

Voices From the Frontline

Exploring Untold Stories of Resilience and Loss Among Women, Youth, Indigenous Peoples, and People With Disabilities in the Climate Crisis



ABSTRACT *Voices from The Frontline* illuminates the resilience of Pacific Island communities against climate adversity. Through spirited local collaborations, these villages ingeniously adapt and uphold cultural legacies and pioneer sustainable relocations, setting a global precedent for inclusive, grassroots-driven climate action.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Addressed:

- ✓ SDG 5: Gender Equality
- ✓ SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- ✓ SDG 13: Climate Action

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the climate crisis, *Voices From the Frontline* calls for inclusivity, resilience, and cultural preservation. This compelling collection of case studies explores the untold stories of resilience, loss, and adaptation of women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities most affected by environmental changes. This report covers three case studies from Cogeia Village, Nabavatu Village, and Malaupaina Island, offering invaluable insights into the challenges faced by communities on the frontline of climate change.

This narrative centers on the Pacific Islands' fight against the climate crisis, where rising sea levels, natural disasters, and cultural heritage loss are daily occurrences. The grassroots strategies used by Cogeia Village, Nabavatu Village, and Malaupaina Island to mitigate non-economic losses demonstrate the importance of community-led initiatives developed by impacted groups in creating resilient solutions.



Cogeia Village's community-led migration with local and international support describes a revolutionary climate adaption method preserving cultural identity and social cohesiveness. Nabavatu Village's resilience during relocation highlights the delicate balance between tradition and modernization and the significant non-economic displacement losses. Community solidarity and traditional wisdom can overcome environmental issues on Malaupaina Island.

Voices From the Frontline accounts for these communities' difficulties and offers hope and advice to other locales. Including underrepresented perspectives enhances community knowledge in climate change policy and initiatives. This narrative reminds us to listen, learn, and act since resilience is built on people who take the most significant risks to find sustainable solutions.

disasters, and non-economic loss and damage (NELD), threaten the Pacific Islands, where this project is embedded.

This endeavor examines and documents the resilience and loss of climate-affected women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and disability groups. The case studies demonstrate grassroots initiatives used by these communities to combat non-economic losses from environmental deterioration, territory loss, and cultural heritage erosion.

Each case study shows the power of community-led efforts and the relevance of including excluded groups in sustainable solutions. In response to catastrophic flooding, Cogeia Village launched a community-driven relocation strategy. This relocation approach, supported by local and international partners like Bread for the World, has shown how communities may adapt to climatic challenges while retaining their culture and society.

In response to land instability and floods, Nabavatu Village established a community-led task force to preserve cultural integrity and unity through a carefully planned move. This inclusive design used traditional knowledge and respected cultural norms.

Traditional and creative methods like borehole pumps and communal water tanks help Malaupaina Island tackle climate change. Although political and environmental issues persist, flexible agricultural practices assure fresh water and food security.

Case study initiatives document traditional knowledge, improve livelihoods through sustainable practices, and empower women and youth through education and capacity building to scale up community resilience models. These activities help the communities survive and inspire other vulnerable populations worldwide.

These initiatives' successes, challenges, and lessons learned demonstrate the necessity for continued community assistance, consideration of non-economic loss in climate legislation, and active community engagement to navigate climate change sustainably.

OVERVIEW

Organizations

Ecological Solutions Foundation, Solomon Islands
Climate Tok
Pacific Islands Climate Action Network

Key Findings

- ✓ **Community-Led Adaptation:** Each case underlines the critical role of community-driven strategies in climate resilience. Cogeia Village's self-led relocation is pioneering, securing safety while retaining cultural cohesion.
- ✓ **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Nabavatu Village's inclusive task force underscores the need to blend tradition with modernity, safeguarding against displacement while honoring ancestral connections.
- ✓ **Innovative Self-Reliance:** Malaupaina Island's use of traditional knowledge and modern technology like borehole pumps and water tanks demonstrates innovative adaptation to secure water and food.
- ✓ **Empowerment Through Capacity Building:** The initiatives aim to document traditional knowledge, emphasizing the empowerment of marginalized groups via education and economic diversification.
- ✓ **Policy Integration for Sustainable Futures:** Lessons learned call for integrating non-economic loss considerations into broader climate policies, advocating for robust community engagement and international partnerships for holistic climate action.

The enduring spirit of these island communities is immortalized through their unwavering commitment to their heritage, even as they confront the stark realities of climate change. Their experiences serve not only as survival mechanisms but as a repository of wisdom for global populations facing similar threats.

Narrative Description: *Voices From The Frontline* is a testament to the resilience of Pacific Island communities at the precipice of climate-induced calamity. Rising seas, erratic weather, and cultural erosion pose existential threats, yet, within this turmoil, the case studies of Cogeia Village, Nabavatu Village, and Malaupaina Island emerge as beacons of hope and ingenuity.



