

## **My Mats! My Mats! Where Have They Taken My Mats?**

### **The Old Site**

"My name is ..... I am 84 years of age and this is my wife, ..... We spent most of our lifetime at the old village where now only our loved ones are resting and guarding the site. We did not agree to move here. However, we were never left out in the meetings and discussions of the relocation. It was indeed painful on the day we had to move. We had a church service, all the small items that we could carry were loaded in the truck. I made sure my wife boarded the truck with the other women and children. I choose to walk up. I want to feel for the last time the ground that I once ran around on; I have come to terms with what was happening and accepted that we were moving. I turned back every step of the way, hid my tears but continue to walk on for this choice is for my wife, children and the future of my grand-children. They need to be safe and protected where they chose to live and we are making that decision now."

### **The New Site**

"We got to the new site, they have already assigned families to their new homes. It looked beautiful but I was not sure where we were going. Everyone had gone into their homes, excited and sad at the same time but I was left standing on the road near the truck wondering which house have they chosen for me and my husband. A daughter of mine came to my aid and showed me the house they have selected for us. Oh! It's on the hill. Did they ever consider that we are now old and might find it difficult to move around? I walked with my daughter up to the house and I noticed they have not brought in all my belongings. *"Noqu Ibe ? Noqu Ibe? E sa kau kivei noqu ibe?"* translated My Mats! My Mats! Where have they taken my mats? I need those mats to spread in this house as this is our new home now."<sup>1</sup>

### **The Strands of Our Mats**

From an old village full of life, memories and loved ones laid to guard the last foundation that can withstand the rising seas to a new village of many dreams, opportunities and hope for the present and future. A culture and identity associated with the *waitui*, *wasawasa* will now adapt to farming on surrounding hills, and breed introduced fish species in ponds and grazing livestock as part of the relocation plan in Vunidogoloa.

1. The mat is spread to invite people for talanoa: When the mat is woven and spread in the homes, it is open for everyone, all are invited to sit together on the mat and dialogue or talanoa. This invitation to consultation allows participatory of the different groups thus allow communities to drive the processes facilitated by the other stakeholders.
2. Mat as symbol of interconnectedness: Most of our mats have stood the test of times as well. Broken and torn areas are repaired with new strands of mats. This depicts the natural fabrication of our community. There will always be a space to welcome the different strands or contributions that elevates or promotes better life. On the same note, this also highlights the relationship between human beings and the environment.
3. The uniqueness of mat and its use in different parts of the Pacific. This portrays the vast ocean of learning in the Pacific region. Therefore to assume the context in Fiji is similar to all other PICs, would be wrong. The use, shape, design of mats all propose different message and reactions to the issue especially as these are sensitive issues to most.
4. The mat projecting the resilience framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews done in August 2019.