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Colonial Relocation and Implications for Future Climate Change Induced Migration and Displacement

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Abstract

Scientific research has projected that climate change is one of the greatest threats to human security because it disrupts the livelihoods of people and will generate the migration and displacement of vulnerable populations across the globe. In particular, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific are characterised as low-lying atolls, with economies that are heavily dependent on the natural environment and ecosystems. The emphasis on migration as an adaptation strategy has been widely debated in international, regional, and national forums, and at the community level. While it appears to be a possible solution for vulnerable communities in the Pacific, without proper planning and preparation, and the involvement and consent of people, it could also potentially lead to forced displacement. This paper reflects on the relocation of the Gilbertese from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands, and eventually to the Solomon Islands in the 1960s. The planning of the relocation, especially from the Phoenix Islands to the Solomon Islands, and the experiences of the people provide important lessons that can be used to inform future climate change induced migration and displacement in the Pacific Islands.

Introduction

Climate change is affecting the planet, but the impacts are felt more severely in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as the Pacific Islands. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has underlined that climate change is one of the greatest threats to human security because it undermines livelihoods, compromises cultures and individual identity, increases migration and displacement of people, and disrupts the ability of states to provide the conditions necessary for human security (Adger et al. 2014). Of particular concern is the rising sea level and its impacts on Pacific Islands Countries (PICs). Recent projections show that sea level rise could exceed 2.0 metres by the end of the 21st century. Despite uncertainty about the accuracy of this predicted rise, scientific modelling has suggested the sea level will be significantly higher by the end of the century (Storlazzi et al. 2018).

The rise in sea level will significantly affect Pacific Islands especially atoll islands because of their low-lying features. Many of these islands have a maximum height of four metres and an elevation average of not more than two metres above sea level, and therefore are extremely exposed to rising sea levels, coastal erosion and flooding, saltwater inundation, and contamination of freshwater lenses (Storlazzi et al. 2018). The increasing impact of climate change will also cause ecosystems to deteriorate and impact Pacific Islands communities heavily reliant on the natural environment for their livelihoods and economies (Mortreux and Barnett 2009). When this happens, many of the islands will no longer be habitable. Populations will gradually migrate elsewhere, some through a planned relocation project as an adaptation strategy, or they may be forced to leave their home islands, which may create a sense of displacement among the people. Displacement in this context refers to the forced relocation of people from their ancestral lands, which for Pacific Islanders is foundational to their livelihoods, cultures, traditions, and identity (Tabe 2019; Campbell 2019).

A recent IPCC report predicts that the global mean sea-level rise will be between 0.52 - 0.98 metres between 2081 – 2100 (IPCC 2018). The report exemplifies that the pressure on human settlements in the Pacific Islands is likely to increase significantly in the coming years with the increase of global warming and environmental changes that pose risks to human health, livelihoods, food security and economic growth, and will likely result in the forced relocation and displacement of Pacific Islands people (ibid). Migration can be an adaptive measure if it is voluntary and the decisions to migrate are taken by individuals or at the household level (Mortreux and Barnett 2009). However, forced migration usually results in the involuntary displacement of people and examples of these types of movements have occurred in the Pacific. For instance, the Banabans were relocated from Ocean Island to Rabi in Fiji in the 1940s as a result of phosphate mining (Edwards 2014), and the Tikopians were relocated to the Russell Islands due to environmental problems (Larson 1977). In the mid-1950s, a major volcanic eruption on the island of Ambym in Vanuatu forced its population to relocate to the island of Efate (Connell 2012).

More recently too, communities in the Pacific have been relocated as a result of climate change impacts. In 2014, the village of Vunidogoloa in Fiji was relocated two kilometres

inland from the coast due to sea level rise and extreme coastal surges and erosion (Charan et al. 2017). The relocation of the community of Narikoso in Fiji is also underway; part of the community has already been relocated, as a result of sea level rise and coastal erosion (SPC 2016). It is inevitable that migration will take place with the increase in rising sea levels, but mostly internally, within countries' jurisdictions (McAdam 2012). However, the complexity of planning and preparation, and moving people from one location to another should not be underestimated. Instead the nature of the movement should be carefully considered, understood, organised and administered over time to ensure the relocation of communities is effectively carried out in a manner that avoids potential difficulties or conflicts and involuntary displacement.

This paper reflects on the historical account of the Gilbertese relocation from the Gilbert to Phoenix Islands, and to Solomon Islands during the colonial period (See Figure 1). The planning for the relocation, especially from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands, and the experiences of the people provide important lessons that can be used to inform future climate change induced migration and displacement in the Pacific Islands. The paper will focus specifically on the second wave of relocation to the island of Wagina.

