

# Climate change and migration in the Pacific: options for Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands

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**Abstract** As climate change impacts, particularly rising sea levels, manifest there is a high probability that some island populations will be faced with the need to relocate. This article discusses several discourses around migration options for people affected by climate change impacts in small island developing states. Options currently available to citizens of the Pacific nations of Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands are explored, including the perspective that high levels of customary land tenure in the Pacific are a barrier to permanent movement to other Pacific countries. Migration to Pacific Rim countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA is complicated by strict migration eligibility criteria, which often require proof of language abilities and income, and may restrict the number of accompanying dependants. The Compact of Free Association provides visa-free entry to the USA for citizens of the Marshall Islands, but the lack of financial assistance restricts eligibility to those with existing financial resources or family networks that can provide access to capital. The difficulty of directly attributing single weather/climate events to climate change hinders the formulation of a definition of climate change-related migration. This obstacle in turn hinders the establishment of effective visa categories and migration routes for what is likely to become a growing number of people in coming decades.

**Keywords** Climate change · Climate change migration · Migration · Tuvalu · Republic of the Marshall Islands

## Introduction

Climate change is a multi-faceted policy issue expected to impact different regions of the world in different ways. Expected impacts include damage to coastal infrastructure due to sea level rise, reduced productivity of fisheries and impacts to agriculture. In a sad twist of irony, the distribution of climate change impacts is expected to disproportionately affect those who have contributed the least to historical emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2014; Connell 2013; Marino and Ribot 2012).

The anticipated impacts from climate change are expected to influence migration patterns and increase long-term migration flows, particularly from small low-lying island states. Extensive research has found that low-lying coastal areas on atolls are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise (SLR). SLR may result in the inundation of coastal areas which may change coastal profiles through loss of harbours, gardens, homes and damage infrastructure close to the shore, impacting the capacity of communities to continue living in certain areas (Campbell and Warrick 2014). Resources such as coral and marine ecosystems may be damaged by SLR, which may restrict access to food and income from fisheries (IPCC 2014). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2014:1618) has stated that it is ‘virtually certain’ that global mean SLR rates are increasing. In response to the expected future impacts of SLR, some citizens of atoll states such as Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands are anticipated to require access to long-term international migration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Herein, ‘migration’ will refer to ‘long-term international migration’ unless otherwise stated.

Migration is a situation made more precarious when country borders are the sea, as with Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands. When piecing together the existing literature examining migration routes for people from Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands following climate change impacts, it is unclear what rights exist and if any legal pathways can provide long-term migration. A country composed of small atolls requires the development of an organized migration policy between states in advance of the worst impacts of climate change, as an ad hoc response is likely to be more contentious socially and politically, and thus less effective.

The issues of ‘climate change refugees’ and ‘environmental refugees’ have gripped politics, academia and the media as a significant policy issue (De Souza et al. 2015; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). Much of the discussion surrounding climate change-related migration surrounds images of ‘sinking states’ and ‘drowning islands’ slipping beneath the waves (Morales 2014; Stephen 2011; Colville 2007). The estimates and imagery have been criticized as being alarmist as they reduce the agency of the potential migrants and may fuel anti-immigrant sentiment (Farbotko 2010).

Reviewing the existing literature on climate change-related migration uncovers a number of issues that may hinder the journey for somebody to migrate. First, there is no clear definition of what constitutes climate change-related migration and there are a large number of synonyms used to describe climate change-related migration. Second, media coverage often seems to include basic legal errors and promotes migration pathways that are not legally recognized. Third, migration is a highly politicized issue; the politicization may hinder establishment of future migration options or modifications to existing migration pathways. Fourth, discussion of existing migration schemes, unrelated to climate change, assumes that a potential migrant has access to financial capital and a strong network in a future home. A small number of studies have examined these four issues and tried to determine what may be the best routes for people required to undertake transnational migration following climate change impacts. Fewer studies have examined which migration routes are available to citizens of specific countries.

This article explores in non-technical terms the legality and practicality of a range of legal mechanisms to facilitate migration from Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands. This research examines legal mechanisms and suggested routes in academic literature, interviews and the media. The research involved a media analysis of articles discussing climate change-related migration and semi-structured interviews with identified experts in Pacific studies, the target countries, NGOs, environmental issues, demography, human rights and the law. The results from the media analysis and the semi-structured interviews were analysed

in conjunction with existing research to determine what practical routes exist or could be developed in the future. The discussion will examine how the results correspond with the previous literature and what migration options are available to Tuvaluan and Marshallese residents.

