply entwined in national political dynamics and underlies many of the common complaints from citizens about the pervasiveness of national corruption (see Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 2006; 1998; Allen 2011).

In addition, the small mining industry is growing. Given the kinds of conflict associated with logging, as well as the serious conflict experiences generated by mining in neighbouring

---

[1] *Wantok* or literally 'one talk' is a term which denotes belonging within a social structure, commonly of the same vernacular language group, of which there are approximately 80 in Solomon Islands (Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016: 241). However, the term is applied in different ways depending on how close/far one is situated from one's home. In a village *wantok* might refer to a close relative, at an island level to the vernacular language group, at the national level to an island group, and when overseas, to someone who is also from Solomon Islands.

Bougainville, there is significant potential for mining to increase the likelihood of conflict in Solomon Islands (Porter and Allen 2015; Allen 2017; 2018).

Logging and mining leave destructive marks on the environment. Extractive industries impact upon food security by damaging forests, gardens, mangroves and reefs as well as polluting water sources (see Minter et al. 2018: 6). Logging has caused significant local social conflicts, often causing "lasting rifts between and within landholding groups, villages, families and households", while also reinforcing "gender inequity by systematically excluding women from decision-making and from sharing in the benefits" (ibid.).

Influxes of cash from logging feed substance abuse issues which are now embedded – often cited as a common form of instability in communities (Allen et al. 2013: 27-30) – and have been linked to high levels of gender-based violence (SPC 2009: 10). Therefore, the combination of the environmental impacts of climate change and resource mis(management) is compounding stresses on the physical environment and consequently on the capacity of localised forms of governance and peacebuilding situated in community social and land relations to resolve localised conflicts.

A mixed and changing demography

Not only is the Solomon Islands a culturally and linguistically diverse nation characterised by small-scale group identities, the population of Solomon Islands is rapidly increasing and is expected to surpass one million by 2050 (UNPF 2014: 70, 72). This will add stress to existing land and sea resources, a factor which can undermine stability.

Demographic data shows that the population of Solomon Islands is young, with 60% of people under the age of 25 (ibid.: 72). Intergenerational tension is a commonly expressed community grievance while the legitimacy of decision-making by chiefs and elders is under stress (Allen et al. 2013: 16-18). This is perceived to impact upon the effectiveness of existing localised conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms which tend to be dominated by elders (ibid.).

Dissatisfaction with the state

Conflict is not only localised. Solomon Islands is a post-conflict state where a low-level civil conflict known colloquially as 'the Tension' escalated from 1998 until 2003 when the Australian-led international intervention *The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands* (RAMSI) put an end to fighting (see Braithwaite et al. 2010; Fraenkel et al. 2014). The conflict has been stabilised, yet many of its underlying causes remain unresolved, including land issues, historic and current internal-migration issues, uneven development, the management of the logging industry, and the anger of citizens at the nature of the centralised state and failures of decentralisation policies (TRC 2012).

While the state, and its associated 'formal' justice mechanisms, is idealised as the key mediating entity between the different interests driving conflict (Cudworth et al. 2007: 3), state institutions as they currently exist – including some actors who are manipulating or mimicking state institutions – often cause or exacerbate conflict, both at national and local levels.

For example, in the case of logging, Foukona and Timmer explain how the state acts as a 'capitalist landlord', treating customary land as 'estates' and facilitating the very transactions which cause conflict (2016; also McDougall 2016: 221-2). The constituency slush funds which Members of Parliament receive also cause instability (Porter et al. 2015; see also Batley 2015). As McDougall explains, the expansion of state power has undermined the "dynamics of everyday life". She argues that "[c]itizens may have much to gain from a better government, but they also have much to lose from the strengthening of a state they have good historical reason to mistrust" (2016: 222). The centralised state, and the actors who draw upon state forms of power, are the most significant potential drivers of larger-scale conflict in Solomon Islands.

