**Planned Relocation of communities with a focus on Fiji**

Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs

**Authors:** Merewalesi Yee, Annah Piggott-McKellar, Celia McMichael

# Introduction

This contribution draws on our collective experiences as researchers working with iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) communities in Fiji on planned relocation, including those who have relocated and those that are relocating. Three villages serve as the primary case studies in this submission: Vunidologoa and Narikoso (both already relocated) and Cogea (relocation ongoing). Below is a brief description of each.

**Vunidogoloa**: In 2014, the entire village (~140 people) of Vunidogoloa relocated roughly 2km inland in response to tidal flooding, saltwater intrusion, and coastal erosion. The relocation occurred with the support of government ministries, donor agencies, and community resources. The authors of this submission have undertaken fieldwork in Vunidogoloa from 2014 – 2023 with seven visits over this time[[1]](#footnote-1),[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4),[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Narikoso**: In 2020, Narikoso village undertook a planned partial relocation of seven households in response to coastal flooding, inundation particularly during king tides, shoreline erosion, saltwater intrusion, and storm surges with support from Fiji government and other external organisations. Authors of this submission have undertaken fieldwork in Narikoso in 2016, and 2022[[6]](#footnote-6),4,5.

**Cogea**: Cogea village was severely devastated by TC Yasa in 2020. Due to the devastation caused by TC Yasa, a government-led planned relocation program was initiated in Cogea from December 2020 to December 2022, after which Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) backed by financial support from Brot Fur Die (Bread for the world), a German NGO took over the relocation. The relocation is currently ongoing, with houses beginning to be built in the new site. Fieldwork has been undertaken in Cogea in 2021 and 2023 and contact with members of the community and staff involved is ongoing[[7]](#footnote-7).

# Human rights impacts of planned relocation

**Residents in Vunidogoloa** have experienced diverse livelihood outcomes and challenges, as well as improvements, since the relocation in 2014, which have evolved and changed over time. These include: changes in access to livelihoods and food security, changes in access to markets and services, changes in infrastructure including housing, and impacts on health.

Residents have experienced changes in their access to fishing and marine resources after the village moved away from the coastline. These were especially felt amongst populations who were unable to walk the roughly 2km down to the old site, including older populations. Men, however, are closer to their farmland.

The new site is closer to the main road and residents are better able to access the town and services including schools, markets, and health services including hospitals for childbirth and medical treatment. However, moving closer to the road has created challenges as outsiders visit the village more frequently, and there is now greater access to alcohol and store-bought and packaged foods which have created health issues.

Homes built in the new site have improved facilities – particularly bathroom facilities including a toilet and bathroom, and a solar panel. However, some people feel houses are too small, with limited privacy (open-plan room), and no kitchens were provided (due to lack of consultation with women in the relocation process), and households have constructed their own kitchen from salvaged materials. Incomplete community infrastructure is another challenge in the new site, with lack of footpaths and adequate drainage systems.

Health benefits have been realised. These include reduced exposure to flooding and saltwater intrusion and associated adverse health impacts (e.g. infectious water-borne diseases), reduced anxiety about climate/environmental risks, and improved access to health services. The new site has improved access to drinking water and sanitation. However, there are negative health outcomes associated with altered diet, with fewer marine resources being consumed, the increase in packaged food consumption as well as increased access to alcohol (as mentioned above owing to closer access to roads).

**In Narikoso village,** the partial planned relocation altered forms of capital that underpin sustainable livelihoods, leading to both benefits and problems related to inadequate consultation and participation, inadequate infrastructure and services, cultural neglect or cultural omission, absence of pyscho-social support, and community fragmentation and continuity.

The relocation of Narikoso village in 2020 has been characterised by insufficient consultation and participation. Community members felt excluded from decision-making processes. As a result, important factors were reportedly neglected such as the need for a village *rara* (communal green space), suitable house designs (no kitchen), and a safe path connecting the communities (original site and relocated site) given that majority of services are located in the original site including the dispensary, community hall, church, co-operative store, and kindergarten. Furthermore, the pathway connecting the two sites (relocated site and the original site) is not safe especially for the elderly, disable and mothers with infants.

