

SAVE THE PLANET

Climate WATCH

A Fiji Sun Investigative Project

RISING WATERS

How Climate Change Transformed Navutu Solomoni Village



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More than 55 years ago, Navutu Solomoni Village had their seawall built by Colonial Sugar Refinery workers.

But it slowly eroded into oblivion, along with the history of its builders and those it served to protect.

One of the surviving members of the predominantly Solomon Island descendant community, Vinaisi Vosa, recalled the tranquility of the village when she was a teenager.

The 73-year-old described the 1960s as “nice” and “good” with no disturbance to the village or surroundings around the Lautoka area by the forces of climate change.

“I am the last lady from this village to be with the Solomon people when they lived here and one of them was my grandfather. They’ve all passed on now,” explained Ms Vosa.

“The only thing I know is that some members of the CSR built the first seawall here in either 1965 or 1966, they also built a church here.

“At the time, everything was good, it was nice when the Solomon people stayed here. We had vegetation everywhere.”

Navutu Solomoni Village is one of the many villages located in the Sugar City that has more than 600 members who reside in and around the village area.

At least 15 homes are located near the sea. Most of them depend on the sea for food. Others grow their

own crops and vegetables to sustain themselves.

Ms Vosa said it was in the early 1990s when the seawall, built by CSR workers, was first destroyed.

“I can’t recall how it was destroyed but in 1991 our seawall here experienced its first damage and from that time till now we have never constructed a proper seawall,” she said.

“The village men only gathered big rocks and stones to put in place of the seawall to offer some protection.

“Now that I am in my old age, I can see how the environment is changing as compared to before. With our seawall, I hope something can be done soon because I am thinking of my grandchildren.

Village headman Kaminieli Cecena, who is now two months into his new post, said the situation of the temporary seawall was not conducive.

“During cyclones and hurricanes, the water comes into the village. In the last five years, I can see the situation of our temporary seawall worsening, only before it was okay.

“I know Government has plans in the pipeline to help us so we will just wait patiently now.”

Whether villagers have considered relocation, Mr Cecena said: “Relocating our village is not on my mind, we will just be here.”

Villager Jale Virivoa, 57, said it was a longtime dream of him and the other members of the village to have a proper seawall constructed.

“I was born here, before when the seawall was still here even when it was high tide and we lived near the

sea, we never got affected by flooding or when the tide would come in,” said Mr Virivoa.

The former Fiji Sugar Corporation employee hopes their dreams would materialise soon.

The Navutu Youth Group assistant leader, Jeke Waisake, who works with about 60 members in the youth group, said they were working together with the village community to clear up the coastline area. All in a bid to help save the environment.

“For the Navutu youths, our next project in line is fundraising for the village community hall,” he said.

In August last year, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Mahendra Reddy said that in the Government’s 2020/2021 financial year, 19 seawalls would be constructed around the country for 19 communities.

In response to questions sent by the Fiji Sun on whether the Navutu Solomoni Village will be included in the plan, Mr Reddy said the ministry would assess the vulnerability of the community.

“The ministry will assess the vulnerability of the community and based on the need, we will decide if it can be done next year or in 2022,” the minister said.

“Decision on timing of works will be made after assessment and comparison with other requests.”

For now, the villagers of Navutu remain hopeful.

Edited by Rosi Doviverata

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1. The oldest villager in Navutu Solomoni, Vinaisi Vosa.



2. Navutu Solomoni villager Jale Virivoa with his two grandchildren, Aseri and Jona Matea sitting near the village temporary seawall.
Photos: Nicolette Chambers

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