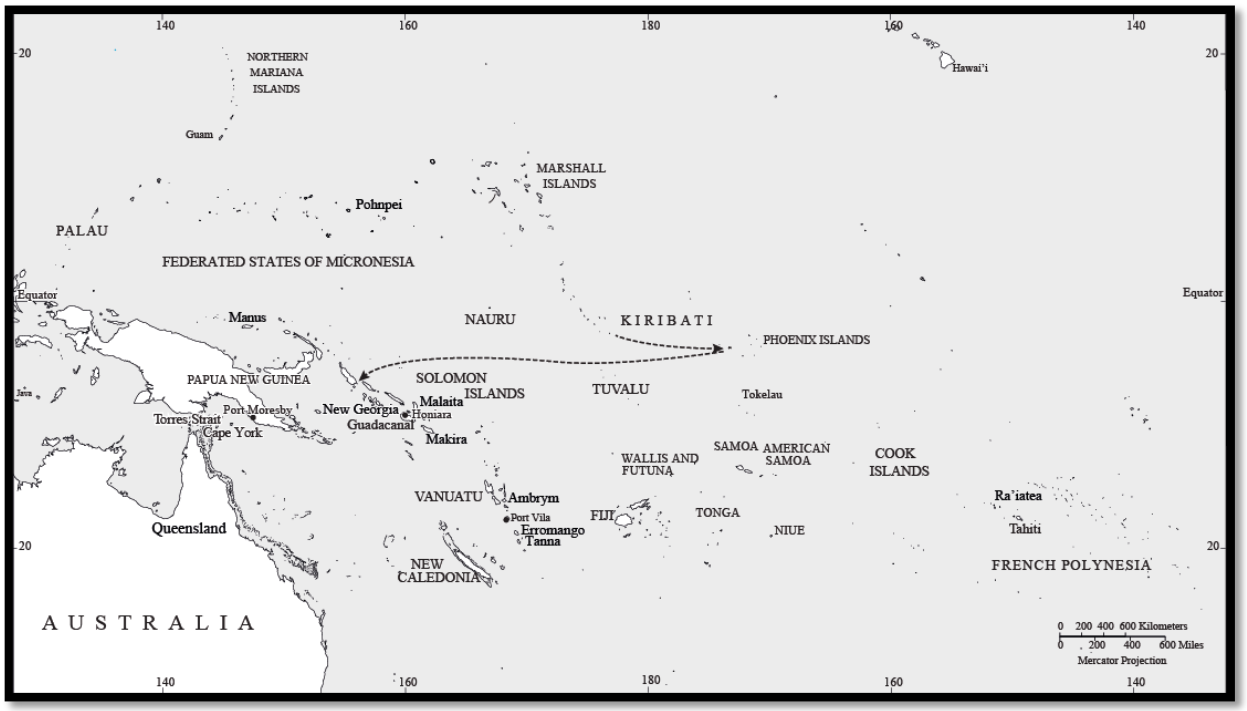

Figure 1: Map of the Gilbertese relocation from Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands and to Wagina, Solomon Islands.

Terminology

There are interchangeable definitions for migration, relocation, planned relocation, displacement, involuntary displacement, and voluntary displacement when used in climate change migration discourses. The way in which these concepts are perceived also differs significantly according to the context in which they are used. For the purpose of this paper, the following concepts will be used as defined.

Migration is the movement of persons away from their usual place of residence, either within a State or across an international boundary (IOM 2020). This type of movement can be voluntary in nature or forced at times, but it is commonly used to describe the voluntary movements of people and is associated with an element of choice (ODI and UNDP 2017).

Relocation can be voluntary or forced. *Voluntary relocation* takes place when there is still freedom to choose between realistic options, whereas *forced relocation* occurs when the freedom to choose from the realistic options is no longer available (McAdam and Ferris 2015). *Planned relocation* is an adaptive measure administered by the State in which a community is physically moved from its original site to another location, usually to a safer one in the case of both slow and sudden onset events (UNHCR 2014).

Displacement involves the movements of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of residence as a result of war and conflict, persecution, natural and human-made disasters, violation of human rights, and climate change impacts (IOM 2020). It also refers to the forced movements of people from their homes and ancestral lands as a direct result of slow and sudden onset events (ODI and UNDP 2017).

Relocation from Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands, and to Solomon Islands

The Gilbert Islands and Ellice Islands, today known as Kiribati and Tuvalu, are located in the central Pacific Ocean. The islands are characterised mainly by low-lying atolls with lagoons and lands not more than four metres above sea level (Hoverson 1983). In 1892, both groups of islands were colonised and became a Protectorate under the British Colonial Administration. The islands became the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC) in 1916. The colonisation of the islands brought about many changes subsequent to the European encounter and the arrival of Christianity. These changes disrupted the traditional way of life on the islands and of the systems that governed them.

The fragmentation of the *kainga* (the extended family unit) into small villages altered relations between family units and prevented land acquisition and repossession through warfare between *kainga* groups (Namai 1987). Communal rights to land and properties, and the traditional distribution of land through family lineages, was also transformed. The ban of traditional practices to curb population growth, such as abortion and warfare, and inter-island migration, which prohibited the mobility of people between islands, led to an increase in the population beyond the capacity of the islands to sustain it. The traditional land tenure system was replaced with a new land tenure that supported the registration and ownership of individual landholdings and real property. The new land tenure was complemented with a land taxation system to encourage landowners to develop their land or distribute it to others who needed it to be developed. The introduction of the new land tenure system and the survey of the islands led to what was perceived by the administration as overpopulation and land shortages, particularly in the Southern Gilbert Islands (Chambers and Munro 1980).

