

Bearing Witness 2016

A Fiji climate change journalism case study

Abstract: In February 2016, the Fiji Islands were devastated by Severe Tropical Cyclone Winston, the strongest recorded tropical storm in the Southern Hemisphere. The category 5 storm with wind gusts reaching 300 kilometres an hour, left 44 people dead, 45,000 people displaced, 350,000 indirectly affected, and \$650 million worth of damage (Climate Council, 2016). In March 2017, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) launched a new 10-year Strategic Plan 2017-2026, which regards climate change as a ‘deeply troubling issue for the environmental, economic, and social viability of Pacific island countries and territories’. In November, Fiji will co-host the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23) conference in Bonn, Germany. Against this background, the Pacific Media Centre despatched two graduate journalists to Fiji for a two-week field trip in April 2016 on a ‘bearing witness’ journalism experiential assignment to work in collaboration with the Pacific Centre for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD) and the Regional Journalism Programme at the University of the South Pacific. This article is a case study assessing this climate change journalism project and arguing for the initiative to be funded for a multiple-year period in future and to cover additional Pacific countries, especially those so-called ‘frontline’ climate change states.

Keywords: bearing witness, climate change, COP23, environmental journalism, Fiji, Pacific Islands, Pacific Regional Environment Programme, SPREP

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Introduction

CLIMATE change is the most serious challenge confronting the microstates of the South Pacific. Indeed, some of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, especially Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, are often referred to as the ‘frontline’ of global climate change in a struggle against



AMI DHABUWALA/PMC

Figure 1: Daku village, Tailevu, Viti Levu, at low tide surrounded by mangroves: Tackling climate change resilience.

‘carbon colonialism’ (Dreher & Voyer, 2015; Lata & Nunn, 2012; Nunn, 2009; Robie, 2011, 2014). The complexities and nuanced range of issues facing the Pacific are rarely addressed or explored by Western media, notably in Australia and New Zealand (Nash, 2015). What is published or broadcast tends to be ‘framed in ways that centre the interests and concerns of more powerful countries’ (Dreher & Voyer, 2015, p. 58). Dominant frames portray SIDS as ‘proof’ of climate change, as ‘victims’ of climate change, as ‘climate refugees, and as ‘travel destinations’ (p. 59). Whereas preferred frames by Pacific Islanders themselves are in more positive terms such as human rights, climate justice and adaptive responses (Figure 1).

In March 2017, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), launched its new Strategic Plan 2017-2026 setting priorities and direction for the next decade. The focus is on ‘climate change resilience, ecosystem and biodiversity protection, waste management and pollution control as well as environmental governance with oceans as a key cross-cutting theme across all priorities’ (SPREP launches new 10-year Strategic Plan, 2017). Climate change resilience has been elevated as the ‘primary concern’ for the Pacific region. The Director-General of SPREP, Kosi Latu, declared:

We have built on the success of, and learnt lessons from, the previous strategic plan, and worked together with members to identify priorities to address the Pacific’s environmental challenges. We now have a strategic plan that takes into account emerging issues ... and clearly charts our path forward from here on. (Latu quoted in SPREP launches, 2017)

The Strategic Plan (2017, p. 2) considers climate change to be a ‘deeply troubling issue for the environmental, economic, and social viability of Pacific island countries and territories’. It argues that climate change has the potential to ‘undermine the very basis of the Pacific way of life’, which needs healthy ecosystems and ongoing access to natural resources for livelihoods and cultural enrichment. According to the plan’s foreword, unsustainable harvesting of natural resources, destruction and modification of habitats and ecosystems, and severe reductions in species populations continue to threaten the integrity

and health of the vulnerable natural systems on which all island life depends. As the report noted:

Pacific Island countries are striving to balance the needs and economic aspirations of their growing populations on the one hand, with the maintenance of healthy environments and natural systems on the other. Our ability to address these threats together, to craft cooperative and sustainable solutions, build on the opportunities provided by ecosystem services and secure political commitment, will determine the future for Pacific Islands people. (p. 2)

Building on the earlier Strategic Plan 2011-2015, SPREP has also addressed undertakings to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and other key regional and global commitments. It has prioritised four regional goals with supporting objectives as the core programme for the next decade:

1. Climate change resilience
2. Ecosystem and biodiversity protection
3. Waste management and pollution control
4. Environmental governance

The strategic plan concept envisages the integration of gender and human rights, traditional knowledge with technical capacity, technical knowledge and communication, environmental advocacy, institutional capacity building, and leadership. The cross-linked components of the plan are perhaps best represented in a conceptualised diagram of the structure of a traditional Samoan house, or *fale* (Figure 2). The structure of the roof represents the overall vision and objectives while the apex represents the target of a resilient Pacific environment ‘in harmony with our cultures’ (p. 10). Both climate change resilience and oceans are ‘mainstreamed’ into other regional goals. The *fale*’s supporting posts are the ‘enablers’ to achieve the planned outcomes. The *fale* foundation represents SPREP’s support for the values and cultures of Pacific people.

