

## Chapter 2

# Customary Land and Climate Change Induced Relocation—A Case Study of Vunidogoloa Village, Vanua Levu, Fiji

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### Introduction

The South Pacific being the hub of climate change associated environmental and social developments is irrefutably one of the world's most predisposed regions when it comes to the climate and weather induced disasters (Boege 2011). Particularly susceptible are the several of the low-lying coral islands (Nunn 2012). The livelihoods of majority of the Pacific Islanders which revolve around the Pacific Ocean is being acutely affected due to rising sea levels, increased coastal erosion, inundation, flooding and salinization of coastal aquifers (Ferris et al. 2011). For several of the communities in the South Pacific, adaptation has become an immediate necessity for survival. The pressing need to acclimatize to climate change adversities has escalated over the last couple of years and the issue of climate change taking its toll in many island nations has surfaced in recent discourses (Barnett and Campbell 2010).

On the onset, Fiji's marine and coastal ecosystems endow considerable physical, financial, societal, ecological and cultural benefits to approximately half of the country's estimated 902 964 population (Govan 2009). Yet, the repercussions of climate change on the coastal ecosystems are threatening the way of life of the coastal inhabitants and for the residents of Vunidogoloa in the province of Cakaudrove in Vanua Levu, relocation has emerged as a reality for more than three decades.

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In February 2014, the village was the first in Fiji to reposition; moving 2 km inland after years of inundation, storm surges, coastal abrasion and unwarranted flooding had made their village susceptible to the impacts of climate change (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2014). The traditional responses of disaster relief were no longer protecting the village community despite thousands of dollars spent on the construction of sea walls. Community relocation was the only cogent solution to safeguard the inhabitants of Vunidogoloa (Edwards 2012, p. 3). Conversely, this was an enormously emotional and harrowing headway for the villagers especially since they had to retreat from their customary land which has been part of their culture and identity for their entire life.

Relocation may be the last resort but also one of the best adaptation responses for several of the coastal Fijian villages currently facing similar tribulations as Vunidogoloa (Rubelli 2015). This also indicates that quite a few of these vulnerable villagers will be experiencing similar limitations as faced by the people of Vunidogoloa. Some of the drawbacks are the availability of land for settlement, governance and funding and perhaps the most intricate of all is the traditional and emotional place attachment. Disputes over land rights as well as loss of social and communal cohesion will highly likely create some of unconstructive effects of population relocations (Ferris et al. 2011). According to Wewerinkle (2013), the cultural identity of the people is likely to be impeded by the loss of customary land that is anticipated to occur as a result of climate change. A report by Nurse et al. (2014) explains that barriers to taking action have also been attributed to endogenous factors such as traditional values and awareness.

In many indigenous communities access to land depends on membership in a specific clan. For the iTaukei (indigenous Fijians) the ownership of land is vested in the *mataqali* (Fijian clan or landowning unit) (Fonmanu et al. 2003). Land offers not only livelihood but it is also the source of the traditional and spiritual wellbeing for many of the island communities. This is why despite the distressed situation on the islands there are still people who do not want to relocate (Boege 2011). Generation gap also influences the decision to relocate. In the Vunidogoloa resettlement case, it was particularly the elderly who did not want to move, while members of the younger generation were keen to move.

Developing countries also have a major limitation in capacity making adaptation difficult. Limitations include both human capacity and financial resources. The lack of funding available in various forms and difficulties in accessing the funds which are available represents a major barrier for adaptation, particularly for local community action (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2006). Climate-induced population displacement entails a governance and policy framework that can holistically respond to communities challenged with harsh impacts of climate change. Lack of proper awareness and institutional capacity also limits adaptation process (Amundsen et al. 2010). Relocation of Vunidogoloa village provides an opportunity to address the multiple societal issues to foster long term sustainability in the process of relocating communities.

