

# OUR HOME, OUR PEOPLE

## STORIES OF CLIMATE VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN FIJI



COP23 BONN, GERMANY II 6 - 17 NOVEMBER, 2017

## FIJI GENERAL



1<sup>st</sup> country to ratify the Paris Agreement

900,000

Fiji population

2<sup>nd</sup>



Largest economy in Pacific

332

Islands in Fiji (110 inhabited)

820,000

Tourists per year<sup>1</sup>

18%



Predicted decrease in Fijian tourism by 2030 (considering effect of rising temperature only)

1,290,000km<sup>2</sup>

Exclusive economic Zone

54%



Percentage of urbanised population

3.3 million

People directly affected by disaster events in Fiji (between 1970 and 2016)

**SOURCES**

- 1. Fiji Bureau of Statistics (July 2017)
  - 2. Pacific Climate Change Portal
- All other data obtained by Fijian Government's Climate Change Assessment 2017. To see the entire report visit [www.ourhomeourpeople.com](http://www.ourhomeourpeople.com)

## EXTREME WEATHER IN FIJI

28

Average number of tropical cyclones per decade<sup>2</sup> (data collected between 1969/70 and 2010/11 seasons)

32,400

Predicted average number of Fijians pushed into poverty due to tropical cyclones and floods by 2050 (per year)

F\$500 million

Per year (5% of GDP): Average asset losses due to tropical cyclones and floods

## CYCLONE WINSTON

1

Most intense storm ever recorded in Southern Hemisphere

68%



Percentage of the population impacted (540,000)

80%



Percentage of population that lost power

## SEA LEVELS

Present

2065: Most models suggest a rise in global sea levels of 17-38 cm by 2065

2100: Most models suggest a rise in global sea levels of 26-82 cm by 2100

Note: above figures derived from IPCC 2013: Summary for Policymakers - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The Physical Science Basis. Working Group I Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report.

# About this project

*Our Home, Our People* is a storytelling project produced by the Fijian Government, in partnership with the World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery and the ACP-EU Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Program.



Encompassing a 360° virtual reality video and an interactive website, *Our Home, Our People* explores climate change vulnerability and resilience in Fiji through the stories of four people.

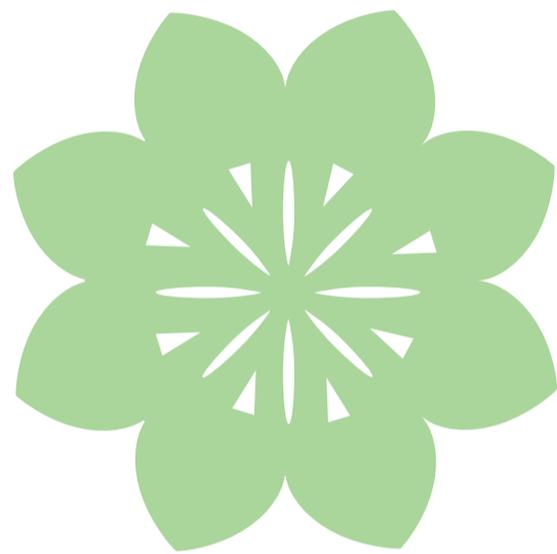
Their memories, hopes, fears and resilience reveal to audiences how rising sea levels and extreme weather impact Fijian people today, and what support is required in the future.

*Our Home, Our People* was launched at the UN's climate change conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany alongside Fijian Government's Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2017.

Action on climate change is crucial. Immerse yourself in *Our Home, Our People* and join our call for immediate global investment in adaptation to reduce climate vulnerability for Fiji and other small island states.

[www.ourhomeourpeople.com](http://www.ourhomeourpeople.com)

# Bula! Welcome Home



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By Arieta Tora Rika

If someone asked you to think about Fiji, white beaches and crystal clear oceans may come to mind. When I think of Fiji, I think of home. A beautiful island nation with a beating heart. One I share with 900,000 people from countless ethnicities and walks of life.

As a Fijian born in Australia, I have the benefit of knowing Fiji as a local and through the eyes of an outsider. I want to *talanoa*, which means to sit down and share stories, about Fiji beyond tourist photographs and climate change challenges, because I know we're more than rising sea levels and five-star resorts. .

One of the biggest strengths of Fijians is working communally - a value and an attitude you'll see reflected many times in the stories within this newspaper. In the province of Ra, for example, you will often hear the saying, *ma'e na ma'e* which translates to 'until death' - there is always work to be done.