Ever since COP15 in Copenhagen during 2009 when disillusionment set in after a high profile global media exposure for South and Central Pacific communities threatened by climate change (Ryan, 2010), the Pacific again took centre stage at COP21 in France. Here successful Pacific lobbying and teams of young islanders from Oceania involved in the document drafting meant that the Paris Agreement ended with 195 countries agreeing to an action plan limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees C. below pre-industrial levels (Paris Agreement, 2015). Beyond the Paris Agreement, and the desire to make the aspirational goals more binding with specific country targets, Fiji took advantage of this initiative and was elected in Marrakesh, Morocco, as co-host of COP23 to be held in Bonn, Germany, in November 2017 (Fiji to be co-chair, 2016; Fiji to

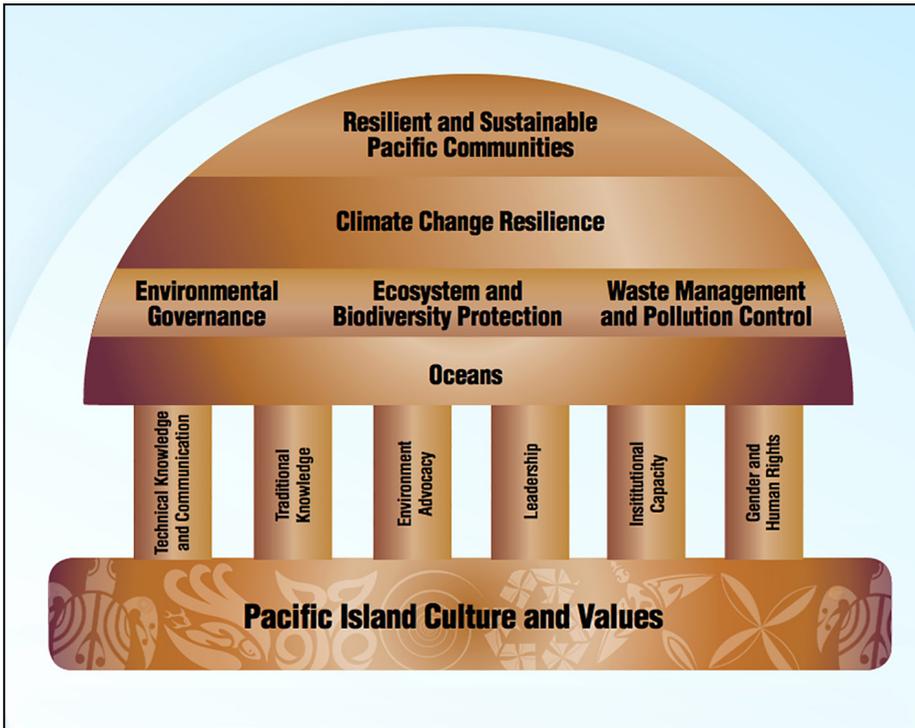


Figure 2: The SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026 *fa'e* concept.

chair, 2016; Fiji seeks support, 2017). Former coup leader Voreqe Bainimarama relished the opportunity of becoming president of the conference, with much of the planning being conducted in Fiji.

However, commentators such as economist and opposition National Federation Party leader Professor Biman Prasad have criticised the lack of a robust consultation with the nation, saying ‘even our fellow members of the Pacific and SIDS were caught unaware’ (Prasad, 2017). Prasad argues that coming straight after Severe Tropical Cyclone Winston that devastated Fiji in February 2016, ‘as many of our citizens are still struggling to get their lives together’, a legitimate question is whether this conference should really be the nation’s priority.

Against this background, the Pacific Media Centre despatched two neophyte journalists to Fiji for a two-week field trip in April 2016 on a ‘bearing witness’ journalism experiential assignment to work in collaboration with the Pacific Centre for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD) and the Regional Journalism Programme at the University of the South Pacific. This paper is a case study assessing this project and arguing for the initiative to be funded for a multiple-year period in future and to cover additional Pacific countries, especially the so-called ‘frontline’ climate change states.

