



**CONCILIATION
RESOURCES**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT RISKS IN BOUGAINVILLE

Practice paper



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 10-year violent conflict in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) spanned from 1989 to 1998 and has been recognised as ‘the most acute and intricate conflict in the history of the Pacific’.¹ This period was characterised by state violence and intergroup violence, leading to intense social upheaval and displacement. Hostilities concluded with the 1998 Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA), and the newly created Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) has been successful in navigating the BPA without renewed hostilities. Multiple conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts by the ABG, Bougainville society and international organisations, have helped develop a more peaceful post-conflict society.

Despite this progress, there are ongoing conflict legacies that will intersect with the increasing impact of climate change — an intersection that holds a real possibility of contributing to future conflict in Bougainville. These include socio-environmental changes in land and sea use being exacerbated by climate change, climate change-related migration and displacement, and the conflict effects of natural disasters. Local and regional governance and community capacities for managing and resolving conflict may be overwhelmed by these changes. In particular, this intersection may see an increase in community violence, including sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) as the impacts of climate change are more acutely felt in Bougainville.

Addressing the legacy of the Bougainville conflict is just as important as building resilience in Bougainville communities to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Learnings from the programming approaches that Conciliation Resources and partners the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation and the Bougainville Women’s Federation have developed provide some insights into how climate change-affected communities can be supported. A central approach is building local agency through enhancing the peacebuilding and conflict analysis capacities of climate change-affected communities.

Other policy and programme implications emphasise the intersection between climate change and drivers of conflict in Bougainville. These include:

- developing approaches to incorporating conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity into government climate change policy development and implementation;
- including specific localised research on climate change impacts;
- developing participatory approaches with communities; and
- developing systems of information sharing between government and civil society.



Kukul Beach, North Bougainville, PNG © Julia Lee / Conciliation Resources



Palm trees at Tsiroge Conference Centre, North Bougainville, PNG © Julia Lee / Conciliation Resources

BOX 1: PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Conciliation Resources has worked in Bougainville since 2001, supporting community awareness of the Bougainville conflict and peace process. Since 2016, the Conciliation Resources Bougainville Capacities for Peace Programme has worked with local partners to support the implementation of the BPA and to develop peacebuilding capacities to transform longer-term conflict challenges.

In 2023, the Conciliation Resources Building Peace in Climate Change-affected Communities Programme (the Programme) commenced work in Bougainville, funded through climate finance from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of the International Development Cooperation (IDC) programme. As part of the Programme, Conciliation Resources has worked closely with peacebuilding partners, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCFR) and Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF). Activities in Bougainville have focused on understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on one relocated community and its hosts, as well as beginning to look at the broader impacts of climate change on Bougainville.

NCFR Analysis and Peacebuilding Workshops in Tinputz, North Bougainville

In August 2023, a conflict analysis and dialogue training workshop was held as part of the Programme for families relocated to Tinputz from the Carteret Islands, resettled as a result of rising sea levels. Designed to enhance peacebuilding skills, the workshop used conflict analysis tools and dialogue to identify conflict risks and challenges faced by participants and help them identify options to overcome those challenges. The aim of this workshop was to strengthen the community's conflict analysis skills and help them identify conflict drivers. Two further peacebuilding activities with the relocated Carteret Island community were implemented by NCFR as a result of the analysis workshop, improving the community's food security and financial literacy — two of the key resettlement challenges faced by communities after relocation.

Climate Change Analysis Workshop with NCFR and BWF

A one-day climate change analysis workshop was held in February 2024 in collaboration with NCFR and BWF. This workshop focused on examining the links between climate change and conflict more broadly in Bougainville. As part of the workshop, Conciliation Resources, partners and participants conducted a joint analysis and strategised to enhance local capacity for addressing climate-related challenges and fostering peace. The workshop employed a five-step methodology, starting with presentations from each organisation on their climate change initiatives. Participants identified climate impacts, linked these impacts to conflict drivers, and conducted deeper analyses on specific conflict issues. The final plenary session allowed for participant reflection on the discussions, identifying knowledge gaps and areas for further analysis.

ANALYSIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT RISKS IN BOUGAINVILLE

The drivers of conflict in present-day Bougainville are complex and many. These include governance challenges faced by the ABG, the continued presence of factions not aligned with the BPA, and continued divisions related to extractive industries. Following the 2019 referendum on Bougainville's political status, Bougainvilleans have had high expectations for the rapid realisation of independence. The lack of progress in discussions between the ABG and the National Parliament of PNG on Bougainville's future political status has contributed to increased tensions within Bougainville. Communities in Bougainville also continue to contend with numerous post-conflict challenges, including: the presence of weapons, personal and community trauma, high rates of interpersonal and gender-based violence, limited communication avenues, and the spread of misinformation and conspiracy.

These conflict challenges are now beginning to intersect with a complex array of challenges related to climate change. Situated within the Coral Triangle, one of the most biodiverse marine regions globally, Bougainville's ecological richness is under threat from rising temperatures, changing weather patterns and sea level rise. Additionally, the island's socio-economic fabric is intricately tied to its natural resources, making it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental degradation and population changes.

LAND AND SEA USE DYNAMICS

Traditional practices and natural resources play a central role in the livelihoods of communities in Bougainville. The impact of changes in weather patterns, development projects and population growth on the environment and society is particularly significant. The impacts of climate change on land and sea exacerbate existing and emerging conflict drivers.

As climate change alters weather patterns in Bougainville, communities are observing an impact on the local fisheries and marine ecosystems. For example, communities have observed the decrease or migration of fish populations, leading to the absence of fish and prawns in creeks and rivers. As a result, fishermen have been compelled to venture further out to sea in search of viable fishing grounds. This shift has been exacerbated by the cutting of mangroves, which has altered the proximity of fishing areas to land, and rising sea temperatures have caused fish populations to decline or migrate to cooler waters,

further disrupting local fishing zones. Destructive fishing practices also present a significant problem, with unsustainable fishing contributing to the decline of marine life, including the destruction of coral. These environmental changes have sparked conflicts among fishing communities as they vie for access to dwindling resources and fishing grounds, resulting in disputes over boundaries.

Another prominent environmental change in Bougainville is the transformation of land use patterns. The expansion of infrastructure and agricultural activities have altered Bougainville's landscape significantly, while also affecting land accessibility and land use. Climate change is likely to further affect and accelerate this land change dynamic, with issues such as receding land and changing weather patterns affecting land use. The long-term effects of climate change will only add to these tensions, placing pressure on the relationship between existing priorities such as economic growth (especially mining), environmental conservation and social equity within Bougainville.

RELOCATION, MIGRATION OR DISPLACEMENT

Bougainville is experiencing increased internal population movement and migration. Relocation, migration and displacement can lead to conflict, and are driven by various factors such as economic opportunity, environmental change, population pressure, conflict and rising sea levels. Patterns of relocation, migration and displacement include unorganised migration to urban centres, and the organised relocation of people from areas affected by climate change, such as the Carteret Islanders' organised relocation to Tinputz, in North Bougainville.

Like many areas across the Pacific, Bougainville has seen increased internal migration to urban areas, such as Buka, Kokopau, Arawa and Buin. These migrations occur for numerous reasons and include people from areas impacted by climate change (particularly atolls) and those who have migrated for economic reasons both related and unrelated to climate change. These economic impacts of climate change include food security, land pressures from population growth and dwindling opportunities in villages (for example, lessened garden and fishing yields).

In urban areas, there are unique conflict challenges related to urban land management and the pressure placed on limited services by relocation, migration and displacement. A conflict challenge is the dilution of traditional social structures, compared to the rural cultural norms or village rules. In these settings, the traditional mechanisms that promote social cohesion and conflict resolution can be limited in their effectiveness.

Communities relocated as a result of climate change are also particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, exploitation and marginalisation. Without effectively planned or well supported relocation, the unique environmental and socio-political context of Bougainville compounds this population's vulnerabilities. Inadequate access to essential resources, services and support systems further amplifies existing inequalities among displaced populations. Consequently, displaced individuals, especially women and children, may resort to high-risk coping mechanisms, exposing them to exploitation and violence.