My parents felt strongly about teaching me Fijian history and values, derived from highly developed social and cultural systems that are thousands of years old. I was often reminded by my Dad that I must always, *dola-va na katuba vei ira na weka-mu*, which means to open the door to people who are family. Showing love, kindness and support to all my relations, is one the most important Fijian values he taught me.

My family is originally from the island of Gau, and my great grandparents, missionaries, settled in Suva in the early 1920s. Their son, my grandfather, eventually built our family home in Nasese Suva, which still stands today. Suva has the country's main cruise port and my father says it has always been a hub of the latest trends, innovation, and political and industrial movements.

Located on Fiji's largest island Viti Levu, Suva is one of three main centres of industry. Quiet and serene Nadi is known as the epicentre of tourism. Lautoka, also known as 'sugar city', is famous for its sweet sugarcane, drawing workers from across the country during harvest season. Fiji's economy is the second largest in the Pacific after Papua New Guinea, but the most industrially advanced.

Both science and a rich storytelling history says that Fiji was formed around 150 million years ago. Some storytellers still describe the Fijian creation myth of the ancestral snake god, Degei, but others, along with archaeological evidence, will tell you that Fiji was settled around 3500 to 1000 BC, by people from various ethnic populations in Asia, Africa and Oceania.

Neighbouring islands such as Tonga have also played a significant factor in Fiji's early development, through intermarriage and war.

My own mother is Tongan, and she recognised the importance of understanding the ties and contrasts between both of my two cultures. She sent me to live in Tonga with her brother and his family throughout my high school years to balance my connection with Fijian culture.

My story is not dissimilar to many young Fijians today with mixed backgrounds. There are three official languages in Fiji - English, Fijian and Hindi - but many of us speak more, including some of the 100 different *itaukei* (indigenous Fijian) dialects found across the islands. Over 50% of the Fijian population are *itaukei* with many having ancestral links to nearby islands in the Pacific, like me. Others (nearly 40%) are descendants of Indian ancestors such as Asmita Kamal, who you'll meet on page 14. There are also Rotumans, a Pacific indigenous ethnic group, and small groups of Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific island minorities.

Culturally, relationships are everything to Fijians. They dictate everything we do, starting with relations with family, followed closely by community. Within indigenous communities, there are complex kinship principles, with a strong focus on family, spiritual leadership and direct guardianship. Fiji upholds a patrilineal society, with clans based on traditional customary ties rather than biological links.

There is so much more to share about Fiji, but we'd need a few long *talanoa* sessions to even scratch the surface. Climate change vulnerability and resilience in Fiji will be one of my country's greatest challenges, but it doesn't define us. I hope I've imparted a sense of our culture and way of life beyond the statistics.

Many visitors return from Fiji and tell me Fiji is a place where the wonder and beauty of the landscape matches the warmth and beauty of the people they meet. This, I know, is *vei lomani* at work; the spirit of love, strength, hospitality and warmth the 'Isles of Smiles' is famous for. It's also what makes me proud to be a Fijian.



Arieta Tora Rika was part of the *Our Home, Our People* project team, taking on the role of writer as well as advisor for Fijian culture and traditions. She is also the founder of *Talanoa*, a digital platform for Pacific storytelling.

**As the Presidency of COP23, our message is simple: the global community must take concerted action to reduce greenhouse gases and limit global warming to within 1.5 degrees Celsius. For Fiji and other vulnerable and developing states, this is not just an ambitious goal, it is an imperative and a minimum achievement. For some of our island neighbors – such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands – it is an absolute matter of survival.**



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By The Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum,  
Fijian Attorney-General and Minister  
responsible for climate change

This year, we worked with the World Bank to conduct a climate vulnerability assessment, which puts facts and numbers behind Fiji's climate experiences. The results reinforce what we already knew to be true, which is that the situation is urgent and the world needs to act immediately to raise its ambition to tackle this great threat. And also that vulnerable nations will need much greater access to financing in order to properly adapt to our changing climate.

The effects of climate change are wide-reaching, touching nearly every aspect of our national development. And it is ordinary men and women in Fiji and in every climate-vulnerable nation who are experiencing the cold face of climate change.

But this is not the time to point fingers or lay blame, we are here to listen, learn and share the experiences of ordinary Fijians. Only together can we take on this great challenge facing humanity, and only together can we drive climate action that spares our planet from the worst effects of climate change.

Through these pages, you will not only learn more about the Assessment findings, but you will see stories of our people, their lives and experiences, and hopefully you too will see what we are fighting for.

Vinaka vakalevu.



