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Key Points:

- Migration is likely from Small Island Developing States due to climate change.
- Many complexities emerge for decision-making on migrating or not migrating.
- No decision-making process exists in isolation, so wider contexts are needed.

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Difficult decisions: Migration from Small Island Developing States under climate change

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Abstract The impacts of climate change on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are leading to discussions regarding decision-making about the potential need to migrate. Despite the situation being well-documented, with many SIDS aiming to raise the topic to prominence and to take action for themselves, limited support and interest has been forthcoming from external sources. This paper presents, analyzes, and critiques a decision-making flowchart to support actions for SIDS dealing with climate change-linked migration. The flowchart contributes to identifying the pertinent topics to consider and the potential support needed to implement decision-making.

The flowchart has significant limitations and there are topics which it cannot resolve. On-the-ground considerations include who decides, finances, implements, monitors, and enforces each decision. Additionally, views within communities differ, hence mechanisms are needed for dealing with differences, while issues to address include moral and legal blame for any climate change-linked migration, the ultimate goal of the decision-making process, the wider role of migration in SIDS communities and the right to judge decision-making and decisions. The conclusions summarize the paper, emphasizing the importance of considering contexts beyond climate change and multiple SIDS voices.

1. Introduction

The Small Island Developing States (SIDS; <http://www.sidsnet.org>) are several dozen countries and territories which have joined together through the United Nations to tackle sustainability challenges [UN, 1994, 2005, 2014]. One major sustainability challenge for SIDS is climate change, for which migration seems to be a likely outcome in several SIDS as ecosystems change, as freshwater supplies are affected and as the sea level rises [Barnett and Campbell, 2010; IPCC, 2013–2014; Kelman and West, 2009]. Despite the climate change challenges being well-known and many SIDS aiming to take action for themselves, limited support and interest have come from external sources. That is true even for the possible impacts on migration destinations, in terms of little in-depth interest from non-SIDS peoples for dealing with the challenge and opportunity of potential migration, and for developing decision-making processes for deciding if, when and how to migrate from SIDS.

This article proposes and examines a decision-making framework for SIDS regarding climate change-linked migration. The framework is presented and critiqued to examine the pertinent concerns and resolutions related to the decision-making, to determine how SIDS peoples could be supported in their decision-making and to indicate what SIDS peoples require in order to further help themselves. The next section summarizes climate change-linked migration from SIDS and consequent issues. Section 3 uses this background material to provide a decision-making flowchart with section 4 indicating topics which the flowchart cannot resolve. The conclusions summarize the paper, emphasizing the importance of considering contexts beyond climate change and multiple SIDS voices.

2. Climate Change-Linked Migration for SIDS

Much rhetoric on climate change-linked migration constructs it as being a threat from masses of poor people fleeing their angry environment, epitomized in the film *Climate Refugees* [2010] by Michael Nash. The film's main downfall is aiming to frighten the viewer about migrants. Dramatic red arrows leap from poorer countries to converge on richer locales. Accompanying commentary decries that "our" children might die

fighting to protect “us” from “them”. Without any critique or evidence, concepts of “National Security” frame the film, presumably to appeal to American patriotism.

Bettini [2013], *Hartmann* [2010], and *Nicholson* [2014] deconstruct such discourse. They argue that it plays into the hands of those who wish to securitize and militarize the topic of migration, seeking an excuse to create confrontation and fear in order to support melodramatic, militaristic measures for stemming the mythical flows of helpless people. They also point to little empirical evidence that masses of people will suddenly migrate due to climate change, suggesting that the idea of “climate refugees” is politically constructed. For SIDS specifically, authors such as *Farbotko* [2010], *McNamara* [2009] and *McNamara and Gibson* [2009] garner viewpoints from the countries of potential migrants. They demonstrate how many islanders accept the likelihood—perhaps inevitability—of moving due to climate change, but they do not wish to be labeled as “refugees”. They would instead prefer to have the international support to implement any needed movement on their own terms in their own way.

