

# TALANOA TOKTOK

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Who  
will  
help us?

**Answer from above ... a child at Navunisavisavi, a community threatened by rising waves**

AT Vunisavisavi on Fiji's second largest island of Vanua Levu, the sea has slowly but surely clawed away at the coast line. Watery fingers have torn sand and soil, stripping the tiny village of its protection. Now, exposed more than ever to the sea, the people of Vunisavisavi have been told they must leave.

But where will they go? The villagers are guardians to the ancient ruins called Lalagavesi, original home of the Tui Cakau who is the traditional head of the villages along this coast and the province of Cakaudrove.

The villages desperately want a seawall to hold back the water but the government will not help.

What was once the village playing field is no more than a vast expanse of mud through encroachment from the sea and intrusion of salt water from beneath the soil.

Some homes have been rebuilt on higher ground but now the survival of their sacred site appears to be literally slipping beneath the waves. For Vunisavisavi, time is running out and there is nowhere to go.



Village life ... PCC's Bedi Racule (left) at Vunidogoloa in Fiji

# Bound by values

## Reflections of a community worker

By **BEDI RACULE**

AT Vunisavisavi, Vunidogoloa and Naviavia in Fiji's North, community leaders face unique problems from coastal erosion to land and food security to dealing with relocation and the challenges of a new home.

Despite their separation, the leaders in each community share common values - strength and tenacity of character and the love they hold for their people.

In each village the Turaga Ni Koro (village headman) has kept excellent records. At Naviavia we were shown black and white photos from years ago as if to say: "We have been here for a long time as stewards of this land." Although they had no legal rights to the land they occupied, their spiritual connection was undeniable. Their hospitality knew no bounds. He tried to give me the photos – these precious and priceless treasures - offered to a stranger. When we visited Vunidogoloa, the Turaga Ni Koro handed us a book which contained the names of visitors to the new village dating back to its inception. He was proud of this history and eager to pass it on to the future ancestors of his land.

As we sat in his home, he told us of their relocation. "The day we left the village..." he began but could only end his sentence with tears. He didn't need to use words, the weight of what he had felt in his heart spoke volumes. I experienced the same sadness within Turaga Ni Koro of Vunisavisavi who waded through the struggles and hopes of his people, in search of solution that would secure their future while honoring their past. These leaders bear this incredible burden that is often overlooked and misunderstood by climate justice organizations. Yet, through it all they have fought and displayed a powerful form of leadership. If we claim to want to help, we must hear what they have to say.

**Bedi Racule is intern to the Climate Justice Desk. She is from the Republic of the Marshall Islands and lives in Fiji with her husband and two children**



## Youth, be heard!

WE'RE giving young people a chance to be heard in words, dance and song. That means, if you're between 18 and 35, feel free to send in a form of art which shows issues affecting the young people in your community.

We welcome written articles of 2000-3000 words or video submissions of five to seven minutes showing drama, song, poem or dance related to your issues. If you're successful, your art will go on display at the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Germany later this year.

For details, visit our website at [www.pcc.org.fj](http://www.pcc.org.fj) and send us a submission. Entries close on July 29



[www.pcc.org.fj](http://www.pcc.org.fj)

# Leaders keep kids safe



**Keep them safe ... PCC programmes protect children**

CHURCH-based trainers will put in place plans for child-protection programmes over the next month.

This is after ten women and eight men representing children, youth, women, and men's fellowship groups attended a PCC-facilitated training course in Savusavu, Northern Fiji.

They discussed Biblical models of child protection, safe church, and the impacts of child violence and child sex-abuse. The PCC Child Protection Team facilitated its first training of church enablers in response to a call to action by Methodist, Catholic, and Anglican Church leaders last year.

These leaders from the North strongly condemned "all acts of violence and abuse that damage and traumatize Fijian children".

Highlights of the May meeting included identifying existing practices in village communities that contribute towards preventative methods of child protection. These included "solesolevaki" (communal project work) or the use of the lali (wooden slit drum) to communicate the time for children to be inside their homes.

In urban settings, discussions centered on the importance of churches working together with local stakeholders, including the police) to raise awareness on children's wellbeing and protection from harm and violence.

The UNICEF funded programme supports churches in addressing child protection and safeguarding from a lens of Biblical values and teachings in Matthew 19:14 and Psalm 127:3.

## Teacher points to moral compass

PETERO Ratucove is a trained teacher and lay minister who works in his local parish - Saint Andrew - in Savusavu.

He described the PCC Child Safety Training of Trainers programme as excellent and relevant to church community life and work.

Here are his reflections: The training is very useful for our parish as the Church is the 'moral compass' of society. The church not only has the moral authority but the moral obligation as well to protect the sacredness of human life and to promote human dignity for all including children. The church needs all the training it can get to live up to its calling as a Prophetic Voice to society. It can do this by its very words, messaging, principles,

practices and example. A church built on the foundation of Christ must be configured to His values and teachings.

Jesus was a child in a family and his family is the Perfect model and inspiration for any effort to protect children. The training has helped to raise our awareness and consciousness to evaluate her own standards.

After the training I have been able to identify some of our Parish's shortfalls: 1. Absence of Disability Access to church buildings and facilities 2. Lack of understanding and application of the Archdiocese's Code of Conduct 3. Lack of emphasis and absence of translation of the Code into the local vernacular, lack of trained

personnel equipped with the skills and knowledge around the area of Child Protection. 4. Absence of a structured Children's Ministry and lack of advocacy/messaging in the area of Child protection 5. Absence of structured programs that engage Children, offer safe spaces and provides opportunity to identify and address cases of Child Abuse 6. Lack of discussion and engagement with other related Child Protection agencies to allow our parish to make informed decisions and implement informed mechanisms directed to support Child welfare

But structures exist within our parish to address and overcome these issues as a faith community for our children.

