

## Climate change and migration: the case of the Pacific Islands and Australia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There is growing consensus that voluntary labour migration can promote economic development in migrant sending and receiving countries and can be a positive adaptive response to the effects of climate change. However, for voluntary migration to be a positive form of adaptation, policy commitment and collaboration between migrant sending and receiving countries will be required. In the Pacific, Australia has capacity to collaborate with Pacific Island governments to facilitate voluntary migration; however, Australia has been reluctant to expand migration access to the Pacific. This article makes the case for promoting migration opportunities between Australia and the Pacific as part of the adaptive strategy efforts.*

**Keywords:** migration, climate change adaptation, Pacific Island countries, Australia, policy.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the International Panel on Climate Change, “small island states - especially the atoll nations of the Pacific and Indian Oceans - are among the most vulnerable to climate change, seasonal-to-interannual climate variability, and sea-level rise...Among the most vulnerable of these island states are the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tonga, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Cook Islands (in the Pacific Ocean); Antigua and Nevis (in the Caribbean Sea); and the Maldives (in the Indian Ocean)” (IPCC, 2014, p. 936).

Reflecting this, there has been considerable discussion on climate change adaptation in the Pacific region. As articulated by Campbell (2014, p.4), climate change adaptation generally refers to “measures that enable communities to cope with, and where possible benefit from, the effects of global warming”. Based on this definition, voluntary labour migration can serve as a positive adaptive response for Pacific communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Bardsley & Hugo, 2010; Barnett & Chamberlain, 2010; Barnett & Webber, 2010; ADB, 2012; Koser, 2012; Edwards, 2013; Birk & Rasmussen, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Campbell & Bedford, 2014; Hugo, 2014; IOM, 2014; World Bank, 2014; Burson & Bedford; 2015). More specifically, voluntary migration is identified as a way for communities to cope with environmental change through alleviating pressure on existing resources and diversifying income, thus allowing those who remain to better adapt to the effects of climate change. However, for voluntary migration to realise its potential as a positive climate change adaptation strategy, policy intervention is required in both the sending and receiving countries (ADB, 2012; Koser, 2012; IOM, 2014; World Bank, 2014). This is particularly the case for Pacific island countries with limited migration options, including the Melanesian states of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and the isolated microstates of Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu (Koser, 2012; Hugo, 2014; World Bank, 2014).

Due to geographical proximity, colonial legacies and existing social networks, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (USA) are currently key destination countries for many Pacific migrants. Current migration routes to these countries are largely based on colonial relationships, family reunification, educational pursuits or employment through skilled and seasonal worker programmes. Both Australia and New Zealand have existing seasonal workers programmes. Many Pacific island countries have access to the USA through the Compact of Free Association which grants visa-free access to the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Similarly, the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue have access to New Zealand. Additionally, many Pacific Islanders can access New Zealand through the Pacific Access Category scheme for long term migration. Australia offers limited permanent migration access for Pacific Islanders in comparison with New Zealand and the USA. Many papers have noted the benefits of expanding migration from the Pacific to Australia for those who are vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Opeskin & MacDermott, 2009; Koser, 2012; Hugo, 2013; Weber, 2015). However, the current policy climate in Australia seems to be leaning toward maintaining existing migration programmes, such as the Skilled Migration Programme and the Seasonal Worker Programme (Campbell & Bedford, 2014).

This article<sup>1</sup> reviews and analyses the existing Pacific climate change literature on voluntary

migration as a positive adaptive response to climate change, with a particular focus on migration to Australia. The article then discusses the potential benefits that could arise through identifying and promoting skilled and unskilled migration from the Pacific to Australia. In order to facilitate such migration, it would rely on strong national commitment of the sending countries to ensure full participation in existing unskilled labour schemes and to improve training in order to promote participation in skilled labour schemes. This article makes a case for migration to Australia as providing positive benefits for both Australia and Pacific countries. As an enabling factor for promoting migration to Australia, public opinion towards Pacific migration is pivotal. Reflecting this, the article aims to address some of the myths that have contributed to a negative public opinion, and contribute to improved public opinion by providing an enhanced understanding of the potential positive and negative impacts of Pacific Islander migration to Australia.

