

- Three Ways Pacific Nations are Adapting to Climate Change
- Miss Samoa as activism? Using unusual platforms to break cultural silences
- The Kingdom of Tonga

“There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself.”
~ Pope Francis

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Photo by Alec Douglas on Unsplash

THREE WAYS PACIFIC NATIONS ARE ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Pacific Island countries are on the frontline of climate change and are leading the way on adaptation and resilience.

Fiji’s village of Vunidogoloa was the first community in the Pacific [forced to relocate](#) due to being [flooded by high tides](#) (see *GJOP Pacific Outlook Bulletin June 2023*), with saltwater seeping into farmland and drinking water supplies. In 2014, [the villagers relocated 2km inland](#). Ten years on, Fiji’s [list of villages earmarked to move](#) due to climate change has grown.

Rising sea levels, more cyclones, and changing weather patterns are threatening Pacific Island nations’ very existence. Recent reports, [such as the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Sixth Assessment](#), have highlighted the urgent need for global emissions reductions to keep temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius — a threshold crucial for the survival of many Pacific Islands. Pacific Island countries may be small, but they are implementing big ideas to tackle climate change.

1. Nature-based solutions

Many Pacific islands are harnessing nature’s power to protect their shorelines. In [Fiji](#) and the [Solomon Islands](#), communities are restoring and planting mangroves along coastlines. Mangroves are not only effective in reducing coastal erosion, but they also act as natural barriers

against storm surges. According to a [study by The Nature Conservancy](#), these ecosystems can reduce wave heights by up to 66 percent, providing vital protection during cyclones.

The restoration of coral reefs is being prioritised. Healthy coral reefs act as natural breakwaters by absorbing the energy of waves before they hit the shore. Programs such as the [Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan 2021-2030](#) are helping to rehabilitate damaged reefs.

2. Resilient agriculture

Agriculture contributes [27% and 37%](#) of total employment and [16.3% and 33.8%](#) of the national income in Tonga and the Solomon Islands, respectively. But agriculture is under threat from climate change. To address this, Pacific Island countries are shifting to [more resilient farming practices](#), by planting drought-resistant crops such as cassava and sweet potatoes.

The Pacific Adaption to Climate Change project is a [groundbreaking initiative](#) in the Pacific, focusing on practical adaptation measures through demonstration projects in 14 Pacific Island nations. Without adaptation, climate change could [reduce crop yields](#) by up to 10 to 20% by 2050.

3. Community-led relocation

The government of Kiribati, one of the most vulnerable nations in the world, has [bought land in Fiji](#) as a potential site for future relocation. The [Kiribati Adaptation Program](#) is working to improve coastal defences and prepare communities for the possibility of relocation.

Relocation is not just about moving people; it is about making sure they have the resources and infrastructure to thrive in new environments. This includes access to clean water, education and health services. The [Pacific Resilience Partnership](#), a regional initiative, is helping to coordinate these efforts to make sure that relocations are carried out with dignity and sustainability in mind.

The path forward

Pacific Island countries face significant challenges as they make strides in adaptation and resilience. Limited financial resources, dependence on foreign aid, and the sheer scale of the threat make it difficult to implement large-scale solutions.

By 2040, the projected [annual expenses](#) for adapting coastal areas and infrastructure to the anticipated changes in rainfall and temperature could [range between \\$US400 million and \\$US1.2 billion](#). At the COP29 conference in November 2024, Pacific Island leaders pushed for stronger global commitments to climate finance and emissions reductions, advocating for a “loss and damage” mechanism to provide compensation for the irreversible impacts of climate change.

What next?

The future of the Pacific Islands depends on a combination of local resilience and global action. The strategies being implemented today — from nature-based solutions to community-led relocations — are a blueprint for how vulnerable regions worldwide can adapt to a changing climate. And the international community can step up by providing the financial resources and policy support necessary to help these nations in the face of climate change. The message from these small, resilient nations is clear: adaptation is possible, but time is running out. The actions taken over the next few years will determine the fate of these islands — and perhaps the world.

Source: This is a slightly edited version of 'Three ways Pacific nations are adapting to climate change' by Dr Bernard Njindan Iyke, 26 August 2024, published by 360info.

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MISS SAMOA AS ACTIVISM? USING UNUSUAL PLATFORMS TO BREAK CULTURAL SILENCES

Beauty pageants are prolific in the Pacific. Miss Samoa is crowned during the Teuila Festival and she appears in all tourism campaigns and represents the country at diplomatic meetings. Well-known climate change activist Suluafi Brianna Fruean was one of this year’s Miss Samoa

contestants. Fruean has engaged audiences on climate change since aged 11 – [famously appearing](#) at the opening ceremony of the World Leaders Summit at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. In contesting for [Miss Samoa on 5 September](#), Fruean chose to make a different kind of statement: “It takes a village to raise a child and by that same understanding it takes a village to fail a child. It takes a village to keep children safe and it takes a village to silence them when they are unsafe.”

These were the most explicit references to child and sexual abuse in her five-minute speech. When the first judge noted that there was a lot “unspoken” in her speech, Fruean responded: “There’s silence in this room right now but I know that all of us know what I’m talking about. And that silence is scary. I think that’s why in my speech, there is a lot unspoken. But that silence is dangerous, so I will break the silence. There is a lot of violence against women; there’s a lot of abuse of our children; and there’s a lot of incest that happens in our villages.”