The document on Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States (Displacement Solutions 2013) forms a preliminary guiding framework and premise

for policy and lawmakers, based on current international law. Myriad doctrines such as community engagement and consent, provision of affordable housing, land solutions, basic services and economic opportunities to those affected, have been experiential in Vunidogoloa.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how social, cultural, financial and environmental factors can form barriers to the process of climate change induced relocation. The paper also aims to provide recommendations for assimilation of socioeconomic and customary elements in the much anticipated institutional relocation strategies. In addressing this purpose, the study as exemplified by testimonies and series of in-depth semi structured interviews from some people of Vunidogoloa village and the government administrators provides a synopsis of some of the fundamental challenges encountered by the people of Vunidogoloa village from the inception till the completion of the entire resettlement. In particular, it accentuates the intricacies surrounding the socio-cultural aspects of the relocation process. The loss of Fijians customary land that is projected to occur as a result of climate change is plausible to impede with their cultural identity and associated climate induced repositioning. The challenges to relocating the community manifestly exhibits the exigency for new policies and procedures that specifically respond to climate induced relocation. This paper concludes by proposing some strategies that can be applied to accomplish an improved transition that suits closely knit Fijian communities as a whole and also cares for the various socio-cultural facets that embrace the community.

## Method

Many forecasts have been made to predict the number of climate change induced migration with the International Organization for Migration (2009) estimating the number of environmental migrants to range from 25 million to a billion by the year 2050. In the past, more than 15 million people have been estimated to be displaced due to natural disasters annually around the globe with these numbers projected to increase significantly due to the increasing risk brought upon by climate change (Yonetani 2014). The government of Fiji, in recognition of the eminent dangers and urgency of climate induced relocation, is currently engaged in a design and consultation process of establishing a relocation guideline to assist communities forced to migrate due to climate change impacts. The vulnerability assessments carried out by the Fijian government has identified as many as 830 communities that are at risk from climate change with 45 of these being recommended for relocation (Turagaiviu 2015).

This article examines Vunidogoloa village relocation with respect to the challenges faced by the villagers, essentially in terms of their attachment to the land, cultural and community cohesion and governance and funding. The challenges faced by the villagers and their coping mechanisms will be highlighted in this article with the expectation it will provide a repository of experiences that contains

lessons and guidelines for other villages in Fiji. Therefore this research is oriented towards unearthing and documenting the experiences of the villagers to form recommendations that can be used by villagers who will experience similar relocation due to sea-level-rise. This research forms a key element to tackle the adverse impacts of climate change by proactively learning about climate induced relocation and adaptive responses in an effort to increase the resilience of those affected.

The sentiments surrounding relocation is complex and as such a mixed methodology was employed to gain an insight into the experiences of the Vunidogoloa villagers during their relocation. Key informant interviews and village survey were conducted to gather primary data on the relocation from those who had first-hand knowledge about the entire relocation process. The key informant interviews and survey were conducted during the month of January, 2016. Literature review was also conducted using electronic databases, relevant websites and online reports related to the research topic. The review of existing research, related to this topic, was used to explore and define how this study fit in the work being carried out on climate induced displacements regionally and globally.

Key informant interviews using a structured questionnaire was conducted with government officials and other professions who were directly involved in the Vunidogoloa relocation process. The ten key informants interviewed provided an insight which served as a basis for future information gathering as the study progressed. The village survey was carried out using questionnaires via face-to-face interviews with Vunidogoloa villagers. The researchers interviewed 20 villagers. Non proportional quota sampling with categories of gender, age, social status and membership in community sub-groups (such as women's group) was used to identify the survey participants within the village. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, exploring the following themes: demographic characteristic; level of awareness on climate change and its related adaptation activities; coping mechanisms employed to overcome flooding and sea level rise at their previous village site; challenges faced during/after the relocation. Each interview usually lasted between 30 and 45 mins.

Communication in iTaukei language was carried out and interpreted by a translator who was engaged to assist the interviewers. The language barrier was a major limitation that was faced during this research. The villagers, especially the elderly had difficulty speaking in English and a translator was involved in this research project, to overcome this problem. Since translation is an interpretive act which depends on the interpretation and understanding by the translator, there is always a risk that meaning may get lost in the translation process. For instance, it was difficult at times to capture the strong sentiments expressed by the villagers especially in relation to the relocation day, by translating the iTaukei language they used to English. The villagers also had difficulty understanding some of the scientific terms used in the questionnaire as it was difficult to translate some scientific jargons in the iTaukei language. However, constant discussion and consultation between the translator and the researcher during each step of the interview process ensured that translation related problems were reduced whenever possible.