## **CHANGING CLIMATE, CHANGING HOME: VOLUNTARY MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTIVE RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

### THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) binds countries to emission reduction targets and sets the overall direction for global climate change adaptation and mitigation. The through the UNFCCC process, the term “loss and damage” was first recognized in the Bail Agreement (2007) and was then given its own work programme through the Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage. The Warsaw Mechanism was established “to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change” (United Nations, 2013).

Although the First Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1990 emphasised that the greatest single impact of climate change might be on human migration; the Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage only included text related to improving the research “to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planning relocation, where appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels” (United Nations, 2013). The inclusion of climate change related migration in the upcoming Paris Declaration which will arise out of the COP21 in Paris in December 2015 has been widely controversial. The draft of the Paris declaration elaborates on migration in paragraph 70.3 a: “Institutional arrangements under the Convention shall be strengthened to support the implementation of the commitments related to loss and damage under this agreement: a. Provisions for establishing a climate change displacement coordination facility that: i. Provides support for emergency relief; ii. Assists in providing organized migration and planned relocation; iii. Undertakes compensation measures.” (UNHCR, 2015)

The current version of the Paris Declaration primarily focuses on climate change displacement and does not mention voluntary migration as a opportunity to reduce future displacement. Additionally, there is no mention of the need for an international legal framework related to international displacement or migration, which has implications for the human security of migrants from small atoll countries in the Pacific for which internal migration is not an option.

The International Organization for Migration suggests climate change is expected to affect human security to the point that may result in the movement of people in at least four ways (IOM, 2014). Firstly, greater frequency and intensity of natural disasters, both sudden and incremental, may lead to higher risk of humanitarian emergencies. Secondly, the effects of climate change on livelihoods, health, food security and water availability are likely to exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities. Thirdly, rising sea-levels may make coastal areas and low-lying islands uninhabitable. Lastly, competition over shrinking natural resources, such as availability of fresh water, may exacerbate tensions and potentially lead to conflict. As human security becomes threatened some people may feel that they are forced to move or displaced, while others may make a voluntary decision to migrate partially due to climate change.

The International Organization for Migration defined forced migration, or displacement, as a “migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes” (IOM, 2014).

The relationship between voluntary migration and climate change is more complicated (Campbell, 2014). Most voluntary migration is primarily due to education, employment, family reunification, etc. However, when the decision making process is partially influenced due to a decline in human security, livelihood opportunity, land security or natural resources due to climate change, then could be considered being related to climate change. In simpler terms, while climate change may not be a primary reason for migration in many cases, it may be a factor that makes a person more likely to decide to move as compared to staying.

There is not an agreed distinction between displacement and voluntary migration. Each individual makes migration decisions based on a complex range of factors and there is no clear line between when a person chooses to move or feels forced to move. Voluntary migration is perhaps best articulated by Barnett and Webber (2010, p.6), in that a voluntary migration can only be considered voluntary if the person feels that they are making a choice, i.e. they have “the right to stay as well as the right to leave, so that people are free to choose the response that best suits their needs and values”.

Climate change may therefore be seen as one variable of many, which in turn makes it challenging to discern environmental factors from other factors motivating migration (Koser, 2012). Due to the fact that migration decisions are made due to a variety of factors, it is very difficult to estimate the impact of climate change on migration. One approach to attempting to estimate the future impacts of climate change on migration is through agent-based modelling in when an individual (agent) decides to migrate due to a combination of their propensity to migrate (a combination of education, employment status, climate change and other factors) and their ability to migrate (financial means necessary, health, ability to obtain visas, etc.). Based on this way of viewing voluntary migration, it is likely that many people will have a propensity or interest in migration as climate change becomes more severe, but will not have the ability to make this interest a reality.

## THE PACIFIC CONTEXT

Migration is not a new phenomenon in the Pacific region. For centuries Pacific Islanders have been migrating in response to both environmental and social change, and as a means for individuals and families to pursue educational and economic opportunities. The bulk of contemporary migration from Pacific island countries has involved permanent resettlement abroad, with about half a million Pacific Islanders residing overseas, or about one-fourth of the populations of Micronesia and Polynesia (Bedford & Hugo, 2012). In parts of Polynesia, more people are resident overseas than in the home islands, while Melanesian migration remains predominately internal. As emphasised by Connell (2011) and Bedford and Hugo (2012), the next 40 years are likely to see significant increases in migrant populations from the Pacific Islands, with the main drivers of migration likely to be: rapid population growth, resulting in overpopulation in areas with limited resources; the pace of environmental change, largely brought about by climate change; and limited prospects for economic growth.

