

The Planning Process of Climate Change Relocation: The Case of Vunidogoloa in Fiji

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1. Research Background and Objectives

The adverse impacts of climate change cause individuals, groups or a whole community to move from their traditional territories to planned locations. This mobility requires effective planning and management, as well as the active participation of affected communities and responsible stakeholders for the relocation to work. In relation to climate-induced relocation projects, planning is done differently, depending on the nature of organisations or stakeholders involved. In comprehensive rational planning, stakeholders follow a systematic or procedural that allows them to have legitimate control and power over the planning process, with much emphasis on the technicality and scientific methods, as similar to underlying notions of urban or spatial planning for instance. Whereas, participatory planning promotes the collaboration and active participation of all stakeholders in the planning process; more significantly, the affected community is guaranteed a certain degree of participation in the relocation plan. Based on a case study of the relocation of Vunidogoloa, this thesis aims to evaluate the planning process of the climate change relocation, starting by investigating the outcomes and challenges of the relocation of such community in Fiji. An in-depth study of this evaluation extends to distinguish and examine some factors that influenced the formulation of the relocation plan for the affected community. Furthermore, the research also seeks to include discussions about the significance of community participation with various stakeholders involved in planning relocation.

2. Research Methodology

To align with the objectives of the study, the research comprises primary data collected from semi-structured face-to-face interviews and secondary data were compiled from literature and white paper evaluations adopted from official documents, including policies and regulations. Interviews were conducted with eight participants who are the representatives of the government, non-government and international organisations based in Suva, Fiji. The purpose of these interviews is to capture the experiences and the perceptions of these participants based on the overall process of relocation of Vunidogoloa. The significance of information collected from the interviews is to gain an insight into how the planning process was (or could have) done for Vunidogoloa, whilst learning more from the experiences of the Vunidogoloa's relocation to note for future relocation cases.

3. Results and Conclusion

The results of the study show that the relocation of Vunidogoloa undeniably made partial success provided that there are limitations and cross-cutting issues that need to be addressed. In practice, the overall process of relocation for Vunidogoloa was rather complex, given the absence of a legal framework or guideline and left alone, a concrete plan that could have helped guide its implementation at the time. There should be a systematic framework so as to achieve creating a sustainable community at the new planned site and to help develop a sustainable plan for relocation in the future. Relocation is not simply about the physical movement of the community. It is also about moving the lives of these people and how the transition impacts them henceforth. This places a great emphasis on constructing a planning framework to provide governments and responsible organisations with a holistic approach to correspond to complications of relocation.