## Methods

Two qualitative research techniques were used for this research: an analysis of media coverage of climate change-related migration and a series of semi-structured interviews. The qualitative research followed a general analysis of the literature discussing climate change, predicted impacts and the different migration options that have been suggested as available for citizens of Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands. This multi-pronged research approach offers greater insight into the issues confronting development of climate change-related migration options and critical analysis of the different migration options available to citizens of the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu.

### Media analysis

An analysis of media coverage of climate change-related migration may provide insight into how potential migrants view their migration options. A journalist’s discussion of migration pathways and the use of language such as ‘climate change refugee’ may influence the way in which a person (including a person’s social and familial network) understands their migration options. The manner in which material is presented may reflect current policy, present novel options and may disseminate misinformation.

A media analysis of 72 news articles was undertaken to determine the full suite of migration options being discussed and presented to Tuvaluans and Marshallese from sources such as the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *SBS news*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Waikato Times*. The media sources that formed the main sample were from the period 2004–2014. The sources were found through the media archive ‘ANU Supersearch’ and a ‘Google Alerts’ notification for various keywords such as ‘climate change emigration’, ‘climate change refugee’ and ‘climate change migration’.

### Semi-structured interviews

A key objective of the research process was to discuss the viability of migration options identified in the literature review and media analysis with identified experts. The participants had an identified background in Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands and/or in Pacific studies (see Table 1). All participants have a strong profile regarding migration,

climate change and Pacific studies: six of the eight participants have conducted extensive fieldwork, work and research in Tuvalu and/or the Marshall Islands.

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted between June and August 2014, lasting between 19 and 109 min. The research was conducted from Canberra and Sydney (Australia) with four interviews taking place face-to-face and four interviews taking place over the telephone or via Skype. All interviews were semi-structured and were framed to encourage the participant to guide the direction of the interview with the aim of a critical analysis of the identified migration options. Four question topics were consistent across all interviews: (1) knowledge of existing arrangements to facilitate climate change-related migration, (2) the Nansen Initiative, (3) the term 'climate change refugee', (4) facilitation of a regional Pacific response to climate change-related migration. An advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the participant can guide the nature of the interview, thereby reducing potential bias arising from researchers asking questions encouraging a specific response.

## Results

The findings from the media analysis and the semi-structured interviews are rich in content and accumulate to approximately 60,000 words collectively, and accordingly, the research has been organized thematically. The key themes identified during the research process were: definitional issues, the general incompatibility of utilizing existing migration options for climate change-related migration and barriers to the development of future migration pathways.

## Defining climate change

The difficulty of directly attributing migration to climate change impacts was a reoccurring theme throughout the media analysis and semi-structured interviews. A theme present throughout all of the interviews was that there is not one single cause leading to migration. Rather, there are a compounded series of factors such as socio-economic status, geographical location and access to resources that influence a decision to migrate.

The difficulty of attributing migration to climate change impacts creates difficulty in establishing a definition delineating what climate change migration is and in what circumstances the climate change-related migration can occur. The media analysis uncovered 14 synonyms relating to climate change-related migration including 'climate change refugee', 'climate change disaster survivors', 'climate change resettlers', and 'eco-migrants'. This may cause confusion, result in the dissemination of misinformation and hinder the formation of climate change-related migration policy.

## The incompatibility of existing migration options

The media analysis identified a series of suggested migration options following climate change impacts: as a 'climate change refugee', via a purported agreement with NZ and Tuvalu, and through existing migration streams. The participants were cautious to recommend the existing migration options as appropriate following climate change impacts.

