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**Title**

**PLANNED RELOCATION AND EVERYDAY AGENCY IN LOW-LYING COASTAL VILLAGES IN FIJI**

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**Anonymisation**

- [Reference1] = “Prepared by Chandra Jayasuriya, School of Geography, The University of Melbourne.”

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Climate change issue is a natural disaster. We realise that this is happening in our coastal-lying areas; maybe a good option is to relocate. (Village leader, Vunidogoloa, Fiji)*

Climate-related planned relocation refers to the systematic relocation of people and assets away from places that have become uninhabitable, or at risk, due to climate change impacts (Arnall 2014; Ferris 2011; Foresight 2011). This article examines the everyday agency of residents of low-lying coastal *iTaukei* (Indigenous) villages in Fiji as they adjust to changing environments and navigate processes of planned relocation. It focuses on three villages: Vunidogoloa that relocated in 2014; Vunisavisavi that completed partial retreat in 2015; and Narikoso that has initiated planning and major works for relocation. The agency of people living in sites of climate vulnerability in Pacific Island countries is under-appreciated and under-researched, with widespread assumptions of vulnerability, fragility and low adaptive capacity (Barnett and Waters 2016). Here, the focus on everyday agency is not intended to diminish the macro-level determinants and challenges of environmental change and 'systematic relocation', but rather to highlight the ways in which local people adapt to environmental changes and negotiate and shape processes of planned relocation.

Given the potential for relocation of low-lying coastal communities, 'it is critical to begin to document the early case studies [*of relocation*] under a range of social, economic and cultural scenarios' (Albert et al. 2017). Globally, relocation of low-lying populations is anticipated including where sea-level rise increases flooding and coastal erosion, reduces arable land, affects groundwater reserves, damages infrastructure, and threatens human lives and well-being (Dutton et al. 2015; Hino et al. 2017; Nurse et al. 2014; Wong et al. 2014). Some governments – e.g. Mozambique, Solomon Islands - are formulating planned relocation policies, including as a component of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs)

(Warner et al. 2014). There are to date, however, few sites where climate-related relocation has been implemented (Burkett 2015; Hino et al. 2017; Lipset 2013; McNamara et al. 2018; Weir and Pittock 2017).

Fiji is an 'early adaptor' (Betzold 2015) that has implemented planned relocation. While a last resort measure, the government has stated that low-lying villages and settlements will be difficult and expensive to protect against sea-level rise, coastal erosion, flooding and storm surges, 'possibly making some of these settlements unsustainable over the long term' and has supported some relocations (Republic of Fiji, 2017a: 22). While diverse factors shape local environments and coastal geomorphology (e.g. climate-related sea-level rise, tectonic changes, tidal and storm surges, cyclones and human modifications) (Mann et al. 2016), the Government of Fiji expects increases in mean regional sea level to be the primary factor driving extreme water levels and coastal flooding in Fiji to 2100 (Republic of Fiji, 2017a: 82). Relocation is understood at local, provincial and national levels as a response to climate change impacts: i.e. coastal flooding, coastal erosion, salt-water intrusion, retreat of shoreline (Pacific Island Development Forum Secretariat, 2015; Republic of Fiji, 2014; 2018). In 2017, the Government of Fiji indicated that 830 vulnerable communities would require relocation due to risk from climate-related impacts, and 48 communities were identified as in urgent need of relocation (Republic of Fiji, 2017b). The Fijian Government, with the support of the German Cooperation Agency (GIZ), has developed and launched National Climate Change Relocation guidelines and is currently working on the Standards of Operation (Republic of Fiji, 2018). Given these significant policy and practice developments in Fiji, it is of value to document the everyday experiences and agency of villagers in sites of relocation and retreat.

The following section sets out the concept of everyday agency, which foregrounds how people act within and adjust to shifting opportunities and obstacles, with reference to contexts of climatic and environmental change. Then, the Fiji case study and the research methods are outlined. In Section 4, analysis of research findings is organised around two main themes: first, responses to local environmental changes – e.g. coastal erosion, flooding, saltwater intrusion – among residents of the villages; and second, everyday agency as residents navigate planned relocation, with a focus on multi-scalar engagement with stakeholders, community consensus and debate, negotiation of access to customary land, and access to funding. The final section considers everyday agency and its importance for the micro- and macro-politics of climate change adaptation.