Regarding the possibilities of violent conflict emerging from climate change-linked migration, *Salehyan and Gleditsch* [2006] review and suggest pathways through which refugees could increase the chance of violent conflict; however, pre-existing violence exists in these cases. Those migrating due to climate change are not refugees under international law, are not moving due to violent conflict and are not expected to be moving into volatile areas. *Raleigh et al.* [2008] analyze the potential for violence from climate change-linked migration, concluding within numerous provisos that the nature of the migration expected from climate change would limit the prospects for violent conflict. Dovetailing with *Hartmann's* [2010] work, it appears as if the evidence currently available regarding violent conflict from climate change-linked migration is contested [see also *IPCC*, 2013–2014]. These points do not eliminate possibilities for political tension, perhaps even violent conflict, emerging from migration. Instead, they indicate that no reason exists to assume the inevitability of negative or violent reactions while questioning why some discussions present climate change-linked migration as being naturally and inevitably conflictual.

Nor do the critiques deny the seriousness of the situation and the need to consider migration as a strong possibility. SIDS which might need to move their entire populations elsewhere due to climate change's consequences include Kiribati, Maldives, and Tuvalu. These actions would require negotiations with other countries over where they should move, how they should resettle, and on what terms. For instance, on many Pacific islands, almost all the land is owned according to tradition [*Chapelle*, 1978]. Acquiring some of it for resettlement, such as on Fiji's largest island Viti Levu, is not straightforward [*Clarke and Jupiter*, 2010]. After long, drawn-out negotiations, Kiribati recently completed a land purchase from Fiji, ostensibly to move because of climate change, but many unknowns remain in terms of whether or not that land is suitable for resettling everyone from Kiribati, on top of the uncertainties regarding the need for and speed of any migration.

Given these unknowns and uncertainties, what preparations ought to be started now? How could those preparations be balanced with the need to avoid expending too many resources in case migration does not manifest? When discussing the topic and beginning to plan and prepare, how is it possible to avoid causing the affected peoples to assume the inevitability of migration, but instead to keep it open as one option among many? An assumption of migration could cause loss of hope for and lack of investment in communities.

Many leaders and scientists from potentially affected countries and from around the world have been raising such questions since the topic became politically prominent at the Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise, held from 14–18 November 1989 on Malé, the capital of Maldives (<http://www.islandvulnerability.org/slr1989.html>). Much of the work and declarations from 1989 remain relevant today, suggesting that few changes have resulted, despite plenty of publications on the topic since then [*Arnall et al.*, 2014; *Barnett and Campbell*, 2010; *Gerrard and Wannier*, 2013; *Kelman*, 2010; *Yamamoto and Esteban*, 2014].

Additionally, climate change-linked migration from SIDS did not start with humanity's influence on the atmosphere. *Nunn* [2000], *Nunn and Britton* [2001], and *Nunn et al.* [2007] document how changes to the climate and sea level in the fourteenth century around the Pacific led to communities disappearing. The evidence is scarce regarding what happened exactly, but it appears as if mass migration was one consequence for some communities, rather than all the communities simply dying.

SIDS communities evacuating is not about climate change only, thereby presenting some analogies which could inform present-day approaches to climate change-linked migration. Volcanoes are particularly common examples with entire island populations leaving suddenly or over a longer time period without any certainty that return would be feasible. Examples are Niua Fo'ou in Tonga in 1946 [Lewis, 1979], Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic in 1961 [de Boer and Sanders, 2002], Vestmannaeyjar in Iceland in 1973 [Chester, 1993] and Manam in Papua New Guinea in 2004 [Mercer and Kelman, 2010]. These communities' experiences, especially regarding those who did and did not return, could help to prepare climate change-threatened communities for migrating. Other reasons for island communities questioning their own viability or resettling entire populations include the 26 December 2004 tsunamis after which communities in Maldives were relocated [Sovacool, 2012]; residents of St. Kilda, Scotland being told in 1930 to abandon their islands and to resettle closer to the mainland [Steel, 2011]; and criminal charges related to child abuse on Pitcairn Island, an Overseas Territory of the UK in the Pacific, leading to questions about continuing the community [Marks, 2008].

In examining analogies and precedents to inform contemporary discussion of climate change-linked migration from SIDS, it is also important to recognize that not all contemporary SIDS movements are due to climate change. The Lateu settlement in Vanuatu was forced to move in 2002–2004 as sea floods increasingly encroached onto their village. Initial assumptions were that the flooding occurred due to sea-level rise, so those moving were presented in the media as being climate change “refugees”. Ballu *et al.* [2012] showed that tectonic subsidence was more of a factor than sea-level rise, with the entire group of Torres Islands in northern Vanuatu being affected. The migration was not any less difficult due to the underlying cause, but it demonstrates that resettling SIDS communities should not be focused on the single topic of climate change; it can draw on a variety of experiences and embrace wider contexts.

