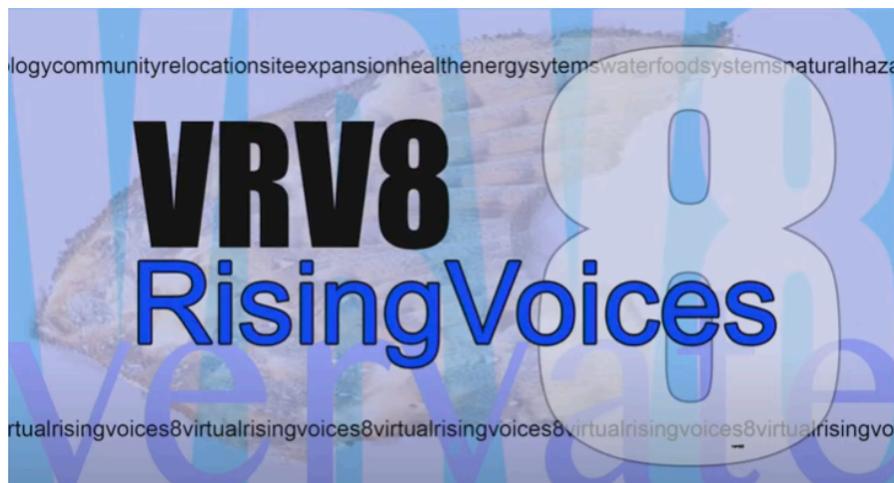




# The Rising Voices Center for Indigenous and Earth Sciences



Virtual Rising Voices 8 (VRV8) Workshop  
 Community Relocation/Site Expansion Sessions  
 June 2020



## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The [Virtual Rising Voices 8 Workshop Series](#) (VRV8) Community Relocation/Site Expansion Sessions took place in June 2020. These virtual sessions offer the opportunity for everyone to speak, engage, and ask questions in smaller group settings similar to what would occur in person at the Rising Voices annual workshops. VRV8 is possible due to the technological broadcast network capacity developed by [Lomikai Media](#) and the [Olohana Foundation](#), who had the foresight to develop this capacity over the last few years to prepare for the very situation we find ourselves in with the novel coronavirus and COVID-19. This type of disaster preparedness has enabled our ability to be socially connected while at a physical distance.

[The Rising Voices Center for Indigenous and Earth Sciences](#) (RV) facilitates intercultural, relational-based approaches for understanding and adapting to extreme weather and climate events, climate variability, and climate change. RV supports a growing network of Indigenous, tribal, and community leaders, atmospheric, social, biological, and ecological scientists, students, educators, and other experts from across the United States, including Alaska, Hawai'i, and the Pacific and Caribbean Islands, and around the world. It functions as a boundary network among diverse individuals and knowledge systems, and fosters relationship building based upon mutual trust and respect. It acknowledges the inherent value of Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous science, including but not limited to traditional ecological knowledge and adaptive practices and processes, honoring them equally with Earth science.

RV's mission is to center Indigenous knowledge systems in the Earth sciences for more innovative responses to extreme weather and climate change. The vision is more diverse and inclusive Earth sciences to drive a climate-resilient and just world. This includes envisioning collaborative research that brings together Indigenous knowledges and science with Earth sciences in a respectful and inclusive manner to achieve culturally relevant and scientifically robust climate and weather solutions. In doing so, RV seeks to advance science; remove the boundaries between science and society; and create innovative partnerships among collaborators with diverse disciplinary and cultural backgrounds to support adaptive and resilient communities. RV's core objectives include: assess critical community needs in relation to the impact of climate and weather extremes; encourage Indigenous and other youth to pursue a career at the science-Indigenous knowledge interface; and pursue joint research aimed at developing culturally, socially, and economically optimal plans for community action towards sustainability. RV is co-administered by the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research/National Center for Atmospheric Research ([UCARINCAR](#)) and the Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network ([LiKEN](#)) in partnership with Haskell Indian Nations University, the Indigenous Peoples' Climate Change Working Group, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's ([NOAA](#)) Office for Coastal Management.

The second VRV8 installment of thematic-focused months was on community relocation/site expansion, which considers issues around communities working on community-led relocation, resettlement, or expanding into a new or ancestral site when adapting in place is no longer a viable option.

