



Community consultations to develop
guidance on planned relocations.
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Fiji Learning from Communities in the Development of National Planned Relocation Guidelines in the Context of Climate Change

1. Context

The Fijian archipelago includes 100 inhabited islands located in the central South Pacific Ocean. Many of the families and communities living on low-lying atolls and in coastal areas face the possibility of being displaced from their homes in the future due to a combination of factors. These include climate-related hazards, human-induced environmental degradation, population pressure, new or expanded settlements in

hazard-prone areas, poverty, inequity and other sources of social vulnerability. At the same time, Fiji's different ethnic groups also have a measure of resilience in dealing with future hazards given the strong ties of kinship at the heart of their respective cultures and their resource sharing practices linked to their relationships with the land and ocean.

Over the past decade, several communities in Fiji undertook planned relocation processes without formal guidance and with little previous national experience. Relocation in

Fiji is only pursued as a measure of last resort when all alternative adaptation options have been exhausted as ineffective or unfeasible.¹ Abandoning traditional land has particularly profound cultural and spiritual implications for indigenous (*i Taukei*) communities, both for those who leave behind their land behind and for the communities that provide their land to another relocated community.² With over 80 per cent of land in Fiji communally owned by the *i Taukei* communities, cultural and spiritual ties to the land inevitably play a prominent role in relocation processes. Thus, each early relocation processes had to navigate anew amidst complex social, cultural, economic and environmental issues, including tensions over land, identifying suitable sites, the dislocation of community members, and insufficient financial resources.

The Government of Fiji's 2012 National Climate Change Policy did not address relocation related to climate change. However, with a growing number of communities requesting support for relocation due to climate change impacts, the Government of Fiji has recognised the need for guidance to help communities and other stakeholders navigate the complicated process.

2. Description of the practice

Following a multi-year process initiated by the Government in 2012, Fiji launched its national "Planned Relocation Guidelines: A framework to undertake climate change related relocation" (the "Planned Relocation Guidelines") at the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice (COP24) in December 2018.³ These guidelines, the first of their kind, outline principles and social safeguards to guide government assistance to Fijian communities who, as a measure of last resort, may need to relocate to new sites. The example below explores how the Government engaged affected communities in the development of the Planned Relocation Guidelines.

The Climate Change Division, responsible for all climate change policy issues in the country, initially led the process to develop the Planned Relocation Guidelines and began by consulting those communities that had already gone through a relocation process, including Tukuraki and Vunidogoloa, as well as communities considering relocation.⁴ Government representatives responsible for community engagement in the areas of disaster management, *i Taukei* affairs, meteorological services and climate change took part in the field visits.⁵ In particular, community members⁶ were asked to reflect on lessons learned from their previous relocation process and to identify the issues requiring further consideration and improvement to better support future processes.

Based on these consultations, an Officer from the Climate Change Division who had taken part in the community discussions drew up an initial draft of the guidelines drawing on the community consultations and contributions from a cross-sectoral government Relocation Task Force. The Task Force had been established to address technical issues raised by the communities, such as the impacts of saltwater intrusion.

Progress slowed and then stalled due to contentious issues related to land tenure, debates over how to structure the guidelines, and government restructuring that ultimately led to staff changes and the Climate Change Division being moved to the Ministry of Economy. However, in 2016, Fiji's forthcoming presidency of the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23) provided the political impetus to move forward given that COP23 was viewed as an important opportunity to throw light on relocation as a growing issue for Fiji. The Climate Change and International Cooperation Division (CCICD) re-initiated the process to develop the Planned Relocation Guidelines, working in conjunction with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)⁷ and with dedicated technical support from an advisor⁸ whose position was funded by an international donor (GIZ).