**We Must All Unite  
for Climate Action –  
Further, Faster,  
Together**

# Fallen Kingdom

## Rising tides for one of Fiji's most sacred communities

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Vunisavisavi is not, at first glance, what you'd expect to be the home of a King. Perched below steep hills, on the south-east coast of Fiji's second largest island of Vanua Levu, Vunisavisavi is relatively unassuming. Tucked quietly into the landscape, wrapped on both sides by the sea, the village is home to just 82 people. To step foot into the village is a privilege reserved for few outsiders.

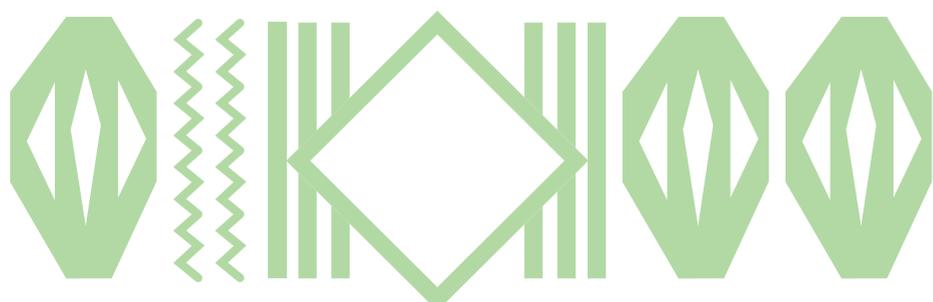
"Vunisavisavi is the original home of the 'Tui Cakau' and we are proud of that," says Meredani Koco, a retired head teacher who has called Vunisavisavi home for 23 years. "The whole of [the district of] Cakaudrove is named after this place."

*Tui Cakau* – translated directly from Fijian as 'King Cakau' – is the title given to one of three paramount chiefs in Fiji, a position that's been passed down through fifteen generations. For reach Tui Cakau, the responsibility to guard Vunisavisavi is personal, because it's here where the home of the very first Tui Cakau stood, the home of Ro Kevu.

Fijian history remembers Ro Kevu fondly, as the son of a demigod and High Chief. Yet amongst these ancestral grounds, all that remains of the Tui Cakau's home is a stone hedge that once surrounded it, the rest has been destroyed by the ever-encroaching sea. Physical remnants aside, the deep responsibility to protect Vunisavisavi has not diminished.

**"We are the keepers of these ancestral grounds. These lands ancestrally belong to us. My elders were asked many years ago to keep this place, and we've been here ever since,"**

says Sepesa Kilimo, village nurse and descendent of the first settlers in Vunisavisavi.



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Sepesa 'Kili' Kilimo in front of his new home, one of four provided as part of a partial relocation of Vunisavisavi. Kili's original home, in his family for more than 100 years, was demolished due to damage caused by coastal erosion, storm surges and rising sea levels.



1. Asmita Kamal, 24, with her sister. Their family home in nearby Dugavatu was completely destroyed when Cyclone Winston hit in February 2016.
2. Sunrise over Vunisavisavi, a coastal village on the island of Fiji's second biggest island, Vanua Levu.

Time – and a rapidly-changing environment – has not been kind to Vunisavisavi. Rising sea levels, coastal erosion and recent extreme weather is have left their mark here: steps sink far too easily into unusually soft soil, crab holes are scattered across the whole village, and even before low tide, there are visible remnants of what were once houses and a church. A large, uprooted Banyan tree sits on the shore, long since lost its footing due to coastal erosion.

According to the Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2017, average and extreme sea levels around Fiji are projected to increase significantly this century.

Most global models suggest an increase of 17-38cm by 2065 and 26-82cm by 2100.

Should these predictions come to light, the impact on communities such as Vunisavisavi, which is actually located below sea level, will be devastating. This reality feels all too present for mother of two, Pauline Tikoisuva.

Five years after having their first child, Pauline and her family were forced to move out of their home on the shoreline of Vunisavisavi. The foundations of the house had become unstable due to coastal erosion and storm surges during extreme weather.



Meredani Koco speaks with her daughter in Suva. Vunisavisavi community members often contact family members to check weather reports and warnings, as there is no television or radio signal in the village.

“That house stood on the shore for over a hundred years. We had our first child in that home and our fondest memories of being a newlywed couple were there,” says Pauline.

When asked how she felt about relocating, Pauline uses the strongest Fijian word for pain: *e mosi*. “It deeply hurt my spirit,” she says. “We all cried and even though we had a house rebuilt nearby, we stayed until we were forced to move.”