The VRV8 Community Relocation/Site Expansion sessions considered the group's continued conversations since last year's 7<sup>th</sup> annual Rising Voices workshop relocation/site expansion group sessions (the full summary can be found [here](#) on pages 25-27). Three central topics arose from the previous working group conversations: retention of cultural identity, language, and trust. Identity was a focal point as participants immediately resonated with the fundamental loss of identity that is often the result of adapting to a new location and the forced assimilation that can be a consequence of this process. To prevent and mitigate this attack on identity, the group pointed to the importance of the following methods: community-led decision making, culturally sensitive studies/research, and the strengthening of relationships with groups involved in site expansion processes, with an emphasis on legal knowledge and preparedness. On language, participants discussed its importance as a powerful tool that can be used to the detriment or empowerment of Indigenous people. As a detriment, because it can pose challenges to community members when attempting to understand technocratic, bureaucratic, and administrative language used when navigating a westernized system of bureaucracy that is not inclusive of Indigenous languages. As empowerment because language can be used as a tool to self-identify and an instrument to communicate/express Indigenous values, and thus, must be defended and we must advocate for Indigenous thought to be present in scientific publications. Trust focused on how resettlement/site expansion can be relational rather than transactional in approach and the need to prioritize connection, transparency, and respect in the scientific community and move towards an integrated co-created understanding.

On the topic of next steps, the Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group was intent on continuing the conversation beyond annual Rising Voices gatherings. Participants discussed the importance of cultural continuity and physical safety as relocation/site expansion can be a taxing, traumatic process and how this working group and members of the Rising Voices community could help uplift the voices of these communities and continue supporting and empowering them, creating a safe space for resources, experiences and understandings. With this in mind, the Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group was committed to develop workshops aimed at understanding the various lenses through which government organizations address issues, and form coalitions between federally recognized and unrecognized tribes, and those who have been experiencing and/or standing in allyship and leading efforts for community resettlement and site expansion. Since October 2019, the Working Group has had bi-monthly calls together and created a listserv to be utilized to stay connected and share resources and strategies, thus creating a year-round Rising Voices Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group.

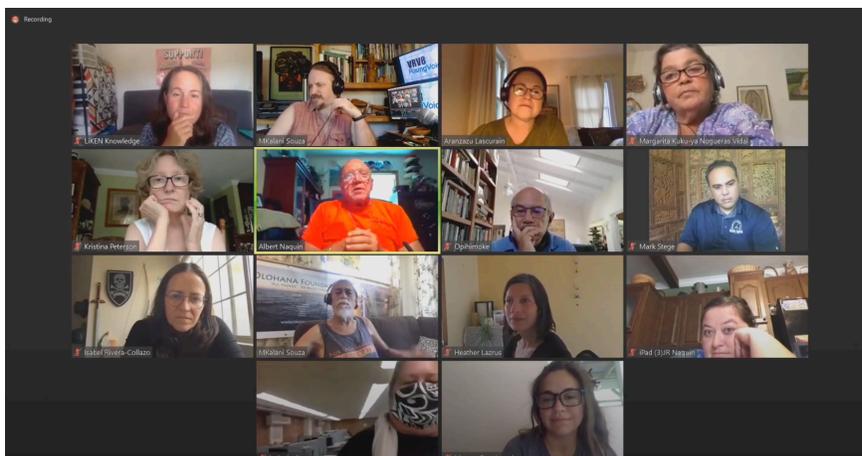
## **VRV8 COMMUNITY RELOCATION/SITE EXPANSION PANEL SESSION**

The VRV8 Community Relocation/Site Expansion Panel Session took place on June 1. The recording of the session can be found [here](#). The session focused on participants sharing their and their communities' priorities, needs, experiences, and actions taken by answering the

following questions, the first two of which were answered together as they represented opposite sides of the same topic:

1. What are your communities' priorities in considering relocation and site expansion in your homeland/territory as part of their overall adaptation to climate change?
2. What challenges are posed by the State and/or scientific institutions in implementing those priorities?
3. What are the community practices in healing from these community relocation-related processes?

The panel session was organized by Community Relocation/Site Expansion co-leads/co-facilitators Bill Thomas (NOAA Office for Coastal Management) and Aranzazu Lascurain (Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center), in partnership with Rising Voices co-directors Heather Lazrus (NCAR) and Julie Maldonado (LiKEN). The participants included Lesley Laukea (University of Hawai'i), Chief Albert Naquin (Isle de Jean Charles Tribe), JR Naquin (Isle de Jean Charles Tribe), Margarita Kukuya Noguera-Vidal (Coalition of United Taino People), Kristina Peterson (Lowlander Center), Isabel Rivera-Collazo (University of California-San Diego), and Mark Stege (World Bank Pacific Atoll Resilience Group).