This initiative chronicles the poignant narratives of resilience and loss

among the most climate-vulnerable: women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and individuals with disabilities. It is an exploration of how grassroots strategies can effectively mitigate the non-economic losses born from environmental and cultural degradation.

Additional Information

Malaupaina. (2024, March 21). [Wikipedia](#).

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News on village destroyed by cyclone. [Radio New Zealand](#)

News on displacement in Nabavatu Village. [Fiji One News](#)

Photo sources: Photos from Climate Tok, Ecological Solutions Foundation, Nabavatu Village and Malaupaina Island residents.

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REGIONAL CONTEXT AND APPROACH



The Pacific Islands are uniquely vulnerable to climate change, facing significant risks such as rising sea levels, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and the consequential non-economic losses and damages (NELD).

These challenges necessitate inclusive, localized strategies that consider the diverse needs and contributions of all community members, particularly those most affected by climate change, such as women, youth, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and persons with disabilities.

Addressing non-economic loss and damage (NELD) in the Pacific Islands requires a nuanced and inclusive approach to recognizing the complexities and variations inherent in climate-related challenges. The engagement of marginalized and frontline communities—

including women, youth, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and persons with disabilities—is crucial in formulating effective, context-specific strategies for resilience and adaptation to climate change.

These groups are often the most affected by climate change despite contributing the least to its causes, and their involvement is essential for equitable and sustainable solutions.

Exploring case studies from Cogeia Village, Nabavatu Village, and Ma-laupaina Village, this presentation showcases grassroots strategies to mitigate non-economic losses stemming from environmental degradation, territory loss, and the erosion of cultural heritage.

These case studies illustrate the power of community-led initiatives in developing countries, emphasizing the engagement of marginalized groups, including women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and individuals with disabilities.



CASE STUDY: “Navigating Waters of Change: The Cogeia Village Relocation”



Credit: Radio New Zealand/Vinay Ranchhod

Location and Context: Cogeia Village, an inland village at the confluence of the Wainunu and Nalomate/Waininaro Rivers in Bua Province, Fiji, is a prime example of a community adapting to climate change. This case study examines non-economic climate-related losses for a population affected by environmental degradation. Tropical Cyclones Yasa and Ana have caused devastating floods in the village, forcing residents to seek refuge in evacuation centers. The village had 32 homes before a 2020 flood, but almost half were lost. Farmers in the village depend on the rich biodiversity of the surrounding rivers and lands for food and income. As a Methodist village, its governance and social fabric are close, demonstrating a strong community spirit.

Climatic Impacts and Vulnerabilities: Heavy rains from Tropical Cyclone Yasa in December 2020, followed by Cyclone Ana, caused unprecedented flooding, leading to the destruction of homes and a significant upheaval in the villagers’ lives. This catastrophe underscored the village’s vulnerability to environmental changes, exacerbating non-economic losses, including the loss of territory, cultural heritage, and ecosystem services. The village’s geography makes it particularly susceptible to flooding, a vulnerability exacerbated by the increasing severity and frequency of tropical cyclones and heavy rainfall. These events have led not only to physical and economic losses but have also threatened the village’s cultural heritage and traditional ways of life. The repeated flooding events have significantly impacted food security, housing stability, and the overall resilience of the community.



The scene of Cogeia’s flash flood.

The Solution and Implementation: Village Relocation

Designed and Driven by the Community:

The decision to relocate was a community-led response, showcasing a proactive stance against recurring floods. This initiative, supported by local and international partners,

including a significant contribution from Bread for the World (a German NGO), reflects a groundbreaking approach to climate adaptation. The decision to relocate Cogeia Village was community-led, facilitated by local governance structures and external partnerships. Funding and support for the relocation were secured through collaboration with NGOs and government agencies, marking Cogeia as a pioneering example of community-led adaptation to climate change. The process emphasized inclusivity and traditional practices, ensuring that the voices of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups were integral to decision-making. This holistic approach to relocation not only addresses the immediate threats posed by climate change but also seeks to preserve the community’s cultural identity and social cohesion. [Read more about relocation efforts.](#)

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A destroyed house in the Fiji village of Cogeia.

Engagement and Inclusivity of Marginalized Groups: The process was inclusive, involving women, youth, and Indigenous knowledge holders. This collaboration ensured that the relocation plan was not only about moving physical locations but preserving the community’s cultural and social integrity. The engagement of women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities was foundational to the relocation process. Women play a significant role in agricultural activities

and income generation, such as mat weaving. They have formal agreements with NGOs to support their craftsmanship, contributing to the village’s economy. The Cogeia Youth Club is part of the community’s development committee, participating in decision-making and development activities, particularly in agriculture. Efforts are made to consider the needs of older persons, people with disabilities, and potentially other historically disenfranchised groups within the village planning and infrastructure.

Implementation and Scale: Set to be executed over 18 months, the relocation to an 80-acre site near Daria village promises enhanced safety and access to essential services. It marks a significant step towards a sustainable future, setting a precedent for community-led climate adaptation projects.