While the intentions of the GEIC Administration was to bring 'civilisation' to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, they did not realise that these changes had amplified the problems of over-population because people were no longer practicing their traditional ways of controlling population growth. The establishment of medical clinics and medication helped to improve the health services in the islands and increased the life expectancy of the elderly and infants (Maude 1968). The ban of warfare between islands and *kainga* groups and the prohibition on inter-island migrations accelerated population growth on islands beyond their carrying capacity. Land was of high value and importance to the Gilbertese people. Land ownership and rights were based on family landholdings comprised of individual and communal systems in which rights were passed on from generation to generation through the matri-lineal and patrilineal systems. This led to the increased fragmentation of land across many islands because a land plot was distributed to everyone including children. The amendment of the traditional land tenure caused numerous land disputes amongst the people.

To reduce overpopulation and address land shortages in the Gilbert Islands, the GEIC Administration decided to facilitate a resettlement scheme for the surplus and landless families, mainly from the Southern Gilbert Islands. Families identified as very poor with very little land were given priority for relocation. The Phoenix group of islands in the colony was identified as the relocation destination; in particular, the islands Gardner, Hull and Sydney were seen as the most suitable for the Gilbertese families. The islands were later christened by the Gilbertese with names familiar to them and which reminded them of their homes in the Gilbert Islands. Gardner was called Nikumaroro; Hull Island was named Orona; and Sydney, Manra (Maude 1968). Although the islands were quite distant, they would still be managed by the GEIC Administration from its headquarters in Tarawa. While the resettlement scheme was regarded as voluntary by the GEIC Administration, many families refused to be relocated but were convinced on the basis that they would be granted more land in the Phoenix Islands.

The relocation to the Phoenix Islands was also considered favorable for the Gilbertese families because of the similarity of the environment and physical nature of the islands, the fact that the Phoenix Islands were part of the colony, and the ability to maintain connection and be able to visit their relatives in the Gilbert Islands. However, prior to their departure for the Phoenix Islands, the Gilbertese families were required to surrender all their lands to their relatives who were remaining, as those leaving would be distributed land in their new home (ibid). In the late 1930s, the Phoenix Islands Resettlement Scheme was conducted, and groups of Gilbertese families were relocated from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands (both groups of islands are today part of Kiribati).

However, the Colony was greatly affected during World War II. The war caused extensive damage to the phosphate and copra industries, which were the primary backbone of the economy in the Colony. The disruption of the Colony's economy became a major concern for the GEIC administration; the management of the Colony could prove difficult in the long term, especially the management of the Phoenix Islands, given their remoteness from the GEIC headquarters in Tarawa. It also became apparent during this time that the Phoenix Islands were highly vulnerable to long periods of drought and would be inadequate to support the growing population of Gilbertese families. Therefore, the GEIC Administration

came to the conclusion that the management of the islands from its headquarters in Tarawa would become a liability in the long term (Tabe 2019).

The island of Manra in Phoenix was greatly affected by a series of droughts especially livelihood resources on the island, which led the elders of the community to request that the GEIC Administration relocate them to another island within the Colony. But with the slow recovery of the Colony's economy after the war, the GEIC Administration was not prepared to administer further resettlement schemes within the Colony that would require additional management. Instead, it pursued potential resettlement sites in other British Colonies that would provide an opportunity for the Gilbertese to be recruited as labourers, with the possibility of being granted citizenship (ibid).

Subsequently after WWII, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) suffered a shortage of labourers to work in its plantations, which were a backbone of its economy, and many of the labourers who previously worked in the plantations did not return after the war. This dilemma presented an opportunity for the recruitment of labourers from elsewhere to work in the plantations. At the same time, the need to relocate the Gilbertese from the Phoenix Islands offered a prospect for the recruitment of potential labourers to work in the Solomon Islands. This would address the problems faced by the two colonial administrations. The relocation of the Gilbertese people from the Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands would provide the supply of labourers needed by the BSIP and would relieve the GEIC of the burden of the management of the Phoenix Islands in the long-term (Tabe 2016).

The engineering of the resettlement was also made possible because both colonial administrations were under the Western Pacific High Commissioner, who was based in Fiji at that time, which made possible discussions around the relocation of a vulnerable community and the recruitment of Gilbertese as potential labourers for the BSIP. The relocation was coordinated under the assumptions that, firstly, the BSIP was in need of additional labourers for its plantations and, secondly, the GEIC desired the relocation of the Gilbertese population from Phoenix Islands to safeguard them from the detrimental effects of drought and provide them an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. It also allowed the GEIC Administration to avoid the future accumulation of expenditures for the management of the Phoenix Islands (ibid).