Four houses - including one for Pauline and her family - have already been built on the cliff that directly looks over Vunusavisavi. While some families have moved, Pauline and her husband have so far resisted. Instead they stay in a house just 50 metres from their original home, pulled by a desire to stay close to the tight-knit community and cultural connection to ancestral land.

“There is no electricity or running water up there, which makes it hard for us to cook, clean, shower and even fill up the toilet water tanks,” Pauline adds.

Eventually, however, Pauline will have no choice but to relocate. Less than five years since moving, their home is again threatened by the same strong waves that destroyed their first home, but at an alarmingly quicker rate.

Twice a year, during king tides, waves push water some 200 metres beyond the shoreline under her house and the others scattered along the coast.

Meredani's home is also under threat. With the reality of relocation looming, she knows that Vunisavisavi needs support, and soon. Her greatest fear is that young people will leave the community in search of income. “The land has been greatly damaged here, a lot of soil has been washed away by the sea water, taking away the fertile part of it,” she explains, referring to coconut trees that once grew along the shoreline. Many of the families now have plots of land for subsistence farming away from the community.

“The community will be empty. They will all move to town where they can earn money. People will lose their dialect, their language, all the manners (of Vunisavisavi) and all their behaviours.” Meredith is very aware that Fijians have done little to contribute to climate change.

“We really feel sorry that what has happened has been caused by some others people, by fully developed countries. They are still moving forward, whereas we are still trying to develop and we are being pushed backward by all this.”

Despite climate change's growing presence, Meredith believes there is still time, still hope, for the people of Vunusavisavi. She beams with pride as she says her community does not plan to go down without a fight. “In some ways we feel safe, because we haven't been struck by the big waves, but we don't know what will happen if nothing is done now.”

“We have to be resilient: plant more trees, reduce the burning and cutting of trees, and planting more mangroves.”

“This is a special place, and we will do everything we can to make sure our future generation have the same benefits that we enjoyed, growing up near the ocean on royal ground.”

# The 360 degree virtual reality film *Our Home, Our People* explores the impact of climate change in Fiji through the stories of four characters - Raivolita, Catalina, Asmita and Rupeni.

## RAIVOLITA TABUSORO

After travelling the world and working in the Fijian tourism industry, Raivolita 'Rai' Tabusoro, 43, is proud to call Nabukadra home again. "There is no place like Fiji. It's a beautiful place, fresh air and happy people," he says. "There are many things that I saw when I was away. When I returned, I wanted to lift my village to another standard."

Rai was elected and re-elected to various leadership positions in Nabukadra, eventually taking on the role of Village Headman, bringing significant improvements to the community.

"Senior citizens [now] receive social welfare, we improved sanitation, the community has two boats to assist students, and arranged for a dispensary so women didn't have to travel for sanitary items."

Determined to improve livelihoods, Rai has arranged transport so local fishermen could sell at the markets in Suva, Fiji's capital city. He also invested in honey as an income source for the community, one that requires little effort, no ongoing investment, yet good returns.

**"We have the perfect weather for it here. It's a good business. We don't waste of a lot of money buying food or anything, we just buy the box and place it, the bees will go to work."**

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Raivolita Tabusoro and two of his sons paddle alongside dead mangrove trees nearby their village, Nabukadra. When Cyclone Winston hit the region many of the tall mangrove trees died, leaving patches of dead forest along the coastline.



A small coastal community on the northern coast of Viti Levu, Nabukadra sits below sea level. It is vulnerable to increasing sea levels, storm surges and extreme weather events which may be worsened by climate change. When Cyclone Winston hit Fiji in 2016, Nabukadra was completely destroyed; Rai and his family were lucky to survive.

Today, the impacts of Winston are still being felt across Nabukadra, emotionally and financially. Rai is determined to meet his weekly budgets and keep the community motivated and working together.

"I don't want to show self-pity because I'm leading; all the others are looking up to me. I have to demonstrate good leadership in the village."



**“Vei lomani means when we have conflict we call each other and ask for forgiveness so we can go back to how things were.”**

Catalina at her favourite place to swim, a deep hole in the reef she calls *tobu* (tomb), nearby Cakaudrove-i-Wai, an island off the coast of Vunisavisavi.



## CATALINA

Catalina\*, 11, lives in Vunisavisavi, a small Vanua Levu village significantly impacted by rising sea levels, coastal erosion and extreme weather. Though an ambitious student, Catalina's favourite time of the day is when it's time to go fishing.