### *1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees*

A uniform concern expressed within the interviews regarded the inappropriate use of the term 'refugee'. The

**Table 1** Participants in the semi-structured interviews

Participant	Background
Coordinator of a Regional NGO	Regional coordinator of an Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working directly with Pacific Islanders on climate change campaigns
Environmental Professional	Based in Samoa for more than a decade working with various bodies
Human Rights and Displacement Legal Scholar	Has conducted extensive fieldwork with numerous organizations on the issues of human rights, displacement and housing rights
Migration Law Scholar	Experienced legal scholar working on migration law, displacement law and has conducted extensive fieldwork in the Pacific
Human Geographer 1	Researcher who has conducted field based research investigating adaptation to climate change, climate change-related migration and resource management in small island states in the Pacific
Human Geographer 2	Researcher whose primary research areas are political, social and economic development in small island states focusing on inequality, migration and rural development
Human Geographer 3	Researcher who has conducted extensive fieldwork over a 50 year period in the Pacific specializing in migration and population movement
Government Advisor to Small Island State	Government advisor on climate change and international law

concern largely related to the description of climate change-related migrants as being ‘climate change refugees’ and ‘environmental refugees’ by the media and some parts of the NGO sector. Human Geographer 3 expressed frustration at the legally erroneous ongoing use of the term ‘refugee’ in relation to climate change, a view expressed by all participants, bar one:

The key issue surrounding the use of the term ‘climate change refugee’ is that the media and NGOs need to be very clear that there is no acceptance in international law of the status of, under the refugee convention, climate change as a factor that creates refugees under the convention.

The term ‘refugee’ has an extremely narrow legal meaning, applying to those with a fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or of their political opinion (United Nations General Assembly 1951). There is a general tendency by the media to use the term ‘refugee’ as a broad descriptive term applying to people who may be faced with the decision to move following climate change impacts. The use of a term that has a specific meaning within the law as a general descriptor may create confusion about what migration options are available. The concern with the term ‘refugee’ in relation to climate change was corroborated by criticism of the term within academic literature (Saul et al. 2012; McAdam 2011; Burson 2012).

Reflecting on their fieldwork, the participants discussed how the term ‘refugee’ is viewed as being disenfranchising for many Pacific Islanders. The Coordinator of a Regional NGO stated ‘I know a lot of our organizers get very angry when people talk about them becoming refugees or moving’, and the Migration Law Scholar stated that in Tuvalu the title ‘refugee’ is one ‘that they strongly reject’. The participant’s concern with the term ‘refugee’ in relation to climate change was corroborated by criticism of the term within academic literature. There is extensive research criticizing the use of the term ‘climate change refugee’ as, whilst well meaning, it is a term that creates an image of passivity and tragedy that denies agency to those who may be required to make a decision to move following climate change impacts (Connell 2015; Saul et al. 2012; McAdam 2011; Burson 2012).

#### *The Pacific access category and the compact of free association*

The two existing migration streams that have been identified, in both the media and the preliminary analysis, are the Pacific Access Category (PAC) in New Zealand (NZ) and the Compact of Free Association (CFA) between the USA and the Marshall Islands. Both schemes allow for migration

but are not related to migration following climate change impacts. The participants highlighted the lack of accessibility for many people who do not have existing funds necessary to move to NZ and the USA as key issues restricting people from accessing the PAC and the CFA.

Two articles published by *The Guardian* identify NZ as a viable place to migrate following exposure to ‘climate risk’; ‘partly based on these known climate risks, New Zealand has agreed to accept 75 migrants from Tuvalu per year’ (Adger 05/11/2007; Adams 12/10/2005). *The Guardian* articles do not discuss details of the purported agreement such as if the agreement legally binds NZ to accept Tuvaluans, timeframes, and if the agreement occurred between senior politicians or between members of civil society. It is likely that that the reference to the NZ–Tuvalu agreement is making a reference to the PAC labour scheme which annually grants 75 Tuvaluans residency to New Zealand, but without any reference to climate change (New Zealand Immigration 2016a; Bedford and Bedford 2010:107).

Participants emphasized that caution should be exercised when suggesting labour schemes as viable migration pathways due to the restrictive eligibility criteria. The PAC provides migration to NZ for 75 Tuvaluans annually who are between 18 and 45, have an existing job offer, meet income requirements and have a tested level of English (New Zealand Immigration 2016b). The promotion of the PAC as a viable migration scheme is fraught with difficulties as only a limited number of people can access the scheme, and the language and employment criteria exclude large proportions of the population, as highlighted in the interviews. Human Geographer 1 stated there is concern for ‘the people who can’t do that [access labour schemes] we should be worried about—the people who will be left behind, those on whom the impacts of climate change will fall hardest on’.