There has been high-level recognition of the important relationship between migration and climate change in the Pacific, including through President Tong of Kiribati's vision for "Migration with Dignity". The Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference in 2013 established a population development agenda for Asia and the Pacific for next decade through the "Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development". Item 197 of the Declaration acknowledged the need to "support and facilitate adaptation and/or migration with dignity and respect for identity where countries can no longer support their lives of people due to adverse changes in their circumstances and environment resulting from climate change" (ESCAP, 2013, p. 24). However, Australia expressed significant reservation towards the Declaration, particularly in relation to climate change and migration.

The effects of climate change in the Pacific region are reported to include significant temperature increases, changing rainfall patterns, greater monsoon variability, sea-level rise, floods and more intense tropical cyclones (ADB, 2012; IPCC, 2014). The impacts of climate change coupled with pre-existing socio-economic and development challenges in Pacific island countries, such as rapid population growth and poor infrastructure are likely to exacerbate the vulnerability of people in the region (Weber, 2015). Campbell and Warrick (2014) identified three key elements of climate change affecting Pacific island communities: land security; livelihood and food security, such as through the reduction of crop productivity and water quality and quantity; and declining health and habitability, due to changing disease vectors and restricted access to water supply. As the quality of life available to people in the Pacific declines, it is expected that more and more people will consider migration (either internal or international) as a personal climate change adaptation strategy.

It has reported that almost all the island states of the Pacific are considered vulnerable to changes in the environment due to climate change; however, some communities will experience particularly acute challenges that will make these communities likely to become source areas for climate change-related migration (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Koser, 2012; IOM, 2014; Campbell and Warrick, 2014). Atoll countries and communities are considered some of the most vulnerable. Atolls are low-lying islands many of which have high population densities (these

include the countries of Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu and a number of other islands in the Pacific in the countries of Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga). Atoll countries often have very limited ground and surface water, a lack of land for agriculture, are highly dependent on subsistence fishing, are susceptible to salt water intrusion and the entire population is located on the coast line, which makes them vulnerable to storm surge, king tides, natural disasters and sea-level rise. In the cases of many atoll nations, internal migration will be difficult due to a lack of available land to migrate to and the climate change vulnerability of the entire nation.

Campbell and Warrick (2014) also identified Pacific coastal communities, river deltas and large river systems as being highly susceptible to climate change related migration.

While estimating the number of future migrants impacted by climate change is a challenging task, some scholars have provided estimates for the Pacific islands region. Campbell (2009) estimated that there could be between 665,000 and 1,750,000 climate migrants in the Pacific region by 2050 when the total population is projected to read in excess of 20 million people. Another estimate by Edwards (2013) noted that by 2050, in the worst-case scenario, 600,000 people will face resettlement associated with climate change across the Pacific. While these numbers should be used with caution, it is reasonable to postulate that the effects of climate change will increase mobility across the Pacific islands. By not planning for this future challenge, there is potential for humanitarian crises to occur.

The Government of Kiribati, recognising their country is particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise, had established a long-term relocation vision for promoting voluntary migration in order to avoid forced displacement in the future. This is based on the premise that by planning for migration now, it will preserve the dignity of those being relocated as well as minimise the burden on the receiving countries. The vision consists of two components, establishing opportunities with potential destination countries, and equipping I-Kiribati with the skills needed to find work and settle abroad. However, as raised by McNamara (2015), low-skilled and unskilled citizens are likely to be left behind, and some groups might not have the financial and informational resources to migrate voluntarily. Weber (2015) further argued that these people may likely become 'climate change refugees', with few skills and little wanted by countries that should receive them.

Voluntary migration, either temporary or permanent, is seen as having potential as a positive climate change adaptation strategy in the Pacific for three key reasons. Firstly, voluntary migration can reduce population pressure, thus increasing environmental sustainability in climate change affected areas. However, as articulated by both Locke (2009) and Campbell and Warrick (2014), policies supporting gradual migration would need to be coupled with local adaptation strategies if they are to relieve environmental pressure to the degree required to increase security. Secondly, migration can be a means of income diversification for climate change affected communities and may also increase income generation through remittances. Remittances can ensure access to basic needs, and provide added capital to the local economy (Barnett & Webber, 2010). This added capital could be utilised to fund community-level infrastructure to build resilience against the effects of climate change and provide communities the tools to adapt. Thirdly, migration can result in skills transfer between the migrant receiving country and the sending country,

increasing a community's access to information and technology. This is particularly the case when permanent migrants return home temporarily, or when temporary migrants return, bringing with them new skills and knowledge. However, for voluntary migration to be a successful climate change adaptation strategy there should not only be benefits for sending countries, but also for receiving countries.