“Sometimes I go fishing with my mother,” Catalina says. “She catches the bait for me. I jump into the water and spear some fish. When we have enough we stay in the sea for a little bit longer for a swim.”

“When I put my goggles on I dive under water and I see sea shells, clam, stones and eels. I love to see fish swimming around me, but the fish and turtles have declined. We just catch enough fish for us. We leave some to grow.”

In the indigenous Fijian itaukei language, there is no word for climate change. Like most people, Catalina refers to climate change as *veisau ni draki*, directly translated to ‘a change in weather’.

“When the weather changes then we see that the sea is scary. When the weather is really bad, the seawater can reach my house. It can even reach up to here [knee height] and past this house.”

Catalina doesn't know what her family will do if their house is destroyed, but she has her own plans for combatting rising sea levels and storm surges in her village.

“When I'm older I want to construct a seawall for the village, to protect the future generation of Vunisavisavi and also to make the people happy.”

“We will have a big thanksgiving celebration. The seawall will stop the waves from entering the village. It will give peace and assurance to people and they will no longer worry.”

\* name changed



Asmita Kamal and her students in class at Bayly Memorial School.

## ASMITA KAMAL

Asmita Kamal, 24, is a teacher at Bayly Memorial School in northern Viti Levu. She grew up in a large family in Dugaratu, a remote village near the town of RakiRaki. "This part of Fiji is very peaceful and people are loving and caring. My family have been living here for three generations, a very long time, this is where my grandfather was born."

Asmita has been teaching for two years and gets great satisfaction from her work. "I wanted to become a teacher firstly to fulfill my parents dreams and secondly to be in a noble profession. I like controlling the young minds and moulding them to be good citizens."

During her first term of teaching, Cyclone Winston hit. It devastated Bayly Memorial School and completely destroyed Asmita's family home while she was inside, hiding under a table with her elderly grandmother. The rest of her family lay under a bed.

Asmita's heart broke further when she returned to her classroom. The roof was gone and all of the furniture, books and supplies were destroyed.

"I just felt like crying after seeing the school. This school was beautiful. Suddenly it was not safe for the students to come and study in the school. All the students and teachers were relocated."

Bayly Memorial School reopened six months after Cyclone Winston but rebuilding works continue to bring the school back to the condition it once was. Asmita has noticed a different level of interest in her climate change classes amongst her students.

"Since they have gone through the experience, they are very attentive and they do participate and they do give real life experience."

After many months of living in a temporary structure, Asmita's carpenter father has started construction on the family's new home.



**"I'm telling my father to build our house strong."**

**“Some ask me, ‘why do you do it’? This is how I live my life, to help others. I have been doing carpentry for over twenty years and I don’t get any payment for it. I do it out of love and to help those that need their houses built.”**

## RUPENI VATUGATA

Rupeni Vatugata, 75, and his wife Losena Cagi live in Namarai, a small village in the province of Ra. Parents of four and grandparents of ten, the couple are loved and respected in their community because of their open door and generosity towards others.

Namarai was one of the villages that found itself directly in Cyclon Winston’s path when the Category Five winds first made landfall. Of the 37 houses in the village, just six remained standing. Though damaged, Rupeni and Losena’s house was one of them.

“The first winds blew from the south. You couldn’t see when you looked outside – it was like a fog – I couldn’t see a single rain drop. That was the strength of the winds, it evaporated the raindrops.”

Having lived through Tropical Cyclone Bebe in 1972, Rupeni understood the devastating impact of a tropical cyclone. But nothing prepared him for Winston.

“I thought it was the second coming of Jesus,” he says. “Houses were blown away, together with their stilts. The roof flew away, together with the posts. Only the soil was left. I’m not sure which part of the world it was blown to.”

After the storm passed, Rupeni knew what needed to be done. An experienced carpenter, he quickly assembled and led a team of builders from the community, gathered debris such as timber and corrugated iron, and started working.

“At first we started building to provide temporary shelters, since there were hardly any houses. Tents came later. We rebuilt our village communally. Everything went well because we look after each other and work together.”

In the 18 months since Winston hit Fiji, with support from the Fijian Government through the provision of building materials, Rupeni has helped to rebuild 13 homes in his and neighbouring communities.



Rupeni Vatugata and his dog Lela outside one of the partially constructed homes in Namarai.



# Man on a mission

## Luke Tuibua proactively combats climate change for his village.



The day before Cyclone Winston hit, Luke Tuibua and students from Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia) were hard at work planting mangroves along the coastline near Luke's village Waivunia, on the coast of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in Fiji.