Official event for village relocated to safer ground due to the adverse effects of climate change.
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Building upon the previous draft and community consultations, the Advisor worked with CCICD to keep the Planned Relocation Guidelines focused on legal and policy elements, setting aside the technical operational and coordination issues to be dealt with in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that were to follow. The Advisor proposed using a “hybrid legal approach” for the guidelines, rooted in international environmental, human rights and migration law alongside national Fijian legislation and the traditional customary law (“*kastom*”) that governs local communities in Fiji. This approach ensured that the Planned Relocation Guidelines were grounded in traditional Fijian values and practices and retained the centrality of community engagement in the process.⁹

Over the course of 2017 and 2018, the Ministry of Economy convened a series of meetings at the division level to review the revised draft. Although some urban residents living in informal settlements in the capital Suva were consulted, the Planned Relocation Guidelines primarily focus on rural *i Taukei* communities living on communal land.¹⁰ Thus, three division-level consultation workshops sought to capture diverse experiences across the country by bringing together representatives from villages already relocated or those

in the process or considering relocation. Communities leaders, primarily traditional village headmen and church pastors representing clusters of villages, were nominated by Provincial Councils and Divisional Commissioners to participate.

Each division-level workshop was facilitated by a varying team of CCICD officials, the Advisor to the Fijian Government, senior GIZ representatives and Divisional Commissioners. The workshops introduced key concepts and provided background information about the Planned Relocation Guidelines. The agenda was structured around the different stages in a relocation process: making the decision to relocate, developing a sustainable plan for relocating to an acceptable site, and, finally, implementing the plan. All aspects were considered, with a focus on upholding the values and human rights of Fijian communities, households and individuals. Government officials primarily listened to community views.

Following the workshops, the Advisor evaluated the large amount of qualitative feedback to identify points of agreement and difference. For example, while all the communities strongly agreed on the need to protect land rights, expectations differed

with respect to the extent to which education and health services should be guaranteed in relocation areas as compared to what was available in their current locations.¹¹ To organise, prioritise and validate content, the Advisor developed a scoring system to identify those issues on which there was the strongest agreement across community representatives from different regions. Greater weight was given to views from communities with direct relocation experience. These points were further validated by consulting Commissioners and relevant findings from the Advisor's prior academic research.¹² Ultimately, a 20-page document was widely shared for feedback in advance of national-level consultations in 2018.

The Ministry of Economy hosted two national-level one-day workshops, facilitated by the Advisor, to review the resulting draft. The first event brought together traditional and religious community leaders and government officials representing different ministries or agencies, including the Prime Minister's Office, to encourage buy-in and agreement on their respective technical roles and responsibilities related to managing planned relocations.¹³ The second event included a diverse group of around 150 stakeholders, including community representatives, civil society organisations representing the perspectives of specific groups,¹⁴ universities, UN agencies and other Pacific regional and international organisations. Prior to each event, community leaders were provided with documents to enable them to prepare for the discussions.

During both events, the Advisor systematically reviewed each paragraph of the draft, identifying areas for discussion. In addition to providing comments during the event, all the participants were given 14 days in which to consult their organizations and submit further feedback; this resulted in 20-30 submissions. The final drafting process assessed all the remaining contributions, giving priority to those with direct knowledge of the Fijian

context. Recognising that not all community members or community groups had directly participated in the meetings, supplementary information was drawn from the findings of community-based research conducted by the Advisor in 2015-2017.¹⁵ The final version of the 2018 Planned Relocation Guidelines used terminology and definitions already used in Fijian policy and plans, while also referencing international guidance, including the Planned Relocation Toolbox.¹⁶

3. Results for internally displaced persons and others

The "Planned Relocation Guidelines: A framework to undertake climate change related relocation" emphasise relocation as a bottom-up, inclusive process that keeps all members of the affected communities at its centre. The quality and relevance of the Planned Relocation Guidelines owes much to community contributions. The methods used at village, divisional and national levels enable community representatives, government officials and other stakeholders to be engaged and keep participants informed. Key concepts and terminology were adopted and adapted to fit with and build on the context-specific culture and language at local to national levels. Differing views on difficult issues could be openly discussed and resolved in consultation workshops, such as the level of community consensus required before a decision to relocate could be taken,¹⁷ and the complexities of land ownership and transfer.¹⁸ Having participated in their development, communities at-risk should also have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in implementing the guidelines. In short, it is "a Fiji document based on the Fiji context"¹⁹ that is relevant, locally owned, and inclusive of potentially marginalised voices.

“The guidelines are helpful. When we started the relocation, it was trial and error, learning from experience... Now it’s all documented so it helps me if I’m a bit lost... It’s like a map to help us get to the end of the process. Lessons learned from other relocations are really relevant to future relocations.”