Tuvalu, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu are examples where migration is working as a positive development strategy, and reducing climate change vulnerability. All of these four countries have high numbers of overseas migrants in Australia and/or New Zealand. This migration has been voluntary through existing employment opportunities and provides a mechanism for generating remittances and income diversification. In particular, the population of Tuvalu has experienced only a slight increase over time, with an average annual population growth rate of 0.27%, despite a high fertility rate. This limited population growth in Tuvalu is due to the high access to international migration on a per capita basis (United Nations, 2013a). On the other hand, Kiribati, which experiences similar climate change vulnerability, has a rapidly rising population at an annual population growth rate of 1.55% due to high fertility and limited international migration (United Nations, 2013a).

## **PACIFIC MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA**

As mentioned, there has not been any formal recognition of cross-border relocation or the idea of climate change refugees at the global level or in Australia. There has been discussion on climate change relocation and displacement at the national level in Australia; however, most of the discussions around the issue of a legal framework for climate change displacement is happening at the global level.

In 2006, the Australian Labour Party proposed a Pacific Rim coalition to accept climate change refugees; however, this was not endorsed. In 2007, the Australian Greens Party proposed the Climate Refugees Amendment Bill which would create a new visa class to formally recognise climate refugees and to grant the Minister for Immigration the power to declare certain environmental disasters as a result of climate change. However, this initiative failed to gain backing from the major parties, partially due to the lack of appropriate criteria for defining a climate change refugee and if Australia implements a migration programme specifically for Pacific climate change migrants, it may then be seen as inequitable as it excludes other countries experiencing similar environmental changes. The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection has recognised that potential internal migration due to climate change in Pacific island countries may be necessary; however, this view constrains climate change migration to internal relocation rather than resettlement abroad (Mence et al, 2013).

Although a decision on climate change refugees or displacement is not likely to be made at the national level in Australia in the near future, expanding opportunities for voluntary temporary and permanent migration to Australia for Pacific islanders could provide climate change adaptation benefits in the Pacific and provide benefits to Australia.

The overall objective of Australia's migration programme is to contribute to Australia's economic, demographic and social well-being (DIBP, 2013). Incoming migrants can play a key role in filling labour gaps in Australia's labour market, as well as contribute to positive population growth and cultural diversity.

Many countries in the Pacific have recognised migration as a means of income diversification and sustainable development. Migration can help reduce population pressure on the resource base by lowering the population, and remittances from migrants can provide significant income support for those who remain at home (Hugo, 2014).

Australia has also recognised the important role of migration as a tool for development in migrant sending countries through being a signatory to the United Nations High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2013 which acknowledged "the important contribution made by migrants and migration to development in countries of origin, transit and destination" (United Nations, 2013, p.1). In 2014, Australia was ranked as having a high potential to use incoming migration as a development tool for less developed countries<sup>2</sup>. Migration between Australia and the Pacific enhances remittances and the skills and knowledge transfer. Australia could then be considered as well positioned to further the migration and development agenda, through intervention of migration policy which facilitate positive outcomes. However, migration has been under recognised as a development tool in Australia's aid policies.

If migration were to be included in the aid programme it would be necessary to ensure that migration does not contribute negatively to development through "brain-drain" or created social cohesion problems. Circular migration can reduce the risk of "brain-drain" and help Pacific Islanders acquire skills, knowledge and insights that can become crucial when they later have to leave their home countries for good (Weber, 2015). Furthermore, the return of temporary migrants to their home communities can result in skills and knowledge transfer, as well as an increase in financial capital, in turn enhancing the capacity of the community to adapt to changes in the environment. Other migration related issues could be addressed through promoting well-managed migration through good policy.