Rationale and methodology

Framing is arguably the most common conceptual tool applied to climate change communication, including news media coverage (Hackett, 2017; Olausson, 2011). Climate change is not just a scientific, technical or economic issue, argues Canadian journalism professor Robert A. Hackett. It poses profoundly ethical and political challenges to human institutions, including journalism (Hackett et al., 2017). Another Canadian, Naomi Klein argues that the status quo is no longer an option. She argues that climate change is not simply another issue to be tucked between various media rounds. It requires a major overhaul of a flawed and failing economic system. Massively reducing greenhouse emissions is the globe's best chance to simultaneously reduce gaping inequalities and provide social justice for the SIDS of the Pacific (Klein, 2014). Hackett has pressed for fundamental shifts in journalism priorities towards 'greening democracy' and has suggested sharing some of the tools characteristic of Peace Journalism (PJ) such as 'an analytical method for evaluating reportage of conflicts, a set of practices and ethical norms that journalism could employ in order to improve itself, and a rallying call for change' (Hutt, 2016; Hackett, 2017; Shaw et al., 2011). This approach has also been explored to some degree by Shaw, specifically writing about parallels between Peace Journalism and Human Rights Journalism (HRJ) (Shaw, 2011). There are key challenges for journalism educators too, who need to think outside conformist teaching frameworks and have a radical approach (Ings, 2017). From subtle to obvious shifts in wording with climate change stories, argues cultural politics of climate analyst Maxwell T. Boykoff, media portrayals possess great potential to influence reader perceptions and concern. Critiquing the notion of 'who speaks for the climate', he says that in turn, these media changes can feed into public awareness and engagement, as well as politics and policy (Boykoff, 2011, p. 11). The project also related well to a journalism-as-research strategy (Bacon, 2012; Das et al., 2009; Nash, 2017) and a 'bottom up' approach with marginalised groups (Harris, 2014). In a Pacific context, the unveiling of the SPREP Pacific Plan is very timely, and implicit in the document is a challenge to journalists to play a greater role in communication about climate change resilience and human rights.

In 2013, the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) baseline Pacific-wide 'state of media and communication' report indicated that reporting on climate change in remote areas – often impacting on women and people with disabilities—was 'difficult and costly' (p. 36). It also found that respondents, in some countries such as Kiribati and Palau, reported 'information fatigue' over climate change. In Fiji, journalists commented on the importance of reporting 'from the field', whether that involved 'showcasing the work of scientists or community efforts' in response to a range of issues around climate change.

However, resources are usually scarce and reporting in an urban centre is ‘often cheaper and faster’ (p. 36).

The language of reporting was also noted as a common issue, especially around the documentation of climate change. Almost all respondents across countries pointed out that the translation of scientific terms into local languages or a language that communities understand is challenging. Pacific journalists are making an effort to report more in-depth stories but this hinges upon the resources that are available to them. (PACMAS, 2013, p. 36)

Surprisingly, nowhere in this report did it emphasise the crucial and urgent challenge for the journalists and news media to dramatically improve their capacity to participate more decisively in climate change communication. This is in contrast to global academics with a message for the media such as Professor Bill McKibben, founder of the 350.org movement, which in Fiji spawned the creative ‘Pacific climate warriors’—‘we are not drowning, we are fighting’ (Pacific climate warriors, n.d.).

McKibben visited the University of the South Pacific in April 2016, but in earlier articles and writings (2012, 2016a, 2016b) he has been strongly direct about the urgency for climate action on the part of political decision makers and media. Writing in the *New Republic*, he likened the global challenge to a ‘world war’, describing carbon and methane as the ‘deadliest enemy of all time’, and capable of ‘impoverishing our entire civilisation’.

We’re used to war as a metaphor: the war on poverty, the war in drugs, the war on cancer, usually this is just a rhetorical device, a way of saying, ‘We need to focus our attention and marshal our forces to fix something we don’t like.’ But this is no metaphor. By most of the ways we measure wars, climate change is the real deal: carbon and methane are seizing physical territory, sowing havoc and panic, racking up casualties, and even destabilising governments. (McKibben, 2016a).

Faced with this challenge, the Pacific Media Centre developed a plan for a two-week climate change field trip for two postgraduate student/graduate journalists to gain firsthand experience of reporting on climate change issues in Fiji. Drawing on previous field trips organised by the PMC and the experience of journalism programmes at institutions such as a 2015 New Caledonia and Vanuatu reportage by Queensland University of Technology (Duffield, 2016), this was an exercise in professional development. Fiji was selected for the climate project for logistical and media resource reasons, given that the centre already had a long-established relationship with the USP regional Pacific journalism

programme with available accommodation on the Laucala Bay campus close to the centre of environmental research. Also, USP is currently engaged in a major Pacific-wide climate change baseline media research project, headed by Dr Shailendra Singh, and there was a synergy between these two initiatives.

Another partner at USP was the Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD), which was established as a centre of excellence in 1999 for ‘environmental education, research and community engagement’ in the Pacific region. The director, Professor Elisabeth Holland, has led the centre in carrying out environmental and climate change research to ‘empower [Pacific] people with the adequate knowledge to be able to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to also pursue sustainable development’ (About us, n.d.). Communications officer Sarika Chand was the principal collaborator for the project.