Rev. M. Kalani Souza (Olohana Foundation) opened the session with a prayer, blessings, and a reminder that “may we do the good work for our people, may we do the good work in the memory of our grandparents, and for the new memories of our great-grandchildren.” A short introduction to the panel session and participants was given by Julie Maldonado, followed by Aranzazu Lascurain introducing the questions posed to the participants.

**What are your communities' priorities in considering relocation and site expansion in your homeland/territory as part of their overall adaptation to climate change? and What challenges are posed by the State and/or scientific institutions in implementing those priorities?**

Isabel Rivera-Collazo (University of California, San Diego) and Margarita Kukuya Noguera-Vidal (Coalition of United Taino People) opened the conversation by discussing the priorities and challenges faced by communities in Boriken/Puerto Rico. Isabel discussed the need to prioritize land acquisition for their communities but doing so while understanding the history of their lands and traditions, and being aware of the unique circumstances these communities face as part of the archipelago that forms Puerto Rico. For example, for several islands in the

archipelago it is tradition to remain in the land and live where their families have lived for several generations. The challenge is that those families and communities do not have land titles and do not have the acquisition power or the financial means to purchase either the land they live on or other land where they could relocate if needed. Instead they are experiencing land grabs by powerful groups and big corporations. Kukuya reaffirmed these challenges and spoke of them in terms of the harm these groups have on the well-being of the community. There are tourist corporations coming in and disrupting sacred lands to make way for tourist attractions on one end and on the other end there are companies, such as pharmaceuticals and electric companies, discharging toxic waste throughout the island, causing health issues such as cancer and diabetes in the surrounding communities.

Isabel and Kukuya touched base on the impacts that climate change has had on these communities, the physical risks/threats communities are exposed to due to these changes, and how the need to have land is exacerbated by these risks because land can mean safety. Isabel talked about fishing communities facing coastal erosions that not only threaten their homes but also their livelihoods, and Kukuya about communities living in the mountains threatened by rain and landslides that can disrupt their pathways and access to food and resources. Overall, the main focus was the need to acquire land, but acquire it not only as a possible means for relocation or site expansion if/when staying in place is no longer a viable option; but first and foremost, we need to remember that the need for land is not only due to climate changes. Isabel shared thoughts that echo those of other communities in this working group sharing similar experiences:

“We need to live today...[I]t is a very complicated issue and it is systemic; it extends well beyond the current challenges of climate change. It[s] completely tangled with power relationships, with identity issues, with political relationships, with economic hardships and constraints...So you have issues of relocation, site expansion, forget it. We have to first think of where are we, who we are, and where we’re going.”

There is history, traditions, and individualized and unique needs to each community that need to be considered before any plan for relocation, site expansion, or mitigation to climate change can be implemented.

Food security and sovereignty were also discussed in relation to the need for land, Boriken’s colonial relationship with the United States (US), and as a form of identifying their Indigenous roots/self-identification. Isabel and Kukuya reminded us of the need for land as means for safety but also as a means of increasing food security. Isabel introduced the group to part of the colonial relationship between the US and Puerto Rico and its impacts on food security for their communities. Currently, communities have been forced to move away from their self-sufficient food supply system and instead engage in the globalized market of food supply systems today. They are only allowed to hire ships that sail under the American flag and if there is anything that affects the navigation of these ships, such as the hurricanes and storms that have been ravaging through Puerto Rico, the communities are the ones left to fend for themselves –

something which has already been seen when a boat with food sank and the community was hit hard by that loss of supplies. Bill reflected on what Isabel and Kukuya shared, commenting that we need to think about the bigger picture and change the way in which we operate as a government, such as considering antiquated federal laws like the [Jones Act](#) (Merchant Marine Act of 1920), which [requires shipping between US ports to be conducted by US-flag ships](#); presently there are only a fraction of the number of US ships that were around when the Act was established.