The CFA was discussed in the interviews as a key migration pathway for citizens of the Marshall Islands wanting to go to the USA. The CFA is an agreement signed between the USA and the Marshall Islands in 1986 granting Marshallese citizens rights to enter the USA (Bedford et al. 2014). Despite the bureaucratic ease of entering the USA without a visa, participants were cautious to recommend the CFA as a viable migration option. The three Human Geographers discussed the potential journey that Marshallese citizens face if they live on an outer atoll; a journey that would require cross-atoll transport and international travel. In order for this to be viable, a Marshallese citizen would need to have sufficient funds for start-up costs associated with moving across an international border and may require an existing social network in the USA for this journey to be seriously considered.

Viewing agreements such as the PAC and the CFA as viable migration pathways was criticized as shallow analysis by some participants. Human Geographer 3 stated ‘the bulk of people don’t have access because they can’t afford it’. Reliance on such agreements was stated to create

‘a vicious spiral that just goes in a uncontrolled direction whereby all the educated, wealthy, politically connected and maybe multi-passport holding nationals leave the country first’ (Human Rights and Displacement Scholar)

The media articles made few references to the issues associated with labour schemes. An article discussing the NZ PAC largely corroborated statements by the participants; ‘the position has attracted criticism for leaving out the young and the old, who have the least ability to relocate’ (MacFarquhar 29/052009).

### **Future migration opportunities and expected obstacles**

#### *Nansen initiative*

The Nansen Initiative is a project initiated by the governments of Norway and Switzerland that is premised around highlighting the importance of a multilateral consultation process in correcting the policy gaps in international law regarding displacement caused by environmental change, and has been promoted as a viable solution to the migration pathways deficit (Türk 2014; Kälin 2012). All participants were asked about the Nansen Initiative with many describing confusion over exactly what the Nansen Initiative is, and the media analysis yielded no references to the Nansen Initiative.

The media analysis involves a relatively small sample of 72 media articles, and therefore, coverage of the Nansen Initiative may have been missed. However, the lack of coverage of the Nansen Initiative may indicate that there has been a lack of meaningful consultation, by the proponents of the Nansen Initiative, with customary land-owners, community leaders and other members of the community. Equally, the absence of coverage of the Nansen Initiative may indicate that journalists are not providing adequate coverage of schemes examining climate change-related migration. There was a lack of conclusive details as to what exactly the Nansen Initiative will achieve and which organization will be responsible for implementing suggested reforms.

#### *Migration to Australia and New Zealand*

The participants indicated that Australia and NZ were reluctant to appear as though their doors were wide open to

migration from the Pacific Islands, and that the countries were unwilling to facilitate migration under the category ‘climate change’. The participants made reference to attempts to formulate public policy concerning climate change-related migration and individuals undertaking judicial proceedings attempting to gain NZ residence due to climate change, and how these attempts have largely failed.

The participants made no reference to the 2006 Australian Labor Party (ALP) policy document ‘Our Drowning Neighbours’ (Sercombe and Albanese 2006). The document suggests a public policy strategy of assisting with full ‘evacuation’ of countries such as Tuvalu and establishing an international coalition to accept ‘environmental refugees’. The ALP did not implement measures recognizing ‘environmental refugees’ and the policy document is not available from official ALP websites suggesting that the ALP may no longer be in favour of expanding the definition of ‘refugee’ or establishing a migration route to Australia for people affected by climate change impacts. The participants discussed the politicization of migration in more general terms by making reference to the general Australian attitudes towards migration and how this may hinder the formation of policy.

Similar wariness was expressed by participants when discussing the possibility of viewing NZ as a viable state for receiving migration relating to climate change impacts. Domestic courts in NZ have rejected attempts to have climate change recognized as a way to access asylum as a refugee (*Teitiota v Chief Executive of the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment* (NZHC 3125) 2013). The participants did not specifically make reference to these cases; however, a number of participants discussed how the use of the term ‘refugee’ in relation to climate change is legally erroneous. The media analysis yielded references to the case of Ioane Teitiota; ‘No refugees please, we’re New Zealanders. That is the message from New Zealand’s court of appeal in endorsing earlier rulings that Ioane Teitiota—a Kiribati national—is not a climate change refugee’. (Godfrey 2014).