## 2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND EVERYDAY AGENCY

Agency has been invoked to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level analyses. For example, scholars have variously argued that: agency reproduces social structures (Giddens, 1984); external social structures are embodied through the agency of social daily practice or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990); and in sites of modernity, societal structures and powers are eroded such that individuals increasingly must make choices (Beck et al. 1994). Theories of agency highlight that people's lives are neither the outcome of individual decisions and behaviours, nor entirely shaped by societal structures, but are constituted through both agency and structure (Carr, 2008; Giddens, 1984). In the context of climate change adaptation, recent evidence suggests that agency enables people to anticipate and respond to changes, minimise adverse environmental and socio-political impacts, convert resources into effective adaptive action, and take advantage of emerging opportunities (Cinner et al. 2018).

Yet agency, even as it pushes up against macro-level structures, occurs at the level of the everyday. 'Everyday agency' refers to expressions of agency in daily life, events, practices and relations; to the routine, ordinary, familiar and often mundane ways in which people and communities act to gain control over their lives (Jokinen, 2016; Selimovic 2018). Nonetheless, scholars have pointed out that foregrounding the everyday should not be a descriptive exercise to document what "ordinary" people do in their daily lives at the local level; wider processes – e.g. the global, regional, national – should also be within the frame of reference as day-to-day routines and decisions are connected to multi-scalar practices, policies and initiatives (Dunn 2009). Consideration of everyday agency can illuminate how environmental changes and associated policies and initiatives are resisted, accommodated, or borne through daily activities. In this paper we take everyday agency to refer to the spectrum of activities, decision-making and meaning-making that unfold in place and through the day-to-day worlds of people and communities, and that might range from everyday adjustments to farming practices through to politically-engaged interaction with multi-scalar actors.

Researchers have examined everyday agency as people experience and respond to climatic and environmental changes. They have considered, for example, the ways in which people observe, interpret and respond to local changes in weather and environments (Crona et al. 2013; Kuruppu and Liverman 2011). In Kiribati - where groundwater is threatened by rapid population growth, poor water governance, and climate change - Kuruppu (2009) found that

people in outer islands diversified water resources by accessing wells located away from the coast and by borrowing rainwater from churches or neighbours. In the Maldives, Kothari and Arnall (2019) found that island-based guest-house owners are keen to maintain beaches for tourists; with limited resources to construct large-scale defences, they manage movement of sand and coastal erosion through small-scale coastal modifications such as constructing small concrete groynes and using sandbags. And in northeast Brazil, Safra de Campos et al. (2017) found that small-scale farmers adjust their daily movements in response to drought, including mobility related to agricultural production and consumption, attendance at church, and trips to visit relatives and friends. So, people are shown to adjust everyday practices, lives and livelihoods in response to changing environments and risks.

Climate change impacts and adaptation initiatives have also been shown to contribute impetus for local politics of resistance and negotiation. In Alaska, for example, indigenous communities are calling for their relocation as an adaptive response to climate impacts, yet the urgency of community efforts to plan for relocation is in tension with bureaucratic barriers and time-frames (Bronen 2013; Bronen and Chapin III 2013; Maldonado et al. 2013). Residents of one Alaskan community, Shishmaref, voted to relocate in 2002 to a new site, a decision that has been reiterated by community-wide vote in 2007 and 2016, yet there remains no commitment of government resources to facilitate or fund relocation of essential services, infrastructure and housing (Albert et al. 2017). Conversely, studies in Pacific Islands have highlighted local resistance to the notion of climate-related migration and relocation (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; McNamara and Gibson 2009). For example, Farbotko et al. (2016) found that some Tuvaluans resist projections of displacement saying they would rather drown than move and lose their identities and homes. Indeed, in low-lying island states, many people refuse labels such as 'climate refugees' and dispute the idea that their homelands are 'drowning' and relocation is a foregone outcome (Bettini 2014). These studies highlight acts of resistance and negotiation as people and communities grapple with proposed policies of climate migration and relocation.