There is a growing movement towards food sovereignty. Kukuya spoke of “working consciously towards staying alive and continuing our original traditions and empowering people as best as we can...[how there is a] movement to have food sovereignty and encouraging communities to be able to plant, to have [their] own traditional food.” She shared how communities are working together to prioritize their needs, their elderly and children who are at most risk due to health threats and depression, respectively, and the need to provide support for and uplift each other. Ultimately, Kukuya articulated that what is needed is:

“A piece of land [which they] can call ‘The Land of the People’ or ‘The Land of the Community’ and it’s not about having a little piece of land...This land has been inherited from generation to generation...[W]e need to have land in order to build our community resilience and have our own resources. [W]here people can come together as a nation, to work together and to help people in general.”

That land is theirs, and the government needs to recognize these Indigenous groups, their needs, and their priorities.

Next, the focus shifted to the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians of Louisiana (IDJC), with participants Traditional Chief Albert Naquin and Tribal Advisor Deme (JR) Naquin, and Kristina Peterson (Lowlander Center) sharing IDJC’s priorities and challenges. IDJC and Lowlander leaders have been core members of the community relocation/site expansion working group since it started coming together in 2014. The Rising Voices community has been part of the Tribe’s journey for a just relocation, and has witnessed some of the relentless injustices they have experienced. The group honors those who have been at the center of its work, including those who have past, most recently Richard Krajeski (Lowlander) who was a prominent voice in the group and whose work was predicated on principles of justice, mercy, and grace

Chief Albert Naquin summarized their experience working with government on a project that would have reunited their tribe and brought the community together once again, and especially those who had already been forced to move away. Their main priority is to have land where their community can safely relocate to, especially given the impacts that climate change is having on their lands, including flooding due to hurricanes, storms, and sea level rise, which already has and continues to displace families. The initiative to purchase land has been in the works with the Louisiana government for nearly two decades, and after working to locate the plot of land that the Isle de Jean Charles Tribe designated as a safe place where their entire community – not

just individual families – could relocate to, as Chief Albert put it, “The State hijacked [their] project.” Thus, the Tribal leadership is returning to their original priority of looking into other funding sources that may be more supportive of the Tribe’s relocation needs. JR Naquin pointed out that even in the midst of the conversation, a storm was brewing in the southern Gulf of Mexico and the local communities, including the IDJC Tribe, are having to brace for flooding yet again. With sea level rise and the sinking land, it seems like there isn’t another alternative but in needing to move north.

Kristina Peterson (Lowlander Center) emphasized the challenges posed by governmental, economic, and other institutions to traditional, tribal, and Indigenous communities in their efforts towards a just support system for climate adaptation. Kristina touched based on issues brought forth by Isabel and Kukuya, highlighting the issue of land grabs and the need to secure land. Part of the reason that Isle de Jean Charles lost the support and land towards which they had been working was due to the scarcity of land and the movement of populations that cause shifts in the price of properties continuously. In their case, the price of the property that the Tribe had planned for escalated tremendously from the first time they had looked at it to the time that it was purchased by the State. So, there is a need to have land properly secured from the very first moment it is considered and kept intact and ready to be utilized by communities, giving them a choice of where they can go rather than the government entities choosing who and how many can receive help, and directing the community on where to go. The main challenge in this aspect, however, is that government is no longer a trusted entity with many of these communities.

As experienced by the Isle de Jean Charles Tribe, the systems developed to aid communities in these relocation/site expansion processes are often met with political and institutional barriers, jargon, and rules which do not include community input in the process itself, and whose language can often be confusing and unclear. This in turn causes harm to communities when applying for grants, aid, etc., as they may apply without full understanding of the “fine print”, and/or can be misguided due to the language used to describe the objective and requirements of these policies. As Kristina discussed,

“[W]e have a new kind of Manifest Destiny going on that’s called ‘managed retreat,’ and it’s managed by those who didn’t take any regard for who or what was in place or how to respect people’s lifeways or to respect people’s cultures and background and we have to circumvent that kind of mentality.”

Lesley Laukea (University of Hawai‘i) echoed Kristina’s thoughts by introducing the group to a question asked by Kalani Souza before the panel session started, “How do we humanize it?” in reference to the policies of relocation. She discussed a new term, forced migration, which has started to be used to talk about countries, island nations, and communities that have had to move to other countries, not by choice but as a result of climate change impacts. Nonetheless, while this terminology and others such as relocation, site expansion, and managed retreat are used to describe management plans to aid these communities, the communities themselves, their experiences, input, history, language, and identity are often left off the discussion table. These communities are forced to enter into processes which often lead them into locations that

have been chosen for them, not by them, and which more often than not introduce them into a process of assimilation to the dominant culture in those places.

