

**A Brief Account of the Opening Ceremony for the New Lateu Settlement, Torba
Province, Vanuatu: For the benefit of supporters
of climate change adaptation**

Taito Nakalevu¹ and Brian Phillips²

Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for the funding support they had provided to enable this project to get-off the ground. Contributions from government agencies, Non-Government Organisations, the Church of Melanesia and in particular the Vanuatu National Advisory Council on Climate Change (NACCC) and Meteorology Department in terms of political, technical and administrative support is deeply acknowledged. Not forgetting the communities for their firm support all the way; to you all we devote the success of this resettlement programme.

Introduction

This report briefly summarises the opening ceremony for the new Lateu settlement in the Torba Province, Vanuatu. It is part of the Capacity Building for the Development of Adaptation in Pacific Island Countries project (CBDAMPIC) funded by the CIDA and executed in the Pacific region by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Proceedings are described as they unfold. A short background is also provided to give context to the event. This short account of the opening ceremony also serves to inform the climate change community on the progress that has been made in one of the first relocation programmes globally to be undertaken due to the adverse effects of climate change.

Official Delegation

On Tuesday 23rd August, the official delegation of the Minister for Ni Vanuatu Business, the Hon Joshua Kalkasua arrived at Lateu in Tegua to officially open the new settlement where the community of Lateu have relocated. Tegua is part of the Torba province, the northern most group of islands in the Vanuatu chain with only canoes as their connection to the outside world. Trading ships only visit Lateu once or twice a year from Santo and intermittently by neighbours from other islands in the province.

The Minister's delegation included the Director General for the Ministry of Works and Public Utilities Mr. Manasah Tari, the Director Meteorology Mr. Jotham Napat, the Head of the Hydrology Section, Department of Geology and Mines Ms Rossette Kalmet, the Secretary General for the Torba Province Father Boldwin Lonsdale and the Regional Project Manager for the CBDAMPIC project and SPREP representative Mr. Taito Nakalevu.

The official delegation was welcomed with garlands prepared from exotic flowers and plants that grow abundantly on the island. The Chief traditionally welcomed the delegation and in his speech pointed out that there has not been any development as significant as this that had reached the shores of Lateu 25 years after Vanuatu's independence.

¹ Climate Change Adaptation Officer, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, PO Box 240, Apia, Samoa +(685) 21929 e-mail - taiton@sprep.org

² CBDAMPIC Project National Coordinator, Vanuatu Meteorological Office, PMB 9054, Port Vila

Plate 1 Villagers singing a welcome song to the delegation



Brief Background

Lateu community is one of the three pilot projects for the CBDAMPIC project in Vanuatu. It is very vulnerable to storm surges and tidal waves due to its very low elevation and has suffered from frequent inundation and coastal erosion of 2 to 3 meters per annum. The village is 5 m from the high water mark (HWM) and any strong south easterly during high tides will generate waves that will overtop the 1m coral strands that act as barrier and floods the whole village and dwellings. The most recent flooding was in July 26-28, 2005.

Plate 2 Lateu village by the sea



Sleeping houses are built on foundations of accumulated limestone rocks to avoid flooding at high tide. Kitchens are a separate building from the sleeping house where fireplaces are raised on limestone rocks to keep them dry. The village grounds are permanently wet, muddy and slippery from flooding and this is aggravated during periods of prolonged rain. Furthermore extensive salt marshes located behind the village contribute significantly to flooding in the event of heavy rain.

Plate 3 Cooking places have to be raised to avoid flooding



Malaria and skin infections especially among children are the most common health problems. These health problem stem from the regular flooding or inundation of the village compound, coupled with existence of extensive swamp areas, which create favourable conditions for mosquitoes and water borne infections. A small health aid post on the island caters for minor medical problems while serious cases are referred to Loh or Santo.

CBDAMPIC Project Intervention

The main problem that has prevented the people of Lateu from relocating to higher grounds on their own is the issue of water. Their main source of water at present is a small water tank that was supplied by the Government years ago and fresh water springs at low tides. There are no above ground water sources in the whole island of Lateu and people rely on rainwater they harvest to maintain a constant supply for their daily sustenance. Containers to hold water are scarce and people rely on buoys that drift into the shores of Lateu to hold water that are harvested.

The CBDAMPIC project intervention included improving the ability of people to harvest water and be able to store for longer periods of time than is currently the case. In practical terms these included providing the people of Lateu six water tanks of 6,000 litres each, which gives a total 36,000 litres of quality fresh water now available to the people of Lateu. The CBDAMPIC project also funded roofing irons that were erected as shelters to harvest water for the tanks. The project intervention enabled several things to happen. The people are now moving to higher grounds therefore avoiding coastal inundation that they have been vulnerable too for many years. People now have an abundant source of water, which is a basic need for all human beings. They have stopped using latrines that are usually flooded when the village is inundated thus minimising health risks to the community.