While centralised state justice institutions are ill-fitting remnants left by colonialism, international donors have pumped significant financial and human resources into rebuilding centralised state justice institutions with the aim of managing conflict and creating stability since the civil conflict (see Allen and Dinnen 2015). Yet, the state does not have the capacity to manage conflict which occurs, not only in geographically hard-to-reach rural areas, but also in urban spaces where the legitimacy, conduct, or the capacity of police and formal justice mechanisms to resolve conflict are limited (McDougall and Kere 2011; Brigg et al. 2015).

In a separate sphere to these efforts to improve formal justice, and beyond the capital, Solomon Islanders are grappling with questions of how to 'marry' non-state (primarily categorised as customary and church) and state structures to produce peace, and questions of how to produce peace as it is defined by Solomon Islanders themselves.

Intergenerational trauma

In post-conflict Solomon Islands, there remain issues of intergenerational trauma. As it was reported to one researcher, "Solomon Islanders may have order but they do not have 'peace in their hearts'" (George 2018: 1324). This may relate not only to the legacies of the recent conflict, but to the incredibly disempowering form in which colonialism took place in Solomon Islands (see Bennett 1987), the impact of the Second World War, and the array of intergenerational conflict and violence which has occurred in different locales and which is embedded within the worlds of communities and families.

These conflict legacies may have bearing on the forms of social disorder occurring across the country including high levels of gender-based violence – most commonly against women and children (SPC 2009) – and the increasingly embedded and destructive impact of alcohol and drug abuse (Allen et al. 2013). In cases where climate change impacts add stresses to the environment, or force relocation, and given the importance of identity around land and place, issues of trauma are important in considering questions of a shared and long-term peace and stability in the country.

Local and external climate change adaptation and the potential of 'project conflict'

Existing local adaptive capacity to climate change

There are locations within the Solomon Islands which are facing immediate climate change impacts such as sea-level rise and food and water insecurity. These include low-lying islands and atolls – including the Polynesian outlying atolls – as well as the artificial islands in Malaita Province.[2]

It is important to understand how local communities are adapting to changing environments. The literature on adaptation to climate change notes that adaptive capacity is "highly context specific" (Warrick 2016: 1048). Communities have coped with climate variability and extreme weather events over centuries, successfully maintaining levels of well-being in highly uncertain environments (Warrick et al. 2016: 1042; Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016: 248). A myriad of local power-relations and factors determine the potential and actual capacities of communities to adapt to climate change, and to do so with conflict sensitivity.

Local leadership is a key factor in a community's ability to adapt to vastly changing environments, particularly given the slow speed and relatively limited capacity of government responses (Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016: 246). Warrick et al. describe the way in which community leaders of Pileni, low-lying islands in the Reef Islands of Temotu Province, play an important role in decision-making processes, conflict mediation, and cultural forms of reconciliation which have enabled community members to adapt in uncertain circumstances (2016). Asugeni et al. describe the local innovations in adaptation efforts of the villages in East Kwaio in Malaita province, bringing together indigenous leadership practices and knowledge of the natural environment as well as leadership from influential community members working in the health centre to combat sea level rise (2017). Albert et al. describe how indigenous leadership has helped to maintain fish catches despite evidence of fish stocks reducing due to climatic change by changing the methods and/or the locations in which community members fish (2015; also Sulu 2011).

The way Christianity – a powerful force across Solomon Islands – is practiced, that is, the differences between denominations or differences in Christian beliefs, and the attitudes towards climate change, is the second key factor in how communities adapt to changing environments. For example, Ha'apio et al. describe how church leaders in one village in Western Province argue they are protected from climate change as their village is a historically important Christian site (2018: 361-2). Conversely, the church in Ontong Java – low lying Polynesian Atolls facing relocation in the north of the country – is actively speaking about climate change, running adaptation programmes, and attempting to mediate national conversations about the need to relocate (Solo n.d; *pers. coms.* Fr. Nigel Kelaepa, *Honiara, 30 August 2018*).

---

[2] Historically, the artificial islands of Malaita have been built in the lagoons surrounding the coast out of coral rocks and other local materials (Moore 2017: 216). They are said to have been built so as to avoid malaria affected areas on the mainland and due to the relatively large size of the population (ibid.: 21, 48).