#### *Customary land tenure and inter-Pacific settlement*

Inter-Pacific resettlement and migration presents a labyrinth of issues associated with land rights and land tenure (Campbell 2014). A 2008 AusAid study of customary land and development in the Pacific found that between 65 and 99 % of land in the Pacific is managed through customary tenure systems, with the exception of Tonga which has 100 % of land managed through a public land system. There were unclear figures for the Cook Islands, East Timor and Palau with ‘some’, ‘little’ and ‘most’ used to describe different land management systems. The AusAid



research indicates that ‘most’ of East Timorese land and ‘some’ of Palauan land is managed through customary land ownership systems (AusAid 2008). Land managed under customary ownership systems cannot be bought and sold, and can only be transferred according to kinship arrangements (Campbell and Warrick 2014; AusAid 2008). The complexity of inter-Pacific settlement was highlighted by both the media analysis and the participants emphasizing the importance of methodically examining issues of land tenure and engaging with all relevant stakeholders when creating migration and resettlement policy.

Two media articles examined the issues that faced the Papua New Guinean Carteret Islanders following internal migration to Bougainville in response to environmental impacts. One article examined in detail the issues facing Carteret Islanders and illustrated the difficulty associated with trying to access land held by other customary landowners (Kenneth 2009):

Three of these [Carteret Islander] families complained that they were in frequent arguments with Tinputz landowners [landowners in Bougainville] over land and that they were finding it very difficult because they did not have gardens, sometimes no food and most of all had no proper house. Some of them were living in makeshift houses while most of them needed roofing iron and other housing materials to build decent homes.

Many of the participants expressed wariness to assume that Australia and New Zealand represented a ‘nirvana’ (Human Geographer 3) easily adapted to by people coming from a culture associated with living on an atoll. Equally, the participants stressed that any discussion of developing migration pathways needs to respect that many people are not willing to leave their homes. The Coordinator of a Regional NGO stated:

‘It is a very sensitive issue for a lot of people I’ve worked with or in meetings I’ve been at. It raises some emotions definitely, it surfaces pretty quickly. For a lot of people I’ve talked with, they don’t want to entertain the possibility of moving’ ... ‘because basically they identify so strongly as a part of the land and without it they would be lost’

## Discussion

The various drivers influencing a decision to migrate creates difficulty in identifying climate change impacts as sole causes of migration, highlighting the onerous task of establishing a definition pertaining to climate change-related migration. The establishment of a legally and

politically accepted definition is a key to delineating the rights of a migrant and the responsibilities of a receiving state to the migrant. Without such a definition, it is extremely difficult for a migrant to understand what their rights of passage are and if a receiving state is required to offer access to services such as welfare, education and health care. For potential receiving states, without a universally accepted definition, and understanding of what climate change-related migration is, it is not clear what responsibilities the receiving state has to potential migrants.

Within scholarship, the media and the few policy documents discussing climate change-related migration, there are a vast array of different titles used to describe climate change-related migration. The media analysis alone found 14 synonyms for climate change-related migration.

The saturation of the different terms describing climate change-related migration may create confusion for people who are trying to understand what their future migration options may be. Possible migrants (or, a potential migrant’s social network) may read discussion of a ‘climate change refugee’ and consider that the refugee pathway extends to people affected by climate change impacts. This was a view aired by all of the participants, bar one. Similarly, there is significant scholarship regarding the continued use of the term ‘refugee’ in relation to climate change, decrying its use in the media, by NGOs and occasionally in academic literature (Kothari 2013; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; McAdam 2012; Saul et al. 2012).

To be classified as a ‘climate change refugee’, one must establish that adverse consequences of climate change are a result of the actions of a person’s Government, in accordance with the *1951 Refugee Convention* (Lopez 2012; McAdam 2012; Hugo 1996). The *1951 Refugee Convention* requires that displaced persons be subject to persecution in order to qualify for status as a refugee. Persecution is defined as ‘an act of Government against individuals’ (Lopez 2012:175) and when a Government is unwilling to protect persecuted citizens. The Convention limits the types of persecution to reasons of ‘race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’ (United Nations General Assembly 1951: art. 1). It is also required that a displaced person crosses international frontiers in order to be eligible to apply to be recognized as a refugee.