## Focus of Vunidogola Relocation

The Vunidogoloa village is located in Cakaudrove Province in Fiji's second largest, northern island of Vanua Levu. The original site of the village was located on a tract of land overlooking the Natawa Bay in the rural town of Savusavu with the houses sited only a few meters inland from the coast. A report by Nurse et al. (2014) predicts with certainty, acceleration in sea level rise for the smaller island countries in the Pacific and forecasts severe sea floods and erosion for low-lying coastal areas. This holds true for the previous site of the Vunidogoloa village, where heavy rain and high tides continuously coalesced causing inundation and salt water intrusion, rendering sustainable local community gardens extremely difficult to manage and causing widespread damage with floodwater incessantly threatening the safety and health of the villagers (McNamara and Des Combes 2015). Following abortive attempts to adapt by building seawalls which easily succumbed to raging waves, in 2014 the villagers moved 2 km inland from their original village to a new site which fell within the customary land boundaries of the community. The villagers named this new site, as *Kenani*—a Fijian word for the biblical word *Canaan* for “promised land”.

Undoubtedly, the issue of relocation is a sad predicament facing many communities around the world. More so, many villagers like those in Vunidogoloa in their “promised land” are increasingly and innocently being subjected to complex problems such as forced land abandonment and likely socio-environmental changes while having a very minute contribution to anthropogenic climate change and associated sea level rise. The paper by Mitchell et al. (2015) proposes a joint response by the government and community to ensure the success of such relocations. The government of Fiji largely organized the Vunidogoloa relocation as an integrated action across different government ministries.

## Dynamics of Land, Identity and Adaptation

Irrefutably, Fijians have always shared a special relationship with land, regarding it as a foundation of their identity, a place that defines them as the rightful owners of their land, closely associated to the natives' wealth, status and placement in their respective *mataqali*'s. Hence, land is revered nowhere more fervently than in Fiji. For the natives of Fiji, land is viewed as being more than a resource, with islanders possessing an instinctive and spiritual attachment to their land (Edwards 2014). An iTaukei community refers to their land as *vanua*, a term which unites the concepts of personhood and land ownership as an inseparable entity where the ownership of an area of *vanua* is translated to mean the land area one is identified with.

Majority of land in Fiji is owned in trust by natives with the remainder being state land and freehold (Boydell 2001). Currently, 87% of the land is owned by traditional Fijian *mataqali*'s and according to the laws of the country, this land is prohibited from being sold, exchanged or sub-let by the *mataqali*. The iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) oversees all the indigenous land and is also responsible for liaising with various *mataqali*'s. Depending on the size, a village can have several land-owning *mataqali*'s within its boundaries. As a result of such strong land laws, the Fijians remain a proud race, forming strong spiritual and family connections with the land (Boydell and Reddy 2000) which is an integral component of a Fijians' communal life style.

Boydell and Shah (2003) compacts this relationship fittingly by suggesting that a customary land belongs to a communal stewardship rather than an individual with the *mataqali* entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the land for the spirits of one's ancestors, use of one's life and protection and to ensure sustainability of the land for one's descendants. Due to these reasons, relocating becomes psychologically stressful for the entire village. They collectively view the process of relocation as agonizing, poignant and one that is robbing them of their communal identity. This shared identity of belonging to a *mataqali* and people of a respective *vanua* is a pride that they uphold as landowners and landowning units in their village. Hence, acquiring alternative land for relocating is a primary obstacle and this is even true for communities where such land is available as villagers habitually associate leaving their ancestral homes as potentially losing their identity and becoming a displaced, landless people (Edwards 2014).

Such is the overwhelming case of the Vunidogoloa village, which moved to a land owned by the same *mataqali*. Since the community moved to a land within its boundaries, the transition was smoother than what the villagers would have experienced if a suitable resettlement site was not available. Noteworthy is the fact that even though the relocation was within the vicinity of the existing place, the prospect of leaving their place of birth, the very land that defines them and solidifies their identity, has a pessimistic bearing on the villagers.