There has been failure to prioritise integration of cultural elements and spaces essential for maintaining community identity and heritage at the new relocated site. This occurred in Narikoso relocated site, where the implementing agencies did not integrate the village rara. The rara holds cultural, social, and practical functions, serving as a central hub for cultural rituals, social bonding, and decision-making. It also facilitates economic activities, education, and knowledge transfer, contributing to community sustainability. By hosting celebrations, festivals, and leisure activities, communal spaces promote unity, recreation, and a sense of place and identity within the village, showcasing their significance in fostering resilience and cohesion in Fijian village life.

Psychosocial support provides crucial emotional and mental assistance to individuals and communities facing upheaval or trauma. Residents reported that improved access to psychosocial support during relocation processes might have better safeguarded the mental health and overall welfare of community members.

Residents of Narikoso were initially not in favour of the partial relocation (of seven most vulnerable households) funded by EU, funnelled through GIZ. Partial relocation disrupts the communal dynamic in Fijian culture by creating divisions within the community and altering traditional social structures and interactions.

Whilst the seven families moved out of the original village site which they have lived on for generations, living in the new site has not taken away their role and responsibility as Matanivanua (chief’s spokesman) in the village structure. The men in the relocated site continue to play their traditional role to the Marama and Turaga ni Raviravi (district Chief).

# Legal, policy and institutional frameworks

Table 1 below details the legal, policy and institutional context in Fiji.

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| Table 1. Fiji's policy, framework and documents response towards climate-related threats (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023; Sevudredre, 2023; Government of Fiji, 2019). | | |
| Policy, Legal framework, and document | **Year of Launch** | **Purpose** |
| Planned Relocation Guidelines | 2018 | Erves as an overarching framework to guide and advance national processes and procedures required to manage national relocation needs in Fiji. |
| Displacement Guidelines in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters | 2019 | Provides guidance for the Fijian Government and all other stakeholders present in Fiji to address and reduce vulnerabilities associated with displacement |
| Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act | 2019 | To establish a trust fund for the planned relocation of communities in Fiji |
| Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund | 2021 | Worlds first dedicated national trust find to support relocation of communities in Fiji |
| Climate Change Act | 2021 | Creates legal mandate for state for the Minister responsible for Climate Change ‘to allow for the orderly, respectful, and dignified relocation of at-risk communities’ |
| Fijian Taskforce on Relocation and Displacement (FTRD) | 2021 | Provide recommendations to the Minister responsible for Climate Change on activities relating to planned relocation of communities |
| Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in Fiji | 2023 | Lays out processes and steps to be undertaken for the planned relocation of climate vulnerability communities in Fiji |
| Culture-Gender-Relocation Nexus in iTaukei Village | 2023 | Support a culture and gender sensitive approach when implementing the Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in Fiji |
| Comprehensive Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Methodology | Ongoing | FTRD is creating a tool as part of the Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation in Fiji. |
| Draft Regional Pacific Mobility Framework | Ongoing | Provide a coordinated approach to human mobility in the face of climate change, considering the unique contexts of Pacific Island Countries |

The Standard Operating Procedures[[8]](#footnote-8) detail that 90% of the entire village as well as 90% of specific populations (men, women, youth (18-35), elderly (65+), those with a disability, and LGBTQI persons must provide consensus for the initial relocation request. Following on from this, if a decision to initiate relocation is made, then a consensus of 60% across the entire village, as well as population categories listed above, is required for the village to make a decision related to: reconfirming the relocation decision, identifying the new site including house plans and layout, community obligations and contributions to the relocation, and relocation plan activities (see page 4-5 of Standard Operating Procedures). If this is not granted, there will be options for other adaptation measures to be taken. The Standard Operating Procedures state that the community can opt for partial relocation if required, therefore providing options for people to remain if they choose not to relocate.

In relation to assistance within frameworks for anticipated or experienced losses, current work is being undertaken within the Fijian Taskforce on Relocation and Displacement (FTRD)to scope Non-Economic Loss and Damage and an approach to quantify and mitigate these losses in relocation to planned relocation, especially in relocation to cultural and traditional practices, sacred and historically significant values, and sites losses.