The GEIC and BSIP Administrations were aware of the fact that the resettlement would be from a distinctive geographical, environmental, and cultural region to another, yet they were determined to experiment with a large-scale movement of people across jurisdictions. The proposed resettlement to the Solomon Islands was not accepted by the Gilbertese families and many refused to be relocated, primarily those from Manra who had suffered from the effects of drought. Their elders had requested that the GEIC Administration relocate them elsewhere in the colony, but not to the Solomons. However, the GEIC Administration was determined to seek potential sites outside of the colony. British territories in Asia, Africa, in Oceania, and even London were considered but none of them offered such opportunities. The BSIP was the only territory that offered the opportunity for labour recruitment and permanent settlement (ibid), so discussions between the two colonial administrations proceeded.

The relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands was conducted in two waves. Despite the lack of enthusiasm for the relocation, people agreed on the basis that they would access more land and have a better livelihood in the Solomon Islands. The relocation would be conducted on a five-year contract which was signed by the people prior to their departure for the Solomon Islands. If the Gilbertese were not able to re-establish themselves in their new home during this period, they would be repatriated back to the colony after five years. Many of the people signed the contract and in 1955, the first wave of relocation, comprised of 500 people, was conducted from the island of Manra to Titiana on Gizo Island, in Solomon Islands (See Figure 2).

The Manra-Titiana relocation was conducted in a series of eight voyages between 1955 and 1962, which allowed the allocation of land to the Gilbertese families and time for them to re-establish and familiarise themselves with their new home. Titiana was located near the Western District Headquarters on Gizo, and the headquarters provided assistance for the settlement of the Gilbertese people. After five years of the resettlement to Titiana, the GEIC Administration declared the scheme successful without the knowledge of the Gilbertese. This was done to prevent the Gilbertese from seeking repatriation back to the colony under the terms of the contract. Instead, the administration saw that there was still an opportunity to relocate the rest of the Phoenix Islands population to Solomon Islands, so it initiated the second wave of relocation (ibid). Prior to their departure, the remaining population of Phoenix Islands was told to give up all their lands on Nikumaroro and Orona to the GEIC Administration in exchange for the lands they would be given in Solomon Islands.

The abrupt decision to relocate the remaining population gave little time for the Administration to consult and obtain the people's consent. This led to the refusal of many people including the elderly to relocate to Solomon Islands. Most of the families had also just developed the land and established their households in Phoenix Islands after the initial relocation from Gilbert Islands, so they were not prepared to abandon the new home and see all their hard work go to waste. Others refused to abandon their loved ones buried on the islands.

From 1963 to 1964, the remaining population of nearly a thousand people from the islands of Nikumaroro and Orona in the Phoenix Group were relocated to Wagina, also in Solomon Islands (See Figure 2) (Weber 2016; Tabe 2016). Due to the cost of the operation and facilitation of the Titiana resettlement scheme, the entire remaining population of Phoenix Islands was relocated to Wagina in one large-scale movement. Wagina Island was remotely located from the Western District Headquarter, which at that time was in charge of administering Titiana and Wagina Island, along with other islands and communities in the District.