The unwillingness to relocate was echoed by a villager who blatantly responded, "We were trying to adopt by our own so that we don't have to leave our land and each time the sea came to our doorstep, we moved a little away from it until it became so worse that we knew we had to relocate" (Vunidogoloa village interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). Sovaraki (2014) quoted a village spokesman of Vunidogoloa who revealed that plans to relocate had begun in 1956 but due to the reluctance of the elders to leave their ancestral grounds/boundaries, they had to wait till 2006 to start the process of relocating. The hold of the land was so great that it bound the villagers for almost half a century, delaying their process of adaptation till the sea burst its bounds. Moving away from their land inevitably affects an individual's physiological and mental health, particularly in the context of disaster recovery and extreme weather events (Frumkin et al. 2008). Social networks and community connections are likely to be fractured as a result of climate induce displacement.

The prime contributing factor of the Vunidogoloa relocation stemmed from the constant salt-water inundation, which coupled with the consequent relocation to another land, cogenerated significant disruptions to the social and mental health of the villagers. The emotional distress and anxiety of leaving their ancestral land was expressed by a villager who vividly recalled, “Initially relocating was not an option to us at all but climate change came like an enemy that chased us away by taking our land, taking our food, taking everything” (Vunidogoloa village interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). The connection to the land and the environment, traditions and customs associated with it are very profound for a Fijian community, forming part of their identity. Relocation due to rising sea level is likely to cause communities to have some physiological impacts while they try to re-build their lives in a new location after their upheaval from the ancestral lands.

## **The Cultural-Spiritual Dimension of Resettlement**

The findings also recount the emotional ordeal which obscures the process of relocation. As recollected by one of the villagers in an interview, “Movement to new site was very painful and upsetting” (Vunidogoloa village interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). This is a precise indication of the level of attachment and sentimental value upheld by people who are in the process of relocation. As shared by the villagers, it was a difficult situation to leave the old site where they had lived all their lives, and to go through the harrowing decision to disentomb and shift the remains of their ancestors to a new burial site. In an interview with another village representative, it was noted, “We didn’t want to leave the cemetery where it was, to be washed away, so the church arranged for the burial site to be moved. Sadly the first burial at the new site was that of a still-born child which is interpreted as a bad omen from our ancestors” (Vunidogoloa village interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji).

The Fiji Police Force facilitated the relocation process and in a conversation with one of the police officers, it was recorded that, “the spiritual connection to the land was so strong that some families were adamant not to move despite being fully aware of the severity of climate change impacts” (Fiji Police Force interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). All the villagers interviewed during field study indicated that climate change and the need to relocate had always been a topic of discussion at community gatherings, church assemblies, and even at homes amongst family members and such deliberations had often ended with sundry responses from the people. It seemed that the youngsters were willing to relocate while the elders of the village could not come to terms with having to uproot an entire community and relocate—it meant detachment from their identities, parents and cultural ambience. In an interview with an administrator from Cakaudrove Provincial Council, it was recorded, “People were not ready and

discussions concerning relocation took several years” (Cakaudrove Provincial Council interviewee, personal communication, 25 November 2015, Savusavu, Fiji).

For the people of Vunidogloa, relocation would not have eventuated if it was not utterly necessary. The old site was linked to some exceptional and momentous nostalgic significance. The day of actual relocation was the most difficult moment in the lives of the people of Vunidogloa. A representative of the Vunidogloa Women’s group described the movement, “as if a funeral procession was underway” (Vunidogloa village interviewee, personal communication, 27 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). Although, the relocation for Vunidogloa village was planned and executed with the consent of the villagers the entire process from its inception to completion created a profound spiritual predicament. An increased feeling of alienation and stress associated with relocation may pose threat to the health, and the overall welfare of the people (Fresque-Baxter and Armitage 2012).