On the topic of priorities, Lesley spoke of the need to prioritize cultures, histories, knowledge, and developing approaches to make these thrive wherever communities may go. The process of reaching that goal may be difficult and there are a lot of aspects and complexities at play, but our communities, Native communities, have always been visionary. Our ancestors have moved from different lands to new ones and they have been able to bring their culture and thrive. As such, in the context of forced migration, we should consider how to best support communities in bringing their cultures into these new settings.

Lesley provided an example of a relocation process by discussing the Island Nation of Tokelau, which experienced a hurricane in the 1960s and four islands went under and became uninhabitable. They were forced to move and were taken in by Aotearoa/New Zealand. They were put to work and used as second-class citizens. They learned English, went to work 12-hour days. In the process what became erased in their next generation was the language, traditions, and the religious or spirituality aspect. In 2000, the elders realized that of the 70% that moved to New Zealand, about half of them could no longer speak their native language or even hold a sentence in Tokelauan. They started a grassroots movement to bring back the language and culture. This movement featured members of the community opening up their garages to have church services and gatherings, and as people began noticing these spaces featured the Tokelauan language, the movement grew and within five years they saw the number of language speakers rise. By 2014, they began to introduce this movement into the school system and New Zealand incorporated 14 native languages into their public education system and into that law. From being a country that had to forcibly move, and then moving and not being able to speak their language, the elders held it together, and about twenty years later they had the language at the school for future generations to learn their language, and we can learn from that. They found a way to keep their culture and roots, and even bring that and introduce it into their new place.

Nevertheless, the challenge lies within the context of United States territories and the history of its mission to assimilate Native people and the countless other communities and people that have come to form a part of its territory (e.g., Puerto Rico). Part of that history, as participants of the panel have addressed, is the taking away of land, language, and culture, which in turn causes these communities to become dependent on the food, language, and culture that is given to them with no choice except the choice to adapt to them or become essentially isolated. And so, what needs to be done is to place ourselves into these spaces and these conversations, because as Lesley expressed,

“going into these meetings, sometimes the people are not thinking about the culture. They’re thinking about the economic purposes, they’re not even thinking about equality...[but] it is okay to sit there and talk about how it would affect us, where we come from, describe our side of it, to humanize it.”

Mark Stege (World Bank Pacific Atoll Resilience Group) from the Marshall Islands spoke about his community, sharing that he resonated with the different priorities and challenges expressed by those participants that went before him. Concerning his communities' priorities, Mark shared that Marshallese people and their government have been concerned about climate change and its implications for long-term adaptation. He expanded on this and explained that they have two horizons for adaptation strategies. They are presently in the short-term horizon, which includes coastal and flood protection infrastructure, climate proofing, and strengthening water and food security as well as job resilience. The concern is that many of the smaller islands are already low-lying atolls and have no elevation for communities to move back or up to, thus making it evident that their first line of defense, the short-term mechanisms currently in place, may be their last defense as well.

Climate variability assessments are needed to understand what their best options are for adaptation. Mark discussed some of the strategies he has been testing and putting into practice based on accrued experience and the traditional ecological knowledge he holds. He maintains contact with people who have continued to support in developing elevation models, and conduct wave scenario, wave flood risk, and wave driven flooding scenarios on those models. He proceeds to search for approaches on how to bring together his communities' traditional ecological knowledge with that of the Western approaches. For example, once these models and assessments are developed, he compares the models to the communities' responses of where they have observed waves lapping onto the shores. In his own way, Mark is "looking for ways for the traditional and the modern to come together and inform [their] future adaptation needs...trying to test out the idea of identity" and ultimately producing identity enhancing flood risk models.

Nonetheless, Mark also noted that though he resonated with the priorities needed due to climate change, his community is in a different position with regards to governmental challenges as the Marshall Islands are part of a self-governance model that was negotiated in the 1970s and 1980s, which allowed the Marshallese to establish self-determination in their communities. That is not to say that they have not experienced colonization; the Marshall Islands have a history of colonial occupation from Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. This history and their current concerns with climate change have led them to truly look at the complexities of their institutions, their situation, and their identity. The challenge for them is not a matter of relocation just yet because if their adaptation mechanisms were to fail, all they can do is continue going forward. Rather, the challenge lies in that radical and societal transformations will be needed to support communities undergoing these processes and this level of change will need to ask important questions such as, how do you maintain it moving forward? What is it that you want to remember and retain? And what is it that you would want to introduce to the new community that you settle into? There is a need to continue building networks and partnerships to be able to see everything through. Mark does not know "if relocation is something on the tip of our tongues just yet. Science will say otherwise but I think there's more to it than, you know if you're looking at a 30, 50 year timeframe there's time. And I think it's okay to take it at the pace needed by the community."