Project Manager, Narikoso village relocation

The Planned Relocation Guidelines are one element of a suite of mutually reinforcing government frameworks, tools and mechanisms that, together, are designed to protect and strengthen the resilience of at-risk or displaced communities and persons. A technical government Task Force, led by CCICD, is in the process of developing Standard Operating Procedures to support implementation of the guidelines. Notably, in 2019, the Government of Fiji adopted Displacement Guidelines in the context of climate change and disasters. These state that when IDPs cannot return home, the Relocation Guidelines procedures should be used to find a durable solution.²⁰ Specific provisions on planned relocation are also found in the latest versions of the National Climate Change Policy (2018-2030),²¹ the National Adaptation Plan (2018),²² and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2018-2030).²³

In addition, a new Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund has been created with seed funding from a percentage of the revenue from Fiji’s Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL)²⁴ that was expanded in scope to include displacement.²⁵ The Trust Fund has already begun to receive external funds to support research, assessments, studies, the identification of viable settlement locations and infrastructure.²⁶ The creation of this fund would not have been possible without the Planned Relocation Guidelines and complementary Displacement Guidelines. Finally, each of these elements has been included in a draft Climate Change Bill which, assuming it is passed by Parliament, will lend them legal strength and rigour.²⁷

4. IDP participation

The community-level consultations used “*talanoa*,” a traditional *i Taukei* concept and form of participatory and transparent dialogue that extends across Indo-Fijian culture and other Pacific communities living in the country.²⁸ In a *talanoa* process, which may be formal or informal, discussion is encouraged to flow without a rigid structure or timeframe with the intention of reaching a shared understanding of the matter at hand.²⁹ During community *talanoa*, the heads of families and elders, mainly men, usually sit together in a circle with women seated behind. While women can listen to the discussions, they only speak when given permission to do so. To ensure that women, youth and otherwise marginalised voices had an opportunity to share their perspectives, Fijian government consultations commonly adapt or complement traditional *talanoa* by organising “focus groups,” adapted to each community, to speak separately with these groups. As a Fijian official from the capital observed, “Rural and urban life are very different... You need to be mindful of the cultural context when going into the community. *You* have to adapt to *them*.”

Government representatives or facilitators largely play a listening role during these sessions. When officials from outside the local areas visit, the *Roko Tui*, or executive heads of the governmental provincial councils and provincial administrators, act as respected interlocutors with the communities. In particular, the *Roko Tui* facilitate the consultation process by ensuring that visitors are sufficiently briefed on each community’s specific background and cultural protocols.

5. Challenges

Several factors obstructed community participation. First, the remote and widely dispersed location of villages around the islands of Fiji, compounded by limited or absence telephone and electricity networks, impeded efforts to fully engage communities. Thus, face-to-face meetings required a significant investment in time and financial resources. To adapt to these logistical challenges when meetings were held in the capital, some communities nominated a branch of their kin who worked in Suva and understood their villages' issues to represent them during discussions.

Finally, while documents were shared ahead of consultation events to facilitate community discussion and feedback through their leaders, lower levels of literacy among some leaders forced them to rely on assistance from others to understand their content.

6. Lessons learned

Engaging communities through traditional cultural practices, governance structures and local leadership at community level is important, but may also reinforce the social exclusion of women and other marginalised individuals. Community leaders were specifically requested to include women, older persons, people with disabilities, and other marginalised or vulnerable groups, as well as the LGBTI community, in their community-level discussions. Not all discussions were adequately inclusive, however. Complementing the traditional *talanoa* dialogues with “focus group discussions” ensured separate spaces for the perspectives of women, children and youth to be openly expressed and heard. In the national consultation events, the diversity of participants helped to ensure that perspectives that may have had less prominence at other points in the process, notably those of women and LGBTI groups,

could be voiced and heard.³⁰ Thus, while some elements could have been more representative, in general, the process improved how groups in Fijian society converse with one another.³¹

Although not originally planned, the Ministry of Economy CCIDC subsequently recognized the importance of presenting the final version of the Planned Relocation Guidelines to the participating communities both from the point of view of accountability - so that they could see how their contributions had been incorporated - but to also help instill community ownership of the final product. At the time of writing, CCIDC was exploring opportunities to disseminate the Planned Relocation Guidelines at community level, including as part of adaptation awareness workshops for Commissioners and Provincial Council members who work directly with communities. Nonetheless, some communities have reportedly already accepted the Planned Relocation Guidelines, as evidenced by their use in a current relocation project in Narikoso.³²