The conceptual lens of everyday agency aligns with increasingly audible calls to recognise the agency, perspectives, experiences and resilience of people living in climate-vulnerable places; to highlight socio-political responses 'from below' to climate change impacts and responses. It disrupts the tendency to view climate-affected people as victims rooted in wider structures of disadvantage and unable to respond to climate impacts (Adger et al. 2014; McNamara and

Gibson 2009; Popovski and Mundy 2012). Indeed, researchers, governments, donors and implementing agencies have recognised the resilience and adaptive capacity of Pacific Islanders to environmental variability and disturbance (e.g. drought, flood, storms) due to their local knowledge of weather, seasonal cycles and ecological processes, customary resource management institutions and practices, innovation, use of modern technologies, and the important roles of leaders and social networks (c.f. Bryant-Tokalau 2018; McMillen et al. 2014; Warrick et al. 2017). Climate change adaptation discourse increasingly views local communities as active agents of change with valuable knowledge, resources and adaptive capacity, rather than as victims of climate change (Cinner et al. 2018; Cochran et al. 2013).

And yet expressions of agency, including in situations of so-called crisis, can be perceived as part of everyday life rather than something which is extraordinary or an example of notable resilience or resistance (see Payne 2012). People's own experiences are not necessarily or consistently rooted in narratives of crisis or resilience (Payne 2012). Further, everyday agency might not be manifest as decisive acts of control and self-determination but can reflect precarity and contingency as people are exposed to diverse and potentially destabilising social and environmental changes: this is referred to by Jokinen as 'precarious everyday agency' (Jokinen, 2016). These nuances are important as there is a temptation when conducting research with people living in iconic sites of climate vulnerability – i.e. low-lying Pacific Island areas – to focus on expressions of crisis or extreme disruption. And certainly such experiences and expressions are evident. Nevertheless, people and communities continue with daily routines, respond to climate impacts, shape and navigate adaptation, make sense of their lives, and imagine their futures within the context of the everyday. There is a need to listen out for and understand the everyday agency and quiet accommodation of change, as well as the more explicit accounts of disruption and multi-scalar and political engagement in processes of planned relocation.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, rather than focusing on the vulnerabilities of people in sites of climate risk, it considers the everyday agency of village residents. Second, while numerous studies have considered the ways in which local communities grapple with *anticipated* futures of relocation (c.f. Farbotko et al. 2016; McNamara and Gibson 2009), only a small body of research focuses on *realised* climate-related relocation (Arnall 2014; Bronen 2013; Bronen and Chapin III 2013; Kothari 2014; Maldonado et al. 2013; Marino 2012; Mortreux et al. 2018). This paper is one of few to provide empirical insight into lived

experiences of climate-related planned relocation and retreat. Drawing on research conducted with residents of three villages in Fiji, the paper contributes new insights into everyday agency as people respond to environmental changes and steer their way through emerging and dynamic processes of planned relocation.

### 3. FIELD-SITES AND METHODS

Fiji provides a valuable context to better understand everyday relocation experiences. Fieldwork was conducted in Fiji during November and December 2015 and June 2016. The research sites included three low-lying coastal villages: Vunidogoloa (Cakaudrove Province), the first entire village to relocate; Vunisavisavi (Cakaudrove Province), the first village to complete partial retreat; and Narikoso (Kadavu Province), where relocation planning and earthworks were underway. These villages were chosen through review of local media releases and policy documents (e.g. Republic of Fiji 2014), the local expertise of two co-authors (MK, TP), and consultation with the Government of Fiji Climate Change Division.

The data derive from *talanoa*<sup>1</sup> discussions, semi-structured interviews, and observation of original villages and sites of relocation. The research aimed to examine experiences of local environmental change and relocation. Participants were asked about everyday life and livelihoods, observations and experiences of environmental change, planned relocation and imagined futures. Interviews and *talanoa* were conducted in English or in Fijian/local dialects with translation provided by local counterparts (including co-authors MK and TP); they were audio-recorded and transcribed or recorded as written notes. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Research permits were granted by the Government of Fiji; research approvals were provided by relevant Provincial Councils and the *Turaga ni Koro*<sup>2</sup> of each village. Ethics approval was granted by La Trobe University; the Research Ethics Committee of University of the South Pacific approved the project proposal and methods.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fijian word *talanoa* derives from *tala*, meaning talking or telling stories, and *noa*, meaning without concealment.

<sup>2</sup> The Fijian term *Turaga ni Koro* is the title for the village headman. It derives from the words *Turaga*, meaning man, and *Koro*, meaning village. The *Turaga ni Koro* is chosen by village members to coordinate village development and to liaise with State and other actors and is paid a small allowance by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 73 years. All participants were *iTaukei*, reflecting the Indigenous ethnicity of villages. Among the three villages that form the focus of this paper, 71 people (37 male, 34 female) participated in seven *talanoa* (n=42) or semi-structured interviews with one or two participants (n=29). People with different ages, gender and place of residence were purposively included in interviews. Local custom shaped attendance at *talanoa* with the *Turaga ni Koro* calling villagers to discussions.