The PMC project adopted the name ‘Bearing Witness’, drawing on the Quaker tradition of taking action over ‘truth’ based on conscience and being present at the sites of injustice. This seemed highly appropriate given that the field trip was seeking to provide an alternative framing of climate change journalism in terms of resilience and human rights. An inspiring example of this ‘bearing witness’ frame for climate change is the Collectif Argos (2010) photojournalism portfolio on climate refugees, many of the images were portrayed in their book of the same name. The concept is also widely adopted by environmental groups, such as Greenpeace. According to a definition by Gray Cox in his *Pendle Hill Pamphlet*,

Quakers view truth as something that happens, it occurs ... truth is not a dead fact which is known: It is a living occurrence in which we participate ... the guiding concern of people bearing witness is to live rightly, in ways that are exemplary. (Cox, 1985)

The project—Bearing Witness: Experiential climate change journalism

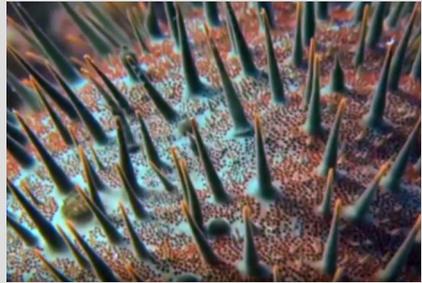
Two student journalists, or rather one student journalist and a journalist who had graduated on an honours programme within four months of the start of the project, were selected for the 14-day pilot mission between April 19-23, 2016. At the time of the project, Taylor Jo (‘TJ’) Aumua was contributing editor of the Pacific Media Centre’s Pacific Media Watch freedom project (www.pacmediawatch.aut.ac.nz). She had gained her Bachelor of Communication Studies degree with a major in journalism and a minor in screen writing in 2014. The following year she was awarded an Honours degree in Communication Studies and also won a Pacific Cooperation Foundation scholarship to Samoa and an Inclusive Journalism Initiative (IJI) exchange to Finland in 2015. Of mixed descent (Samoan, Fijian and English), Aumua had been brought up immersed in the values of the Baha’i faith and Presbyterian Protestantism. Aumua reflects:

Bearing Witness 2016 project video outputs

Crown of Thorns Phenomenon (5min 50sec): The crown-of-thorns phenomenon may sound like something from a Hollywood storyline. But instead it is the name given to the rapid mass reproduction of the crown of thorns (COT) starfish—the biggest threat to the Pacific’s coral reefs. Resource: Dr Pascal Dumas, a researcher at the Institute for Regional Development (IRD).

Reporter/Editor: TJ Aumua

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJBfgkNRGGY



Pacific youth fear losing homes to climate change (3min24sec): The effects of climate change on Pacific Island nations such as Samoa are leaving young people faced with the uncertainty of having to leave their homelands and migrating to other countries. Resource: Chair for Ōtara-Papatoetoe local board, Fa’anānā Efeso Collins who is also a former broadcaster.

Reporter/Editor: TJ Aumua

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pux-jdCOOjE



Meet the Mariana Trench ‘ghost fish’ (3min): Research expeditions can involve newly discovered species. This video shows a pale-winged fish dubbed ‘the ghost fish’. It was discovered by the Schmidt Ocean Institute (SOI) in 2014 while on an expedition to the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the world’s oceans.

Reporter/Editor: TJ Aumua

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddekPtv76es



Daku – climate change adaptation in a Fiji village (2min43sec): Sea-level rise is a major threat to coastal villages in the Pacific. In spite of the village receiving a floodgate funded by USAid to help drain water out of the village, the sea level and strength of waves are increasing. Sea water flooding in the village can reach up to the people’s ankles, forcing some children in the village to relocate to another school. Resource: Biu Naitasi, headman of Daku

Reporter/Editor: TJ Aumua

www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQChUea5n8I



‘Having intertwining cultures and religions has always made me interested in, and eager to learn about, other people’s cultures, ethnicities and the differences these bring to the world’ (Aumua, 2015).

Ami Dhabuwala is an engineer-turned-journalist from India. After having had two years’ experience in media in her home country, her passion for journalism brought her to Auckland University of Technology’s Postgraduate Diploma in Communication Studies (Journalism). She was enrolled in AUT’s Asia-Pacific Journalism Studies paper in 2016 (Dhabuwala, 2016a) and was interested in ‘exploring untold stories from the Asia-Pacific region’. During the year, she wrote a number of articles on cultural diversity, including one about a Gujarati theatre and literature group entitled ‘Gujarati migrant theatre group keeps mother tongue alive in NZ’ in *Te Waha Nui* and *Asia Pacific Report* (Dhabuwala, 2016b).