Mangroves are an excellent way to combat coastal erosion. The complex underground root system helps to bind and build soil, while the above-ground roots slow down water flows and can help with storm surges.

But twenty-four hours later, category five cyclonic winds and heavy storm surges had erased all of their efforts. The experience hasn't deterred Luke from his mission, however. In fact in some ways he sees Cyclone Winston as positive; an opportunity to start fresh, do things right and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Luke is the founder of the Waivunia Marine Park, an initiative set up by Naivuatolu Cooperative Limited, a group of people from Luke's village who are customary owners of the land and ocean surrounding Waivunia.

"After seeing the abundance of marine species decreasing, I became concerned. When I retired, I started pushing really hard to increase sustainability in the village. And after witnessing evidence on television and the radio about diminishing resources

and climate change, I think there will be a lot more villagers that will be joining us as well," says Luke.

The independent cooperative is the first in Fiji's history to hold an official government licence for their project, which means they can prevent fishing in an area 600 metres from the foreshore to the break in the reef. The cooperative work hard to protect this area and preserve marine life, which was dwindling before the license came into effect.

Naivuatolu Cooperative has also identified species of fish that are close to extinction and have worked with scientists abroad to learn about how to boost them. Their conservation efforts don't stop at the ocean, they also look at how to reduce the cutting down of trees, the use of fertilisers and the burning of land.

"The project we are working on is focused on conservation of resources, renewables and trying to put in place a resource that will sustain the lives of these little ones walking about this village now."

Many communities in Fiji rely heavily on traditional knowledge to conserve their environment. While Luke and the cooperative recognise and value these traditional practices and truths, what makes them so unique is that they've collaborated with scientists, ecologists and marine conservation experts from around the world to understand why they were experiencing an extinction of certain species of fish.



**“It isn’t about getting lots of money in your pocket, it’s about enjoying what you have and if you want to keep on enjoying it then live smartly and conserve whatever resources you have.”**

1. A new mangrove tree grows from the waters around Waivunia, on Vanua Levu in Fiji.
2. Luke Tuibua (pictured) and members of his community are replanting mangroves to improve coastal health and resilience to extreme weather.

Luke says that before these collaborations, he was unsure as to whether these extinctions were caused by overfishing, pollution, or climate change. He now has a better understanding of how climate change may impact the natural resources of Waivunia.

“Climate change is coming and it’s not easy trying to influence people - they’re in their comfort zones - but I am surprised at how many have come on board,” he says.

Having already received government support, Luke is now looking to further expand the work of Naivuatolu Cooperative Limited. They want to see more protected marine and forest parks and sustainable fishing practices not only in Fiji, but worldwide. Educating young people is something Luke’s particularly passionate about.

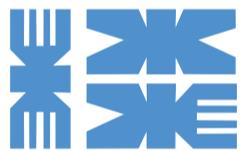
“We want to instill in the next generation information about resources. If we abuse resources what will they have in this village? Those are the things we need to look at because we all care about our young ones and if we don’t show them the right direction it is going to be haywire.”

He believes ecotourism is a way to bring in further funding for conservation.



## Rebuilding Ra Province after Cyclone Winston

# Vei Lomani



The province of Ra is one of the strongest, most ethnically and linguistically diverse communities in all of Fiji, with over 86 villages and a population of 29,464 (2007 census).

Well known for its abundant resources and beautiful, friendly and hardworking people, Ra is also commended for keeping traditional Fijian values like *vei lomani* - directly translated as 'love in action' - alive.

"There's a difference in values [in Ra]," says Rupeni Vatugata, an elder from the village of Namarai. "When you see someone, you will say hello and share a special respect with your fellow villager."

It was *vei lomani* that saw communities across Ra come together in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Winston in early 2016. Winston - the biggest storm ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere - impacted 62% of the Fiji population and caused F\$2 billion in damage (20% of GDP). It killed 44 people, injured hundreds and left 131,000 people homeless. The Category 5 storm first made landfall in Ra, leaving its communities completely devastated.

### TROPICAL CYCLONE WINSTON

"I thought that God was returning on that day," says Raivolita 'Rai' Tabusoro, 43, former village headman of Nabukadra, just down the road from Rupeni and Namarai. "There were many who sustained heavy injuries from flying debris and falling into drains, trying to survive."

The ceiling of Rai's home was ripped away by catastrophic winds. He was able to save the life of his elderly mother by placing her in a concrete bathroom, as well as a pregnant woman who he carried to shelter.