### **Relocating and Retreating Villages**

The following three overviews summarise processes of planned relocation in Vunidogoloa, Vunisavisavi and Narikoso.

#### **3.1 Vunidogoloa, Cakaudrove Province**

In 2014, villagers from Vunidogoloa relocated to a higher site within their *mataqali*<sup>3</sup> land. The old village had a population of approximately 140 *iTaukei* people living in 26 houses located close to the foreshore. Villagers practised subsistence farming and caught sea-food. Earlier efforts to adapt to coastal erosion and flooding included *ad hoc* retreat of houses and construction of two sea-walls. In 2006, Vunidogoloa's residents approached the Government of Fiji seeking financial assistance for relocation. In 2011, earthworks were initiated at a new site but site levelling problems were encountered. A second site was identified 2km inland from the old village. No Ministry had complete responsibility for the relocation, but several were involved. Community members contributed labour, and catering for builders and government officials who worked on the project. The entire village relocated together in January 2014 (see also Tronquet 2015; Charan et al. 2017). The new village has four fish ponds, pineapple plantations, a copra drier, and farms with funding for these initiatives provided by the Fiji government, community members and international partners (e.g. International Labour Organization). However, infrastructure works are not complete (e.g. drainage, community hall). At the time of research, villagers were awaiting a second phase of the project to further improve livelihoods and complete infrastructure works.

#### **3.2 Vunisavisavi, Cakaudrove Province**

In late 2015, four households from the coastal village of Vunisavisavi retreated to new homes set back from the inundation zone. Vunisavisavi has a population of approximately 100 *iTaukei* people. Due to limited land resources, villagers rent plantation land nearby to farm kava, their

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<sup>3</sup> A *mataqali* is a Fijian clan or landowning unit.

major income source. They produce taro, catch seafood, and make woven mats. In previous decades households retreated as the shoreline encroached. USAID provided USD120,000<sup>4</sup> for housing materials and construction through the Coastal Community Adaptation Project (C-CAP), with work sub-contracted to Habitat for Humanity Fiji. Community members provided labour for housing construction and meals for project workers. In late 2015, four new homes were completed that were set back from the inundation zone (projected for 2090). Seven existing houses were also upgraded with cyclone proofing work.

### 3.3 Narikoso, Kadavu Province

In Narikoso, planning and earthworks for relocation have been carried out. Narikoso has an *iTaukei* population of between 95 and 109 people and comprises 27 households. Villagers fish, harvest bêche-de-mer (sea cucumbers), and practice semi-subsistence agriculture (e.g. root crops, honey). Transport to and from the village is by boat or on foot to neighbouring villages and farmland. The nearby Great Astrolabe Reef generates some tourist income, and local resorts on Ono island purchase some crops and fish and employ a few villagers (Barnett and McMichael, 2018). According to vulnerability assessments, Narikoso's shoreline has receded by about 15 metres over the past 30 years (EU-GIZ, 2016). Sea-walls were built previously, but assessments indicate they exacerbated coastal erosion. In 2011, the village sought government assistance for adaptation. Despite initial plans to relocate the entire village, the current plan is to relocate seven households that are closest to the foreshore and frequently flood (Barnett and McMichael, 2018). The land for the new site is within territory owned by two village *mataqali* (i.e. the wider *yavusa*<sup>5</sup>) and extended village boundaries have been negotiated by villagers and accepted by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. At the time of research, new homes and infrastructure were yet to be built and no-one had moved.

#### Figure 1. Map of Fiji highlighting field-sites

Prepared by Chandra Jayasuriya, School of Geography, The University of Melbourne.

## 4. EVERYDAY AGENCY

This section explores 'everyday agency' in relation to, first, place and changing environment and, second, relocation initiatives.

### Place and environmental change

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<sup>4</sup> Approximately £79,281.

<sup>5</sup> A *yavusa* is formed by one or more *mataqali* (i.e. clans). Indigenous Fijians belong to a particular *mataqali* and therefore *yavusa*.