States with climate vulnerable populations everywhere, not only in the Pacific, now need to take heed and start developing their own context-specific strategies. Fortunately, though, these policymakers are spared from having to start from scratch.

# Engagement of communities

**In Vunidogoloa**, residents highlight that their relocation was community initiated as a way to adapt to climate change impacts. As one man explained in 2015, ‘we wanted to relocate our village because of the rising sea levels and also flooding and erosion and the effects of climate change’. Importantly, approached the Provincial Government and formally requested government assistance as early as 2006.This decision-making aligned with traditional village governance with the elected and traditional village local driving discussions with Provincial and National Government. Some women explained that men led the relocation decision-making and the community, after extensive discussion and deliberation, agreed. The entire community relocated to the new site in 2014.

**Narikoso** village was a partial relocation where only seven households in the red zone were relocated (i.e. those closest to the foreshore and exposed to coastal flooding) and the remaining households remained at the original site. The SPC cost benefit analysis in 2016 found a partial relocation was the most feasible. The land that was excavated for the new site was only enough for 7 families. Currently, unexcavated land has been demarcated for the remaining households when Phase 2.0 of the relocation occurs (timeframe unknown) however, excavation a challenge as isolated and limited resources.

The ongoing relocation of **Cogea village** has provided some examples of how collaboration with community members can lead to improved outcomes in relocation design and planning phases. The implementing agency – FCOSS - has in-depth understanding and knowledge of the local community context and the Indigenous way of life including power dynamics, needs, and cultural sensitivities. They collected baseline information, and were attentive to local oral histories, traditional economy and social structures. FCOSS included the community in relocation decision-making. Through effective collaboration with the community, improved outcomes have already been seen including for example women’s input into the house design.

# Consideration of specific needs of relocated and affected populations

In **Vunidogoloa,** decision-making around allocation of resources was organized around principles of equity. The village Chief and the Turaga ni Korodecided that every resident of Vunidogoloa village – whether or not they were registered as a member of Nadawa clan – was entitled to a home and to benefit from the use of funds for community development initiatives raised through logging clan land. Nonetheless, decision-making could have better accounted for diverse community perspectives, particularly those of women.

In **Narikoso**, the relocation decision-making process didn’t take into account people with a disability, the pathway not conducive or safe for people (women with young children, elderly, disabled). Important because this pathway provided access to essential services.

In **Cogea**, specific consideration of diverse community needs was given through the design of houses to have privacy and safety for women, after they expressed this as important. Further, the house designs were culturally appropriate including rural kitchens and chimneys as the women use firewood.

# Recommendations

1. Relocation, done well and effectively, takes time. Local actors who understand social and cultural norms should be engaged early and often with the community on the topic of planned relocation long before the actual physical relocation takes place to allow community members time to make decisions, received support needed (such as psycho-social support), and ensure when relocation does occur respect for local social norms and power dynamics is embedded in the relocation process. Further this baseline understanding, and engagement will allow important aspects such as totems, cultural values and traditions to be embedded in relocation design. This baseline information will be used to guide the relocation process.
2. Funding is a huge challenge as relocation can be a very expensive process, however it must be sufficient to avoid the shortfalls that have occurred in existing relocation processes.
3. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) or guidelines should be developed for implementers, focusing on a culturally centered and sensitive approach to planned relocation. Initially, this should be crafted in local languages, to ensure the accurate capture of all nuances, ethics, and protocols regarding communication with various groups, including appropriate tone and language usage. Subsequently, they can be translated into English for broader dissemination, but the primary application should remain in the local languages. This SOP will provide guidance to officers involved in planned relocation processes, encompassing community consultations, decision-making procedures, field assessments, conflict resolution, training initiatives, and capacity-building efforts related to livelihoods, all while maintaining cultural sensitivity and relevance.
4. The current SOPs in Fiji identify the need to monitor and assess planned relocation, but currently no framework exists for this which is a current gap and must be addressed drawing on a people-centred approach which details insights from community members related to their experiences of relocation and how the process may be enhanced. This should include diverse perspectives including those who remained, relocated and host communities.

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6. Yee, M., McMichael, C., McNamara, K., and Piggott-McKellar (in press). Partial planned relocation and livelihoods: Learnings from Narikoso, Fiji. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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