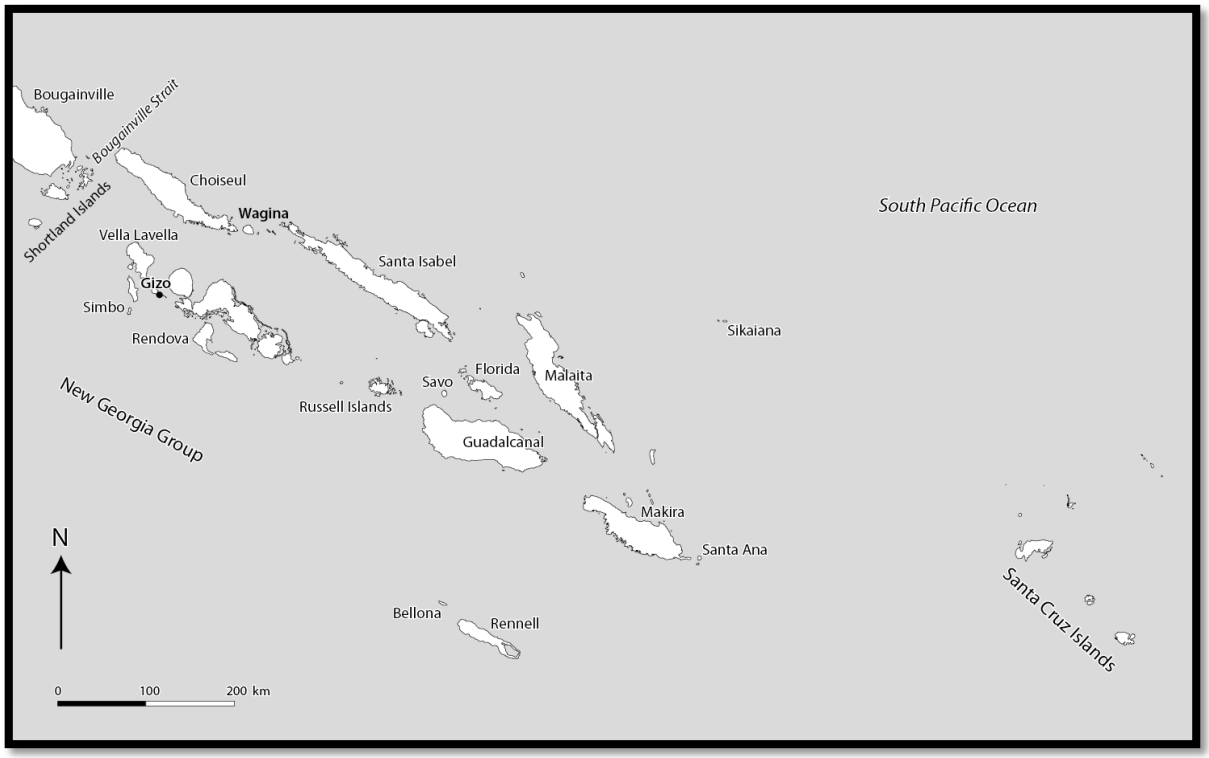

Figure 2: Map of Solomon Islands with the location of Titiana on Gizo Island and Wagina Island in the Southeast of Choiseul.

Due to the hasty relocation of the remaining population of Phoenix Islands to Wagina, the village sites and homes were not ready when the people arrived on the island. Most of them had to be housed in communal housing with rationed food to allow time for the clearing of the land and the allocation of land plots to each of the households. Many of the men were overwhelmed with the work required of them to clear the village sites especially coming from atoll islands where cutting down big trees and clearing thick vegetation was not required. However, following the clearing of the village sites, land plots were distributed to heads of households for their families and they were required to clear, develop, and re-establish themselves in their new home (Tabe 2016).

Relocation to Solomon Islands: The Gilbertese Experiences

The understanding of the Gilbertese people was that their relocation to Solomon Islands was based on the instructions of the GEIC, which gave them a new home in exchange for their Phoenix Islands lands which they returned to the GEIC Administration. However, the Gilbertese people faced challenges upon arrival in Solomon Islands particularly on Wagina Island, due to the geographical, environmental, and cultural differences they experienced. The people had very little time to prepare themselves before they were moved to Solomon Islands. Although there was an expectation from the colonial administrations that the people would re-establish themselves as soon as they were allocated land plots, this was not the case. Instead the people struggled to overcome the challenges they faced on the island as they tried to settle into their new home.

Some of the challenges encountered included the lack of consultation with the Gilbertese people and lack of proper planning and preparation before the relocation from Phoenix Islands. This was the primary basis of many of the problems faced by the Gilbertese people which included the lack of consent from the Solomon Islands indigenous people; environmental problems encountered on the island due to the topography and ecological differences in comparison to atoll environments; land related issues; and assimilation into the Solomon Islands society.

a) Consultation and Consent

According to the elderly men and women who were part of the relocation to Wagina in the early 1960s, there was no proper consultation with the people on Orona and Nikumaroro about their relocation to Solomon Islands. While the Administration officers held a meeting in the *maneaba*[1] with the elders of the islands, the rest of the people were not included in the decision-making process. Many of the elders were not pleased with the proposal of their relocation to Solomon Islands, but a letter of Order from the Resident Commissioner of the GEIC Administration was issued and read out to all the elders and the people. Despite the reluctance to comply with the given orders, the elders were forced to instruct and convince the people that they must all leave for Solomon Islands and that no one should remain behind. The people had to comply with the instructions of the elders and gathered their families in preparation for the relocation to Solomon Islands (Knudson 1964).

b) Planning and Preparation

The lack of planning for the second wave was evident in the immediate removal of the remaining population from Orona and Nikumaroro to Solomon Islands. The alleged successful relocation of the Manra population to Gizo Island gave the GEIC Administration the impression that the remaining population of the Phoenix Islands could also be relocated successfully to Solomon Islands. However, the people were not given adequate time to contemplate the relocation or envisage what their lives would be like in Solomon Islands. A group of men was sent to Wagina in 1962 prior to the relocation of the remaining population to assist with the clearing of the settlement sites, but without the experience of working a heavily vegetated and forested landscape, clearing of the land was laborious and they were not able to get the sites ready in time for the arrival of the remaining population (Tabe 2016).

The rush to remove the remaining population from the Phoenix Islands did not permit adequate planning for the large-scale transportation of the Gilbertese people. Instead of relocating groups of families in sequenced trips, a large cargo ship was hired and all the people lodged in the ship's hull until they arrived at Wagina. When they reached their destination, they were winched off the ship. The urgency of relocating the remaining population of Phoenix Islands also did not provide ample time for the Gilbertese to physically prepare either materially or psychologically by making sense of their relocation and what their lives would be in their new home in Solomon Islands.