A third important factor to consider is one of perceptions among different community members about what climate change is. Knowledge about current and future climate change impacts is highly variable across the country and within each community (Ensor et al. 2018; Albert et al. 2015; Ha'apio et al. 2018; Solo n.d). However, Monson and Fitzpatrick report that people living by the coast and on atolls and artificial islands are proactive in identifying observed weather phenomena as symptomatic of climate change, particularly changes in winds, tides and extreme weather conditions (2016: 242).

While the academic and policy worlds understand the problem to be a technical one, explained by scientific evidence, it is likely that local villagers comprehend changing environments in a far more holistic sense. Spiritual understandings and localised cosmologies are likely to be part of such perceptions. Therefore, conflict sensitive strategies that aim to address issues of climate change adaptation must not only incorporate but also respect and value community perceptions of environmental change, rather than solely 'explaining science', as can often be the case in externally-led secular adaptation projects.

Externally-led intervention

The post-conflict Solomon Islands context has led to a flood of international intervention, often under the banner of 'development'. Development is ubiquitous in commentary within and about Solomon Islands. However, 'development' is a poorly defined endeavour and is also a significant driver of conflict. Donor, NGO, and government projects which introduce new resources can cause jealousies and create or exacerbate existing disputes between groups, often leading to project failure (Allen et al. 2013: 23-6).

This is important when considering the implementation of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, or other relevant environmental projects, and whether these projects address existing localised power-relations and if they are implemented in conflict-sensitive ways. While not specific to climate change adaptation or disaster risk reduction projects, the following issues tend to cause project failure and conflict at community level.

Externally-led projects often fail due to short project cycle timeframes. Often, there is not enough time allowed for external actors (including locally engaged staff and volunteers) to *walk alongside* community members throughout the project processes. This also limits the ability to recognise and develop strategies which work with existing capacities, and instead tend to apply standardised solutions as outlined in the project document, treating each community context in an ahistorical and apolitical way. External interveners fail to understand the interwoven nature of the existing contexts – including the existing conflict dynamics within each community – in which the project seeks to operate. This also has the effect of reproducing the idea that outsiders alone have the solutions to 'fix' environmental impacts and create dependency on outsiders – referred to throughout Solomon Islands as a 'hand-out mentality'.

Finally, questions remain as to whether adaptation measures have positive and sustainable outcomes, or whether methods of adaptation may in fact be forms of *maladaptation*, making matters worse over the longer-term. Given project evaluations are often conducted a short

time after a project is implemented, this is currently difficult to measure. However, if mala-daptation occurs (for example, Fazy and Schuett 2011), this has the potential to further em-bed climate change impacts in the overall conflict context of Solomon Islands over the longer term.

Displacement and relocation from island homes

The last-resort adaptation measure is *migration from one's island home* and this poses a sig-nificant conflict risk. As with the relationship between climate change and the conflict con-text discussed above, there is no clear-cut correlation between climate change and internal migration in Solomon Islands. Internal migration has long been a feature of life in Solomon Islands, and there is frequent movement to and from the village to provincial centres and/or to the capital, Honiara. Moreover, there are long histories which tell of the movement and settlement of people. This is often a strong feature of local oral histories, retold in the form of oral histories or custom stories which relate how a group of people have arrived at a certain place (see for example, Scott 2000). Therefore, while connection to one's '*home*' – meaning one's own island and land – is ubiquitous in localised discourses, migration and settlement is often also a significant feature of place-based histories which detail the rela-tionships between people and their environment (see Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016).

Nonetheless, for low-lying islands and atolls, the risk of losing one's home is a real threat, one that is likely to cause political, social, economic, spiritual and psychological uncertainty and distress. Climate change-related migration is already occurring – although often *in com-bination* with other factors – and much of this migration is taking the form of urban drift to Honiara.

Climate change-related relocation can be understood in three categories: 'institutionally-led', 'community-led', and 'family/individually' led.

1. *Institutionally-led relocation* involves a scenario where outside actors such as govern-ment or churches assist with the relocations of people. Based on instances to date, this approach remains fraught, with a range of problems (Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016; *pers. coms*. Fr. Nigel Kelaepa, *Honiara, 30 August 2018*). *Institutionally-led relocation* hinges on the interaction between the state and customary systems and highlights the capacity (or lack thereof) of the centralised state to manage this relationship – particularly in relation to land governance.