Arrangements and Enabling Factors:

A complex relocation plan involved local governance, traditional leadership, and external partners. Community support for local government policies and the proactive approach of the Cogeia Youth Club (CYC) and CCDC were crucial. Planning the relocation of Cogeia Village involved land negotiations, housing design, and infrastructure development. Village, government, and NGO collaboration highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in climate-induced relocations. Financial, technical, and institutional support made this transition possible, highlighting the need for supportive policy and community engagement.



Village Meeting at meeting hall (Old Village Cogeia Site)

Lessons Learned and Future Directions: Success and Challenges: The relocation’s success hinges on its community-driven nature, ensuring that solutions are culturally appropriate and inclusive. The successful relocation of Cogeia Village offers valuable insights into community resilience, the importance of cultural and social considerations in climate adaptation, and the potential for sustainable, community-led solutions to climate-induced challenges. Future support for similar initiatives must prioritize local knowledge, inclusivity, and the safeguarding of non-economic values to ensure holistic and sustainable outcomes. However, challenges such as maintaining traditional knowledge and ensuring sustainable livelihoods in the new location remain.

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Arrangements and Enabling Factors: The relocation of Cogeia Village required intricate planning, including land negotiations, housing design, and infrastructure development. The collaboration between the village, government agencies, and NGOs underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in addressing climate-induced relocations. Financial, technical, and institutional support was crucial in facilitating this transition, highlighting the need for a supportive policy environment and robust community engagement mechanisms.

Future Support and Integration into Policies: Sustaining this initiative and applying its lessons elsewhere demand ongoing support to the vulnerable or affected communities, particularly in integrating non-economic loss considerations into broader climate policies and community planning. The relocation of Cogeia is an instance where the community’s social fabric, traditional knowledge, and ancestral ties are at risk, showcasing the importance of including non-economic factors in climate adaptation policies.

To ensure the sustainability of such initiatives and to replicate their success in other communities, ongoing support to the community—especially vulnerable groups—is essential. This support includes: WW

- ✓ **Capacity Building and Empowerment:** Providing training in new economic activities that are climate-resilient, such as sustainable agriculture and aquaculture, can help diversify income sources. It is crucial to create opportunities that empower women and youth, ensuring their participation and leadership in these new ventures.
- ✓ **Health and Nutrition:** Future initiatives should support the development of local food systems that enhance nutritional outcomes, considering the shift from traditional diets as the community relocates.
- ✓ **Education and Documentation:** There is a need for educational programs that document and transmit traditional knowledge, ecological understanding, and disaster preparedness from elders to youth, ensuring these practices are not lost.
- ✓ **Infrastructure Development:** Infrastructure planning, such as housing and utilities, should consider the unique needs of the elderly and people with disabilities, ensuring safety and accessibility for all community members.

In terms of policy integration:

- ✓ **Climate Adaptation Strategies:** Policies should integrate community-led adaptation strategies that incorporate traditional knowledge and local ecological practices.
- ✓ **Cultural Preservation:** Cultural heritage and traditional practices need protection in policy frameworks, recognizing their intrinsic value and role in community cohesion and resilience.
- ✓ **Social Safety Nets:** Enhance social safety nets to address the impacts of climate-induced relocations, ensuring that communities maintain their identity and cohesion.
- ✓ **Participatory Governance:** Governance structures at all levels should involve community members in decision-making, particularly marginalized groups, to ensure that policies are inclusive and equitable.
- ✓ **Disaster Risk Reduction:** Policies should incorporate traditional early warning signs and coping mechanisms into modern disaster risk reduction strategies.

To achieve these ends, partnerships between communities, government entities, NGOs, and international bodies must be forged and maintained. By doing so, the resilience of communities like Cogeia can be bolstered, and their rich cultural and ecological heritage can continue to flourish in the face of climate change.

CASE STUDY: “Navigating Waters of Change: The Cogeia Village Relocation”

Recommendations for Scaling Out

- ✓ **Documenting Traditional Knowledge:** Vital for preserving cultural heritage and informing future generations, Cogeia Village’s traditional knowledge, such as the annual fish drive (*tuvaqeqe*), signs of impending climate disasters, and preparation and coping mechanisms for tropical cyclones, are invaluable cultural assets. To scale out, documenting these practices through video recordings, written accounts, and digital archives can help preserve this wisdom for future generations. Engaging the community’s youth in this process can ensure that these practices are not only preserved but also understood and valued by the younger generation.
- ✓ **Dietary and Livelihood Improvements:** Ensuring the community’s food security and economic stability through diversified and sustainable practices. The community’s reliance on agriculture for livelihood and dietary needs suggests a potential area for enhancement. Scaling out could involve introducing sustainable agricultural practices and diversifying crops to ensure food security, particularly given the vulnerability to floods. Additionally, developing the market for local products, such as the mats woven by the women of Cogeia, can enhance livelihoods. Creating more structured supply chains and expanding market access, through e-commerce, can provide more stable incomes for the villagers.
- ✓ **Youth and Women’s Empowerment:** Engaging younger generations and women in leadership and decision-making processes, vital for the community’s resilience. To build on this, providing leadership training and financial literacy programs for women and youth can foster empowerment. Creating inclusive platforms where they can voice their opinions and participate in decision-making will bolster community resilience. Moreover, encouraging the formation of cooperatives and supporting micro-enterprises can lead to greater economic independence and community development.