The purpose of the aid programme is to "promote Australia's national interests by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction" (DFAT, 2014, p. 1). The aid programme is heavily focused on the Pacific. It is in Australia's self-interest to promote development in the Pacific and regional security, as increased conflict or irregular migration could contribute to security issues for Australia and Pacific island countries. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has recognised that "without intervention, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation will erode and reverse development gains, and jeopardise the livelihoods of poor people" (DFAT, 2015). However, Australia's aid programme focus on hard climate change adaptation programmes as opposed to soft adaptation such as climate change.

Although the aid programme does not include a focus on international migration, there are some opportunities for Pacific islanders to migrate to Australia. The current opportunities that are open to Pacific islanders for migration to Australia include primarily short-term unskilled



opportunities, longer term skilled opportunities and a new semi-skilled visa which is open only to Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru. The semi-skilled “micro-state visa” will include 250 slots in total for Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru. This visa has only been introduced this year and it is not yet clear how the visa will work in practice.

Australia has recognised the need to use migration as a tool to fill labour shortages in the existing Skilled Migration Programme and Seasonal Worker Programme. However, these programmes do not attempt to link to vulnerable populations or to improve climate change adaptation. Additionally, the volume of people who participate in the programmes is not high enough to result in large development gains, except in the countries with very small populations.

The Skilled Migration Programme provides access for people based on job skills and outstanding abilities and the programme does not discriminate in respect to country of origin. Since the Skilled Migration Programme is not coupled with a Pacific training outreach programme, it primarily attracts only candidates that are already well-qualified.

The Seasonal Worker Programme, which commenced in July 2012, offers Australian employers in the horticulture industry the ability to employ workers when they cannot find enough local labour to satisfy seasonal demand. While horticulture is the main industry for seasonal workers, the scheme is also trialling the accommodation, aquaculture, cane and cotton sectors. In 2014, the participating countries in the program included Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. However, it has been reported there is both a low up-take by Australian employers and a low take-up of visas by Pacific Islanders (Gibson *et al*, 2014; World Bank, 2014). While the Seasonal Worker Programme facilitates temporary migration, it can help spread the benefits of migration widely and create familiarities with destination countries.

The Seasonal Workers scheme requires limited skills and thus provides a means of income diversification for vulnerable households. However, it is difficult for women and people with disabilities to find placement in the Seasonal Workers schemes due the physically demanding nature of the job.

Much of the permanent migration of Pacific Islanders to Australia has been through the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, otherwise known as step-migration, which allowed Australians and New Zealanders to move easily between the two countries to visit, live and work (Vasta, 2004). A number of Pacific island countries and territories have migration access to New Zealand, so when they become permanent residents or citizens of New Zealand, some take advantage of the arrangement to migrate to Australia.

If these existing schemes were expanded then it could help decrease population growth, or perhaps even result in negative population growth, for those nations vulnerable to climate change. However, the number of people with access to migration would need to drastically increase. According to estimate by Bedford and Bedford (2010) the level of net out-migration in Kiribati would need to increase from the current level of about 100 people per year to 5000 people by 2030; however, Tuvalu, with its much smaller population, would only need to increase from the current level of around 100 to 250 people by 2030.

## **PUBLIC OPINION MYTHS VERSUS FACTS**

Across countries, the public and policymakers in receiving countries often believe immigration can become an economic burden, as immigration is feared to lead to loss of jobs, heavy burden on public services, social tension and increased criminality (UNDP, 2009). Immigration can be perceived to intensify the competition for existing jobs and allegedly bring down the wages for the locals (Ratha *et al*, 2011).

Public opinion plays an important role in shaping a country's immigration policy. Therefore, it could be considered that public attitudes in Australia are a critical factor in the positive and successful settlement of Pacific migrants. While most Australians recognize the value of immigration for bringing new ideas and cultural diversity (Markus, 2011), the people in Australia with negative views may feel more strongly about these views. Therefore, these negative views may be more prominent in the media. This section aims to highlight that negative views toward migration are not shared by most Australians.

Numerous surveys have been conducted in Australia and internationally over the last few decades to gauge the attitudes of existing residents towards migrants, immigration policy and multiculturalism, including the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Australian Election Studies, the International Social Survey Program and the Gallup World Poll. On the whole, these surveys demonstrated that levels of support for increased immigration is increasing, with higher percentages of the Australian population agreeing that immigration has a positive influence in Australian society, and lower percentages of the population agreeing that immigration into Australia needs to be limited (Gibson *et al*, 2004; Markus, 2014). Australia ranks among the countries most receptive to immigration (Markus 2011).