Organizations such as the UNHCR are not ignoring the issue of climate change-related migration as a future policy issue; however, discussion of migration is not framed as a potential migrant being considered a ‘refugee’ (UNHCR 2015). The application of the term ‘refugee’ is determined by how a signatory state enshrines their commitment to the *1951 Refugee Convention* into domestic law (Saul et al. 2012; Simmons 2009).

The UNHCR Director of International Protection felt ‘compelled to comment on the use of the term ‘climate

refugees' or 'environmental refugees'; terms which are best avoided' stating that the UNHCR prefers terminology such as 'external displacement' (Türk 2014). Other guidance for formulating climate change-related migration policy provided by the UNHCR relates to 'planned relocation' of people required to move following climate change impacts (UNHCR 2015). Similarly, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) uses the term 'environmental migrants' when describing persons moving for environmental reasons including climate change impacts, emphasizing that terms describing migrants as refugees have 'no legal basis in international law' (IOM 2015).

As previously discussed, there are two key New Zealand legal precedents that climate changes impacts, occurring or expected, are not sufficient to apply for asylum (*Teitiota v Chief Executive of the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment* (NZHC 3125) 2013). Similarly, the High Court of Australia has found that recognition of a person as a refugee in Australia is ultimately premised on the *1951 Refugee Convention*.

Attempts have been made to see climate change-related migration discussed as an important political issue in Australia. Most notable is the ALP's short-lived 2006 policy document, *Our Drowning Neighbours*, which outlined the need to create a 'climate change refugee' visa status (Sercombe and Albanese 2006:8). The ALP subsequently formed Government after the 2007 federal election, but did not implement measures recognizing 'climate change refugees'. The commitment of the newly formed ALP Government relating to climate change refugees was tested through the introduction of the *Migration (Climate Refugees) Amendment Bill 2007 (Cth.)*, by the Australian Greens, which did not pass through the Commonwealth Houses of Parliament (Collett 2009). Considering broader political discourse surrounding migration in Australia, it becomes clear that there are significant political barriers that may hinder future development of climate change-related migration policy. Key policy principles that have dominated political discourse in the 2013 federal election campaign included 'tough' stances on irregular migration including election commitments not to grant permanent visas to asylum seekers arriving on Australian territory by boat, even if granted refugee status (Kenny 2013). The ongoing political attitudes towards irregular migration highlight significant barriers associated with development of pathways facilitating migration not only from Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands to Australia, but also from other countries severely impacted by climate change impacts.

There are labour opportunities for Tuvaluan residents to move to NZ through the PAC; however, it should not be understood as a climate change-related migration option.

The NZ Government have firmly stated that no agreement exists that allows people to enter NZ following climate change impacts (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013). Two court rulings, regarding i-Kiribati national Ioane Teitiota, have rejected attempts for climate change impacts to be equated with the term 'refugee' (see "[Migration to Australia and New Zealand](#)" section). Despite this judgment, the media sample yielded numerous references to the PAC as a migration option following climate change impacts. A consequence of this promotion may be that people view the PAC as a legitimate source of climate change-related migration.

Much literature surrounding climate change impacts in the Pacific and appropriate policy response fails to engage with policymakers, spokespeople and 'laypeople' within the Pacific regarding the geopolitics of relocation and migration (Smith and McNamara 2014; Farbotko 2010). Discussion of development in Oceania presents viewpoints of inhabitants being isolated from much of the world, despite Pacific Islanders being highly mobile through seafaring, family and social networks, and job opportunities (Campbell 2015; Hau'Ofa 1994), a point important to consider within the context of climate change-related migration.

The Tuvaluan Government position is to resist calls for the development of relocation programs due to the 'fight to keep our country, our culture and our way of living' (former Prime Minister of Tuvalu Apisai Ielemia cited in McAdam 2012:173) and vehemently rejects the title 'climate change refugee' (Farbotko et al. 2016). Fieldwork examining the attitudes of politicians, leaders and activists has found that many Tuvaluans would not consider the prospect of leaving their islands due to climate change impacts.