Conclusion: Cogeia Village’s journey from vulnerability to resilience exemplifies the critical role of engaging frontline communities in climate change adaptation. By centering the voices of those most affected, especially marginalized groups, and leveraging traditional knowledge alongside modern solutions, Cogeia has charted a path toward a more sustainable and resilient future. This case study serves as a beacon for other communities facing similar threats, offering lessons in unity, perseverance, and the power of collaborative action in the face of climate adversity. Cogeia Village’s relocation is a testament to what communities can achieve when faced with the formidable challenges of climate change. It offers valuable insights into managing non-economic losses, the importance of community agency, and the potential for replicating such initiatives in similar contexts globally.

CASE STUDY: Resilience Amidst Relocation—The Journey of Nabavatu Village

Location and Context: Nabavatu Village, the heart of the Dreketi district in Macuata Province, Fiji, sits on a hill overlooking the Dreketi River. This village is not just any community; it's the principal village and a central hub of tradition, authority, and faith. Yet, climate change has not spared this significant locale. As the seat of the Vunivalu, or Chief of Dreketi, and the location for vital government services, Nabavatu's pivotal role in the district is underscored by its responsibility to navigate the shifts climate change imposes.

Climatic Impacts and Vulnerabilities: The village, previously relocated due to the mighty Dreketi River's wrath, faces new challenges as torrential rains from Tropical Cyclones Yasa and Ana caused land instability, threatening its structures and safety. Amidst these calamities, not all have heeded the call to move: while 22 of 40 households sought refuge in a 'tent village,' others remain, their roots holding firm to a land they're reluctant to leave.

Non-Economic Losses Experienced: Beyond the tangible, there's a deep sense of loss that transcends materiality. The non-economic losses are profound, touching on the cultural, emotional, and traditional fabric of Nabavatu. As the tent village becomes a reluctant symbol of displacement, its residents grapple with the erosion of communal unity, strained relationships, and the fear of losing ancestral ties and traditional knowledge.

Specific Non-Economic Loss Addressed: The main non-economic loss addressed is the fracturing of traditional structures and community cohesion. The reluctance to relocate is not just about leaving homes; it's about disrupting a way of life intricately connected to the land.



Nabavatu relocation plan launch

Solution Implemented: The solution involved creating a comprehensive relocation plan that integrated traditional knowledge, respected cultural practices, and considered the emotional bonds to the land.

The establishment of a community-led task force in Nabavatu was a strategic move to address the urgent need for relocation due to land instability caused by severe weather events. The task force played a critical role in liaising with the government to secure a safer and more permanent settlement location for the displaced households. It aimed to maintain the community's cultural integrity and unity amidst the forced changes. In partnership with government and non-profit organizations, the plan included setting up a transitional 'tent village' and later moving to a more permanent location.



CASE STUDY: Resilience Amidst Relocation—The Journey of Nabavatu Village

Engagement of Marginalized Groups: The inclusive community-driven approach was the cornerstone of the initiative. The Village Development Committee, encompassing various *mataqali* (landowning units), along with the village nurse and representatives from women's and youth groups, met regularly to deliberate on village well-being and the relocation process. Their decision-making reflected the village's traditional structures, where the Vunivalu of Dreketi, the high chief, played a central role, illustrating the blend of modern governance with traditional hierarchies.



Nabavatu children celebrate lights provided by CJRF L&D project

Women, youth, and traditional leaders were instrumental in both the decision-making and implementation phases. They brought forward concerns about preserving traditional fishing knowledge and the transfer of cultural heritage to youth, ensuring these elements were woven into the relocation plan.

Women's artisan skills, especially in mat weaving from kuta grass, were highlighted as essential for economic support. The relocation discussions actively involved youth, elders, and members from marginalized demographics, including individuals with disabilities and the LGBTI community. This engagement ensured that diverse perspectives and needs were considered in planning and implementing the relocation.



Implementation Scale: The solution was implemented on a local scale, directly involving 32 households in the transitional 'tent village' and planning for a more permanent settlement. It was localized but had profound implications for the community's future, as it prompted the need for new social, economic, and governance arrangements.

Tools, Methods, and Processes: Traditional communal meetings (Bose Vakoro), discussions with village elders, and the use of vernacular knowledge products on climate change impacts were all tools used to design a culturally sensitive relocation process.

Traditional knowledge was pivotal in the relocation process. Elders provided historical insights that guided the selection of the new site, ensuring that it was not only safe but also culturally appropriate. Modern risk assessment tools were used alongside workshops and focus group discussions, enabling community members to voice their concerns and preferences, which were essential in the site selection process.

