



## Adaptation Gap Report 2023 – Case Study

# Transformative adaptation and human mobility: Planned relocation in Fiji

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The Pacific Island nation of Fiji is facing an urgent and complex challenge, whereby the impacts of the climate crisis, particularly rising sea levels and extreme weather events, are threatening the very existence of some of its traditional coastal communities.

The geographical vulnerability of Fiji is palpable, with many communities located in low-lying coastal areas which are susceptible to flooding and erosion. Unavoidable loss and damage resulting from the climate crisis include the loss of land, cultural heritage, Indigenous knowledge, way of life, health, biodiversity and ecosystem services, in addition to a sense of place and social cohesion (Chandra *et al.* 2023).

As sea levels rise and extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, the need for comprehensive planned relocation strategies has become increasingly evident. Planned Relocation Guidelines provide a detailed blueprint to unlock the potential for continuing traditional ways of life, economic growth, infrastructure development and enhanced resilience.

In response to the increasing climate risks and the unavoidable impacts, Fiji has developed and implemented National Planned Relocation Arrangements, including the pioneering Displacement Guidelines, Planned Relocation Guidelines, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Planned Relocation and an innovative financing mechanism which has been made possible through the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act.

The Fiji Government has assessed that as many as 676 coastal communities would need to be relocated based on unavoidable climate impacts. Among these communities, 42 are expected to require relocation within this decade, with 17 currently considered to be a high priority for relocation (Fiji 2023a). One example is the village of Nabavatu, a high-priority community on the island of Vanua Levu, where villagers who have been displaced by disaster events have been living in temporary locations since 2021.

In this context, the country’s National Planned Relocation Arrangements integrate climate science, policy, community

engagement, social protection and financial innovation to relocate or resettle community groups on a permanent basis.

At the heart of these human mobility efforts lies a Fijian task force, which focuses on the relocation and displacement of communities that are vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis. The task force oversees relocation assessments and implementation arrangements, while the guidelines make sure that relocation efforts are carried out in a transparent, participatory, culturally-sensitive and human-centred manner (Fiji 2023b). The guidelines emphasize the importance of respecting human rights, cultural heritage and the traditional knowledge of vulnerable communities.

Complementing the Planned Relocation Guidelines is an SOP for planned relocation (Fiji 2023b). This SOP operationalises the Guidelines by outlining protocols for community consultations and climate risk and vulnerability assessments to infrastructure development and livelihood support. Its systematic approach ensures that every relocation is grounded in thorough socioeconomic analysis, cultural contexts and community consent to ensure sustainable and dignified outcomes.

Crucially, Fiji recognizes that the success of planned relocations hinges on robust financing mechanisms. To this end, the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act was established in 2019 and is a pioneering initiative to mobilize innovative funding arrangements to address mobility solutions. The fund is designed to mobilize resources from both domestic and international sources and channel them towards planned relocations and the provision of technical assistance, as needed by local communities. By amalgamating public and private funds, grants and impact investments, the fund not only addresses immediate financial needs, but also catalyses a resource pool for future relocations.

The Trust Fund also complements adaptation measures to increase the adaptive capacity of communities. Examples of adaptation interventions in Fiji include the use of natural and built infrastructure, the strengthening of climate-information services and management, the construction of

sea walls, land reclamation, mangrove restoration, riverbank stabilization and the mainstreaming of climate issues into national development planning processes.

In terms of the effectiveness of relocation efforts in Fiji, a key lesson is the importance of involving affected communities in the decision-making process. Engaging with local communities, understanding their needs and respecting their cultural values and traditions are critical for successful relocation initiatives. Planned relocation is best approached as a process that ought to connect to people's pasts and imagined futures under climate change (McMichael and Katonivaliku 2020).

To date, a total of six communities have been relocated. These community relocations have helped to further inform and operationalise the SOP for planned relocation through the many lessons learned. The most recent relocation was that of the village of Narikoso, on the island of Kadavu. This low-lying coastal village was severely affected by rising sea levels, resulting in coastal inundation and erosion. Seven houses located along the coast were identified as being situated in a high-risk zone, which resulted in their relocation to higher ground inland. The partial relocation of the community brought about key lessons on stakeholder coordination and effective community consultation.

Alongside its relocation efforts, Fiji has also been implementing its national adaptation plan. A key lesson here is that proactive adaptation measures are crucial for

averting the risks associated with displacement induced by the climate crisis. As a result, identifying vulnerable areas and implementing protective measures before loss and damage occurs is essential.

The policy frameworks and Trust Fund developed in Fiji highlight the need to develop legal and policy frameworks that are grounded in comprehensive climate risk assessments, which in turn address climate-induced displacement and relocation. Fiji has developed legislation and policies to guide these efforts and ensure that the rights and well-being of displaced communities are safeguarded.

Securing sustainable, long-term financial resources for planned relocations can be challenging. As such, international assistance and climate finance mechanisms to provide these initiatives with adequate funding is crucial for vulnerable, small island developing States. In the absence of dedicated international funds for relocation, the Trust Fund is a symbol of the country's approach to embed planned relocations as a response to climate-induced vulnerabilities, which can in turn ensure economic growth, infrastructure development and strengthened resilience.

The country's endeavours in the realm of planned relocations exemplify an integrated, people-centred approach to adaptation and addressing loss and damage. Furthermore, the experiences of Fiji with planned relocation efforts provide valuable insights for other vulnerable regions facing similar climate-induced displacement challenges.

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