## **What are the community practices in healing from these community relocation-related processes?**

Kalani opened up this part of the conversation by returning to Mark's words highlighting that there is indeed no walking back from the impacts being felt, there is only a going forward. Nonetheless, "we're only going forward together... [and it] is going to take real strength of character, of purpose, of country, of identity," but we have to remember that this is not the first time these processes have occurred. Though Western European history may not go back that far, each other's ancestral roots show that migration has happened before and it has been and continues to be consequential to the planet and to us. We must continue to humanize these processes and create a nexus and intersection of understanding amongst all of us.

Kukuya echoed Kalani's sentiment and his comments on Albert Einstein's famous words about the intuitive mind being the God-like gift and the rational servant being the logistic mind there to support the intuitive gift. Yet, in today's society, we reward the rational servant, those with the PhDs, while those with the intuitive gift are disregarded as being less. Kukuya expanded on this message by discussing how Einstein's gift was reminding us that we can create our own realities and that is a practice she has adopted in her own life, dreaming of the way things should be and in turn ensuring that those dreams become a reality. She spoke of how our elders and ancestors before us have had this intuitive gift, have passed it down to us, and if we begin to utilize it and tap into this spiritual connection, it will assist in guiding our path. Kristina further commented that healing will come from our indigenous roots and from bringing back our knowledge and soul, and reuniting them into the healing process so that we may continue dreaming, forming these connections, persevering and thriving.

The rest of the participants agreed with the comments shared while also bringing attention to the trauma that has become part of the colonial history many of them have experienced. Chief Albert talked about how the healing part, for him, is not so much of a problem because they have already had to learn to heal from the impacts of the federal government on their communities. The problem for him is how to heal, if you will, the federal government that continues to complicate matters. It is complicated because they have had to live through the government telling them they could not attend school because they were "Indians" and now telling them they are not "Indian" enough and having to prove their indigeneity before being able to access benefits provided by said government. Isabel related to this last comment as part of her experience has been dealing with learning a history that has erased her indigenous roots and identity, a colonial process that continues to perpetrate the idea that all Indigenous people are dead and that claiming any connection to these indigenous roots is invalid. Or, if one is able to claim indigeneity, we must look a certain way to be able to do so. She talked about how history books are written by those who hold the most power and who choose to filter history and recreate a reality that erases indigenous identities, and as such, "the healing begins by acknowledging that we are still here... There's a lot of healing that's had to happen and my answer is that sometimes I really want to give up but then Kukuya calls me and I remember I have to keep on working. We have to just keep on."

Lesley spoke of the need to accept that intergenerational trauma is real and address the implications this has had and continues to have within our communities, such as the depression children are experiencing which Kukuya briefly mentioned early on in the conversation. The process of alleviating and healing this pain and trauma, for her, is about learning their language, and not using it simply as a tool, but understanding it and using it as a way to understand our ancestors more. It is about practicing traditions, learning why our ancestors did what they did, and of talking with our elders, and listening to them and understanding them. Lastly, Mark agreed with Lesley on the need to “hold onto our stories and places.” Using the Marshall Islands as an example, he explained that learning their history and putting it into the context of what the future may hold for them and their islands will be important. Science will be needed in helping to answer questions such as which islands will hold ground and stay as long as possible, but the history of their communities will also play an important role in ensuring that these processes will be self-determining and healing through the process of adaptation.

Bill Thomas (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) offered closing remarks for the panel session, highlighting some of the main points shared by the participants, as well as sharing his observations on the different focuses discussed by the participants in comparison to that of the conversations held during last year’s Rising Voices workshop. Although both conversations focused on issues of land, the access to and acquisition of it, and of communication and language issues, last year’s conversation was largely focused on the legal aspects of these topics. On the contrary, this year’s conversation shifted focus to bringing the humanization aspect into these subjects, speaking directly from their communities and “actually speaking not just from our place but from our hearts on these issues.” Some of the connections that these communities shared, such as the cost of land and the lack of it, and the important role that knowing who we are, where we came from, and where we are going will play in the processes of adaptation. Bill expanded on this by remarking that, “the data and funding are all important issues but without the human aspect, it goes nowhere.”