People from the Carteret Islands are widely reported as the world's first case of climate change refugees, having been displaced from their land by rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion.² As a result, the Islands' population was moved through a coordinated relocation program to Tinuput, North Bougainville. The relocation has seen conflict challenges both in the relocated community and between the relocated families and the host community. These experiences yield key learnings for policy and peacebuilding actions.

GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Governance structures at all levels (including ABG, community government and those at the ward level) will be increasingly challenged by the impact of climate change and its emerging conflict challenges to provide both proactive and responsive approaches in support of communities.

The ABG faces challenges with providing effective service delivery outside of urban areas. There have been recent efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of community government structures in Bougainville but there remain challenges in resourcing, access to information and understanding in how governance structure can fulfil their mandate. Communities and community leaders outside of urban areas have limited access to information, including political developments and public policy issues. This deficit of information tends to result in, and reinforce, misinformation and rumour in large areas of Bougainville, compounding governance issues and other conflict challenges. The ABG is also challenged by the continued presence of factions that are not aligned with the BPA.

These broad governance challenges impact the ABG's ability to effectively develop and implement policy approaches to address climate change.

Climate change impacts and the consequent challenges faced by communities are becoming increasingly localised and varied. Appropriate policies and government initiatives will require a specific understanding of these challenges at the local level, as well as the participation and consultation of diverse community members in their design and implementation. Without both broad and localised knowledge about the impact of climate change, government structures at all levels will face challenges in implementing effective policy approaches and local initiatives to address climate-related impacts.

Community participation and consultation in policy and programme design is also important to ensure that climate change adaptation and response measures do not inadvertently exacerbate existing drivers of conflict in Bougainville communities. Broad community participation, consultation and feedback in the design and implementation of climate change initiatives is important to ensure that these measures are responsive to the needs of marginalised populations, including youth, migrants and displaced people.

CHALLENGES TO COMMUNITY MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS AND MANAGE CONFLICT

The impacts of climate change, including food insecurity and land pressures, intersect with existing community conflict issues. Like all societies across the Pacific, Bougainville communities have traditional mechanisms for conflict preventions and resolution. However, the Bougainville conflict had an impact on traditional leadership structures and local authority systems, including being supplanted by combatant leader authority. While there have been significant post-crisis peacebuilding efforts, community leaders in Bougainville often lack effective capacities for addressing the numerous and complex conflict challenges. This is reflected in higher levels of interpersonal violence, a greater number of SARV cases and protracted land disputes that lead to violence.³ Conflict challenges emerging from the impacts of climate change will further stretch the resilience of communities and leaders to prevent violence.

Simultaneously, food security challenges exacerbated by climate change, such as reduced garden, fishing and cash crop yields, undermine community members' abilities to participate in and fulfil cultural obligations, including marriage, funeral and mourning rituals, and other cultural rituals and processes. These cultural obligations serve to strengthen the social fabric of communities, creating mutual obligations and reciprocal arrangements that also help mitigate tension. Reconciliation processes often rely on the cultivation of garden food and animals (e.g. pigs) as part of the exchange and feasting, and the process and time involved in the cultivation of garden food and

animals is also a crucial aspect of the reconciliation, as it represents the time required to reflect, heal relationships and take transformative and healing actions in the lead up to the reconciliation ceremony.

POTENTIAL INCREASE IN SORCERY ACCUSATION RELATED VIOLENCE

Sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) relates to violence that is directed at people who have been accused of practicing sorcery. SARV is prevalent in PNG, including Bougainville. Men, women and sometimes children can be victims of accusations and violence. SARV is a complex issue, driven by numerous factors, including broad social changes in post-conflict Bougainville, changing physical environments, relative and perceived inequality within and between communities, and the spread of misinformation. These factors are compounded by the normalisation of interpersonal and gender-based violence, high levels of alcohol and drug abuse, and the normalisation of immediate violence as a response to suspicions of sorcery.⁴ Conflict analysis and dialogue on specific SARV cases has also shown that SARV is often instrumentalised within existing conflicts, such as leadership and land disputes.