In terms of adaptive capacity enhancement, the CBDAMPIC project intervention has greatly improved the people of Lateu's resilience to current and future climate change risks.

Dedication Service

A dedication church service followed where the thanksgiving was given to the Almighty God for his providence and interventions in the life of the people of Lateu. Father John Andrew Siota from the Anglican Diocese led the service to dedicate the new village site to the Lord Jesus and

also thank CIDA, SPREP and the Government of Vanuatu for the assistance they have provided to enable the CBDAMPIC project to be implemented in Lateu.

Plate 4 Dedication Service



After the dedication service, the procession to the new settlement, which is now named Lirak, was led by Father Siota who sprinkled holy water along the way to the new settlement and around the new site.

Plate 5 On the way to the new settlement, Lirak



Lirak is the name of the land where the village is located and it is now the new name for the settlement. It is a tradition for this community to use names of places or living things that have sustained them for generations to either name their houses, sons and daughters or new places they move to. The official opening to mark the opening of the new Lirak was made by Hon Joshua Kalsakau, the Minister for Ni-Vanuatu Business.

Plate 6 Hon Joshua Kalsakau conducting the honour of opening the new Lirak Settlement



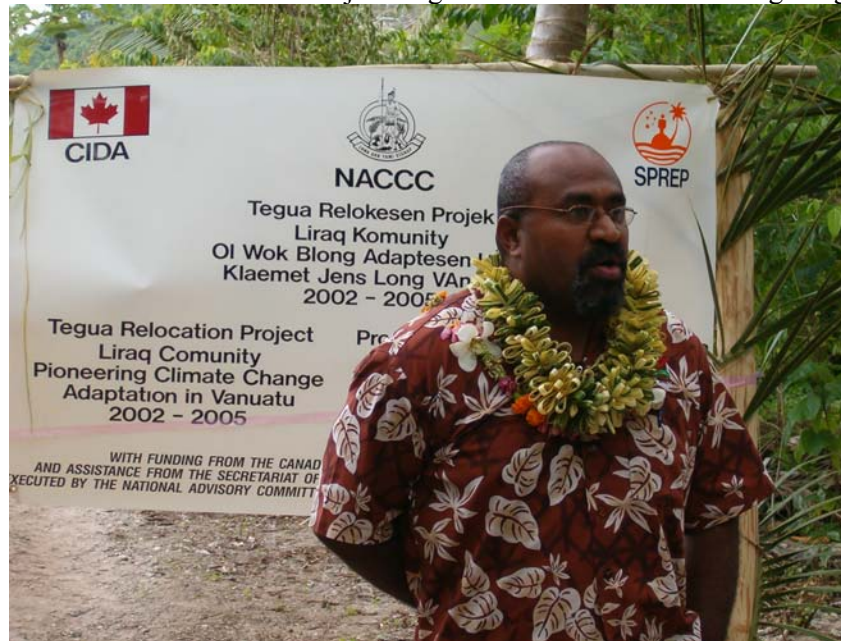
Chief Reuben on behalf of the new Liraq community thanked CIDA for providing the funds to enable all the developments to happen and SPREP in successfully providing guidance and technical support in the overall execution of the project. Vanuatu Government was also being praised by the community in the way they have handled the situation and the help each ministry and departments have provided the project to make the project implementation happen according to plan.

Plate 7 Chief Reuben giving an emotional address



Mr. Nakalevu also addressed the community on behalf of the Director of SPREP and CIDA. He indicated that this is a significant development regionally as well as globally. Small Island Developing States have been asking assistance from developed countries for adaptation implementation and CIDA had responded positively. Very recently, GEF had also allocated resources that will be available for further demonstration of pilot adaptation projects. This is a significant development globally and should be welcomed by all Pacific Island countries.

Plate 8 SPREP and CBDAMPIC Project Regional Coordinator addressing the gathering



The Official delegation entered the village and followed the church elders as they went about blessing the new village and all the project interventions that have been implemented which included six water tanks and roofing's for water harvesting. The CBDAMPIC project provided the iron roofing materials and some timbers whilst the board that serves as the walls are obtained by the villagers from palm that grows wild around the village.

Plate 9 Father Siota sprinkling holy water on the water tanks



As the officials have been given the tourage of the village a whole community photo session was undertaken in memory of the opening of the new village.

Plate 10 The whole community gather with celebration in their new settlement



The community of Lirak were overwhelmed with appreciation and they treated the delegation with custom dances and food (in abundance).

Plate 11 Director General Infrastructure and Public Utilities enjoying a custom dance



The delegation returned to Vila deeply satisfied with the achievement and in the word of the Director General for Public Works and Utilities, Mr Manasah Tari; “at least we know that in the next 50 years, the community of Lirak will be safe from flooding, tsunami and storm surges”.