Arrangements and Enabling Factors: Technical, Institutional, and Governance Arrangements: The Village Development Committee (VDC) was pivotal, liaising with government bodies to secure the necessary technical and institutional support for the relocation.

Policies and Programs: While no specific policies or programs guided the process, government advisories on relocation were a catalyst for action, necessitating the creation of frameworks to address the community's needs. Collaboration with local NGOs, government agencies, and international partners provided the technical expertise and financial resources required for planning and executing the relocation. This multi-stakeholder approach facilitated the development of a robust framework for addressing the complex needs arising from the displacement.

CASE STUDY: Resilience Amidst Relocation—The Journey of Nabavatu Village

Enabling Factors: Community consent, leadership agreement, and a united front against the perils of climate change served as enabling factors. The community's strong connection to traditional leadership, as embodied by the Vunivalu of Dreketi, and their collective adherence to religious and cultural practices, provided a sense of stability and continuity amidst upheaval. However, the very same structure that provided stability also presented challenges when the community faced relocation. The internal conflict following the election of a new Turaga ni Koro (village head) pointed to the delicate balance between maintaining tradition and adapting to new realities.

Replication and Scaling Out: For replication in other places, the community's approach to integrating traditional knowledge with modern relocation strategies, ensuring community consent, and respecting traditional authority structures would be essential. The lessons from Nabavatu underline the necessity of incorporating traditional governance structures while fostering transparency and participatory decision-making processes. Crucially, the successful relocation was underpinned by regular communication with the Macuata Provincial Office, exemplifying the need for continuous dialogue between local communities and higher administrative levels. The ability to bridge traditional communal structures with formal government mechanisms can serve as a model for other communities facing similar displacement challenges.

Lessons Learned and Future Support

- ✓ **Solution Success:** The tent village represented a temporary solution, but the underlying community tensions indicate a need for greater inclusivity and consideration of traditional hierarchies in such transitions. Evaluation of success in Nabavatu's case illustrates a community's ability to leverage its social capital in the face of disaster, while also acknowledging the limitations of their situation, particularly the sustainability of living in temporary tent accommodations. The focus group discussions reflected a community that values traditional knowledge and skills yet recognizes the emerging dependence on modern conveniences and the challenges that come with change. The success was rooted in the community's self-reliance and robust social structure, though its future remains uncertain.
- ✓ **Challenges and Overcoming Barriers:** The primary challenge was maintaining community cohesion during the relocation process. This was partly addressed by ensuring traditional leadership was involved and respected throughout. The task force, though effective, had to contend with conflicts arising from traditional authority and modern governance needs, a delicate balance that was managed through inclusive dialogue and negotiation. Such conflicts are emblematic of communities in transition, particularly where traditional structures meet the pressing needs of contemporary challenges.
- ✓ **Influences on Success:** The success was influenced by the community's strong social capital and the active participation of traditional leaders. The influence on success of such initiatives cannot be overstated. Community solidarity and the external support from governmental and non-governmental bodies played a pivotal role. This underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach that leverages both internal community strengths and external resources.
- ✓ **Integration of Non-Economic Losses into Future Policies:** Non-economic losses must be recognized in future climate adaptation policies, with a focus on cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and social cohesion. Regarding future non-economic loss integration, the village's history and relationship with the land, as well as their reliance on traditional fishing and agricultural practices, highlight the importance of considering non-economic values in climate change policies. As experienced by Nabavatu, the loss of traditional lands and disruption of cultural practices are profound and require sensitive policy frameworks that respect and integrate traditional ecological knowledge.

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Conclusion: The case of Nabavatu teaches us that resilience in the face of climate change requires more than just physical relocation. It demands a reweaving of the social fabric, a careful balancing of tradition and modernity, and a deep respect for the non-economic ties that bind communities together. In addition, it is emblematic of the complex interplay between tradition and innovation in the face of climate change, highlighting both the strengths and vulnerabilities of a community bound by tradition yet striving to navigate the challenges of an unpredictable future.

✓ **Organizations for Support:** Local governments, international NGOs like Bread for the World, and community-based organizations are key players. In the future, collaborations with organizations specializing in cultural heritage preservation and psychosocial support could further strengthen these efforts.



Tent city community in Nabavatu Village (FBC News)

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina’s Mastery of the Elements



Figure 1: Three Sisters Islands
(Source: Google Maps)

Island at the Climate Crossroads: Malaupaina Island, a resplendent speck in the Solomon Islands, is etched deeply in both history and the challenge of modern survival. As the southernmost island of the Three Sisters, the 6.37 km² land masses are cradled by rich reef ecosystems and profound oceanic depths, with its inhabitants—just over a hundred—largely drawn from the nearby Ulawa Island. Their lives, interwoven with the sea, are dedicated to the rhythms of fishing and the ancillary trade of copra, forming the backbone of their economy. With four settlements, its people balance life on the edge of an encroaching sea, a stark reminder of the escalating climate crisis.