That should not sideline SIDS peoples who are moving exclusively due to climate change. Examples are from Papua New Guinea, with communities in the Carteret Islands and Takuu Atoll moving involuntarily entirely due to sea-level rise [Mercer, 2010; Strauss, 2012]. With diverse reasons for migrating, with precedents from history and with communities making decisions for themselves while requesting external assistance which is rarely forthcoming, further examining a decision-making process for migration could assist in understanding if, when, and how to move entire island or country populations.

3. Decision-Making Flowchart

Figure 1 provides a decision-making flowchart summarizing the topics raised in the previous section and drawing on past experiences while integrating possible futures for SIDS. The flowchart could be followed by individuals, households, communities, islands, and countries.

Starting in Box (a) at the top left, a decision needs to be made to migrate or not to migrate. If that decision is to migrate, then the timing for the movement needs to be determined. Should the islanders leave as soon as possible as quickly as possible; should migration over a long time period be planned; or would it be easier to wait for a major shift—such as a devastating cyclone or a collapse in fisheries or crops—in order to convince people to leave comparatively promptly? Boxes (b) and (c) illustrate some available choices regarding the migration's timing. Waiting for a disaster risks fatalities, injuries, psychological impacts, and losses of tangible and intangible assets, for instance photographs and cultural heritage. Planning over the long-term risks a major calamity occurring in the meantime, convincing the islanders to migrate before they are fully ready.

The second decision to be made is in Box (d): Developing a post-migration community which engages with the host communities. One option is Box (e), integrating entirely with other communities which entails accepting the consequences of abandoning one's identity, culture, and language. Many immigrants adopt that approach, preferring to be as similar to their new home and hosts as possible. Others prefer to retain aspects of their original values and culture. Considering a SIDS example, Tuvalu has approximately 12,000 people who could integrate and disperse in mega-cities such as Los Angeles, Sydney, or Tokyo. Few Tuvaluans would be expected to wish for that, meaning that a mechanism for retaining identity is needed.

That suggests the pathway with Box (f): Re-building the original island community in such a way that as much of the community's culture is retained as feasible and as desirable, especially given that culture by definition changes over time [Krüger *et al.*, 2015]. Major changes due to the move are unavoidable leading