Aumua and Dhabuwala arrived in Suva, Fiji, on 19 April 2016. Within minutes of touchdown, they were blogging and filing images by Instagram on the progress of their two-week assignment (see Appendix 1). Within a day of arrival, on 20 April 2016, Ami Dhabuwala had filed her first story, about a monitor-and-clean-up project over the threat posed by the predator crown of thorns starfish (COTS), or *Acanthaster*. This poisonous-spined creature is responsible for disturbing coral reef eco-systems in the Indo-Pacific coastal area. Dhabuwala reported how in 2013, rural communities of southeast Espiritu Santo island in Vanuatu had reported severe outbreaks of COTS. The Vanuatu Fisheries Department launched an initiative called the Oceania Regional Acanthaster Network (OREANET) to control the outbreak of COTS in New Caledonia and Vanuatu. Dhabuwala cited research scientist Dr Pascal Dumas of the Vanuatu Fisheries Department:

With the help of more than 10 years of reports, we have found that many Pacific Islands [nations] are affected by the crown of thorns starfish. But as we don’t have exact quantitative data, it is high time to start a small-scale monitoring initiative. (Cited in Dhabuwala, 2016c)

The project focused on a range of methods to eradicate COTS, ‘including lethal injection, electric/physical barrier and asphyxiation’ (Dhabuwala, 2016c). Dumas referred to evidence linking the COTS outbreak to climate change, such as the ‘increasing temperature of sea water and enrichment of coastal water’. The presentation by Dumas was part of the PaCE-SD Weekly Seminar series based on climate change and the environment featuring graduate students along with local and visiting scientists and professionals. TJ Aumua followed up the next day, April 21, with a video story just under 6min long about how ‘Scientists were taking on the crown of thorns starfish threat’ in the Pacific (Figure 3). (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJBFgkNRGGY). On the same day, a 3min05sec

video story by Aumua about the effects of climate change on young people in Pacific nations such as Samoa was posted on the PMC's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pux-jdCOOjE). Her main talent for the programme was the chair for Ōtara-Papatoetoe local board in Auckland, Fa'anānā Efeso Collins, a former broadcaster who had recently returned from Samoa.

On April 25, Ami Dhabuwala profiled the US-based global grassroots climate campaigner Professor Bill McKibben, founder of the crowd-funded 350.org (<https://350.org>) movement, which has spawned the popular and colourful 'climate change warriors' of the Pacific. McKibben, speaking at a PaCE-SD hosted climate seminar, argued that it was ideal for Pacific people to use solar power, fuel efficient cars, ride bicycles. However, in the end it would not make any difference to the final outcome for the fight for climate change as there were small populations in the Pacific. He continued:

The Pacific is probably going to play a crucial role in helping to build the movement that changes the politics around climate change. You [the Pacific] can make big countries like China, United States and Australia to act fast on it. You have a particular job to build this movement. (Dhabuwala, 2016d)

Writing for *Rolling Stone* just four years earlier than his Pacific sojourn, in 2012, McKibben explained that since he wrote one of the first books for a general audience about global warming in 1989, he had since 'spent the intervening decades working ineffectively to slow that warming' (McKibben, 1989). He added: 'I can say with some confidence that we're losing the fight, badly and quickly—losing it because, most of all, we remain in denial about the peril that human civilisation is in' (McKibben, 2012). His article gave a pessimistic overview of the 'climate change maths'.

Fast forward again to 2016 and McKibben, this time writing in the *New Republic*, had revised his maths based on a new report by Oil Change International Ltd and 13 other environmental non-government organisations:

The future of humanity depends on math. And the numbers in a new study released [Muttitt, 2016] Thursday are the most ominous yet.... If we're serious about preventing catastrophic warming [McKibben, 2016], the new study shows we can't dig any new coal mines, drill any new fields, build any more pipelines. Not a single one (McKibben, 2016b).

On April 26, Aumua and Dhabuwala visited propagation projects at the Pacific Community (SPC) and its Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees in Suva (Ce-PaCT). With 'increasingly hyperactive' severe weather patterns and cyclones in the South Pacific, communities are faced with the destruction of food crops

and ‘left suffering from food scarcity and malnutrition’ (Aumua, 2016c). At CePaCT, scientists are addressing the issue of climate impacts on strategies for rapid plant growth and climate resistant crops for the Pacific:

When we arrived at the centre, busy white-coated lab assistants were counting and double-checking more than 1000 banana, sweet potato and swamp taro seedlings which lay in rows across the counters, packed delicately in plastic pockets. With the assistance of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) these seedlings are one of three batches to be sent to Tuvalu, where the island agriculture is still recovering from the devastation caused by cyclone Pam in 2014. A total of 6000 seeds will be sent as part of this project. (Aumua, 2016c)

The same day, TJ Aumua reported on a pale-winged ‘ghost fish’ through a remarkable video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddekPtv76es) about discoveries by the Schmidt Ocean Institute (SOI) in 2014 while on an expedition to the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the world’s oceans. The story itself examined research around hydrothermal vents, which have been compared as an ocean equivalent of the earth’s volcanoes. Scientists are keen to gain more knowledge about these rich vent ecosystems as they face threats of disruption from deep-sea mining interests (Aumua, 2016d).