Most recently, the International Organization for Migration analysed survey results on how the world views migration. Drawing on data from the Gallup World Poll, the report detailed results from surveys conducted in more than 140 countries between 2012 and 2014. Worldwide, people are generally more likely to want immigration levels in their countries to either stay at their present levels (21.8%) or to be increased (21.3%), rather than to see immigration levels decrease (34.5%) (IOM, 2015). In the region of Oceania, around 69.3% of respondents want immigration levels to stay at the present level or to be increased, which places the region as the most receptive towards immigration.

While there is limited research focusing on Australian attitudes towards Pacific Islander migrants, George and Rodriguez (2009) found in their study on youth identity in Pacific diasporas in Australia that overall acceptance of Pacific Islander youth by the broader Australian community appears high, particularly when compared with the experiences of other migrant groups.

Australian migration policy is increasingly focused on economic factors. In a recent government discussion paper on Setting the Migration Programme for 2015-2016, the key criteria for planning around migration into Australia is to ensure migrants make a strong contribution to Australia's economic prosperity (DIBP, 2014). Furthermore, the Australian Government has called for an inquiry into the greater use of charges relative to quotas and qualitative criteria to determine the intake of temporary and permanent entrants into Australia. The Australian

Government's objectives in commissioning this inquiry are heavily focused on migration being a source of economic enhancement, specifically to examine and identify future options for the intake of temporary and permanent entrants that improve the income, wealth and living standards of Australian citizens, and improve the budgets and balance sheets of Australian governments (Productivity Commission, 2015).

Migrants in Australia have contributed to three factors of economic growth: the volume of the working age population, labour force participation and productivity (DIAC, 2011). Specifically, they add to the size of the labour force, have high labour force participation rates and bring innovation and entrepreneurship to Australia and help make business and trade connections overseas. In Australia, migrants typically fill labour gaps and tend to fill low skilled, minimum wage jobs that existing residents may not want such as in the aged care or manufacturing industries; and thus do not take jobs away from the local population or drive down wages. The common industries of employment for Pacific Island-born people in Australia in 2011 were manufacturing (9.2% of Pacific Island-born workers) and healthcare and social assistance (9.3%) (ABS, 2011). In terms of the drain of the social welfare system, the unemployment rate Pacific Island-born population in 2011 was very low at 5.0% - which is less than that of Australia as a whole (5.6%) (ABS, 2011). In addition, greater numbers of Pacific Island-born people participated in the labour force, with around 77.7% of working age Pacific Island-born people working, compared to 65.0% for Australia (ABS, 2011). Due to the fact that the entire population of the Pacific, excluding Papua New Guinea, is under 3 million people, and that many people in the Pacific are not interested in migration (and are not highly vulnerable to climate change), it is unlikely that an increase in access for migrants from the Pacific to Australia would result in serious disruptions to the economy.

Due to the high labour force participation, there is little merit to the assumption that migrants rely heavily on public welfare but pay relatively little in taxes and welfare contributions (Ratha *et al*, 2011). As with the population overall, migrants in Australia pay tax on income and purchases of goods and services. Additionally, Pacific Island-born people who migrated to Australia from New Zealand via the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement or are in Australia on a short-term visa are not eligible for welfare benefits in Australia until they become a permanent resident or Australian citizen. Overall, research and data indicates that Pacific Islander migrants in Australia largely bring benefits to Australia's economy through high workforce participation, contributions to productive diversity and innovation, and low take-up of welfare services.

In addition to economic benefits, migration also brings changes to the social and cultural landscapes of communities in Australia. The evidence that is available overwhelmingly supports the view that migrants in Australia have made, and continue to make, substantial contributions to Australia's social capital and that the social benefits of migration far outweigh the costs, especially in the longer term (Carrington *et al*, 2007; Markus, 2011; Hugo, 2014). Most of the social costs associated with migration identified are short term and generally arise from the integration phase of the settlement process (Carrington *et al*, 2007). However, research has indicated that the presence of diasporas can be highly effective in assisting newcomers to Australia as they can help migrants make the transition without imposing costs on government

and community support systems (Woolford, 2009; Hugo, 2013). The presence of migrants also substantially increases the range and viability of available recreational and cultural activities for all Australians (Carrington *et al*, 2007). The impact of immigration on leisure and recreation at the grassroots level are clearly demonstrated in many communities throughout Australia through different types of cultural activities in which people participate. As demonstrated in the opinion polls, most Australian's feel that migration enriches the cultural diversities of the receiving communities by expanding the range and viability of recreational and cultural activities, such as the establishment of cultural festivals which can be enjoyed by all