7. Why this is a good example to share

Motivated by its leadership role in the global COP23 process, Fiji was one of the first States to develop a national framework to guide planned relocations. The Government used a community-centred approach, employing culturally appropriate methods to engage key stakeholders, focusing in particular on the experiences and lessons learned from Fijian communities that had already been relocated. The Planned Relocation Guidelines are now one of a multitude of mutually reinforcing policies and strategies, complemented by a Trust Fund, that make up the Government of Fiji's multi-faceted response to internal displacement and relocation in the context of disasters and climate change.

Endnotes

- 1 Republic of Fiji, 'Planned Relocation Guidelines: A Framework to Undertake Climate Change Related Relocation' (Ministry of Economy 2018) 1.
- 2 John Campbell, Michael Goldsmith and Kanyathu Koshy, 'Community Relocation as an Option for Adaptation to the Effects of Climate Change and Climate Variability in Pacific Island Countries' (Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research 2005) 21 and 26 <https://www.sprep.org/att/irc/ecopies/pacific_region/643.pdf>.
- 3 Republic of Fiji (n 1).
- 4 Interviews with government officials from the Fiji Permanent Mission in Geneva, the Ministry of Economy's Climate Change and International Cooperation Division (CCICD) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).
- 5 At that time, visits included Divisional Commissioners (under the Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management) and representatives of government ministries or sections responsible for *i Taukei* (indigenous) Affairs, disaster management and meteorological services and climate change. The Climate Change and International Cooperation Division (CCICD) located within the Ministry of Economy is the lead agency responsible for all climate change matters, working in coordination with other ministries and agencies through cross-government task forces and committee.
- 6 In the rural context, village communities may be seen as a group of people connected by kinship and linked by birthright and/or kinship to local land and sea resources. Campbell, Goldsmith and Koshy (n 2).
- 7 The NDMO leads the development of disaster risk reduction and management policies and coordinates the Government's disaster preparedness, response and recovery operations.
- 8 Human Mobility Advisor to the Fijian Government.
- 9 Cosmin Corendea, 'Hybrid Legal Approaches Towards Climate Change: Concepts, Mechanisms and Implementation' (2016) 21 Comparative Law 14.
- 10 The Planned Relocation Guidelines apply to affected "communities", generically understood to include "*villages, formal settlements, informal (squatter) settlements, and sub-communities within larger urban areas*". Republic of Fiji (n 1) 3.
- 11 Interview with the Human Mobility Advisor.
- 12 Cosmin Corendea, 'Migration and Human Rights in the Wake of Climate Change: A Policy Perspective Over the Pacific' (United Nations University 2017) Policy Report <https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6305/PolicyReport_No2_171113_online_revised_meta.pdf>.
- 13 Participating officials included representatives from the CCICD, the National Disaster Management Office, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, and the Prime Minister's Office.
- 14 Specific groups represented women, children, faith-based organizations, and the LGBTI community.
- 15 Corendea (n 12).
- 16 UNHCR, Georgetown and IOM, 'A Toolbox: Planning Relocations to Protect People from Disasters and Environmental Change' (UNHCR, Georgetown, IOM 2016) <<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/toolbox-planning-relocations-protect-people-disasters-and-environmental-change>> accessed 24 June 2020.
- 17 While many communities argued during the consultations that full consensus was needed, the lower threshold of 90 per cent was decided by the government, recognising the reality that while some parts of the population may continue to refuse to leave their current homes in spite of risks to their lives, the entire population should not be put at risk.
- 18 Relocations may involve the transfer of communal land rights at the place of origin from the community to the government, and conferral of rights to equivalent land at the resettlement site, considering each specific village context.
- 19 Quote from interview with a government official.
- 20 Ministry of Economy, 'Displacement Guidelines: In the Context of Climate Change and Disasters' (Republic of Fiji 2019) <<https://www.pacificclimatechange.net/sites/default/files/documents/Displacement%20Guidelines.%20In%20the%20context%20of%20climate%20change%20and%20disasters..pdf>> accessed 4 May 2020.