On April 27, the Bearing Witness team travelled to the village of Daku, a 50-minute drive from Suva city where a community of 332 people live nestled in a Rewa River delta enclave close to the sea and surrounded by mangroves. This is a community where the people’s daily lives are governed by climate change. It is an area where environmental changes caused by rising sea levels is to expected increase over the next few decades and cause disruption (Lata & Nunn, 2012, p. 169). Village headman Biu Naitasi talked to Dhabuwala and Aumua about how he first noticed the rising sea level around the village four years ago. However, it was only in 2011 that an assistance programme partnering PaCE-SD, firstly supported through an AusAID project and then by the US Agency for International Development’s Coastal Community Adaptation Project (USAID/C-CAP), and the villagers began to modify their existence to meet the challenges. ‘[The term] climate change [was] something new for us. We [hadn’t] heard about it before,’ explained Naitasi.

Arriving at the village, [we] bore witness to flood waters lapping on the doorsteps of village homes. Remnants of super Tropical Cyclone Winston that savaged Fiji two months ago, and other tropical depressions which have left parts of the nation drenched in heavy rainfall, have left their mark. Waterlogged land leaves the village vulnerable to water-borne infections like dengue, filariasis and diarrhoea, and in the worst case scenario, cholera and typhoid. (Dhabuwala & Aumua, 2016)

In 2015, USAID’s C-CAP adaptation project had implemented a floodgate system, built into a river wall, which ‘allows water to flow out of the village while blocking out sea water in high tides of floods’. However, as Dhabuwala and Aumua reported, another floodgate was needed to stem king tides and protect the villagers’ plantation crops from salt-water damage. ‘Sometimes [the water is] up to our ankles,’ said Naitasi. In a series of multimedia reports, Dhabuwala and Aumua documented the experience of the villagers through text, image galleries and a video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQChUea5n8I). They reported how coastal villagers were living with the burden of climate change effects daily. This was their final message:

‘Tell them to believe it, climate change is happening,’ says Naitasi, sending a message to the world. ‘We can’t stop climate change, but we can reduce its effect.’ (Dhabuwala & Aumua, 2016).

Both TJ Aumua and Ami Dhabuwala filed individual reflective reports on their experience in Fiji and wrote about their ‘passion’ for reporting climate change because of the mission. The Daku village visit in the Rewa River delta was the definite highlight. Both journalists found having PaCE-SD environmental and climate specialists and their feedback vital for the reporting challenge, and they would have liked to travel to outer islands in Fiji. However, the available budget and logistics for the two-week period prevented this happening. With more extensive planning, noted Aumua, ‘I think Ami and I could have truly “borne witness” to the effects of climate change’. She added:

I think this is why climate change in the Pacific is still largely untold and undocumented. I know getting to the outer regions of the Pacific is difficult and I believe climate change affects these areas more than we know or could imagine.

However, I have returned from Fiji with a new sense of how serious and urgent action towards the impacts of climate change is needed. A majority of people [in neighbouring developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand] may think climate change is gradual but coastlines are being eroded at a rapid rate and therefore relocation of communities and families are frequent. (TJ Aumua, quoted in Robie, 2016, p. 4).

Aumua also found one of the most valuable lessons she learned in Fiji was ‘the role of adaptation’. She was told that climate change could not be stopped, only have the impact reduced, and so Pacific people needed to adapt to it— ‘a scary thought on how climate change is ongoing and will always have an effect on how we live our lives’ (Ibid).

Ami Dhabuwala reflected with enthusiasm on the special help of Radio Pasifik 89.4FM acting manager Eliki Drugunalevu, cooperative journalism staff

and PaCE-SD communications officer Sarika Chand on the ‘beautiful’ Laucala Campus at USP.