SARV is influenced by broad social, environmental and political challenges that are experienced at a local level but are not readily comprehensible within existing socio-cultural frameworks. For example, there was an increase in SARV cases observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Transmissions increased in Bougainville and communities often lacked clear and accurate information about COVID-19 and there were low testing rates, leading to assumptions that illness was instead caused by sorcery. It is likely that climate change impacts experienced by communities, such as reduced garden yields, changing fishing conditions and experience of increase in severity of natural disasters (such as king tides, droughts and flooding) will see an increase in SARV without the clear and accurate information that the pandemic lacked. There have already been observed cases of sorcery accusations between communities where changing fishing conditions (e.g. migration of stocks) have negatively affected one community but have not affected, or are perceived as disproportionately benefiting, another.



House wind at the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Chabai, North Bougainville © Julia Lee / Conciliation Resources

EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RESPONSE

In light of Bougainville's ongoing challenges related to the impact of climate change, examining what has worked to date can help build on existing strengths and leverage them in future efforts to address climate change and conflict risks.

Peacebuilding Analysis and Dialogue with Carteret Island relocated community

As part of the Programme, the NCFR facilitated analysis and dialogue with the Carteret Islands people, who were relocated to Tinputz, North Bougainville as a result of climate change impacts, specifically due to rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion. The analysis and dialogue work resulted in a deeper understanding of conflict challenges in their community and peacebuilding approaches to address them.

The Carteret Islands people established their own non-governmental organisation, Tulele Peisa, to oversee the relocation of islanders to mainland Bougainville. To date, 10 families have relocated to Tinputz, an area identified for their relocation that is owned by the Catholic church. The relocation was planned and supported through Tulele Peisa and leveraged existing familial connections and reciprocal exchanges with host communities, including collaborative programmes involving chiefs, women and youth. Despite this, the relocated community has experienced a number of conflict challenges related to their relocation.

As part of the Tinputz Resettlement Climate Change Resilience programme, a conflict analysis and dialogue workshop was held in August 2023. The workshop was designed for the Carterets Islands people resettled in Tinputz, aiming to equip them with peacebuilding knowledge and skills using deep-dive conflict analysis tools. The workshop supported participants to use conflict analysis tools to identify and understand conflict challenges and underlying issues, including those that may arise from the impact of climate change, engage in dialogue and find effective solutions through peacebuilding, healing and reconciliation processes. The workshop created a platform for inclusive dialogue among the resettled community, particularly the inclusion of youth perspectives (both young men and young women). The workshop also led to two subsequent dialogues of Carteret Islanders, including those relocated to Tinputz and others living in Buka, to create cohesive approaches to climate change-related challenges, including advocacy and conflict resolution.

The positive impact of this realistic approach to problem identification and the expressed need for further training highlight the importance of ongoing support to these communities. Addressing these needs can significantly contribute to the overall resilience and stability of the Tinputz resettlement and broader Bougainville region. While the workshop and dialogue have focused on participants from the Carteret Islanders' resettled community, there may be opportunities for future workshops to bring together host and resettled communities for conflict analysis and dialogue workshops.

Conflict-sensitive responses to Mt. Bagana volcano eruption

It is expected that climate change will increase the frequency and severity of natural disasters across the Pacific. While Bougainville does not typically experience tropical cyclones, like other Pacific nations, it is subject to king tides, flooding and droughts. Emergency and humanitarian responses to natural disasters can also create new conflicts and exacerbate existing conflicts, particularly if the psychosocial needs of affected people are not adequately provided for in the response. In Bougainville, humanitarian and emergency responses to natural disasters can invoke painful memories of other crises and risk re-traumatisation.

A recent example of humanitarian response to a natural disaster in Bougainville is the Mt. Bagana volcanic eruption of July 2023. The eruption of Mt. Bagana caused ash flow into local communities, polluting drinking water and causing the destruction of garden food and forests in affected areas. An estimated 8,000 people were affected and in need of assistance. Their immediate needs included access to food, safe drinking water, emergency shelter, adequate sanitation and health supplies. Affected people evacuated to care centres in Torokina and Wakunai. The disaster and related responses are illustrative of the unique conflict risks in Bougainville and the need to consider the psychosocial needs of affected people.