The Vunidogloa relocation is the first successful project of its kind in the South Pacific and for Fiji. However, in an interview with an administrator of Ministry of iTaukei Affairs it was revealed that climate change adaptation through relocation may not be so easy to achieve for many of the other vulnerable Fijian villages (Ministry of iTaukei Affairs interviewee, personal communication, 26 November 2015, Suva, Fiji). Piazza and Bolalevu (2014) elucidate that the most important factor is the willpower of the people especially since the cultural and spiritual significance that indigenous people attach to their lands and territories goes far beyond any monetary or productive value or even the value of their life.

In the case of another village, Vunisavisavi, also located in the Cakaudrove Province, the relocation is impeded by traditional obligation of the villagers to the *Tui Cakau* (High Chief of Cakaudrove Province in Fiji). Silaitoga (2016) quoted a village spokesman of Vunisavisavi village who revealed that the cultural obligation towards the *Tui Cakau* was an ancestral tradition and upheld great values. The villagers believe in customary punishment succeeding relocation which will affect their livelihood at the new location. The residents of Vunisavisavi treasure their land and associated cultural values so much that despite being strongly advised to relocate, the villagers are not willing to budge (Frontline Truths by the Pacific Climate Warriors 2015).

In an interview with a Vunidogloa villager representing the chiefly clan, it was highlighted that there is a need to develop the faith of the people. He mentioned “detachment from customary land is heartbreaking and it is important to move people together with their church and faith to make relocation a success” (Vunidogloa interviewee, personal communication, 29 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). People’s opinion of climate change and its impacts is greatly influenced by the church, which is a significant barrier to adaptive capacity (Kuruppu and Willie 2015). The Pacific Conference of Churches, village church leaders and the village chiefs play a pivotal role in ensuring that the traditional values are integral during and after the repositioning process. For indigenous societies, every aspect of climate change is mediated by culture. Community cohesion and place attachment are also key elements in sustaining indigenous societies actions against climate change (Adger et al. 2013).



## **Adaptation Limits—From a Governance and Funding Perspective**

The initial consultations between the village headman and the Fijian Government officials occurred in year 2006. It was not until year 2012 that some events started to transpire. During this period the villagers waited tensely for the government to reciprocate (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2014). In the 2012 national budget, the Fijian Government sanctioned an allocation of FJD \$1.0 million to the Ministry of Provincial Development and National Disaster Office for Disaster Risk Reduction measures (The Fijian Government 2012). The total for Vunidogoloa relocation project cost is estimated at around FJD \$980,000 of which FJD \$740,000 was government contribution while an approximate sum of \$240,000 was subsidized by the community in the form of timber used for construction (Cakaudrove Provincial Council interviewee, personal communication, 29 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). Timber was provided from their forest reserves. Relocation is undeniably costly in many ways and is often considered as a last resort for vulnerable communities (McNamara and Des Combes 2015). Community contribution is essential as it eases the financial burden endured by the government. However, several coastal Fijian communities have limited resources and may not be able to make significant contributions which will further exhaust government funding.

The legislative issues coupled with community consultations also complicates the relocation process and results in delays. This concern was noted in an interview with a Fijian government official, “It is not easy for government to relocate a community, as witnessed in the case of Vunidogoloa, the process takes a lot of time as a lot of government departments are engaged, and there is a lot of paper work” (Fiji Government interviewee, personal communication, 28 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). Similar concern was noted in another interview with an iTaukei provincial council official, “It takes a lot of time to consult with iTaukei administrators and ensure that indigenous protocols are observed” (Cakaudrove Provincial Council interviewee, personal communication, 26 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). There is an immediate need not only for Fiji but for other Small Island Developing States to reinforce synchronization between various departments responsible for climate change adaptation and disaster management (Kuruppu and Willie 2015).