    An example of *institutionally-led relocation* is the case of Taro. The provincial govern-ment in Choiseul Province has plans to move the provincial capital Taro from the low-lying island of Taro to the mainland. It is likely this relocation will take time to achieve (Haines 2016). The Taro relocation "is the first time that a provincial capital with all its services and facilities will be relocated in the Pacific Islands" (Scientific American 2014). The Solomon Island government is now looking for the support of international donors in order to implement the relocation plan.

    The case of the low-lying atolls of Ontong Java is another complex example. Talk of relo-cation is made difficult not only due to internal disagreement about whether people are willing to relocate (Solo n.d.), but also by confusion around the slow and complex nature of the attempts of the provincial government, as well as the Anglican church, to negotiate

a new place to which these people can move (*pers. coms.* Fr. Nigel Kelaepa, *Honiara, 30 August 2018*). Reportedly, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in neighbouring Papua New Guinea has been suggested as a site, as has the island of Malaita (ibid.; Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016: 252). However, some community members report that they fear inter-group conflict over land will emerge if they are to move to Malaita (*pers. coms.* Fr. Nigel Kelaepa, *Honiara, 30 August 2018*; Solo n.d.), and would prefer to migrate over time through intermarriage into other island groups (Monson and Fitzpatrick 2016: 252). Overall, attempts by the government to facilitate relocations are likely to be fraught for both those who are relocating as well as the recipient communities in the new location. Given current state capacities, *institutionally-led* migration is unlikely to be a widely adopted relocation solution any time soon.

2. *Community-led relocation* involves negotiation between different customary groups which occurs outside of state-based mechanisms. As Monson and Fitzpatrick explain, this type of relocation "…take[s] place according to terms, concepts, and cultural frameworks provided by customary land systems… embedded in historical networks of intermarriage, kinship, trade and exchange" (2016: 247-8). This option is highly dependent on the capacity of local leadership, the availability of land, and the historical nature of social relations within an area.

   For example, the community of Lilisiana in Malaita Province has negotiated relocation through customary networks (ibid.: 250-251) as has Walande, discussed further below. *Community-led relocation* is a form of climate-change migration which shows the existing adaptability of Solomon Islanders, and the importance of social networks in the production of peace and livelihoods. However, *community-led relocation* is not an option which can be initiated top-down by state or external actors. It also has the potential for conflict to occur in future generations between host and settler communities, including conflict over issues of 'rights' over land for cultivating food and resources. What has been negotiated in one generation may not hold the same legitimacy in future generations.

3. *Family/individually-led relocation* is the most common type of climate-change related migration. This consists of individuals (especially young men) and family members moving from climate change-impacted areas where food and water security, combined with factors such as reduced land for economic activity and population growth, are causing people to seek livelihood opportunities elsewhere.

   Not all climate-change impacted migration results in people moving to Honiara. Some choose to settle in provincial or other economic centres. However, urbanisation is growing at a rapid rate (Keen et al. 2017: 13). This is occurring due to freedom of movement to Honiara, and as Foukona and Allen explain, the historical precedents which have resulted in the emergence of settlements within and beyond Honiara town boundaries (2017: 88-92).

It is evident that climate change is adding to the urbanisation 'push' factors. Birk and Rasmussen note that half of the families in the low-lying Reef Islands in Temotu and the atoll communities of Ontong Java have at least one family member living outside their island. Moreover, many of these family members are young men who move for work or education, often ending up in informal settlements that suffer from poor access to basic services, poor

housing quality, and unemployment (2014). Informal and 'illegal' settlements in Honiara are often built on sites which are at greater risk of storm surges, as was the case in the April 2014 Honiara floods (Ha'apio et al 2017; Keen and McNeil 2016), a natural disaster which incited tensions and resulted in rioting (Moore 2015: 433).