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[1] Gilbertese traditional meeting house.

c) Environmental Problems

The relocation of a large group of people from atoll islands to a high island covered in dense vegetation and forest, and the differences in the environmental landscape and lifestyle, was not sincerely considered during the planning of the relocation, given the immediate need to undertake the scheme. The people were overwhelmed with the workload required to re-establish each household and the community on Wagina. The lack of knowledge about house construction in Solomon Islands meant many people built their houses using materials that they had brought from Phoenix Islands. However, given the difference in climatic conditions, they were advised to build sturdier houses that could withstand heavy rain and strong winds (Tabe 2019).

The colonial administration had expected the Gilbertese people to subsist from cultivating the land; however, this was unattainable by the Gilbertese people because agriculture had not been a source of their livelihood before and many struggled to learn the proper methods of planting root crops and maintaining them until harvest. The Gilbertese people were not accustomed to eating root crops or vegetables and preferred fish and coconuts, which were the main source of protein and staple in the atolls of their home. However, there were no coconut trees on Wagina, and coconuts had to be collected from offshore islands and rationed among the families (Knudson 1964).

The presence of mosquitoes on the island was a major threat to the health of the Gilbertese people and widespread malaria on the island caused an uncounted number of deaths, especially among children and the elderly. Many of them thought that they were being possessed by the spirits of the land, without any knowledge of the symptoms of malaria or knowing that they had contracted the disease. The expectation of the GEIC Administration that the Gilbertese would be able to cope with the environmental conditions of Wagina were not carefully thought through, especially given that the people came from atoll islands where malaria was not present. The Gilbertese people were also not informed about the history of the island – that it had been abandoned for many years because it was believed to be haunted by spirits, which had prevented the establishment of settlements by the Solomon Islands indigenous people before the arrival of the Gilbertese. The indigenous people feared that the same would also happen to the Gilbertese people and that they would eventually die and also abandon the island, but this did not happen (Tabe 2019).

d) Land Related Issues

The arrivals on Wagina were told that the island belonged to them, and that it would be divided up and allocated to each of the households. The Gilbertese preferred to establish their villages in proximity to each other along the coast but much of the land area on Wagina was covered in swamp and proved to be inadequate and unsuitable for a large-scale settlement. However, the people still preferred residing close to the ocean rather than further inland, so each family's head of household was allocated a residence plot and an area for agriculture purposes uphill towards the interior of the island (Tabe 2016).

To this day, the Gilbertese people have grounded their ownership claim over Wagina and the offshore islands based on the assurances of the Administration officers. The Gilbertese also believed that the island had been given to them in exchange for the lands which they reverted to the GEIC Administration prior to their departure for Solomon Islands. However, the allocation of Wagina to the Gilbertese people was based only on the verbal account given to them when they arrived in Solomon Islands which was not documented as proof of ownership. As a result, rights to the island were contested by the indigenous people of Choiseul who had traditional ownership of Wagina, while the Gilbertese continue to maintain their claims to the island. Despite these tensions, a consensus was agreed upon between the two groups acknowledging the Gilbertese as the occupants of Wagina with both groups of people having mutual access to resources and fishing areas around the island (ibid).

The lack of fixed rights over Wagina has also sparked recent tensions between the Gilbertese and a Mining Company that had been granted a prospecting license by the government to mine bauxite on the island. It became clear during this recent conflict that the government had retained rights over part of the island believed to have economic significance, which had been demarcated by the BSIP during the survey of the island for the Gilbertese people. However, the Gilbertese, with support from the Choiseul Provincial government and people, opposed this development initiative in order to protect the land and their future. The Gilbertese people feared that, without formal rights to the island, the bauxite mining could potentially displace them again and threaten their livelihood and the future of their children (ibid).

e) Integration

The integration of the Gilbertese people into the larger Solomon Islands society was further complicated by the fact that they were culturally different in terms of their language, physical appearance, traditions, and way of life, especially for the people of Wagina because of the distance of the island from neighboring communities. This created an enclave Gilbertese community on Wagina. Although this allowed the gradual re-establishment of villages and households, and adaptation to the new environment, it also prevented opportunities for assimilation and the integration of the Gilbertese with the Solomon Islands indigenous people.