"We lost everything. The next morning, the sun was shining as if nothing happened. It was as if a bomb was dropped in the village because there was nothing left, not even clothes were spared. I called everyone and for a moment, we were all crying."

Asmita Kamal, a 24 year-old teacher from Dagarotu near RakiRaki, found shelter under a table with her grandmother while her family hid under a bed as Winston blasted through their village. Despite their best efforts to secure their house, strong winds swept away just about everything.



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The village of Namarai Viti Levu, Fiji. Cyclone Winston destroyed 30 of the 36 houses when it swept through the community on 20 February, 2016.





“We tried to tie it [house] three or four times. As soon as my brother and father came down from the roof and we came inside the house, half of our roof was gone. Within seconds the other part of the roof was gone. I was very sad and scared. That house, when we were young, my grandfather built it and everything was just gone.”

#### REBUILDING FROM THE HEART

Despite devastating loss, a visit to Ra Province today, some 18 months later, reveals a population working hard to rebuild with significant progress and community spirit.

“That’s caring for each other,” says Rupeni, referring again to the idea of *vei lomani*. “To uplift our lives despite the difficulties after the cyclone.”

**“This is our way of life in Fiji. We live for love, working together and live for development wherever we go. We cannot be passive.”**

Rupeni himself led the rebuilding efforts in Namarai; volunteering his skills as a carpenter and driven by his love of community. Similarly, Rai asked the people of Nabukadra to come together and work hard so the village could return to be an even better place after Winston. “The old Nabukadra is gone and you can see this is a new Nabukadra,” he says, referring to both the physical and emotional change that has developed in his village over the 18 months since Cyclone Winston.

At Bayly Memorial School in Barotu, where Asmita teaches, tradespeople put the finishing touches of paint on new classrooms that were badly damaged during Winston. When the students returned to school, Asmita noticed an increased interest in the subject of climate change.

“Since they have gone through the experience, they are very attentive and they do participate, they do give real life experience,” she explains. “Some of the things they could not prepare for [before Winston]. And now they have learned about it, they know if the warning is there what they should do.”

## VULNERABILITY TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Cyclone Winston was an example of new enemies facing Ra communities like Namarai and Nabukadra. Enemies that are linked to climate change.

Although it has the second largest economy in the Pacific, extreme weather patterns and rising sea levels represent major obstacles to Fiji's development and economy.

According to the Fijian Government's Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2017, in order to reduce climate vulnerability, Fiji needs an investment of over F\$9.3 billion over the next ten years.

The people of Ra are pragmatic but determined when contemplating the future and the changing environment around them.

"We're all [people in Ra] facing difficult times," says Rai who is struggling to meet his family's financial targets some 18 months after Winston took away much of his sources of income.

Rai is not alone. On average 25,700 Fijians are pushed into poverty due to tropical cyclones and floods each year. According to the World Bank supported Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2017, this number is set to rise to 32,400 by 2050.

"I can handle the work and my will power is strong... But my hope for my children, is to strive for their education, their lives and their families in the good future."

"This is a rare thing but you find resilient people in Ra... Caring for each other. One reason why Fiji is paradise is because it's a country that cares," says Rupeni. When asked if she thinks she will see a storm like Winston again in her lifetime, Asmita is hesitant to answer. "I just pray to God that nothing like this happens again," she says.

**"Winston showed me in Fiji that people care for each other, there is peace and harmony between each other and they do care about one another."**

"If it does happen in the future people will be strong and they will work hand in hand. Somehow or the other they will manage it."

1. People from Namarai unload construction materials for new homes in the village. The Fijian Government acted swiftly to support those hit hardest by Cyclone Winston through the provision of building supplies and income support.
2. Portrait of Raivolita Tabusoro at the site of his old home and future home in Nambukadra.
3. Construction continues on a new home in Namarai despite the rain.
4. Asmita Kamal at the site of her family's new home in Dagarotu.



# Behind the scenes



## Making a VR film in Fiji

**Tom Perry**  
Executive Producer,  
World Bank

**Tash Tash**  
Director, S1T2

**Arieta Tora Rika**  
Cultural advisor,  
Writer

**Alana Holmberg**  
Photographer

**Tunpitcha  
Ladapornvitaya**  
Sound Recordist,  
Video Editor, S1T2

**Ken Cokanasiga**  
Cultural & protocol  
advisor, Translator

**What motivated the collaboration to produce *Our Home, Our People* as a storytelling project?**

**Tom:** Everyone wanted to put human faces to the data and knowledge collected for the Fiji Climate Vulnerability Assessment through personal stories. *Our Home, Our People* and the Climate Vulnerability Assessment can be seen as sibling projects - one appeals to the brain, the other to the heart.