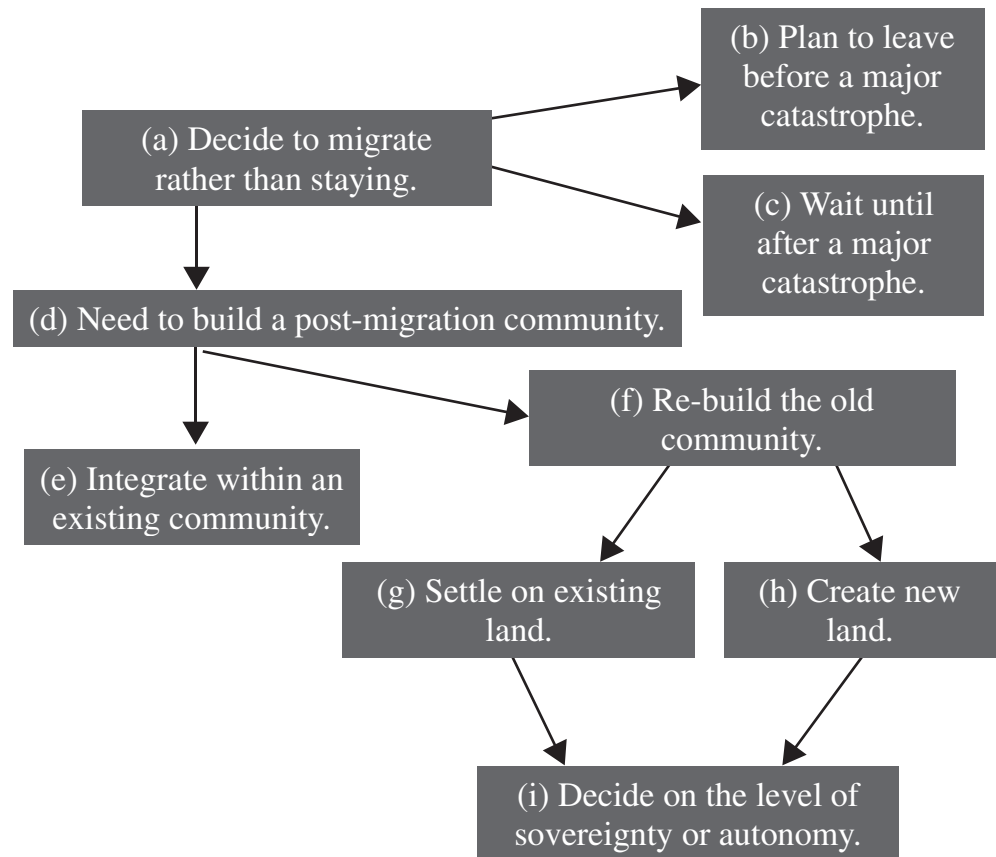


Figure 1. Decision-making flowchart.

to new elements in the culture. Yet desire to retain identity can be fulfilled to a large degree with planning and resources. Two principal options exist.

First, Box (g), in terms of settling on existing land, donated by or purchased from another location. As noted above, Kiribati has purchased land in Fiji while Maldives' President from 2008 to 2012, at the beginning of his presidency, highlighted one important goal as being to set aside funds for acquiring land in another country [Kothari, 2014]. The second option is Box (h) in which new land is created in order to resettle the migrants.

Creating artificial islands is technically feasible and is frequently enacted. The Spratly island of Layang Layang in the South China Sea was artificially created by Malaysia through filling in the shallow sea between two reefs in order to create a tourist resort. Hong Kong's airport is built over two islands connected by land reclamation. Dubai constructed the Palm Islands for a luxury residential and leisure area. Since islands are being built for profit, should resources be allocated to build islands for saving SIDS' peoples, identities and countries? Islands could be built which are similar to the islanders' original homes but which would survive sea-level rise and other climate change impacts. That could be completed in current SIDS territory. Maldives has pursued this approach, building the island of Hulhumalé, which is attached to the island with Malé's airport, in order to provide homes and a community for people who wish to live near the capital city.

Alternatively, islands could be built in entirely new places. Yamamoto and Esteban [2014] describe some of the engineering options for constructing new islands, including prospects for floating islands which are anchored to the seabed or to submerged islands. Kardol [1999] details some legal issues of building artificial island states. Even more difficult, with the potential of being even more legally contentious, would be creating large mobile islands which would sail around the world's seas as mobile sovereign states.

For building new territory, questions exist regarding who would pay for construction and maintenance. Any territorial disputes would need to be resolved, involving access to resources in the seas around the new fixed or mobile island. Nomadic peoples might have solid advice regarding how a population could adapt to being mobile, even if that mobility were over water rather than roaming land, although many islanders have traditions of long oceanic voyages. For islanders not used to nomadism, significant cultural changes would result as a consequence of creating mobile island states.

Irrespective of the choice of Box (g) or Box (h), the next challenge is Box (i) in terms of deciding the level of autonomy or sovereignty for the resettled population. The main questions are regarding who makes, monitors and enforces the decisions? Many SIDS peoples, quite rightly, do not wish to give up sovereignty even if they must resettle. *McNamara and Gibson* [2009] describe how some diplomats from Pacific island countries are concerned that international discussions might be trying to force them to relinquish their countries' sovereignty if their peoples must move due to climate change impacts. Retaining sovereignty, but more importantly ensuring that the islanders retain the right to choose their own sovereignty pathways, might be the aspect that generates the most disagreements between migrants and hosts.

Complications arise in determining the degree to which resettled islanders have the right to retain and manage their laws, justice system, language, education system and identity, whether sovereign or not. While major cultural changes need to be expected, compromise between migrants and hosts—at both community and country levels—would be necessary including where the newly settled land was previously uninhabited.