Fiji’s current climate change policy does not specifically address relocation as an adaptation measure. There is no clear mandate to accommodate the relocation process and therefore, a national relocation guideline is being conscripted, however, it is still a work in progress (Pareti 2015). There is no clear indication as to much longer it would take to establish the guideline which must support a factual and participatory approach to planning and execution of relocation (McNamara and Des Combes 2015). A lack of legal and policy frameworks, procedural and human resources and financing for relocation impedes progress of the guideline (Wilsons 2014). Customary land plays a fundamental role in identity, way of life, communal unity and source of revenue for Pacific islanders, and forced detachment from the

land is a sensitive issue which further complicates relocation policies. Although relocation is considered to be adaptive response to climate change, many Pacific Islanders oppose the notion of resettlement and this has significant repercussions for national policy that supports relocation as an adaptive strategy (Campbell and Warrick 2014).

For the people of Vunidogoloa, the preferred new site was available about 2 km inland on higher ground and was owned by the same *mataqali* who owned the old site. This avoided any land issues which would have emerged if additional customary land were to be acquired from a different *mataqali* (Mitchell et al. 2015). In Fiji, majority land is owned by different *mataqali*'s and while some are prepared to accommodate new occupants at a small cost, some may still engage in extensive negotiations and sizeable remuneration (Wilson 2014). Cultural obligations also plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of climate risks at the local level in the Pacific and a thorough relocation policy would have to adequately address this issue. This concern was noted in an interview with one of the Vunidogoloa villager, "government must consider relocating people together with their church". The reluctance of Vunisavisavi villagers to move to new site is also an example of a cultural issue that can hinder adaptation. Several government ministries provided their input in the relocation process. Some of the authorities provided funding while some provided significant resources for the provision of essential services and new livelihoods. The multi-sectoral approach is vital in maintaining the socio-economic status of the relocated families and must be prioritised in the policy framework.

National governments do not have the capacity to offer displaced people infinite financial support (Edwards 2013, p. 2). Developing nations also experience complications in accessing global climate change fund. The prerequisites to acquiring such funds are sometimes difficult to achieve and as a result, developing nations fail to benefit from them. The process of accreditation is a lengthy one which is prompting some developing nations to opt for alternative route. The Fijian government managed to access some grant from the Green Climate Fund through a partnership with the Asian Development Bank, which has already attained accreditation (Takehiko 2015). The Fijian government's relocation policy must emphasize on the concept of 'relocation with dignity', since relocation has countless strings attached to it for the person, family or community who has or need to be relocated.

## Community Cohesion

Fijian settlement is extensively identified as a closely-knit community due to its communal way of living. This is ingrained in the minds of the people who in many Fijian villages around the country practice and even today are unable to view themselves as a separate entity from their *mataqali*. During the field survey almost all the interviewees stressed that the villagers deal with issues collectively and not

as individual units. One villager shared the reason for Vunidogoloa settlement taking so much time to finally relocate, “Our people of the *Vanua* view this place as *kece* (everyones) and as a community we deal with problems together” (Vunidogoloa interviewee, personal communication, 29 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). In recognition of the important role that community social protection plays in Fiji, efforts to relocate the people to improve targeting, inclusiveness and governance of community-level is a huge challenge here in Fiji. Due to the nature of family units, a strong bonded Pacific community with its cultural roots defining them as one people makes it rather complicated to talk communities for relocation (Ferris et al. 2011).

In addition, according to one villager interviewed during field study, he echoed that “Elders of Vunidogoloa were really against relocation that the younger generation decided not to move unless all the elders within certain age category finally died” (Vunidogoloa interviewee, personal communication, 29 January 2016, Savusavu, Fiji). The respect and solidarity displayed by the younger generation to not hurt the feelings of the elders is noteworthy. The support system in place in this village is a testimony of community unity and to what extent these common people can go for each other during times of tribulation. Together these ideologies of shared community and one people of the *vanua* can buffer these communities against vulnerabilities such as climate change and its impacts. For many years the villagers lived at the same place that continued to threaten their livelihoods, rip them off their prospect of progress, only to live in harmony at their place of birth, a place that defines them as a unique clan. This is one reason it took them so long to relocate even after fully understanding the threat their current place of residence posed on their lives and their families.