It is in Honiara and its surrounds where there is significant potential for violence to erupt, as evidenced by periodic riots. Again, it is important not to make direct causal links between climate change, urbanisation and the potential for violence and instability. Currently, violence tends to emerge over political issues associated with anger at the state. However, looking over the long term, and given existing high rates of urbanisation, in part driven by environmental pressures on rural communities, heightened urbanisation has the potential to exacerbate instability and violence in the capital.

Case Study: Walande Migration – Josiah Maesua[3]

> *Daylight, as the sun rises over our village and homes only posts were left standing.*
> *Daylight, as the sun rises stones were around the village.*
> *Daylight, as the sun rises over my village sand was left around the village.*
> *Daylight, as the sun rises over my village this must be our punishment or a curse.[4]*

It is said that large numbers of dolphins, turtles and fish brought the ancestors of the people of Walande as they followed these animals down the Eastern coast of Malaita. Walande is one of the man-made 'artificial islands' constructed by the Lau speaking people – islands made of stones piled into the lagoon off the coast of Small Malaita (or Maramasike). Walande increasingly became impacted by king tides and rising sea levels. In 2006 and 2009, king tides destroyed half the village. It became clear that Walande was no longer safe. The above quote is a song sung by an older woman, describing the destruction of the changing climate and lamenting the loss of the island (One News Limited n.d.). This is one example of songs and *stori* (storytelling) emerging from affected places across the nation.

Walande is an example of the two different types of relocation mentioned above – *community-led migration* in the first instance, and *family* or *individual led migration* in the second. In the first instance families from Walande negotiated land for resettlement on the mainland through existing customary processes of negotiation and based upon historic relationships (Monson & Fitzgerald 2016: 249). However, those who resettled on the mainland have faced issues. Disputes have emerged over land for food gardening as some settlers are said to have 'illegally' (according to customary rules) grown food without permission. However, many of these disputes have been resolved through local justice mechanisms – including through 'compensation' payments consisting of both dolphin teeth (an important customary form of payment) and cash. Continued renegotiation over land for settlement and subsistence are likely to continue into the future.

The land upon which people resettled is muddy and filled with flies and mosquitos. Part of the original reason for building the artificial island was said to be to avoid malaria which

---

[3] The author would like to thank Michael Amsia and Walter Doraadi who Maesua interviewed in putting together the following case study (Amsia and Doraadi *pers. coms*. Honiara, 2018).
[4] One News Limited Productions. n.d. "Home Blo Iumi" [DVD]. *British High Commission Solomon Islands and One News Limited.*

often affects swampy areas. Resettlement also has involved a change in lifestyle which has required *saltwater* people to leave behind swimming and fishing to instead work in the mountainous *bush* and rely more upon food gardens. These issues have in all likelihood exacerbated the push to migrate to other places, including Honiara, where many people from artificial islands of Malaita, such as Walande, now reside. Therefore, in the second instance, relocation from Walande also constitutes (in conjunction with other factors) a form of *family or individually-led* migration.

Peacebuilding avenues: Climate change and conflict

Despite the prevalence of conflict issues discussed above, it is important to recognise the considerable adaptive capacity of Solomon Islanders, as demonstrated by continued survival through years of colonialism, capitalism, missionisation, war, conflict, and – important to note here – extreme weather events. Communities continue to reproduce their own ways of organising themselves in interaction with the institutions surrounding them, mixing indigenous and introduced practices resulting in *relative* peace and stability at community level (see Boege et al. 2008). A longer view of history demonstrates how Solomon Islanders have survived significant challenges for centuries.

With this in mind, this policy brief concludes with some *recommendations* for the prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflict in Solomon Islands:

1. *Support communities with dialogue which addresses the holistic nature of climate change:* Contextualise scientific knowledge by linking it to other forms of knowledge using dialogue tools and participatory methodologies which allow for community members to unpack their own localised understanding of the cosmological, religious and cultural dimensions of environmental change. In doing so, explore with communities how climate change links to peace and conflict issues by addressing the links between environmental impacts and natural resource management, food and water security, and migration.

2. *Encourage environmental conservation:* Given the current rate of logging (and potentially mining) advocate long-term environmental conservation and sustainable semi-subsistent livelihoods over short-term destructive economic development (such as mining or logging) at all levels – among community members, government, and international development actors.