Fruean did not become Miss Samoa 2024 or win the pre-pageant interview section. But at the time of writing, pre-pageant interviews for Miss Samoa have been viewed almost 42,500 times by viewers in both Samoa and overseas. Comments suggested that “Contestant Number 9” should run for parliament. A [separate video of Fruean’s appearance](#) elicited another 12,000 views.

Miss Samoa is not known as a platform for airing taboo subjects. Yet, Fruean chose to disrupt the usual focus on positivity knowing she would reach a huge predominantly female audience. The high rates of sexual and gender-based violence are in part protected by a culture of silence and fear; open discussions about sexual consent are seen to run contrary to social norms.

However, finding solutions is hard. Judge 3 asked Fruean how these incidents of abuse could be mediated in the village keeping in mind the *va*, the framework through which Samoan families and communities navigate their relationships and attribute ways of speaking and treatment.

“How would you teach your sisters to approach [the *va*]? My concern is that we can’t continue putting people in victim support refuge homes ... which is actually separating families more.”

Fruean responded that she had been reading about the *va*. She acknowledged that cultural taboos required culturally appropriate solutions:

“I would use the *va* to learn more about the knowledge we have around boundaries and the knowledge we also have around reconciliation and healing.” Rather than accepting the premise that crisis centres were not a viable solution, however, Fruean suggested a Samoan approach to rehabilitation; using the *va* to heal families, victims and perpetrators. She concluded that she will “continue to try and learn more”.

Fruean’s courage in bringing activism into the Miss Samoa pageant to raise a taboo subject signals a shift in approach to tackling an endemic problem. It will take Pacific islanders having difficult conversations to eliminate the high incidence of gender-based violence across this region.

Source: This is an edited version of [‘Miss Samoa as activism? Using unusual platforms to break cultural silences’](#) by Elicorah Malifa and Sonia Palmieri, which appeared on [Devpolicy](#) on 28 Nov 2024, published by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University.

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THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

About 3,000 years ago the Lapita people from Southeast Asia settled in Tonga. And since 900AD at least Tonga has been ruled by a line of king and queens. The Tu’i Tonga was the country’s leader, considered a deity. In the 15th century another royal house emerged when the reigning Tu’i Tonga transferred his temporal powers to his brother, and another transfer of power, in 1600, resulted in a third line of monarchs, the Tui’i Kanokupolu, who eventually became the rulers.

But in the 1800s there was a royal assassination and a period of civil war and disorder. It was ended by Taufa’ahau, who emerged most powerful from the conflict. He became Tu’i

Kanokupolu, was converted to Christianity in 1831, and in 1839 he dedicated Tonga to God, and gained support from the missionaries. He brought together the three royal dynasties under one crown. He abolished serfdom in the Vava'u region of Tonga in 1835 and published the Vava'u Code in 1838, the first written laws in Tonga. In 1862, he opened the country's first parliament.

The Vava'u Code formed the basis of Tonga's first constitution, which was enacted in 1875, when Tonga officially became a kingdom, and Taufa'ahau took the name George Tupou I, King of Tonga. The constitution guaranteed the rights of commoners for the first time, limiting the power of chiefs over their subjects, and prohibiting murder, theft and adultery. It also stated that land in Tonga was only for native Tongans, and not to be sold to outsiders, which is still the case today.

"The establishment then of the constitution will become a final testimony to the independence of the Tongan people forever," said the King George Tupou I, when opening parliament that year. Because of the constitution, which was based on England's Westminster system, but adapted to suit Tonga, this Pacific country gained international recognition as a nation and avoided colonisation. Today, 150 years later, Tonga's is the only sovereign monarchy in the region.

George Tupou I died in 1893 aged 95, after a swim in the sea near his palace. He was succeeded by his great-grandson, George Tupou II, under whom Tonga became a British protectorate. Under the treaty with Britain Tonga agreed to conduct foreign affairs through a British consul, who had veto power over Tonga's foreign policy and finances. Tupou II was followed by Queen Salote Tupou III, who ruled from 1918 to 1965. Her choice to sit in an uncovered carriage in pouring rain at the 1953 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in London made her famous around the world.

In 1970 Tonga regained control of its affairs and became a fully independent nation within the Commonwealth. Queen Salote's son, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, reigned until he died in September 2006. In March 2006 Tonga's first non-noble prime minister had been appointed. The country was becoming more democratic. There were recommendations to increase the number of seats in parliament for popularly elected representatives, and a pro-democracy demonstration turned into several weeks of rioting and the burning of the capital's business district.

When King Taufa'ahau's son, King George Tupou V, came to the throne he began to divest of his ownership in state assets that made up much of the wealth of the monarchy. Three days before his coronation ceremony on 1 August 2008, he announced that he would relinquish much of the monarchy's power and be guided by the prime minister's recommendations, except on matters relating to the judiciary. He also announced reforms which meant that for the first time the majority of members of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga would be elected, rather than appointed by the monarch or drawn from the aristocracy. In 2010 the government called on Tonga's 101,900 citizens to add their names to the electoral roll, so they could take part in the historic vote. The king remained head of state, but no longer had the ability to appoint the prime minister and cabinet ministers. In 2012, his brother and sister-in-law donned the Tongan royal gold crowns and ermine capes and were crowned King George Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u.

Sources: 'History of Tonga' by Sophie Foster and Sione Latukefu, Encyclopaedia Britannica; 'Respect for Tonga's royal family runs deep in the kingdom – but how did they help ward off colonial powers?' Alice Lolohea, 17 November 2024, ABC News, and 'The History of the Kingdom of Tonga' <https://tonga-gov.pt/en/the-history-of-the-kingdom-of-tonga/>

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