**Why produce it in VR?**

**Tom:** VR is such a powerful storytelling medium, and it gives the opportunity for people across the world to take themselves to Fiji into the lives of Catalina, Rupeni, Rai and Asmita.

**How did you find and choose the people who would feature in the film?**

**Tash:** We were looking for a range of people that could best represent Fiji's diversity. We're proud people from a variety of ages, genders, ethnicities and places are in the film - a lot of time was spent traversing Fiji to find them!

**How did you approach the communities your work in?**

**Alana:** Our Fijian team members were integral in our approach. They helped us understand and adhere to the traditional protocols when it came to entering villages, communicating our intentions, and (importantly) how to relax into the Fijian way of life. With the help of Ken, Arieta and George we formed wonderful working relationships and lifetime friendships.

**What are some of the challenges you had in VR filmmaking?**

**Tunpitcha:** During the shoot, we didn't think about technical limitations but about how to create an immersive experience for the audience. The camera itself wasn't important, what was important was how the camera could make the audience feel. We had lots of help in community to overcome problems. Need a something to make the camera more stable? A piece of wood would appear. Hungry? Actually, we were never hungry in Fiji. The communities kept us well fed during long days of shooting.

**Tom:** There are so many! There are practical challenges: how do you present text on screen and ensure your audience sees it (particularly if they're looking in another direction), but then conversely; how do you ensure your audience isn't spending their entire time reading? How long should shots last to ensure your audience has time to find/adjust to their surroundings? It's about finding that balance: we want to move people, but we don't want people to be overcome by it all.

**What was the experience like working on this project as a Fijian?**

**Arieta:** It was a rollercoaster of emotions. I knew I would add depth to the project in terms of cultural knowledge, but with that came responsibility to 'do this right'. The integrity and skills of the team meant that the people we worked with felt respected, understood and confident their stories could not only benefit their village, but the whole of Fiji. I loved seeing that process unfold.



**What was is like working in Fiji compared with other countries you've worked in?**

**Tash:** I've never been to a country where you feel so loved and cared for by people who don't know you. That's something that's really special in Fiji - the sense of beauty and wonder of the place and warmth of the people. There this indescribable entity, a sense that something is just..... right. I've never felt that anywhere else in the world.

**What was the most memorable or rewarding experience you encountered in making this project?**

**Alana:** Driving over the mountain to remote Namarai was spectacular in terms of scenery and completely harrowing at the same time. Imagining Cyclone Winston ripping through the area gave me shivers.

**Ken:** Going back to communities I'd known well a long time ago and listening to their stories about life pre- and post-Winston. The beautiful smiles of the interviewees were priceless, life goes on without resolve.

**Tash:** When everyone sang *isa lei* (a farewell song) when we were leaving Vunisavisavi. In Fiji that you can develop a strong affection for people you didn't even know 24 hours prior. You grow to love and want the best for each other. That song was a culmination of everything that we were feeling as a team and community.

**Ken:** Going back to communities I'd known well a long time ago and listening to their stories about life pre- and post-Winston. The beautiful smiles of the interviewees were priceless, life goes on without resolve.

**What is your hope for people who experience *Our Home, Our People*?**

**Arieta:** That people will feel empathy towards the people of Fiji and the Pacific. We are not just statistics, we are real people with real fears and vulnerabilities, and indescribable resilience and strength.

**Tom:** Beyond connecting people with what life in Fiji is really like, and showing the realities of climate change, and creating empathy, I just really hope we ensure the immersive experience of VR inspires genuine action.

**Tunpitcha:** That people will realise how minor actions around the world are causing climate change and creating a dramatic problem on the other side of the world.

**Ken:** For people to see the beauty in my country, my people, my land and my paradise, and that we need things to stay as they are, not destroyed by climate change.



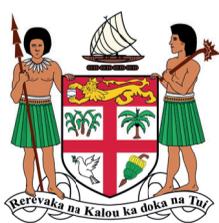
# www.ourhomeourpeople.com



Namarai village, Ra Province, Fiji.

PREPARED BY THE FIJIAN GOVERNMENT

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**CREDITS //** **TEXT** Arieta Rika Tora, Kara Mouyis, Alana Holmberg. **RESEARCH** Ken Cokanasiga. **DESIGN** Heidi Romano.  
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