

TALANOA TOKTOK

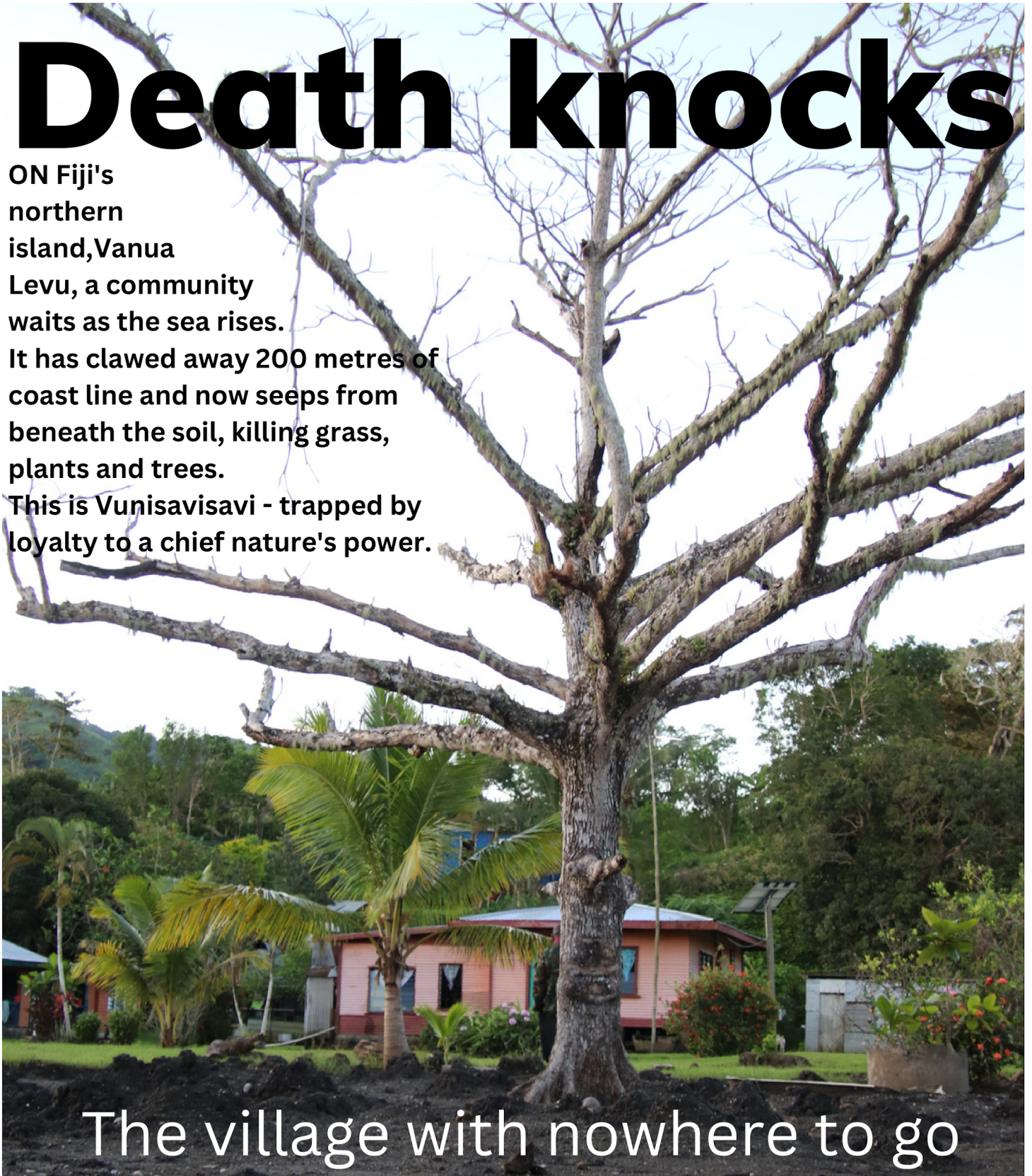
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Death knocks

ON Fiji's northern island, Vanua Levu, a community waits as the sea rises.

It has clawed away 200 metres of coast line and now seeps from beneath the soil, killing grass, plants and trees.