The best part of the internship was the community visit, which Sarika helped us arrange. We went to the Daku village (Tailevu province) with Tuverea and Sairusi with the EU Global Climate Change Alliance project ... We observed the damage Super Cyclone Winston caused to the village. Houses were blown away and floodwaters were [swirling] around houses. We also met some students who went to the Paris conference COP21 [in 2015]. (Ami Dhabuwala quoted in Robie, 2016, p. 2)

Later, almost two months after leaving Fiji, the pair were interviewed for *AUT University News* with Aumua describing the impact on everyday lives in Daku as ‘heart-breaking’. She added: ‘I was aware that climate change was happening before, but I didn’t realise its devastating impacts. Dhabuwala stressed the human rights aspects: ‘It’s not just about rising sea levels or other environmental effects, it’s also a physical and mental health issue’ (Yeo, 2016).

Discussion

What were the tangible benefits of the Bearing Witness project as a two-week multimedia climate change research and publication journalism project?

The package of multimedia news reports (see Appendix 1) produced by the two student journalists based in Suva was, of course, the most tangible benefit of the project. PaCE-SD runs a weekly seminar series and communications officer Sarika Chand notes that many speakers with different backgrounds are involved. The two student journalists were able to make use of this opportunity efficiently and to produce well researched news reports that were shared extensively through social media networks, and with students and staff who missed out on the seminars. Chand recalls:

Not just the seminars though, every point of contact or news tip provided was well pursued and executed. Working with the students on news tips for them to pursue, and also scoping out contacts and angles based on climate change-related issues they wanted to pursue was good experience for the PaCE communications team for strengthening our ability to work with the media. It was also an opportunity to look more closely at the Pacific Media Centre and the work it does from a different perspective to highlight newsworthy activities. (Chand, communication with the author, 16 March 2017)

The students’ feedback in terms of what they witnessed in Fiji—from the impacts of climate change to the innovative solutions that were being used in

some instances—and how valuable (newsworthy) this information was to them also provided an interesting perspective for the researchers and communications team at PaCE-SD. Being surrounded by these issues sometimes makes the team a little too familiar with what is happening and they run the risk of down-playing some important impacts that need to be highlighted in the news media. Overall, highlighting a range of climate change issues that are affecting Fiji and the Pacific as well as showing what communities, young people, scientists, regional organisations and so on are doing about it with several ‘take-home’ messages, was a major achievement of the Bearing Witness project. (Chand, communication with the author, 16 March 2017).

Does a project like this add to the public awareness of climate change and environmental issues?

Most definitely. It not only provides a completely new audience population who access the news reports through the Bearing Witness project in New Zealand and globally, but it also provides other local and regional audiences with a fresh perspective and style of reporting about these climate change and environmental issues. (Chand, communication with the author, 16 March 2017)

A project such as Bearing Witness is also especially important because the mainstream media needs to prioritise many different issues for daily news and sometimes does not have the time or resources for more in-depth coverage of some issues. Alternatively, if there *is* coverage, it gets buried somewhere in between many other reports during the evening news. The Bearing Witness Project allows the student journalists to research their topics well and do more justice to a story than if they were pursuing ‘up to 10 news pieces daily’ (Chand, communication with the author, 16 March 2017).

Conclusion

Democracy and journalism face a crisis of planetary emergency, and a ‘greening’ of media initiatives is needed to prepare for and to engage with this challenge. Hackett argues for the deployment of a Peace Journalism model for the framing of this challenge with an approach he labels Climate Crisis Journalism along with ‘systematic reform of media structures’ in conventional mainstream media (Hackett, 2017, p. 7). Human Rights Journalism and Climate Justice are also useful metaframes. The Bearing Witness project in Fiji was arguably well anchored in the latter two frames.

The strengths of the Bearing Witness project:

- allowing climate change and environmental issues to be covered more thoroughly and in-depth;

- enabling student journalists from different cultural, educational and professional backgrounds to provide new perspectives and renewed enthusiasm in the way some issues are reported;
- providing a more enriching experience for the journalists to be able to report on climate change and environmental issues first hand;
- strengthening relations between collaborating agencies—such as PaCE, Auckland University of Technology and the USP Journalism School—and laying a foundation for timely collaborations on the climate given the crisis being faced globally;
- fulfilling the need for the media to exercise its role as gatekeepers, educators, and disseminators of correct information for awareness and advocacy;
- enabling the environment to raise its profile after being sidelined for so long by neoliberal politics and economics in the newsroom; and
- promoting the establishment of an ‘environment beat (or round)’, giving priority to a sector, which newsrooms and individuals need to realise, affects all the other beats – economy, health etc.

Instilling this framing into journalists as students is a great start.

On the downside, especially with the limited funding for the project and the short time frame available, there were some difficulties. Better long-term planning before the student journalists arrive in Fiji, or the ‘frontline’ country they are going to should help. On the other hand, limited time gives the young journalists a more realistic experience of being a foreign correspondent working under real deadline pressure and an opportunity to ‘get their bearings right in a foreign location’ (Chand, communication with the author, 16 March 2017). Many places seriously affected by climate change are not easily accessible. If traditional protocol is to be observed—providing kava for a *sevusevu* ceremony to request access to a community/village in Fiji, for example—student journalists need a sufficient budget to enable them to comfortably pursue the stories they are seeking.