*We understand climate change because we live climate change, we experience . . . we live with it, it's our daily lives, we walk through this. (Turaga ni Koro, Vunidogoloa)*

The everyday takes place somewhere, and in these three low-lying villages that 'somewhere' is a site of environmental change. Residents of these villages described observations and experiences of higher tides, coastal erosion, flooding, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion. They explained for example that high tides regularly flooded their homes, the houses closest to the foreshore had washed away due to the encroaching shoreline, and flooding occurred within their village during king tides<sup>6</sup> and storm surges (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Representative quotes about local environmental change

<b>Vunidogoloa</b>	<b>Narikoso</b>	<b>Vunisavisavi</b>
<i>The sea water was coming into the village . . . it was almost a daily occurrence.</i>	<i>Five or ten years [ago] from this line we planted some coconut tree and they all fall down. In five years the sea has come up [i.e. encroached]</i>	<i>When high tide comes with the rain it can reach here, inside the house.</i>
<i>The land was being taken away by the sea.</i>	<i>maybe 15 meters.</i>	<i>When it is king tide water comes in very quickly, together with heavy rain. When these two come together all this area is flooded. This has been happening for about five or six years.</i>
<i>The bread fruit trees weren't fruiting well because of the salt water.</i>	<i>Every time the village floods there is erosion; when the water recedes we can see the effect of the flooding.</i>	
<i>When it is heavy rain, it came inside the village. It came from the sea and the river as well.</i>	<i>In previous years it was king tide twice a month, but last year we have noticed that it comes many times. It is happening more often.</i>	<i>Last month there was a king tide. That is why this soily part here is still soil. Before that there was grass growing . . . You can take a raft and go right up into the village at king tide.</i>

<sup>6</sup> The term 'king tide' is used to describe an especially high tide especially high spring tide. King tides occur a few times each year when the gravitational pull of the sun and moon upon Earth is strongest (i.e. Earth is closest to the sun in its annual orbit, and the moon is closest to Earth in its monthly orbit). In the Pacific, king tides typically occur from November to March.

While a few participants (particularly older residents) attributed local environmental changes to causes other than climate change – e.g. cyclical weather patterns, deforestation, gravel extraction from rivers, punishment from God for sin on Earth - villagers widely attributed local environmental changes to anthropogenic climate change (see also Rudiak-Gould 2014), and indicated these threats were new or increasing. For example, the *Turaga ni Koro* in Vunisavisavi explained that higher tides were a ‘*new problem from ten years ago; climate change. Before it was not like that, it was OK just ten years ago. The sea is coming higher now*’. Moreover, it was assumed that climate risks would escalate, with most envisioning an environmental future of worsening coastal erosion and flooding.

Everyday responses to environmental changes included cleaning up debris around their houses after high tides, planting crops uphill as saltwater intrusion affected lower elevation trees and crops, rehanging doors that had been damaged by sea-water, and observing crabs encroaching into villages. As one woman from Vunisavisavi explained:

*We know, we experience it, we feel it, from what we’re seeing in the coastal area, the food. We can feel it. The small crab that used to be out at sea, now is around here near the houses. They are coming up because the sea is underneath. When we dig a little bit we see the sea-water.*

And a family in Vunisavisavi talked about the impact of rising seas, explaining that water comes underneath the house during king tides. One man explained they had covered the foundation-posts of their home with concrete “*so they can withstand the sea-water*”, and an older woman laughingly explained that “*now we can fish from our deck. Just small fish we catch, this size*”.

In each village, adaptive responses to coastal erosion and flooding had been implemented including construction of wave breakers, sea-walls, and mangrove regeneration. Many measures had not been not effective or sustained: sea-walls had broken, mangrove seedlings had washed away. People from Vunidogoloa, for example, said the sea regularly breached the damaged sea-wall and flooded their homes at the old site such that the only solution was to move to a higher location. In these villages then, everyday agency involved contingency, enduring and responding to disruption, and being ready to move.

Yet even as people spoke of everyday acts, adaptations and decisions in response to changing environments within their villages, discussions often turned to the global moral dimensions of climate change. Many village members said their immediate environments, everyday lives and

futures were compromised by climatic changes created by activities in 'big' countries. As one man from Vunisavisavi explained, *'other big countries caused the problem. And the small countries suffer'*. Some noted the injustice that Fiji contributes little to the production of climate change but suffers disproportionate consequences (see Bettini 2014; Kelman 2010; Lazrus 2012; Maldonado et al. 2013). As one man from Vunidogoloa explained:

*What is the cost of climate change? This question should be asked of the big countries, polluting. It's not fair. They should stop all that pollution because we're suffering here.*

This framing matters: there was a moral narrative whereby responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and climate change was seen to lie predominantly with 'big countries', and it was within this frame of reference that many villagers positioned observations, responses and adaptations to local environmental change. Everyday agency and adaptation in the face of local environmental risks was linked to a global phenomenon.