This is Vunisavisavi - trapped by loyalty to a chief nature's power.



The village with nowhere to go



Faces of hope the children of Vunisavisavi contemplate their future

A plea for help

IN many communities threatened by rising sea waters or salt water intrusion, the solution is simple - find higher ground.

But what happens when there is nowhere to go, no alternative site, an absence of resettlement options?

That is the dilemma faces at Vusnisavisavi, Cakaudrove, on Fiji's second largest island - Vanua Levu.

The current village comprises around six homes and half the inhabitants have moved to land gifted to them by neighbouring villages. Vunisavisavi is the ancestral home of the Tui Cakau, one of Fiji's three senior chiefs. While the Tui Cakau has not lived on the site for close to 200 years, Vunisavisavi retains an important spiritual place in the hearts of the Cakaudrove people.

Large stone slabs mark the site of the original chief's home - Lalagavesi - from where he commanded his people before moving to Taveuni, 20 kilometres across the sea.

Today, Tui Cakau's retainers are stoic about their sacred duty to guard this site. Their future appears inevitable - they must flee in dishonour or drown in glory.



Tough choice

WHAT does a guardian do when a defensive position is untenable?

Xxxxxxx XXxxxxx must lead his village to make the tough choice. Because Vunisavisavi is a settlement, it does not fit into Fiji's climate relocation plans. And because the village where the rest of their people relocated 200 years ago is not threatened, they cannot receive help.

What happens next? That is what churches and villagers hope to answer soon.

Solution search

IT'S not often that church leaders see first-hand the cold, harsh reality of the lives led by members of their congregation,

Climate change is an issue lived on the fringes of society, far from the comfort of church headquarters. In August, Methodist Church in Fiji General Secretary, Reverend Semisi Turagavou, visited villages on the climate change relocation front line and listened to their pleas.

It was an ecumenical journey to three villages - Methodist, Roman Catholic and Anglican. While denominations differed, the plea was the same - we need solutions, please help us out of this situation. Turagavou immediately identified the need for greater pastoral involvement in villagers' lives.

"These are our people - God's people - and they need help," Turagavou said after meeting people at Vunidogoloa and Vunisavisavi villages on Vanua Levu.

"At a national level within our churches it is time that we recognise the enormous impact climate change is having on our people and develop programmes to support them in this great time of need."

Turagavou joined leaders of the Anglican church and members of the Catholic relief agency - Caritas - on a two-day tour facilitated by the Pacific Conference of Churches. The PCC brought together villagers from Cakaudrove, Kadavu and Serua who have been affected by rising sea waters and the need to relocate to

safer sites. These moves have included the need - in some cases - to leave behind important historical sites or make changes to food gathering practices.

Representatives of two coastal villages in Kadavu and Serua shared their experiences with the people of Cakaudrove while church leaders listened and - when asked - offered guidance and comfort.

The PCC initiative follows a COP 26 side event held in Fiji last year to highlight the lack of consultation with communities affected by climate change.

Further discussions will be held between affected communities and the church which is a major landowning unit in Fiji and the Pacific.

Women have a chance to speak

EXTREME care was taken to ensure that women and youth made contributions to climate change talks in Vanua Levu, Fiji.

Recognising the burden placed on vulnerable members of society during climate change induced displacement, facilitators allowed women and young people to share their pain with church leaders and community elders,