A starting point to making humanitarian responses, policy and planning more conflict sensitive in such environments is to take account of, and analyse, Bougainville's conflict history, and how it affected particular communities. Some aspects of the response to the volcanic eruption were evocative of crisis-related

experiences and risked re-traumatising affected people. For example, evacuation to care centres to provide emergency shelter was reminiscent of the Bougainville Civil War, where people were moved into refugee camps known as care centres and experienced challenging conditions and deprivation.

Similarly, the use of helicopters to deliver supplies in the volcano humanitarian response triggered memories of helicopters used offensively by the PNG defence force (PNGDF) during the crisis. The PNGDF was eventually brought in to support the Mt. Bagana disaster response — the first time that the PNGDF had presence in Bougainville since the ceasefire and peace agreement. The ABG, PNG government, Bougainville leaders, civil society and veterans used this as an opportunity to strengthen relationships through welcoming ceremonies but the presence of the PNGDF was, regardless, confronting for many communities.

The need for humanitarian and emergency responses may increase as the impacts of climate change grow in severity. Like the Mt. Bagana disaster, these impacts are intersectional — climate change activates and exacerbates other social tensions, traumas and legacies of past conflicts, necessitating an intersectional approach to climate change-related peacebuilding.

This required intersectionality and psychosocial sensitivity was represented in the work of NCFR, alongside ABG, BWF and other humanitarian support organisations, to support communities impacted by the Mt. Bagana eruption including those relocated to care centres. Recognising the need for psychosocial support and the potential re-traumatisation of affected people, NCFR provided trauma counselling to relocated people in Wakunai care centre. BWF provided critical support to impacted communities, including people relocated to care centres, ensuring that the humanitarian support addressed the specific needs of women and children. The engagement of local civil society natural disaster responses was critical for understanding and providing for the unique needs of affected people, particularly understanding of risks of traumatisation and re-traumatisation due to prior experiences of conflict.



Kukul Beach, North Bougainville, PNG © Julia Lee / Conciliation Resources

POLICY AND PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS

1. CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

It is important to integrate conflict analysis and Do No Harm⁵ analysis and approaches in developing and implementing policy, planning and programming to address climate challenges. In doing so, the ABG can understand how policy and programme suggestions may negatively impact existing conflict dynamics and take holistic approaches to addressing climate and conflict challenges jointly. Climate change risks also need to be considered in peacebuilding, community and economic development projects. This includes consideration of climate and conflict risks related to large-scale economic development projects and extractive industries.

2. INFORMATION SHARING BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

There is a need for systematic information sharing and joint analysis between civil society and government representatives to reduce siloing of approaches and improve efforts to address both climate change and conflict challenges. This should also include an understanding of local capacities and local initiatives working at the community level to address climate change impacts.

3. LOCALISED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

There is a need to conduct further localised research and analysis on the impact of climate change in specific areas of Bougainville to tailor programme approaches to the specific localised climate change and conflict challenges. It is important that local communities are involved in this research and that local knowledge and perspectives are incorporated.

4. ELEVATING YOUTH EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES TO POLICY MAKERS

Further research into youth experiences and understandings of climate change is needed. In particular, the voices of Bougainville youth should be elevated to policy makers, and policy and programme approaches should consider their unique challenges and capacities.

ENDNOTES

1. Spriggs, M and Denoon, D. 2017. The Bougainville Crisis, 1991 Update. Dept. of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
2. The term 'climate change refugee' is used colloquially to refer to those displaced or relocated as a result of the impacts of climate change. However, this term is not officially expressly recognised under international law, and the 1951 Refugee Convention offers protection only to those fleeing war, violence, conflict or persecution who have crossed an international border to find safety. See Siegfried K. 2023. Climate Change and Displacement: The Myths and the Facts. <https://www.unhcr.org/au/news/stories/climate-change-and-displacement-myths-and-facts>.
3. Boege, V. 2014. Vying for Legitimacy in Post-Conflict Situations: The Bougainville Case. *2 Peacebuilding* 237-252, 17.
4. This reaction to suspicions was a military tactic during the crisis and has endured.
5. Do No Harm refers to a framework for analysing the impacts of aid on conflict and for taking action to reduce negative impacts and maximise positive impacts. See CDA. Do No Harm. <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/cdaproject/the-do-no-harm-project/>.

Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. We work with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts.

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