Many precedents and current examples exist to guide discussions. For justice, parallel and complementary systems for indigenous peoples operate in Canada [e.g., *Andersen*, 1999; *Baskin*, 2002] and New Zealand [e.g., *Goren*, 2001; *Gibbs and King*, 2002]. For multiple monetary systems within the same jurisdiction, barter networks and local currencies operate around the world. Local Exchange Trading Systems, for instance in Ithaca, New York [*Crowther et al.*, 2002] and Skye, Scotland [*Pacione*, 1997], led to further social and economic advantages especially for more marginalized communities [*Croall*, 1997; *Williams*, 1996]. Many border towns, for example Niagara Falls, Ontario at the border with New York, offer to transact business in either currency—to be friendly and to avoid losses by exchanging money in banks. For education and language training, parallel systems could be set up such as Ontario's French immersion program and its Catholic school system which also offers Catholic French immersion schools [see *Heller*, 2003]. By emulating and refining such initiatives, which permit societies to live together in the same location with differences in sectors such as education and justice, migrants and hosts could collaborate to create and maintain non-physical or non-territorial states, or parts thereof.

Irrespective of how many of the island governance systems could be re-created in new territories, migrating and rebuilding inevitably changes culture and identity. The islanders might seek islands which are similar to their original homes, yet more secure. One major difficulty is that all low-lying areas could experience similar climate change impacts with respect to sea-level rise. Meanwhile, many prospective candidates, such as New Zealand's Kermadec Islands or Australia's Great Barrier Reef islands, are already designated or protected as scientific sites, natural and/or cultural heritage areas, or (with examples from Maldives) tourist resorts.

Consequently, although in theory the flowchart summarizes decisions which need to be taken sequentially, in practice more decisions are necessary to complete a single flowchart pathway. The next section delves more deeply into the flowchart's limitations and overcoming them.

4. Beyond the Flowchart

The flowchart in Figure 1 provides only guidance. It does not and cannot pose all the pertinent questions to understand deeply the dilemmas facing SIDS peoples, and those who would assist, in dealing with climate change linked-migration decisions. This section explores some on-the-ground considerations as well as wider contexts for decision-making.

4.1. On-the-Ground Considerations

The flowchart presents step-by-step decisions, but it is unclear regarding who would decide at each point in the chain and who would pay for, direct/lead, monitor and enforce the decisions which are made. SIDS do not have the financial resources to enact all decisions about climate change-linked migration. They also

sometimes do not have the personnel with technical expertise to advise on the costs and feasibility of different propositions, such as building islands, creating floating islands, or working through international law.

Toft [2013] and *Mattoo and Subramanian* [2012] discuss dimensions of the argument that richer countries who caused most of climate change should pay for supporting poorer countries, among which are SIDS, in dealing with climate change and for effecting any decisions. So far, little has happened outside of fairly typical development assistance and development cooperation programs. More recent mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund [e.g., *van Kerkhoff et al.*, 2011; <http://news.gcfund.org>] and the Adaptation Fund [e.g., *Horstmann*, 2011; <https://www.adaptation-fund.org>] could support migration in theory, but thus far, little has happened in practice. In one proposal from Egypt to the Adaptation Fund, the response included the note “The Board has reservations supporting migration as an adaptation response” (<https://www.adaptation-fund.org/content/proposal-egypt-3>). ADB [2012] summarizes possible financial mechanisms for dealing with climate change-linked migration, naming several international funds, supporting more private sector involvement such as through insurance and encouraging supporting services which reduce remittance costs.

Yet offers from other countries have not been forthcoming for donating land where the islanders could resettle or for unconditional visas or citizenship (whether or not SIDS peoples would want that). New Zealand's Pacific Access Category for selected numbers of immigrants from Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Tonga is touted as an example of a program to admit climate change-linked migrants [*Adger and Barnett*, 2005; *Pilkey and Young*, 2009]. The official material on this category (<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/live/pacificaccess>) does not mention climate or related topics. That could change in the future, but the category currently is for skilled, healthy immigrants to make a new life in New Zealand.

New Zealand's interest in “climate refugees” has been tested in court and has not been accepted. In 2013, a court case was heard in New Zealand from a citizen of Kiribati who was aiming to claim climate refugee status. Two judgments [*Burson*, 2013; *Priestley*, 2013] denied that status to him. In 2014, a Tuvaluan couple was granted residency in New Zealand due to numerous factors which included family and visa complications as well as possible adverse effects of climate change on Tuvalu, although the decision was clear that climate change could not be the only reason for accepting a specific applicant [*Burson*, 2014a]. That judgment was issued on the same day that a Tuvaluan family's appeal to stay in New Zealand for climate change reasons was dismissed [*Burson*, 2014b].