### **Planned relocation**

Decision-making around the timing and nature of planned relocation was shaped by multi-scalar engagement including individuals, households, communities, village heads, Provincial Councils, the Office of the Prime Minister, government ministries (e.g. Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs), Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), and international donors and agencies (e.g. EU-GIZ, Habitat for Humanity). Villagers and village leaders engaged with external actors in relation to risk assessment, funding, site preparation and rehabilitation, village lay-out and construction, extension of village boundaries, and livelihood development. This multi-scalar engagement led to heightened flows of information which helped create momentum and 'oil the wheels of decision-making' (Adger et al. 2003: 389). During one *talanoa* in Narikoso, a man explained that *'the PM told us there is also relocation that this government is planning. They didn't want to fund maladaptation. There is also the option to relocate and that is best'*. Another villager recalled a visit from the Ministry of Mineral Resources in which the dangers of sea-level rise and the need for relocation were discussed: *'they said this village [will be] under sea-level, from this house right to the corner. They showed some pictures in the community hall and we watched the movie and see the houses under sea-level . . . It's climate change'*. So, villagers were exposed to information and interacted with different national and international actors, such that planned relocation was understood to represent a legitimate nationally- and globally-endorsed adaptive response (see Artur and Hilhorst 2012; Moser and Ekstrom 2010;

McNamara and Gibson 2009). Global, regional and national discourses and flows of information entered everyday frames of reference and decision-making.

With proposals for relocation gaining momentum, villagers debated the process and timing of planned relocation; consensus was often difficult to achieve. Across all villages, older people often preferred to remain in their homes and expressed strong place attachment. The *Turaga ni Koro* of Vunidogoloa recalled that older villagers were not initially willing to move: *'those who started off they have maybe three, four ancestors' generations here. They don't want to move, even when high tide flooding comes'*. Similarly, an older woman from Vunisavisavi stated *'we don't want to move. Some want to stay, some want to move. Older people want to stay. They are born here'*. In Narikoso, the *Turaga ni Koro* indicated that it took time to generate understanding of climate change and the benefits of relocation:

*It is pretty hard to change the mindset of people, to come to terms with the reality. Government officials were coming around in the villages and I had to invite people to be part of the District Council meeting to share views on the reality of climate change. But people were reluctant or negligent maybe. But now everyone is saying 'we must go, we must relocate.*

Relocation was enabled as community consensus developed over time, through local-level debate and discussion. In Vunidogoloa, for example, community members designed the new village layout and decided that neighbours should remain in the same spatial configuration. Whereas up to three families had previously shared one house, villagers decided that in the relocation site each family or married couple would have a home. Thirty identical timber-framed houses were constructed. And in Narikoso a group of women explained that they had been involved in planning house design and layout, saying the *'final say will come to the women'*.

Relocation also required careful consideration of customary land boundaries. Relocation within *mataqali* land enabled ready access to land, but also allowed villagers to maintain physical, sociocultural, ancestral and spiritual attachments to place, land and resources (see Barnett and McMichael, 2018). One woman from Vunidogoloa explained she had enduring connections to her ancestors due to proximity to their burial grounds:

*Our forefathers were buried there, and my husband was buried there too. The burial ground is still at the old site. He died four years ago, it feels recent. So I still feel that connection to there. I always go back to the burial ground.*

In Vunisavisavi, short-distance retreat meant that villagers maintained their obligations to protect the ruins of the original home of the Paramount Chief of Cakaudrove, situated within their village. In Narikoso, however, despite the new site being located within *mataqali* land, the plan put forward by international donors to relocate only seven houses near the foreshore was seen to threaten the integrity of social structures and relationships. As one man explained, *'we are going to move in phases, seven houses first . . . it would be better to move all together'*.