3. *Involve existing local institutions*: Avoid establishing new adaptation or disaster project committees at community level and work with existing local formal and informal institutions. Key informal institutions include churches, chiefly leadership, elders, and other customary forms of leadership, women, youth representatives, local service providers (such as teachers and health workers). Work with existing local institutions so as to centre external approaches in local adaptive capacity.

4. *Apply a conflict-sensitivity lens to projects*: Introduce participatory conflict analysis tools into climate change and disaster risk reduction projects. Make conflict analysis inclusive of gender, youth, as well as land 'holding' and 'settler' power-relations.

These tools should be designed for community members to use to map out and mitigate the potential for project related conflict and as a way to create broad consensus around a project.

5. *Better understand and predict climate change-related resettlement areas*: Identify and focus on resettlement areas and focus on intra- and inter-group relationships and localised governance arrangements, particularly in urban and high-density population areas such as Honiara. Provide different groups – such as 'settler' and 'host' communities – with tools for jointly analysing conflict drivers as well as spaces for dialogue on approaches to resolving conflict across difference.

6. *Focus on state-community relations*: Rather than seeing the state as a service provider – or as responsible for 'fixing' conflict issues – focus on the relationship between state institutions and community institutions. In addressing conflict challenges exacerbated or caused by climate change, centre approaches within community understandings of what constitutes peace and justice.

Bibliography

Albert et al. 2015. 'Keeping food on the table: Human responses and changing coastal fisheries in Solomon Islands'. *PLOS One.* 10(7): 1-13.

Allen, Matthew. 2011. "Long-Term Engagement: The Future of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands." *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. Strategic Insights 51.

Allen, Matthew. 2017. "Islands, Extraction and Violence: Mining and the Politics of Scale in Island Melanesia." *Political Geography* 57: 81-90.

Allen, Matthew. 2018. *Resource Extraction and Contentious States: Mining and the Politics of Scale in the Pacific Islands*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Allen, Matthew G, and Sinclair Dinnen. 2015. "Solomon Islands in Transition?". *The Journal of Pacific History* 50, no. 4: 381-97.

Allen, Matthew, Sinclair Dinnen, Daniel Evans, and Rebecca Monson. 2013. "Justice Delivered Locally: Systems, Challenges, and Innovations in Solomon Islands." *Justice for the Poor Research Report*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

Asugeni, Rowena., Michelle Redman-MacLaren, James Asugeni, Tommy Esau, Frank Timothy, Peter Massey, and David MacLaren. 2017. "A community builds a "bridge": an example of community-led adaptation to sea-level rise in East Kwaio, Solomon Islands". *Climate and Development.* 11(1): 91-96.

Ballard, Chris. 2014. "Oceanic Historicities". *The Contemporary Pacific* 26, no. 1: 96-124.

Batley, James. 2015. Constituency Development Funds in Solomon Islands: State of Play." *State Society and Governance in Melanesia*. In Brief 67.

Bennett, Judith. 2002. "Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands-Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism". *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*. Discussion Paper 5.

Bennett, Judith. 1987. *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, 1800-1978*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Birk, Thomas and Kjeld Rasmussen. 2014. "Migration from atolls as climate change adaptation: Current practices, barriers and options in Solomon Islands". *Natural Resources Forum* 38: 1-13

Boege, Volker. 2018. "Climate Change and Conflict in Oceania: challenges responses and suggestions for a policy-relevant research agenda". *Toda Peace Institute Policy Brief* No.17.

Boege, Volker, M Anne Brown, Kevin P Clements, and Anna Nolan. 2008. "States Emerging from Hybrid Political Orders: Pacific Experiences." *Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies*. The Occasional Papers 10, no. 11.

Bolton, Lissant. 2003. *Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Braithwaite, John. 2010. *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: ANU E Press.