Even if offers—possibly competing offers—were provided of land, citizenship, or other mechanisms, in using the flowchart for decision-making, different community members and sectors might have different preferences. It is fairly straightforward to suggest that each individual who is legally an adult should decide for themselves with families reconciling any differences by themselves. That approach could lead to on-the-ground difficulties for maintaining viable communities if different groups make different choices.

Tonga has a population of just over 100,000 people scattered across approximately three dozen islands. If a country were to accept all Tongans due to climate change and a large proportion of the Tongan population accepted the offer, then it might not be feasible for the remaining population to continue running the country. Public administration in small states is fraught with challenges [*Baker*, 1992] suggesting a threshold below which it might not be feasible to provide full services because the staff, resources and technical expertise do not exist. Much might depend on how many of the non-migrants had the skills for and interest in running a country as well as the support provided to those remaining behind. If old Tonga were no longer viewed as a viable country due to climate change, then it might be difficult to find support for old Tonga compared to finding support for the migrants and new Tonga. Permitting those who choose not leave to live out their lives in a depopulated country which is closing down is not an optimistic scenario. Conversely, if only a small proportion of Tonga's population accepted an offer to create their own country on someone else's land, then that migrating population might not have the skills needed for setting up a country, even though they wish to. Eventually, they might be forced to be aid-dependent, to assimilate, or to return.

Forcing collective migration or non-migration decisions on a country's population, such as through a majority vote or act of parliament, could run afoul of human rights regarding forced movement. No country or territory has yet decided to move or not to move based on climate change. The decision-making flowchart does not reveal these legal complexities regarding who makes and implements the decisions. Nonetheless,

as mentioned above with respect to Takuu and the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea, cases are emerging where collective decision-making has been enacted and accepted for SIDS communities moving due to climate change. Community members acceded to the collective process.

Questions remain regarding abandoned communities and islands. If an island country is entirely evacuated, but the islands are submerged only at the highest tides, who owns the fishing, mineral resource, and shipping rights in the surrounding seas? Could those rights be sold or rented? Do the answers to those questions change if a sovereign state is disbanded rather than re-created on new territory? Such questions are just starting to be explored, but few answers emerge, with the lack of parallels and precedents (cf., the Sovereign Military Order of Malta [Farran, 1954]) also inhibiting analysis. *Gerrard and Wannier* [2013] investigate the legal intricacies of territorial concerns, displaced peoples and legal accountability emerging from low-lying island states which might need to move due to climate change. They provide a toolkit of options, but understandably, none can really be satisfactory for the affected islanders, even if reality dictates that these are the main options. *Yamamoto and Esteban* [2014] explore the availability and practicality of legal options for low-lying island states under different climate change scenarios. Again, the options are unpalatable yet could manifest in reality which means dealing with them.

These are the realities which must be dealt with on-the-ground, in addition to the hosts being respected and being involved in decision-making. The decision-making flowchart indicates little regarding the host community's input into or reactions to any migration decision and cannot offer much regarding the considerations raised in this section.

4.2. Contextualizing Decision-Making

The decision-making flowchart needs to be further contextualized beyond on-the-ground considerations in terms of understanding wider topics which emerge from the decision-making process, such as blame and compensation. Not all SIDS peoples wish to give blame to others or to demand external resources. *Rudiak-Gould* [2013] studied the Marshall Islands, describing the views and reactions of Marshallese to climate change. The Marshallese generally accept that climate change is occurring, that it is caused by human activities and that severe consequences for the Marshall Islands are likely. Actions to address climate change are primarily assumed to be local; that is, implemented by Marshallese within the Marshall Islands. Impetus to blame others is uncommon and there is not extensive interest in migrating elsewhere due to climate change. Consequently, it seems likely that decisions made and imposed externally could lead to fundamental disagreements and possibly lack of action for those decisions because that approach does not match Marshallese culture and tradition.

The view from the Marshall Islands that moral blame is not to be foisted on external parties, despite climate change being caused by outsiders, leads to an intriguing question about legal blame. In 2002, Tuvalu's Prime Minister threatened a court case against the US government under George W. Bush and the Australian government under John Howard for causing climate change because those leaders refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol [Jacobs, 2005]. The court case foundered when the Prime Minister was voted out of office. Similar legal action from SIDS on the basis of climate change has not yet been repeated. Given the Marshallese view on moral blame, how relevant for SIDS is legal blame for climate change impacts, including potential forced migration?