At the time of writing this article, Fiji was preparing for the COP23 conference in Bonn during 6-17 November 2017. Already the conference has been called the ‘Pacific COP’ and Fiji’s co-presidency is of major significance. The Bearing Witness project is gearing up for a second year with two new student journalists going to Fiji in April and they are likely to produce a pilot short documentary as part of the visit. While longer term, plans are afoot to seek funding to extend the project over several years and involving a wider range of countries. Preparatory work has already begun for the 2017 mission, and there are related stories to pursue in terms of what the presidency means for Fiji, for the Pacific region—and for COP23 as a whole. What is on the agenda, as well as looking at the Paris Agreement to see how national priorities will be met?

Resources

Bearing Witness Project reports 2016 asiapacificreport.nz/category/climate/bearing-witness/

Full matrix of published and broadcast stories
Appendix 1

Image gallery at Daku village, Tailevu

<http://asiapacificreport.nz/2016/04/27/fijis-daku-village-tackles-the-floodwaters-problem/>

Videos produced

Aumua, T.J. (2016, May 18). Profile: Jenny Jiva— ‘Climate change is very real now’.

[Video, 3m16s]. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIHXypJVjvc

Aumua, T.J. (2016, May 10). Daku—climate change adaptation in a Fiji village. [Video, 2m43s]. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQChUea5n8I

Aumua, T.J. (2016, April 26). Meet the Mariana Trench ‘ghost fish’. [Video, 3min]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddekPtv76es>

Aumua, T.J. (2016, April 21). Pacific youth fear losing home to climate change. [Video, 3min03]. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pux-jdCOOjE

Aumua, T.J. (2016, April 20). Scientists take on Pacific crown of thorns starfish threat – Crown of Thorns Phenomenon. [Video, 5m50]. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJBfgkNRGGY

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Appendix: Bearing Witness climate change research and publication matrix 2016

Date	Topic	Format	Journalist	Publication
20 April 2016	Fiji set to start clean-up project for predator starfish	text, images (369t views)	Ami Dhabuwala	Asia Pacific Report
21 April 2016	Poisonous starfish threatens survival of the Pacific coral reefs	text, video (317t, 328v)	TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Crown of thorns phenomenon", 5m50s), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBFgkNRGGY
21 April 2016	Pacific youth face uncertain future over climate change	Text, video (308t, 183v)	TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Pacific fear losing homes to climate change, 3m24s), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pux-jdCO0JE
25 April 2016	Pacific example can help 'save the world' on climate change, says McKibben	Text, images (590ti)	Ami Dhabuwala	Asia Pacific Report
26 April 2016	Pacific crop centre develops food strategies for climate change	Text, images (317ti)	TJ Aumua	Asia Pacific Report
26 April 2016	Researchers explore Pacific Ocean's hidden deep secrets	Text, video (767t, 629v)	TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Meet the Mariana Trench 'ghost fish', 3m), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddekPtv76es
27 April 2016	Daku has a climate message for the world: 'Tell them to believe it'	Text, images gallery, video (265t, 545i, 478v)	Ami Dhabuwala, TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Climate change adaptation in a Fiji village", 2m43s), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQChUea5n8l
10 May 2016	Fiji's Daku village people adapt to challenge of rising sea	Text, video (503t, 478v)	TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Climate change adaptation in a Fiji village", 2m43s), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQChUea5n8l
18 May 2016	Pacific Profile: Jenny Jiva – 'Climate change is very real now'	Text, video (583t, 287v)	TJ Aumua	PMC YouTube channel ("Pacific Profile: Jenny Jiva – youth climate change activist", 3m16s), Asia Pacific Report https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlHXypJVjc
24 May 2016	'If young people act over climate change, our leaders will listen'	Text, video (259t, 910v)	Ami Dhabuwala, Niklas Pedersen	PMC YouTube channel ("Pacific leaders speak out with 'one voice' on climate change", 2m32s), Asia Pacific Report www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D1bSg6gXbc
26 June 2016	Fiji assignment enlightens aspiring climate change journalists	Text, images (365t)	Denise Yeo	AUT News, Asia Pacific Report
		Total views 8,481 (15 March 2017)		All items sourced at the Bearing Witness project in association with the Pacific Centre for the Environment-Sustainable Development – PACE-SD, University of the South Pacific: asiapacificreport.nz/category/climate/bearing-witness/ Fiji Report 'Bearing Witness', 2016, on Storify (1,954 views): storify.com/pacmedcentre/fiji-report-bearing-witness-2016