Importantly, short distance moves within customary land enabled villagers to sustain livelihoods, subsistence farming and food security and to retain traditional farming practices. Villagers continued to fish, and to practice (semi)subsistence agriculture including production of root crops, honey and livestock. In Vunisavisavi, short distance retreat meant villagers were able to continue kava production in nearby plantation land and to produce and sell woven mats. And villagers in Vunidogoloa diversified their livelihoods and farmed new crops near the site of relocation, including pineapples and bananas, while also continuing traditional fishing and farming nearby. Households held onto the keys of their old homes, now slowly deteriorating through lack of maintenance and coastal flooding, and sometimes returned and slept overnight in these 'abandoned' houses so that they might wake early and fish in traditional fishing grounds. In Narikoso, where villagers were awaiting partial relocation, one woman explained that the new site was *"a bit far to go and fish"*, but had better mobile phone reception and was closer to the subsistence gardens: *"when the men go up to the field we have to wait for them to come back with the food, but at the new site it will be much easier"*. It is also notable that villagers in all sites referred to their ancestor's mobility and resettlement in different sites in response to flooding, coastal erosion, and inter-clan disputes (see Nunn 2012; Campbell 2010). So, relocation and retreat within *mataqali* or *yavusa* land did not challenge territorial sovereignty, protected connection to place, had historical precedent, and enabled continuity of everyday practices and livelihoods including small-scale farming and fishing.

Relocation is expensive – for example, Vunidogoloa's relocation is estimated to have cost FJD978,228<sup>7</sup> - and people spoke of village-level efforts to access and raise funds. In these three villages, relocation and retreat initiatives have been financed in large by Fiji Government Ministries and international organisations and donors (e.g. ILO, USAID, EU-GIZ). Yet villages also raised and contributed money, resources and labour. In Vunidogoloa, residents

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<sup>7</sup> Approximately US\$492,136 or £321,142.

contributed labour for construction works, and building materials worth FJD239,852<sup>8</sup> by logging hard-wood from their *mataqali* land which they exchanged for pine-wood from a local logging company. In Vunisavisavi, villagers contributed labour for building and catering: *“the men and the women do the cooking everyday morning, afternoon and dinner. And the grog! Kava sometimes.”* In Narikoso, villagers raised approximately FJD15,000<sup>9</sup> through extended family networks to build a spring-fed water system for the new village *“to show donors that we are willing to relocate, that we have done some of the work already ourselves . . . that way donors will be willing to support”*.

Yet despite the everyday agency of villagers, relocation and retreat also brought changes and challenges that constrained local capacity to make decisions and shape trajectories. Across all villages people voiced concerns around equity of access to funding, and whether there were sufficient funds for completion of initiatives in their villages, let alone relocation of all at-risk villages across Fiji. In Vunidogoloa, for example, villagers were informed by the Government there would be a second phase of work to complete kitchens for each house and other infrastructure works, but as time passed and funds were not forthcoming they decided to construct kitchens using salvaged materials from the old village site. As one man explained: *“We left our nice kitchen down there . . . It is a waste to leave the materials. We could use those; that could be done during the project time. So now people have gone down there and got materials and brought them up to build the kitchens. They said for us not to do anything to the house because they would come back and finish the kitchens. But they didn’t come back”*. In Narikoso, residents persistently explained to donors and government their preference to relocate the village as a whole, rather than in phases; yet funding constraints have meant that partial or phased retreat – the less costly option – remains most likely. And, also in Vunidogoloa, relocation uphill has meant greater proximity to roads, transport, places and people. The village chief explained that since their relocation *“many people coming in and interfere with our customs and culture”*. Whereas they had previously all shared Methodist faith, new denominations were emerging as Jehovah’s Witnesses and others came and *“started to influence how the community lives”*. He went on to explain that *“down there was less disturbance from outsiders, but here there are changes”* citing increased use of alcohol, changing diets, and different ways of dressing particularly among the youth.

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<sup>8</sup> Approximately US\$120,667 or £78,741.

<sup>9</sup> Approximately US\$7,546 or £4,924.