The Lever Brothers turned the island into a bustling copra plantation in the 20th century after the Spaniards first discovered it in 1568. Ulawa’s tribal groups’ complex land ownership disputes bear witness to these times.

Malaupaina’s affiliation with Central Makira dilutes its residents’ political influence by separating them from their Ulawa/Ugi Constituency voting power. This misalignment disrupts service distribution, hurting islanders.

The Three Sisters Plantation, founded in the 1930s, and its management by William French have left a legacy intertwined with local land disputes. These disputes between Ulawa tribal groups appear to be rooted in the island’s copra production, but historical records are scarce. [Learn more.](#)

Political Misalignment and Historical Disconnection:

Malaupaina is politically unique. Central Makira Constituency governs Malaupaina, despite its natives’ electoral dominance in Ulawa/Ugi. This political misalignment disrupts service distribution by separating residents’ voting power from their geographical constituency. Essential services and development support often go to mainland Central Makira, hurting Malaupaina residents. The island’s representation and access to government services are affected by Central Makira’s administrative categorization, which conflicts with residents’ historical and political ties to Ulawa/Ugi. The failure to renew vital shipping services in 2023 further isolates the community and makes it harder for them to access resources and support for sustainable development and climate resilience.

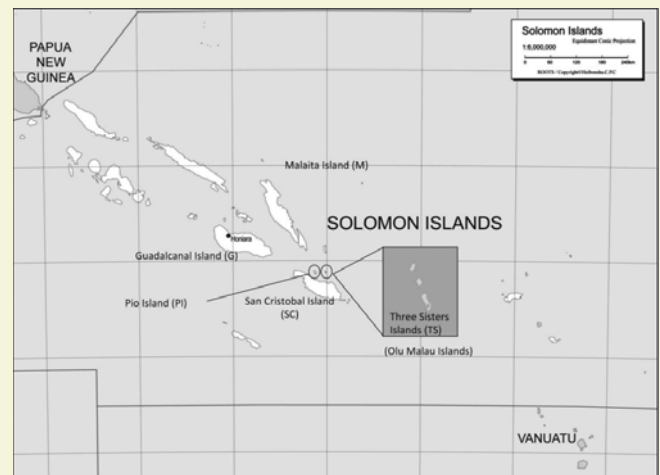


Figure 2: Location of Three Sisters Islands in the Solomon Islands
(Source: Tanaka, N., Seo, A., Sugimura, K., Ohi-Toma, T., Pattson, T., & Watanabe, T. (2020). *Vascular Plants Collected from Eastern Provinces, the Solomon Islands*. *National Museum of Nature and Science*. 46(4), pp. 145–175)

The community’s governance is a tapestry of tradition and spirituality, with a local leader who stands as a chief and a population unified by the Anglican Church’s teachings. Despite the lack of basic utilities like running water and electricity, resilience shines through with borehole pumps and solar panels serving as lifelines.

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RCMS 381_2 Three Sisters Plantation, British Solomon Islands, 1938

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Transportation relies on the modest engines of banana boats, emphasizing the community's resourcefulness amid isolation. The absence of schools on Malaupaina paints a picture of a community at a crossroads, holding onto the threads of traditional knowledge while the promise of formal education lies beyond the waters.

In diet and daily life, the people of Malaupaina adapt to the vagaries of weather and soil, embracing a diet grounded in the ocean's bounty and the fruits of their labor on land.

Malaupaina's narrative represents community resilience and adaptability, a microcosm where the past and present dance with the uncertain tempos of climate and political landscapes, all under the watchful eyes of a community determined to endure.



Malau Paina (Three sister island) children enjoying their fresh water hand pump funded under CDF.

Environmental Adversities: Malaupaina, a small island community, confronts the formidable challenges of climate change. The rising sea level spells doom for crucial food crops, contaminates freshwater sources, and endangers the integrity of dwellings. Particularly imperiled is the Pusimenihi settlement, teetering on the brink of obliteration, which may necessitate the relocation of its residents. Notably, the indigenous swamp taro, a lifeline in times of food scarcity, succumbs to saline intrusion, prompting the villagers to transplant it to safer, elevated grounds

as a measure of disaster preparedness.

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina’s Mastery of the Elements

Environmental Adversities (cont.):

✓ **Unpredictable Weather Patterns:** The islanders face an unpredictable climate, where traditional wet and dry seasons no longer follow historic patterns. The new norm is erratic—droughts during expected rains and unseasonal downpours that ravage crops and exacerbate health issues, ranging from respiratory illnesses to skin conditions. Residents are compelled to be ever-vigilant, constantly devising strategies to mitigate these erratic weather effects. Resilience is key, with continued cultivation and adaptive strategies like the cultivation of hardy bananas and composting to enrich yields becoming critical.