Brigg, Morgan, Wren Chadwick, Cody Griggers, Janet Murdock, and Tracy Vienings. 2015. "Dialogue on Governance and Peace: Choiseul and Western Province, Solomon Islands". *Sharing and exploring pacific approaches to dialogue: a compendium of case studies from Pacific Island Countries.* Fiji: UNDP Pacific Centre

Cudworth, Erika, Tim Hall, and John McGovern. 2007. *The Modern State: Theories and Ideologies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Dey et al. 2016. "Economic impact of climate change and climate change adaptation strategies for fisheries sector in Solomon Islands: Implication for food". *Marine Policy* 67: 171-178.

Ensor et al. 2018. "Variation in perception of environmental change in nine Solomon Islands communities: implications for securing fairness in community-based adaptation" *Regional Environmental Change* 18, no. 4: 1131-1143.

Fazey, Ioan, Nathalie Pettorelli, Jasper Kenter, Daniel Wagatora and Daniel Schuett. 2011. "Maladaptive trajectories of change in Makira, Solomon Islands". *Global Environmental Change.* 21 (4): 1275-1289.

Foukona, Joseph D, and Jaap Timmer. 2016. "The Culture of Agreement Making in Solomon Islands". *Oceania* 86, no. 2: 116-31.

Foukona, Joseph D, and Matthew G Allen. 2017. "Urban Land in Solomon Islands: Powers of Exclusion and Counter-Exclusion". In Siobhan McDonnell, Matthew Allen and Colin Filer (eds.) *Kastom, Property and Ideology*, Canberra: ANU Press, 85-110.

Fraenkel, Jon, Joni Madraiwiwi, and Henry Okole. 2014. "The Ramsi Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003-2013." Independent Report.

George, Nicole 2018. "Liberal–local peacebuilding in Solomon Islands and Bougainville: advancing a gender-just peace?" *International Affairs*. 94(6): 1329-1348.

Ha'apio, Michael Otara, Morgan Wairu, Ricardo Gonzalez and Keith Morrison. 2018. "Transformation of rural communities: lessons from a local self-initiative for building resilience in the Solomon Islands". *Local Environment* 23 No. 3: 352-365.

Haines, Philip., 2016. "Choiseul Bay Township Adaptation and Relocation Program, Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands". *Case Study for CoastAdapt, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility*. Gold Coast, Australia. Accessed 27/02/19 online at https://coastadapt.com.au/sites/default/files/case_studies/CSS3_Relocation_in_the_Solomon_Islands.pdf

Keen, Meg Julien Barbara, Jessica Carpenter, Daniel Evans and Joseph Foukona. 2017. *Urban Development in Honiara Harnessing Opportunities, Embracing Change*. Research Report. Canberra: ANU.

Kabutaulaka, Tarcisius Tara. 1998. Deforestation and Politics in Solomon Islands. In P. Larmour (ed) *Canberra: Governance and Reform in the South Pacific* National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 121-53.

Kabutaulaka, Tarcisius Tara. 2006. Global Capital and Local Ownership in Solomon Islands' Forestry Industry." In Stewart Firth (ed) *Globalisation and Governance in the Pacific Islands*, Studies in State and Society in the Pacific No. 1 Canberra: ANU E Press 239-258

Pers. coms. Fr. Nigel Kelaepa, Honiara, 30 August 2018.

Kempf, Wolfgang, Toon van Meijl, and Elfriede Hermann. 2014. "Movement, Place-Making and Cultural Indentification: Multiplicies of Belonging". In Elfriede Hermann, Wolfgang Kempf and Toon van Meijl (eds.) *Belonging in Oceania: Movement, Place-Making and Multiple Identifications*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1-24.

MacGinty, Roger and Oliver Richmond. 2013. "The local turn in peacebuilding: A critical agenda for peace". *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5: 763-783.

McDougall, Debra. 2016. *Engaging with Strangers: Love and Violence in the Rural Solomon Islands*. New York: Berghahn Books.

McDougall, Debra, and Joy Kere. 2011. "Christianity, Custom, and Law: Conflict and Peacemaking in the Post-conflict Solomon Islands". In Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker (eds.).

Mediating across difference: Oceanic and Asian approaches to conflict resolution. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 141-62.

McDonnell, Siobhan, Joseph Fukuona and Alice Pollard. 2015. *Building a pathway for successful land reform in Solomon Islands.* State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Report. Canberra: ANU.

Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM). 2012. *National Climate Change Policy 2012-2017*. Policy Report. Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Minter et al. 2018. *From happy hour to hungry hour: logging, fisheries and food security in Malaita, Solomon Islands*. Penang, Malaysia: World Fish Programme Report 7.

Monson, Rebecca and Daniel Fitzpatrick. 2016. "Negotiating relocation in a weak state: Land tenure and adaptation to sea-level rise in Solomon Islands". In Susana Price, Jane Singer (eds.) *Global Implications of Development, Disasters and Climate Change: Responses to Displacement*. Asia Pacific: Earthscan 240-255.

Moore, Clive 2015. "Honiara: Arrival city and Pacific hybrid living space". *The Journal of Pacific History*. 50 (4): 419-436.

Moore, Clive 2017. *Making Mala: Malaita in Solomon Islands 1970 – 1930.* Canberra: ANU Press.

One News Limited Productions. n.d. *Home Blo Iumi* [DVD]. British High Commission Solomon Islands and One News Limited.

Porter, Doug, and Matthew G Allen. 2015. "The Political Economy of the Transition from Logging to Mining in Solomon Islands". *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*. Discussion Paper 12.

Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study:*

A study on violence against women and children. Report.

Scientific American. 2014. "Township in Solomon Islands is 1st in Pacific to relocate due to climate change". Aug 15, 2014 accessed online 27/02/19 at https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/township-in-solomon-islands-is-1st-in-pacific-to-relocate-due-to-climate-change/

Scott, Michael W. 2000. "Ignorance Is Cosmos; Knowledge Is Chaos: Articulating a Cosmological Polarity in the Solomon Islands". *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*. 44 (2): 56-83.

Solo, Rex. n.d. *The Plight of Resettling Atoll Communities in the Solomon Islands: The Case of Ontong Java/Lord Howe Islanders*. [Report] Suva, Fiji: Pacific Conference of Churches.

Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2012. *Confronting the Truth for a Better Solomon Islands: Final Report*. Honiara.

Sulu, Reuben John. 2010. "Multidisciplinary Appraisal of the Effectiveness of Customary Marine Tenure for Coral Reef Finfish Fisheries Management in Nggela (Solomon Islands)". [PhD Thesis]. Newcastle: Newcastle University.

United Nations Population Division. n.d. "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Accessed on 12/06/2016 at https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/.

Warrick et al. 2016. "The 'Pacific Adaptive Capacity Analysis Framework': guiding the assessment of adaptive capacity in Pacific island communities." *Regional environmental change* 17 (4): 1039-1051.

White, Geoffrey M. 2007. "Indigenous Governance in Melanesia". *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*. Discussion Paper 5.

World Bank. 2018. "Total Population" [Website]. Accessed online 12/12/2018 at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.

The Authors

Kate Higgins is the Pacific Projects Manager at Conciliation Resources. Kate has been working in the Pacific region for over a decade in areas of community development, governance, and peacebuilding. Kate has a PhD from the University of Queensland. Her research and practice interests are focused on the interactions between local and state-based governance in the Melanesian region and how these interactions produce peace and livelihoods.

Josiah Dora Maesua is the National Coordinator for the UNDP Solomon Islands. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Management/Public Administration with a minor in Tourism and a postgraduate diploma in Management/Public Administration from the University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus Fiji. He is currently the National Coordinator of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programmes (SGP), managed by the UN Office for Project Operations (UNOPS) Implemented by UNDP Solomon Islands Country Office in Partnership with the Solomon Islands Government. The program is focused on Climate Change; both mitigation and adaption measures for rural communities, Biodiversity, Land Degradation, International Waters and Chemical by assisting Community-Based Organisations and NGOs to implement programmes in different provinces. Josiah has been in the role for since 2012.

Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. Conciliation Resources works with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts. Conciliation Resources has been working in the Pacific for 24 years with a range of Pacific-based partner organisations.

The 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 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 catalyses 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 for more information).

Contact Us
Toda Peace Institute
Samon Eleven Bldg. 5th Floor
3-1 Samon-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0017, Japan
Email: contact@toda.org