The lack of understanding about the presence of the Gilbertese people in Solomon Islands created confusion among the Solomon Islands people and the neighboring communities of Wagina. Some of the communities had assumed that the Gilbertese were lost at sea and ended up coming ashore at Wagina to occupy their lands. The Solomon Islands indigenous people should have been informed of the purpose and scale of the Gilbertese relocation in order to get their consent and support for the relocation and assimilation of the Gilbertese; however, the Solomon Islands indigenous people did not understand that the influx of Gilbertese people to Solomon Islands would by no means threaten the future of the indigenous population but would rather contribute to the cultural diversity and the overall economy of the country. Similarly, the Gilbertese people should have been informed of the importance of integrating into the Solomon Islands society, and the potential challenges they would be expected to face in the Solomon Islands.

f) Community and Identity

The lack of integration of the Gilbertese people into the Solomon Islands society was due to the cultural differences. The Gilbertese people perceived the Solomon Islands cultures and way of life as significantly different from theirs; they desired maintenance of relationships within their own community and observance of their own cultures and traditions, language and way of life. Living in a close-knit community and observing social relationships among the Gilbertese people is significant for the continuation of their identity in Solomon Islands. While maintaining their identity as Gilbertese is important to them, they face the challenge of being marginalised as migrants and a minority community. Many of the people usually feel overlooked when it comes to employment and education opportunities, and they are always given the lesser positions. The Gilbertese realised the importance of assimilating into the Solomon Islands as a way to be integrated into the larger society. This meant assimilation through adapting to the way of life and the manner in which they do things in Solomon Islands. This realisation also led to intermarriages between the Gilbertese people and Solomon Islanders, not only as a way of integrating into the society but also as a means to access land and permanency in Solomon Islands (Tabe 2016).

g) Sense of Displacement

The Gilbertese felt displaced when they were forced to relocate to Solomon Islands, for reasons outlined above. Not being able to make sense of the place in relation to their culture and way of life was also a major problem for the people. Most felt that they were uprooted from their home islands and brought to Solomon Islands for reasons of which they were unaware, and many to this day still do not understand why they were relocated to Solomon Islands instead of within the Colony (Tabe 2016).

The abandonment of their loved ones' graves and the labour invested to develop their lands, and the immediate need to leave their home islands made their permanent relocation to Solomon Islands feel uncertain. The Gilbertese people also felt betrayed by the GEIC Administration for not ensuring that they were assisted until such time as they were able to support themselves as a community and people. Their assimilation could have been supported through stipulations about employment or income generating opportunities. However, many felt that they were left to struggle as migrants and a minority community and culture in the larger Solomon Islands society.

The absence of documented rights over Wagina Island and the lands they still occupy today also creates a sense of being displaced, along with the lack of clarity about the lands they gave up. The lack of good land on Wagina for residential and development purposes also raised concerns that the island was not suitable for the inhabitation of larger settlements and many felt that the GEIC Administration did not uphold its promise to the people about accessing more land that would help improve their livelihoods. As a result, most of the Gilbertese people to this day still feel a sense of displacement as a minority group of people in the larger Solomon Islands society (ibid).

In summary, the Gilbertese people have now lived in Solomon Islands for over 60 years and still encounter challenges relating to land ownership, and loss of culture and identity, but have gradually integrated into the larger Solomon Islands society through intermarriages, education and employment, and learning the cultures and the way of life of Solomon Islanders.

Implications for Future Climate Change Induced Migration and Displacement

Migration may be inevitable with the continuous rise in global carbon emissions and climate change impacts, especially for low-lying atolls and coastal communities in the Pacific Islands. Atoll countries may be at greater risk of being affected due to the lack of land to move further inland for safety and their low adaptive capacity to combat climate change impacts on food and water resources, which are the basis of livelihood (Gemenne 2010).

However, studies have argued that while migration may be considered as an effective adaptation strategy for countries, communities, and populations that may be threatened by climate change and related events, it is important that migration is voluntary and decisions are made by households or individuals (Mortreux and Barnett 2009; McAdam and Ferris 2015). Forced migration may lead to displacement if it involves removal of people from their home islands, place of residence, or place in which their identity and sense of belonging is embedded, especially in the Pacific Islands (Tabe 2019).

While many measures may have been developed to assist with the relocation of communities and populations who may likely be forced to move from their islands in the near future, it is important to ensure that these processes are conducted in the best way possible.

Although relocation as a result of climate change has not taken place between countries and beyond national boundaries in the Pacific, the experiences of the Gilbertese relocation to Solomon Islands can help inform some of the decisions for future climate change migration of communities to ensure that these movements are properly planned and conducted with the involvement and consent of those affected. Their experiences can also be used to assist in preventing and minimising potential difficulties associated with large-scale relocation of populations, and involuntary displacement.

a) Consultation and Consent

Consultation with communities and people vulnerable to climate change impacts and in need of relocation is vital, and this should take place on a regular basis over a period of years. Stakeholders who will be involved in facilitating the movement and those affected must be able to communicate and participate in the process. Obtaining the consent of relocated people and communities is vitally important when planning any relocation, and it is not the same as mere consultation and participation. McAdam (2014) argues that while the consultation and participation of people and communities is relevant when planning relocation, obtaining their consent is significantly important. Obtaining peoples' consent involves processes of informing, negotiating and liaising with the prospective settlers about the

reasons for and procedures of the relocation, and also be informed by the authorities about the best ways of relocation which would allow the re-establishment and continuity of the community.