✓ **Weather Intensity:** The intensification of weather phenomena—a deluge of rain in fleeting bursts causes unprecedented flooding, while searing heat waves bring about dehydration, and even fainting, due to limited potable water. The scorching sun also inflicts ecological damage on the reefs, disrupting the community's fishing-based livelihood by killing coral and promoting algae overgrowth.

In Malaupaina, the battle against climate change is a daily reality that tests the bounds of human ingenuity and traditional knowledge. As the environment they have known shifts unpredictably, the community's spirit of adaptation and unity becomes their strongest ally in the quest for survival and continuity.

✓ **Extended Extremes:** Moreover, prolonged periods of rain and drought have a direct and severe impact on the island’s water security, exhausting scant water reserves. In a quest for hydration, inhabitants turn to the coconut trees, scaling their heights for sustenance. Climbing of coconut trees to quench thirst has been a risky activity and there have been a number of casualties of falls previously. In response to such accidents, traditional knowledge and medicine play a crucial role. During bad weather, compounded by the lack of transportation, a traditional form of massaging, akin to chiropractic care, was administered by specialized individuals. These skilled practitioners provided immediate aid to the fallen victims. However, serious falls necessitated transportation to Kirakira Hospital for medical attention by a doctor.

Non-Economic Losses: The community of Malaupaina Island faces the disintegration of irreplaceable cultural touchstones. As sea levels rise, not only do physical lands become submerged, but so too does the intangible heritage tied to these landscapes. The settlement of Pusimenihi, for instance, stands on the brink of erasure. Furthermore, the swamp taro, traditionally reserved for sustenance during disasters, now finds a new home uphill. While it continues to serve as a disaster food, this adaptation also reflects the community's resilience and ability to maintain food security amid changing conditions. Symbolizing the upheaval of the community's relationship with their environment and the alteration of long-held practices.

Compounding Risks: Amidst these environmental threats, the community's political limbo—split between Uluawa/Ugi and Central Makira constituencies—dilutes their political influence and disrupts the flow of essential services. The precariousness of their political representation intensifies their vulnerability, leaving them disadvantaged in obtaining necessary support and services.

Solutions Implemented: In response, the community has become more ingrained in its rich heritage. With the help of the Ecological Solutions Foundation and the Central Makira Constituency Development Funds, they have combined cutting-edge solutions—like communal water tanks—with time-tested methods. Furthermore, water access is made possible by CDF-installed borehole pumps, which are funded by both local and foundation grants.

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina's Mastery of the Elements

Solutions Implemented (cont.):

- ✓ **Anticipation and Response:** This solution is forward-looking; it's about more than immediate relief. By securing water sources and adjusting agricultural practices, the community prepares for a future where similar crises are likely to recur. It is a deliberate strategy to safeguard against both drought and the loss of crops due to salinity.
- ✓ **Involvement and Engagement:** This response was orchestrated by a community united in purpose. Women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and youth stressed the need for water due to scarcity. Thus, boreholes were supplemented by rainwater tanks. They voiced their water access issues on Malaupaina, where women usually lead passively. Women mostly fish traditionally, while men use outboard motors and diving gear. Communities united in purpose organized the response. The project involved the community leader, who also has traditional authority, church committees representing the island's spiritual foundation, and respected elderly members. Their wisdom and contributions from all demographic groups, including women and youth, strengthened their response plan.
- ✓ **Implementation Scale:** The initiative was localized, focusing on the practical needs of Malaupaina's four settlements. Though small in scale, the impact on the community's resilience has been substantial, affecting the lives of approximately 100 people.
- ✓ **Tools and Methods:** The practical measures implemented blend modern technology with time-honored knowledge. Borehole drilling, modern water storage solutions, and the strategic relocation of crops combine the best of both worlds to combat climate challenges.
- ✓ **Arrangements and Enabling Factors:** The project was underpinned by a collaboration between local governance structures and external support from the Ecological Solutions Foundation and the Constituency Development Fund. This multi-tiered support system was vital for the project.
- ✓ **Replication Requirements:** Replicating this successful model in other communities would necessitate a deep understanding of local cultures and traditions, the mobilization of external support, and a keen eye for ecological nuances to ensure solutions are tailored to fit other unique contexts.
- ✓ **Evaluation of Success:** The community's resilience and the success of the interventions, thus far, rest on their alignment with local ways of life and environmental realities. However, the sustainability of these solutions remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in light of the island's complex political and environmental landscape.
- ✓ **Challenges Overcome:** The project navigated the intricate political landscape and environmental challenges by leveraging the inherent strength of the community and drawing on external support to forge resilience.
- ✓ **Influence on Success:** The initiative's success was driven by a sense of community solidarity, an adherence to traditional knowledge, and the judicious application of modern technology.
- ✓ **Non-Economic Loss Integration:** Future policies must recognize and protect the cultural and traditional practices integral to the community's identity, especially as they face the relentless threats posed by climate change.
- ✓ **Support Needs:** To navigate future uncertainties, the community will require ongoing support for basic utilities and a continued emphasis on traditional practices that have been the cornerstone of their resilience.
- ✓ **Supportive Organizations:** The partnership between Malaupaina's community, the Ecological Solutions Foundation, and the government illustrates a synergistic model that could serve as a blueprint for other island communities facing similar threats from climate change.