## Awareness and Monitoring

The Pacific Island countries (PICs) are projected to be one of the first to experience the impacts of climate change. This calls for a proactive approach by the PICs government to create awareness amongst its citizens to ensure that they are equipped to tackle the looming dangers. In the Pacific Islands, however, the reactive approach as compared to a more proactive approach, is more common as the awareness follows after the first hand experiences with the effects of climate change (Ferris et al. 2011). This is clearly demonstrated by the relocated villagers of Vunidogoloa who were initially caught unaware that the receding shore and the advance of the sea waves were signs of climate change. This led to a period of inactivity with little effort by the villagers to adopt using soft adaptation techniques before the seawall construction and the subsequent relocation were finally ensued after 40 years of first detection in the 1950s. Awareness and community outreach programs by civil organisations and the government is of paramount importance as such incentives spark behavioural changes in local people that enhance social resilience and enable them to better adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Capacity building has been highlighted as a priority in developing countries to ensure access to information, knowledge and participatory principles (Kumamoto and Mills 2012). In the case of Fiji Islands, this becomes even more imperative since the national government is usually the contact point and the recipient of international adaptation financing. Studying the case of the Vunidogoloa relocation has made it clear that awareness of the cause of their inundation issues was essential in advancing the relocation and in enhancing the adaptive capacity of the villagers. Government monitoring of communities that are particularly vulnerable and raising awareness at the initial detection of vulnerability is critical to ensure that community members actively search for options to adapt rather than be caught unaware until the full effects of climate change come to bear on them.

## Conclusion

The findings from the survey unveil some valuable qualitative insights into people's perception of climate change and also establish the fact that relationship between land and culture is inherent in the context of climate induced relocation. For the Vunidogoloa village community the call for support from government to consider relocating the village was genuine and necessary. The findings further disclose that in relocating vulnerable communities, it becomes fundamental to contemplate not only the financial and bureaucratic conditions surrounding their relocation, but also the numerous socio-cultural features that encompass the community. Fijian communities are diverse and entrenched in cultural sensitivities of the environment which as realized through this study can be a significant barrier to climate change adaptation. A number of awareness programs are needed to stimulate behavioural changes in people that can increase their capacity to better adapt to the impacts of climate change. The outcomes of this exploratory study also irrefutably support the notion that relocation must be conducted in a holistic manner that befits communities and conserves quality of life. Indubitably, it is essential to note that many such communities embrace distinctive sets of traditional knowledge and abilities that provide opportunities for adaptation both by staying put and by relocating. The Vunidogoloa relocation being the first effective relocation project in Fiji, and the South Pacific sets the premise for future climate change induced relocations by recognizing a list of potential complications that Fijian government must address in their national relocation policy. Fijian government has identified a number of communities that need to be relocated in the next decade and is also developing a national relocation guideline. This paper through its findings recognizes the exigent need for an official relocation policy document which encompasses all the legislative issues and planning framework and is meticulously prepared in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders including research and academic institutes. This is to ensure that climate change induced relocation is aligned to national strategic plan and government primacies. Relocation as a climate change adaptation strategy must be considered as a last resort particularly because it involves an increased cost that

encumbrances the national budget. Communities differ in the level of vulnerability and a systematic preliminary assessment must be carried out to determine the most appropriate adaptation strategies for each community to reduce their vulnerability. Procuring land for relocation may prove to be problematic since majority of the land in Fiji is customary and protected by the laws of the country. A legitimate approach and advance planning and consultation is thus obligatory for securing land for successful relocation. The bonding to land is also strongly embedded in the lifestyle of the Fijian community and a national relocation plan must be able to subtly tackle this issue. Culture, communal unity, and traditional obligations to ancestors play a colossal role in deliberations relating to relocation and in extreme cases even prevent communities to move. It is thus essential to incorporate sociocultural parameters in a relocation policy. In-depth consultations and community outreach programs with vulnerable villagers' necessitates for them to fathom that customary livelihoods may be enhanced through relocation than by staying back and guarding an existing settlement. Socio-economic quandary embraces even greater sway in decisions related to community resettlement and for this reason it is imperative to adopt a cross-sectoral and a participatory approach that is inclusive of environmental consultants, pertinent government and non-government officials, church leaders, community residents, social researchers, academics and local community specialists.

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