



PRP Webinar shares Experiences on Human Mobility in the Pacific

Suva- Traditional knowledge, skills and belief systems need to be embedded in any relocation policies and frameworks in order for it to be effective. Also, preparedness and planning need to be inclusive of affected and host communities when addressing internal displacement as a result of climate change and disasters, the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) Webinar on “Stories of Resilience, Recovery and Solutions in the context of Internal Displacement” was told.

Four panelists from academia, faith-based organization, local government and low-lying communities shared experiences of current and future trends of internal displacement and how the region is gearing up to manage this growing challenge.

Dr. Tammy Tabe, Assistant Lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, shared experiences and challenges faced by the Gilbertese people who were relocated to the Solomon Islands about sixty years ago as a form of humanitarian assistance.

She emphasized that “Pacific islanders have always been culturally mobile and are resilient people. They thrive on social relations and networks. These characteristics and strengths should be used to build and strengthen existing migration capacities and pathways.”

Mr. Mark Stege, Executive Councilman, Maloelap Atoll Local Government, Republic of Marshall Islands shared past experiences of internal displacement of the people of Bikini Atoll due to the Nuclear Testing and how lessons learned from this can be used for future displacement in the context of climate change.

“One of the lessons learned from the past is that ‘choice really makes a difference’. In past experiences, the people of Bikini over 10 to 30 years, the question of where they were going to be relocated always seemed to be a discussion outside of their area of influence. They were consulted but they didn’t participate in any meaningful way,” said Mr. Stege.

Furthermore, Ms. Frances Namoumou, Ecumenical Animator, Ecological Stewardship and Climate Justice Programme for the Pacific Conference of Churches shared the challenges and complexity of internal displacement in the case of Vunidoqloa, the first relocated community in Fiji.

She commented that relocation is about ensuring the affected people are well consulted and participate in the process as this is about land, identity and belief systems, a sentiment that is echoed by all the speakers including Mrs. Lucille Apis-Overhoff of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Our Pacific Island countries have always been connected to our land and our ocean. Therefore, relocation work, discussions, plans must recognise this connectedness when responding to climate related internal displacement or planned relocation as highlighted by the speakers.

“There were issues regarding land and our projection is that in the future, this might create conflicts. As such, how do we build on the relationship that we already have through our traditional structures, clans and tribes in terms of ownership of land? There will always be a space to welcome the different strands or contributions that elevates or promotes better life”, Ms. Frances highlighted.

This shows the need to have a community first approach addressing displacement and engaging with communities.



This webinar was hosted by the PRP Technical Working Group on Human Mobility on the 3rd December. It is a series of discussions seeking Pacific perspectives on internal displacement and will contribute to the High Level Panel on Internal Displacement (the Panel) that was set up by the UN Secretary General in 2019 and tasked with finding solutions to the global internal displacement crisis.