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina's Mastery of the Elements

Malaupaina's journey underscores the enduring power of community unity and traditional wisdom, serving as an inspiring narrative for other small island communities on the frontline of climate change.



A kitchen on Malaupaina (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Malaupaina's fallen trees from sea level rise (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Sea levels rose to 30 meters at this point on Malaupaina (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina's Mastery of the Elements



Dug out well that gets flooded during king tides or big high tides (Photo: Hensilyn Pwe'a- Boseto)

CASE STUDY: Rising Tides, Resilient Lives: Malaupaina's Mastery of the Elements



Trees are dying due to salt water intrusion into swamp land (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Sea level rise has impacted swamps, killing pandanus trees on Malaupaina (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Family house and kitchen gets flooded during high tide; barrels and Eskie used to catch rain water for drinking (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Fireplace lifted higher in order to cook food during high tide (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)



Trees lying in the sea on Malaupaina (Photo: Hensllyn Pwe'a- Boseto)

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Inclusive Frameworks and Programmes

1 ***International Organization for Migration (IOM):*** The IOM's South Pacific Islands Crisis Response Plan 2023-2025 exemplifies a targeted approach to reduce vulnerabilities to displacement through resilience building, effective displacement management, and humanitarian assistance. By working closely with nations like Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, the IOM recognizes the importance of including local and indigenous knowledge in developing strategies to prevent and respond to crises. Engagement with local communities ensures the solutions are grounded in the realities of those most at risk.

3 ***The South Pacific Islands Crisis Response Plan 2023-2025,*** led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), emphasizes resilience and effective displacement management. While its primary focus is reducing displacement vulnerabilities, it offers a platform for inclusive engagement by ensuring that response plans consider the specific needs and roles of women, youth, and Indigenous communities in disaster preparedness and response initiatives.

2 The ***Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility*** advocates for a rights-based approach to climate-induced displacement, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the dignity and rights of all Pacific peoples, including vulnerable groups, in the face of relocation and migration decisions. This framework can be a critical tool for ensuring that the voices of women, Indigenous peoples, and others are heard in planning and implementing climate mobility solutions.

4 ***Role of SPREP:*** The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Pacific Climate Change Centre are crucial in coordinating climate actions and integrating climate adaptation. By leveraging international frameworks and advocating for recognition of climate-related loss and damage, SPREP can facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups in climate decision-making processes. This includes developing programs explicitly targeting the empowerment and capacity-building of women, youth, and Indigenous peoples to participate actively in climate resilience efforts.

Engagement Strategies

To effectively engage marginalized and frontline communities in the Pacific Islands, several strategies can be implemented:

✓ ***Community-Led Consultations:*** Ensuring that policy formulations and project implementations are preceded by meaningful consultations with women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, and persons with disabilities. These consultations can help identify specific vulnerabilities, needs, and strengths, contributing to more effective and tailored approaches.

✓ ***Capacity Building:*** Investing in the education and training of frontline communities will empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to participate actively in climate adaptation and resilience-building efforts.

✓ ***Representation in Decision-Making:*** Facilitating the representation of marginalized groups in climate-related decision-making processes at local, national, and regional levels. This ensures that the policies and actions reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of those most affected by climate change.

Engagement Strategies (cont.)

- ✓ **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Fostering partnerships between governments, NGOs, international organizations, and community groups to leverage resources, expertise, and networks for more impactful and sustainable climate action.
- ✓ **Community-Centric Approaches:** Emphasizing local knowledge and practices is essential in creating effective climate adaptation strategies. Engaging local communities, including indigenous peoples, in the design and implementation of climate actions ensures that solutions are culturally appropriate, sustainable, and effectively address each community's unique vulnerabilities and strengths.
- ✓ **Empowerment through Education and Capacity Building:** Fostering education and capacity-building initiatives focused on climate change awareness and adaptation can empower women, youth, and persons with disabilities to take leadership roles in their communities' climate resilience efforts. This includes training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns tailored to the needs and contexts of these groups.

CONCLUSION



The engagement of those at the forefront of climate change impacts in the Pacific Islands requires a multifaceted approach that integrates the needs, perspectives, and knowledge of women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, and persons with disabilities. By leveraging existing regional frameworks and programs and adopting community-centric, inclusive strategies, the Pacific Islands can enhance their resilience to climate change while ensuring that all community members have a voice in shaping their future. By prioritizing the engagement of those at the forefront of climate change, the Pacific Islands can develop more resilient, inclusive, and effective strategies to address non-economic loss and damage. This approach aligns with principles of equity and justice and enhances the overall effectiveness of climate action in the region.