Bill continued by commenting on how we often focus on discussing the limitations of land but we forget that though land sometimes separates us, we have all also seen how oceans naturally bring us together. We all have had a history of migration and it has happened because of the dreams, the visions, and the visionaries who came before us. We must be leaders and control and create our own narratives. We must look at the importance of storytelling and understand the context in which those stories have been told in order to understand where we came from and where we are going, and more importantly, we need to hold on to our intuitive side. We must make time to stop and ask questions, and listen to our intuition. We cannot be averse to including these conversations into our discussions, though he understood the challenges within this topic that Isabel mentioned when speaking about trying to claim our indigenous identity in a society that continues to perpetuate that we do not exist. Bill spoke of his own journey towards embracing all of these complexities, starting from the school fights he got into because he had to wear a different uniform that marked him as being different and set him and others apart from the crowd. He understood how overwhelming this process can be but noted that he now embraces those moments and those complexities because they helped to inform him of who he is. He concluded by saying that he hopes everyone can reach the point where they can

“embrace all of those complexities...because it’s not easy but we do it because...everybody behind us depends on what we do.”

## VRV8 COMMUNITY RELOCATION/SITE EXPANSION WORKING GROUP SESSION

Building from the [Community Relocation/Site Expansion Panel Session](#) the VRV8 Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group Session ([part 1](#), [part 2](#)) on June 19 was designed to continue the conversation on what the group’s visions for a just relocation process look like, the kinds of collaborations that can help achieve those visions, the roles and positionality we play when envisioning this process, and lastly, the role that science plays when driven by these visions.

The session started with a tribute to some of the Rising Voices ancestors who continue to guide, mentor, and shape who we are as a community and the actions we collectively pursue. Hank Fergerstrom (Na Kupuna Moku O Keawe) then opened the session by discussing how we all share a common ancestry and look for that inherent knowledge that these ancestors have passed onto us. Hank offered a prayer to these ancestors, a prayer which he explained called on the various sites to bring our ancestors close to us and hand that knowledge which they are holding just beyond the veil over to us. Julie Maldonado followed by thanking those who had joined, especially acknowledging that we were gathering on this day, Juneteenth, Emancipation Day.



In remembrance and honor of those who have walked before us and continue to guide our journey.

Bill Thomas (NOAA) proceeded to provide a short summary of what the Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group conversations have focused on, starting from the previous year’s Rising Voices 7 sessions and the bi-monthly calls, and ultimately leading to this working group session. While the conversation included a plethora of issues and topics, there are major themes that emerged. One of them has been discussing the hopes, aspirations, and visions of what a just relocation process looks like, with one of the major priorities being that these processes must be community led. Oftentimes, organizations and government entities

involved in these processes offer solutions without considering community voices and their perspectives, and proceeding to implement solutions that do not meet the communities' specific needs and priorities. As such, there needs to be an effective exchange of information as well as an understanding of the different lenses through which these processes are seen before any decisions are made. Next, Bill discussed the need for the different communities and working groups within Rising Voices to continue building engagement and an exchange of information amongst each other because there are many similarities shared in regards to their needs, priorities, and challenges being faced in each of the different working group themes. Although circumstances may be different, the approaches might be similar and having a vehicle to exchange knowledge could allow for communities to learn from each other and succeed in overcoming their challenges.

Land and data sovereignty were another major issue discussed, especially given that currently many communities lack access and rights to the lands they live on and the knowledge they hold. A call was made to find approaches to ensure that data ownership remains in the hands of the community and that controls are put in place to safeguard this knowledge and warrant that it will be used for the benefit of the community. Lastly, relocation itself and what that means for the communities continues to be a major focus. Bill shared how often, the process of relocation tends to lead to the conclusion that because communities are relocating, they are in essence losing access to the rights and resources provided by their previous location. However, that should not be the case. Whether communities are land or coastal based, they should still have access to those rights and resources and that is something that is already established in statutes and treaties but which is not fully realized in the final products of relocation. Ultimately, the conversation continues to evolve but the main point that unites it all is that the community has to be included into the conversation and into the solutions, and the process as a whole needs to be humanized.