## **POLICY OPTIONS FOR AUSTRALIA**

Several scholars have emphasised that current policy mechanisms in Australia are amenable to adjustment in ways which would allow people affected by climate change in the Pacific to make voluntary choices about migration (Opeskin & MacDermott, 2009; Koser, 2012; Burson & Bedford, 2013; Hugo, 2013; Hugo, 2014). However, there has been little dialogue on how existing policy could be amended in ways that brings benefits for both Pacific island countries and Australia.

Australia should consider a multi-pronged approach for approaching the nexus of issues around climate change and migration in the Pacific.

### **TRADITIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION**

Promotion of migration opportunities does not eliminate the need for climate change adaptation. Climate change adaptation helps improve the living conditions and future security and livelihoods of people living in the Pacific. Managing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations through climate change adaptation and working to reduce future climate change through mitigate will continue to be a priority. Climate change adaptation and mitigation will decrease the need for climate related migration. Thus any activities in support of climate related migration should not be at the expense of support for traditional climate change adaptation or mitigation.

### **IDENTIFYING NEW VISA SCHEMES WHICH COULD FACILITATE VOLUNTARY PACIFIC MIGRATION**

As noted above, facilitating voluntary migration from the Pacific will reduce the change of future climate related displacement and provide income diversification benefits which also results in greater climate change resilience. For a new visa scheme to be effective as a climate change adaptation strategy, it would need to provide opportunities that are open to the populations most vulnerable to climate change, including unskilled women and men. Additionally, a new visa scheme would need to have a high enough quota to result in a decrease in the environmental pressure in the migrant sending community. As noted above, as an example, the quota for Tuvalu could be relatively small at an additional 150 migrants; however, for Kiribati it would need to be much higher at near 5,000.

Australia has currently developed and will soon pilot a micro-state visa for Tuvaluans, i-Kiribati and Nauruans, with an initial quota of 250 migrants. In addition, by targeting the countries with

the highest vulnerability to climate change and the lowest access to international migration, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu, the scheme has the potential to significantly enhance the development prospects of the countries through providing options for people vulnerable to climate change and hardship. However, this new visa is only for a maximum of two years and only for a very small number of people.

A migration scheme similar to New Zealand's Pacific Access Category (PAC), which grants residency each year via lottery to a set number of migrants from Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu is an example to an existing permanent migration scheme in the region. The ballot process attempts to provide an equal chance of being invited to apply for residence; however, the complexity of the application process and the PAC application fee acts a barrier for the most vulnerable populations. Additionally the PAC has the same quota for Kiribati and Tuvalu which means that the per capita access to the PAC is much less in the countries with higher populations, like Kiribati.

The PAC scheme is successfully improving the development prospects of the countries through providing options for people vulnerable to climate change and hardship to voluntarily migrate abroad. However, there are also implications involved with implementing this scheme. As noted in Section 2.2, some Pacific islanders may not be eligible due to being unskilled, not being able to meet the language requirements or do not have the informational resources to find a job in Australia. Those that do migrate through this scheme may result in a loss of human and social capital at their community of origin, which may decrease the community's adaptive capacity to changing environmental conditions. However, ensuring that communities of origin receive the financial and social benefits, such as through remittances and technology transfer, of permanent out-migration may help mitigate any possible negative effects of the loss of human capital.

#### EXPANDING EXISTING VISA SCHEMES IN AUSTRALIA

The Seasonal Worker Programme and the Skilled Migration Programme provide opportunities for migration. The Seasonal Workers Programme is open to more vulnerable groups; however, it is only for very short periods of time. The Skilled Migration Programme only provides opportunities to a very small percentage of highly skilled people, who are unlikely to be considered vulnerable.

Australia could extend the visa period to longer time periods for the Seasonal Worker Programme and increase the Pacific participation in the programme. This would be a way to expand the already successful impact the programme is having in the Pacific.