So, there were constraints to the agency of local people in sites of relocation and retreat due for example to funding limitations, limited control over the timing and processes of government policy and decision-making, varied levels of donor commitment and engagement, and (in Vunidogoloa, at least) exposure to new socio-cultural contexts that influence everyday lives. Nonetheless, everyday agency was evident as village residents adapted to changing local environments, made sense of multi-scalar information flows around climate change and relocation, engaged with diverse external actors, debated the process and timing of relocation, participated in village and household design and layout in sites of retreat and relocation, sustained place attachment through everyday farming and fishing, continued and developed livelihood activities, retained spiritual connection to ancestors, and contributed money, resources and labour to relocation efforts.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This article provides empirical evidence of the everyday agency of residents of three low-lying coastal villages in Fiji - Vunidogoloa, Vunisavisavi and Narikoso - as they adapt to environmental changes and steer their way through the possibilities, problems and trajectories of relocation. Planned relocation is not a bland technical intervention involving problem identification and subsequent delivery of finances, technologies, infrastructure, technical skills and programmes to vulnerable peoples. Nor does it align with dramatic imagery suggested by phrases such as 'climate refugees' or 'sinking islands' whereby people demonstrate extraordinary vulnerability and/or resilience as they flee homelands or seek refuge in the face of sea-level rise (Bettini 2014, McNamara and Farbotko 2017). Here, as shorelines shift and erode, high tides regularly flood village boundaries, saltwater intrudes into subsistence farmlands, and other adaptive measures fail, retreat and relocation have emerged as adaptive responses that are enmeshed with everyday decision-making and activity.

Within these villages, persuasive ideas of the adaptive potential of relocation have been generated in part at the global and national level. And relocation and retreat are funded and implemented with the support of the Government of Fiji, international donors and other organisations. Nonetheless, relocation is strongly supported by village leaders and community-level consensus has developed as a result of involvement in decisions related to, for example, location of new sites, timing of relocation, and village layout and house design. Importantly, in all villages, planned relocation has

been enabled through short-distance moves to sites with customary land, where food and water security was ensured, and where livelihoods were retained, restored or developed. And everyday agency is evident in the continuation and adaptation of subsistence farming in existing and new sites, decisions to salvage building materials and develop homes in a site of relocation when funding flows dry up, continuity of social networks and structures, local fund-raising for relocation infrastructure, and resistance to dimensions of relocation that are out of step with local cultures and values. The focus on everyday agency, then, illuminates the ways that people assess and adapt to both changing social and biophysical contexts, draw on their skills and abilities, and live and make life meaningful beyond categories of risk, crisis or vulnerability (see Payne 2016).

This is not to obscure wider structures and macro-level challenges, as everyday agency and decisions take place in environmental, social and political contexts beyond the control of individuals or communities (Carr 2008). In these villages, agency occurs within the parameters of a warming world where local climate impacts are determined overwhelmingly by the actions and emissions of people living in 'big countries'. Further, while the Government of Fiji aims to ensure community engagement and ownership in relocation processes - as evident in the Relocation Guidelines that state an intention to initiate dialogue and collaborate with affected communities, ensure diverse community needs are integrated in relocation planning, conserve traditions and cultural practices, and remove obstacles to participation (Republic of Fiji, 2018: 12) - there are limits to agency. Constraints to agency are evident, for example, in that relocation efforts and resources are limited by the amount of funding available. Further, the intention is not to position villagers as adaptive agents who bear responsibility for coping with climate impacts and relocation processes (Bettini et al. 2017). As a matter of climate justice, the primary challenge is to drastically reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (Barnett and McMichael 2018; Rigaud et al. 2018). Indeed, Fiji's first stated priority for the 2017 COP23 Presidency was to 'preserve the multilateral consensus for decisive action to address the underlying causes of climate change' (COP23 Presidency Secretariat 2017). Yet with locked-in climate impacts and current greenhouse gas emissions trajectories that are unlikely to limit global warming sufficiently, coastal populations will need to respond to climate impacts through coastal defence, accommodation and retreat/relocation.

In Fiji, planned relocation of low-lying coastal villages is occurring in response to environmental change. Fiji is one of the first countries globally to develop National Relocation guidelines (Republic of Fiji, 2018). Yet even with best-practice principles and social safeguards in place, the complexity of relocation – such as diverse socio-cultural costs - challenges good planning (de Sherbinin et al. 2011).

The contribution of this paper is to highlight the ways in which iTaukei residents of coastal villages in Fiji experience, understand and navigate climate-related relocation. Everyday agency is evident as people respond to local environmental changes and risks, and steer their way through the opportunities and challenges of planned relocation. Cinner et al. (2018) write that agency is the basis for activating adaptive capacity, shaping alternative futures, and resisting adaptation efforts and impacts that encroach on key values such as place attachment. Acknowledging and enabling the agency of climate-affected people involved in adaptation initiatives is critically important.

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