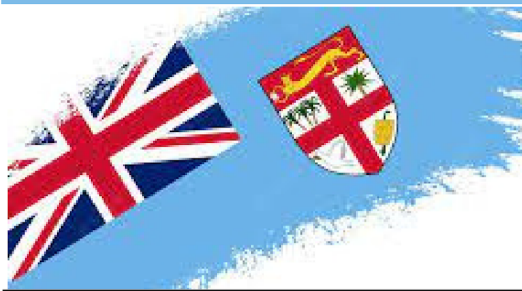
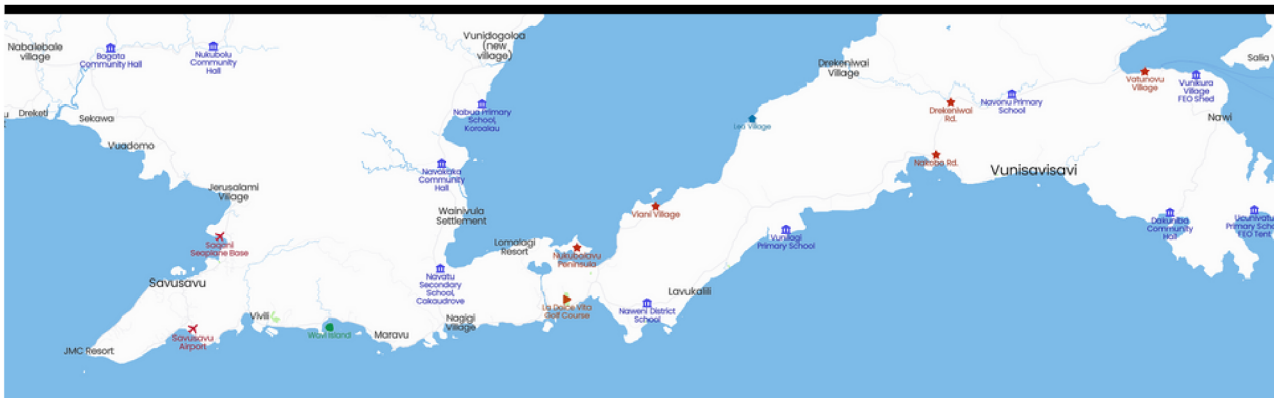
Women spoke of the added burden of travelling greater distances to find food and firewood while adapting to new lifestyles after leaving their previous homes. For young people, challenges included greater dealing with the influences of social media due to better connectivity and better access to communications.

Some spoke about the failure - during relocation - to take into account the need for safe cooking areas.



'When it comes to climate change, it's the vulnerable - women, children and the elderly - who suffer most'

Talanoa Toktok



About Cakaudrove
Population - More than 50,000
Composition - 16 districts, 132 villages
Major religion - Christianity (Protestant and Catholic) with Hinduism, Islam and other religious faiths
Social issues - Climate change, unemployment, drugs
Economic base - Agriculture, fisheries, tourism and remittances

Where is the church?

Villagers want preachers to address climate issues

WHEN congregations face traumatic experiences, they expect the church to be in the midst of the struggle - supporting, accompanying and comforting them.

During a two-day tour of climate change affected villages, Anglican, Catholic and Methodist leaders in Fiji heard from their people that there was a greater need for church leadership to guide congregations through difficult times.

"There are times when we feel that this climate change is due to a curse or something we have done as a people and God is angry with us," one villager told a summit in the Cakaudrove village of Vunidogoloa.

"What other reason can there be for the village to be affected, to be destroyed by the rising waves and the receding coast line?"

Methodist Church in Fiji General Secretary, Reverend Dr Semisi Turagavou (pictured), said it was important for the church to hear the concerns of the people and prepare programmes which would alleviate their fears and encourage them to remain faithful.

"We believe that in all difficulties, God provides for us and offers



solutions if we are able to reflect and listen to God's voice.

"Climate change is a phenomenon which affects our people, it is a new social issue and the church must address it through suitable theology and teachings."

Villagers from Vunidogoloa have been accompanied by Methodist Church elders for around nine years, beginning from their first discussion to move to a new site due to the destruction of the old village by advancing waves.

This accompaniment was supported by the Pacific Conference of Churches

as it tried to help build a Climate Change Relocation Policy for Fijian villagers. A similar initiative was conducted at Narikoso Village, Kadavu, with limited success in 2014.

Reverend Tafue Lusama of the Pacific Theological College accompanied the church elders on the Cakaudrove tour to provide insights from his home - Tuvalu.

"We may think that God is punishing us with climate change but the question is - who caused the pollution and increased temperatures?" Lusama asked villagers.

"Where do we see God in climate change and what responsibility do we bear as human beings for these changes to the environment? Perhaps it is not God, rather it is human beings who have caused rising sea levels."

Lusama said there remained a need for the church to help people see the need to be more responsible for the world in which they must live.

The full transcripts of the community consultation can be found on our website - www.pcc.org.fj