Any form of relocation should occur only with the consent of the people and communities concerned. The lack of consent usually results in the trauma of displacement and display of social tensions between the receiving community and the relocated people (Connell 2012). Obtaining the consent of the recipient country and community is also important to assist in the facilitation of the relocation and assimilation of the relocated community.

b) Planning and Preparation

It is essential that any form of relocation is properly planned. The failure to plan properly leads to the impoverishment of the relocated communities and people (UNHCR 2014). Planning takes time and should take into account all potential problems and how they can be minimised or avoided. It should also include the advanced preparation of a realistic provision of funding that would assist with the relocation process and the settlement of the people in their new destinations. Such funds may be used also for land purchases, house constructions, development of infrastructure and the new community (Wrathall 2011). The psychological preparation of people especially in relation to relocation from their land and island homes, and in terms of their new home—the environmental setting, cultural disparities, opportunities and what their future would be like —, should be taken into account in the planning process in order to minimise and prevent possible trauma from displacement.

c) Environmental Problems

The environmental landscape of the proposed settlement sites must be taken into account during the planning and preparation processes. It is advisable that the proposed sites have similar or rather comparable environmental characteristics to the original homes of those relocated, to assist with the re-establishment of the community and the adjustment of people to the environmental setting. Health factors should also be considered especially when relocating a group of people from a geographically and environmentally different place to one with which they are not familiar, and which presents health issues to which they have not been exposed.

d) Land Related Issues

Land is a culturally important and highly valued asset for Pacific Islanders. It is a living and relational entity that characterises the identity of a group of people or an individual. Many Pacific Islands embody land as a relational part of the people, which therefore cannot be disconnected or left unoccupied for a long period of time (Campbell 2014; Campbell 2019). The acquisition of land for prospective communities is extremely important. This should grant land rights to the community or individuals. The acquired land should also be sufficient to accommodate development requirements and future population growth of the community. The land should provide a place and space for the re-establishment and continuity of the community.

e) Community and Identity

The planning of any relocation should ensure the continuity of the community in the new destination. The social structure, traditional governance systems, culture, traditions, religion, economy and livelihood, and way of life of those relocated must be taken into account to ensure that the social, economic, spiritual and cultural elements of the community are reconstructed in the new location. This will assist in maintaining the identity of the people and help the community thrive in their new home.

f) Integration

It is essential to consider different ways of integrating the relocated community into the new destination and receiving country. Thus, obtaining the consent of the receiving country and community is important in assisting with the acceptance and assimilation of the relocated community. The reasons for the need to support the assimilation and integration of the relocated community should be clearly outlined to the receiving population, including the long-term implications for their future. This should also help in preventing cultural tensions and potential conflicts between the communities. Pathways that support the assimilation and integration of the migrants into the receiving community should be considered in the planning processes and in ways that are feasible for the relocated people.

g) Sense of Displacement

People must be informed so they understand the reason for their relocation and the implications it will have on them as individuals, households, and as a community. They must be engaged in the discussion, decision-making and planning of the relocation. Any relocation should be conducted in the best possible way that allows the continuity of the community in the new location and prevents people from feeling a traumatic sense of displacement. Developing pathways that allow the communities to move without disrupting the social, cultural, economic, and spiritual characteristic of the community is important and should be considered when planning and preparing people for the relocation. Land to be allocated to relocated people must be legally acquired so that people have ownership rights to live and develop it, and ultimately make sense of it. This will minimise people's sense of being displaced. The land must be adequate to cater for agricultural and developmental purposes, and the future population growth of the community. Rights to fishing grounds should also be specified. Without proper planning and preparation, and consultation with the prospective community, relocation may be perceived as being forced upon the relocating and receiving communities.

Conclusion

It has been projected that migration will likely take place among communities and populations in vulnerable states if global carbon emissions remain persistently high, and climate change continues to impact island ecosystems and the capacity to sustain livelihoods. Many of these impacts have already materialised in the Pacific Islands. The degradation of island environments and essential livelihood resources could instigate the migration of people and planned relocation of communities as an adaptation approach to climate change. The relocation of communities in the Pacific as a result of climate change has so far occurred only in a few countries across the region. However, the development of procedural and systematic measures is significant for countries and communities that may be subject to relocation as a strategy for coping with climate related impacts. Thus, it is relevant for governments, stakeholders, and communities to be informed of fundamental measures that can be used when planning and carrying out a relocation. The Gilbertese relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands provides lessons that can be used to inform policies and decision-making concerning future climate change migrations in the Pacific.

It is critical that regular consultation with the prospective community is conducted, and people's consent obtained first, prior to the inception of any relocation. The consent of the receiving community is also paramount. There must be proper planning and adequate preparation of settlement sites and movements' procedures, and material and psychological preparation of a community, households, and individuals that are subject to relocation. Consideration of potential environmental issues with regards to the differences in landscape, sources of livelihoods and access to land and sea resources is vitally important. The cultural, spiritual, social and economic dynamics of the community should also be considered when evaluating potential relocation options and also how to best assist with integration into the receiving community. The acquisition of land and allotment of rights is significant for any relocation and should be adequate for the relocated community to avoid causing conflicts over access to resources.

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