Additionally, Australia could preferentially select qualified Pacific persons in the Skilled Migration Programme, and strengthen Pacific diasporas and community organisations in Australia. However, for the Skilled Migration Programme to be an effective means of climate change adaptation then there would need to be additional investment in providing training to potential migrants, including training which would provide certification recognized by Australian companies. Australia has a long history of providing technical training in the Pacific through Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) which could be further expanded to provide additional opportunities. Additionally, a foundational course which helps people transition into the APTC would be necessary to reach vulnerable populations. It should be mentioned that

vulnerable populations will not be able to participate in the course unless it is fully funded with transportation and room and board.

#### MANAGING THE TRANSITION TO AUSTRALIA DURING THE MIGRATION

There may also be lessons learnt from the Australian Community Proposal Pilot that could be shared across the other migration programmes in Australia. The Community Pilot aims to assist those with humanitarian visas settle in Australia. It couples migrants with a sponsoring community to help ease the migration process, including meeting them at the airport, assisting them to find permanent accommodation and helping familiarise them with services and service providers such as banks, public transport, health-care, education and employment services. The sponsorship of migrants from communities or organisations helps offset the costs to the Australian government. Promoting a similar community sponsorship programme with Pacific diaspora communities could yield successful outcomes, particularly due to existence of many Pacific diaspora communities in Australia, as well as the importance of kinship in Pacific cultures. The Pacific diasporas in Australia could link new Pacific migrants with services and provide economic and social support, and thereby reduce the costs to the government (Hugo, 2012; George & Rodriguez, 2009).

#### PROMOTING THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN MIGRATION

Many of the migration opportunities are easier for men to access as compared to women. Australia could include separate quotas for men and women migrants. To promote women migrants may require a careful review of the types of employment included in the seasonal workers and micro-state visa scheme. Semi-skilled migration for aged-care and hospitality could provide additional opportunities for women.

Promoting women migrants would also require careful consultation between the Australian Government and the Governments of sending countries and additional research on gender and migration. Research would need to include the barriers that women in the Pacific experience due to migration, since the Pacific countries have high levels of gender inequality.

These policy options illustrate how Australia could play a more significant role in promoting Pacific migration and in turn ensuring the success of voluntary migration as a climate change adaptation strategy for vulnerable countries in the Pacific region.

#### **CONCLUSION: MANAGING A FUTURE CHALLENGE**

With a history of migration and demonstrated support for helping Pacific island countries combat climate change, there is scope for both sending and receiving countries to look to amend existing migration policy to cope with future challenges. An increase in Australia's Pacific Islander population is likely to yield positive or neutral impacts on Australia as migrants contribute to Australia's working age population, labour force participation and productivity and innovation. In addition, Pacific Islanders contribute to Australia's rich cultural diversity. As Australia will lose workers over the next four decades due to low fertility and ageing, migrants from the Pacific can contribute to maintaining the workforces in Australia, particularly to the aged care sector. In

tandem, by providing additional options for Pacific Islanders to migrate to Australia, it can also enhance the development of the Pacific region.

It is crucial to Australia's migration future that not only policy development, but also public opinion, is shaped by a balanced assessment of soundly based evidence about the nature, causes and impacts of migration (Hugo, 2014). By promoting migration between the Pacific and Australia, Australia could help promote development today and also manage a future challenge. Voluntary migration can increase climate change adaptation through income diversification, reducing environment and population pressure, and improving technology transfer. This could in turn reduce the likelihood of irregular migration, humanitarian crises and conflict, and contribute to the positive development of the Pacific.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This study was prepared for the Pacific Climate Change and Migration (PCCM) project. The PCCM project is a three year project (2013-2016) implemented by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project is funded by the European Union.
- <sup>2</sup> Each year, the Center for Global Development's Commitment to Development Index ranks wealthy governments on how well they are living up to their potential to help poor countries. The Index scores seven policy areas that affect the well-being of others around the world: aid, trade, finance, migration, environment, The majority of voluntary migration from Pacific islands will likely utilise existing social networks and traditional visa channels established by earlier generations of migrants (Bardsley & Hugo, 2010; Campbell, 2014). Many of these social networks are located in Australia, New Zealand and the USA. In 2011, there were 125,506 Pacific Island-born people residing in Australia, accounting for around 0.6% of Australia's total population and 2.4% of Australia's total foreign-born population (ABS, 2011).

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