An NGO manager stated that 'we have our own culture and we want to maintain that' preferring to 'just stay here [Tuvalu] and die' (Farbotko et al. 2016:540). Accordingly, an NGO worker stated 'you know your way at home. And then you are yourself. Your identity is there' (Farbotko et al. 2016:540) highlighting the powerful intertwining of identity, personhood and place. Many other responses from interviews with NGO staff, government officials, and pastors described *loss of identity*, *suffering*, the *lose of home*, being *stranded* and *death* from drowning (Farbotko et al. 2016:540-1).

Other interview-based research has found that many people wishing to migrate from Funafuti, the capital of Tuvalu, were motivated by access to better services, employment and opportunities with only a single interviewee specifically influenced by the prospect of climate change (Mortreux and Barnett 2009). Other respondents highlighted their profound attachment to Funafuti and/or Tuvalu with one participant stating that she would prefer to stay and 'go down with it' if climate change impacts

required communities to migrate (Mortreux and Barnett 2009:110).

Similarly, McAdam (2012) found that interviewees from the Marshall Islands felt there was a lack of consultation with affected Pacific communities concerning the direction of climate change-related migration policy. Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner (2012) articulates this concern; 'we've never wanted to leave/and that we are nothing without our islands'. Jetnil-Kijiner uses the metaphor of the pandanus tree 'which roots itself deep within the land, we the youth of the Marshall Islands should do the same'.

It is important to note that one cannot presume that interviewed Tuvaluans and Marshallese can represent the attitudes of an entire country. Extensive research examining attitudes of Tuvaluans and Marshallese has found, however, a general rejection of the prospect of a future mobile identity defined by loss (Farbotko et al. 2016:548; Connell 2015; Stratford et al. 2013; McAdam 2012; Mortreux and Barnett 2009).

Ultimately, the need to examine what migration options have been promoted as viable for people migrating following climate change impacts does not simply extend to citizens from Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands but may apply more broadly to other states. Atolls within Kiribati, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia may be similarly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as may be atolls outside of the Pacific. Significant physical, cultural and political differences exist between Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands and other atolls, and climate change impacts may be different and may occur across a different time period.

The decision to migrate, finally, lies in the hands of those who live in areas expected to be affected by climate change impacts, both within Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, and other countries where citizens may be similarly impacted. For many people, their home represents part of their identity, is a link to their ancestors, source of their familial and social networks, and is viewed as central to their culture. The decision to migrate or stay is difficult to make. The development of migration routes and creating greater clarity in rights extended to possible migrants will enable future migrants from countries such as Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands to make informed decisions about whether to remain in their home, or seek a new home.

## Conclusion

At the time of writing, it was clear that no appropriate migration pathways exist to facilitate migration following climate change impacts for Tuvaluan and Marshallese citizens. A definition of an accepted term describing climate change-related migration is an important start to the process of developing policy frameworks and migration pathways.

This provides all parties the opportunity to understand the conditions in which a person may be required to move, the responsibilities of the migrant, and other rights that may be held by the migrant and the receiving state. Upon establishing a definition, it will be easier to gauge the attitudes of all parties when establishing migration policy. This will be particularly pertinent when determining whether sufficient political will exists to establish migration pathways.

This study relies on a small sample of media articles and a small number of interviews to complement an extensive review of the literature. However, the results indicate that there are issues with the media reporting non-existent migration pathways and promoting inappropriate migration options. It is evident that there are large numbers of basic factual and legal errors littered throughout reporting on climate change-related migration. The frequency of the use of the term 'climate change refugee' and the reporting of an agreement between NZ and Tuvalu that does not appear to exist are prime examples of dissemination of incorrect information. A consequence of continued reporting of basic errors may create confusion in the understanding of what migration paths options are available to potential migrants.

The decision to migrate following climate change impacts is likely to be fraught with difficulty. A person's home may be a link to their ancestors, be a source of their familial and social networks, and be integral to one's understanding of self. It is not expected that climate change impacts will result in large levels of migration for the next decade or two. This provides time for policymakers, in both atoll countries and potential destinations, to examine the large volumes of the literature examining climate change and regional impacts, and then determine how public policy can respond to expected impacts. Defining the conditions necessary to be considered a 'climate change-related migrant' provides greater clarity regarding how to proceed with policy formation, and how to begin the bureaucratic process of developing migration policy.

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