The blame game is further relevant in terms of determining the issues for which blame should be apportioned. Should it be blame for causing climate change; for failing to deal with climate change; for the political structures which prevent SIDS peoples from having the resources, choices and capabilities to deal with climate change on their own; or a combination? Asking and answering these questions is beyond the flowchart's mandate and capability.

Another limitation of the flowchart is that the desired outcomes are not articulated. Is the end goal to save as many individual lives as possible, even if that means full integration at the cost of sovereignty, a nation, an identity, or a community? Or is the goal to maintain the coherence of each community, each SIDS culture and each identity? — even while recognizing that no community is ever homogeneous [Cannon, 2007; Walmsley, 2006] and that culture by definition is dynamic [Krüger et al., 2015]. Are these two end goals necessarily mutually exclusive? In several of the volcano-related evacuations cited above, many islanders returned to their islands against the advice and desires of the authorities. The islanders wished to protect their assets,

to maintain their livelihoods and to retain their own identity, culture and control over their fates. Even in the wake of a catastrophe, some islanders might refuse to leave.

These discussions about climate change-linked migration from SIDS occurs in the context of migration, movement and mobility at all scales having always been, and continuing to be, a life and livelihood strategy for SIDS peoples [Bedford and Hugo, 2012; Hau'ofa, 1993; King and Connell, 1999]. The situations described here and the decision-making processes do not start with Box (a) in the flowchart. Instead, a rich and long background exists for the contemporary contexts, intertwining social change, environmental change and a wide variety of responses to those changes including but not limited to mobility.

Throughout their history and continuing today, SIDS peoples have continually moved for numerous environmental and social reasons. Examples are responding to short-term and long-term environmental changes, responding to short-term and long-term social changes, pursuing education, joining family, aiming for adventure and seeking different livelihoods. The migration is sometimes entirely voluntary, sometimes entirely forced and most frequently somewhere along the voluntary-forced continuum [Dickinson, 2009; Nunn et al., 2007]. Despite this long history and continuing phenomenon of migration by SIDS peoples for various reasons, that is no justification for forcing them to move due to contemporary climate change. The key is having choices about if, when and how to migrate while having the resources to successfully carry out the choices made on the SIDS' own terms, again recognizing that SIDS are not homogenous with a single viewpoint.

Attempting to confine the decision-making process to a flowchart from the SIDS' perspective leaves open the question about how different standards and differing perspectives would judge the decision-making process and the decisions. If external science, for instance the IPCC [2013–2014], indicates with high agreement and robust evidence that an island is severely and imminently threatened by climate change, but the population decides to remain, then should that decision be respected and accepted by those external to the community? If a community decides to move due to climate change's potential damage, despite no documented concern, would they deserve the same support as a community severely and imminently threatened?

The flowchart is presented as being for SIDS peoples for decision-making on their own terms, but aside from a flowchart not necessarily being the best format, decisions are not made in isolation. SIDS peoples' decisions affect others while views vary on desired outcomes and need for blame, among other moral and legal topics. The flowchart cannot express or address power imbalances, moral stances, rights, or duties, nor can it solve differences of opinion or impart the right to judge and enforce. The flowchart helps to map out fundamental decision-making steps and issues while presenting evidence and analogies, but its limitations must be acknowledged.

5. Conclusions

As SIDS peoples indicate in numerous fora [Kelman, 2010; McNamara and Gibson, 2009], they are not happy about the potential for forced migration linked to climate change. They recognize its potential for happening, so they request the power and resources to make decisions for themselves on their own terms. That is rarely forthcoming. This paper has examined decision-making for climate change-linked migration from SIDS, presenting a framework in the form of a decision-making flowchart. The flowchart indicates limitations and opportunities of the decision-making process as well as gaps in providing SIDS peoples with the decision-making power and resources which they desire and deserve.

Nevertheless, SIDS peoples are not a single group with a single view or single voice. That presents challenges and opportunities in formulating and implementing decision-making processes for migration linked to climate change, while accepting that such decision-making processes are not removed from other social, environmental and governance interactions. Rather than climate change and migration being completely new threats or opportunities for SIDS, they and their nexus add to ongoing decisions which SIDS peoples face regarding the future of their countries and cultures.

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