Aranzazu Lascurain (SE Climate Adaptation Science Center) ended this first part of the working group session by thanking the participants of the panel session for sharing their stories and introducing those in the working group to the questions discussed during that session. She briefly discussed the topics that came up during this conversation, such as the intersections with food security and sovereignty, land tenure issues, and climate change impacts, and proceeded to lead the working group participants into the breakout sessions, where the following questions were discussed:

- What is your vision of what a just relocation process looks like?
- What kinds of collaborations can help get to that vision?
- What do you envision your role would be towards this vision?
- What is the role of science when it's driven from this vision?

### **What is your vision of what a just relocation process looks like?**

Kristina Peterson (Lowlander Center) opened the conversation by discussing the challenges faced by the Isle de Jean Charles Tribe, specifically their biggest challenge being the acquisition of and lack of access to land. Kristina shared that her vision for a just relocation process would

be to be able to find a good home for these communities where they will be able to thrive and not somewhere where they will face the risk of needing to move again. Perhaps creating climate adaptation land trusts and having land that can be rejuvenated, and which tribes would have sovereignty over, could be one way of achieving these goals. Kukuya Noguerras-Vidal (Coalition of United Taino People) reinforced the need to have land, not only for safety but also to practice their spirituality, and shared that her vision would involve creating a mitigation plan that recognizes the route that needs to be taken.

The next major topic discussed was the need for a just relocation process to include those being affected. Bill Thomas expanded on this by asserting that the process needs to be changed, and adding that we need to make sure that writing is accessible and fine prints are not deceiving. On this, Katie Lund (Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium) shared that her program supports communities in finding funding and aiding in grant proposals, and developing community impact reports to help community planning and assessment of decisions in order of urgency. Dan Wildcat (Haskell Indian Nations University) further discussed that it will also take institutional cooperation and resources, as well as empowering communities and placing community members at the forefront of decision-making. Isabel Rivera-Collazo (University of California, San Diego) agreed on this point but explained that while the federal government is needed, it is also important to not allow them to have the full power over decision making in these processes because their decisions could lead to a traumatic relocation experience.

### **What kinds of collaborations can help get to that vision?**

Collaborations amongst a wide array of tribes, communities, and institutions were one of the major topics discussed, as well as the need to ensure that relationships between these groups are established in trust and cooperation. There is a need to continue sharing knowledge amongst each other to learn of the resources that could be provided and the experiences that could be shared and which other communities could learn and benefit from.

Dan Wildcat reinforced that we cannot undervalue frequent, direct, and active engagement with Tribal leaders, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Statewide and Regional Tribal Leader Associations, and any other organizations who have an actual investment, personal connections, and firsthand experiences in these communities. In addition, Dan discussed the need for research relationship building and structuring these relationships to be person-to-person rather than the usual top-to-bottom approach where government dominates over communities. Even more, a young ambassador program aimed at younger generations to address these goals would be greatly beneficial so as to continue strengthening community involvement.

Lastly, a major point discussed was that understanding the detailed processes and the way in which government functions, as well as understanding how the upcoming administration change could impact these systems, will be a vital part in the continuation of building collaboration amongst institutions and communities. On this, Ann Marie Chischilly (Institute of Tribal Environmental Professionals) suggested that a list of resources and guidelines, and a position

paper for the new administration, should be created to aid communities in being able to understand policies and how it affects them, and aid government in understanding what is needed from them, respectively. As a whole, the group agreed that these documents would be essential in the forthcoming months, especially given the current situation with the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter uprisings, and the upcoming administration changes. Overall, the atmosphere of the group was that of a mutual understanding that now is the time to dive head first into these conversations and see it through that a much needed change happens.

John Wiener (University of Colorado) also shared resources which communities could find beneficial, such as utilizing County Extension Agents who may be able to aid in knowing the status of farms and the Natural Hazard Mitigation Association for disaster risk reduction curriculum

### **What do you envision your role would be towards this vision?**

The sentiment felt by the majority of the participants was the need to continue decolonizing themselves as well as the institutions that have and continue to instill the colonial mindset into communities and individuals alike. Adriana Garriga- López (Kalamazoo College) discussed that in envisioning her role, she considers how her different identities, as a Puerto Rican and a scientist, play a role in these processes and how there has to be a willingness to continue pushing towards abolishing systems such as colonialism and capitalism. There was also a collective understanding that those who hold more privilege must continue learning and understanding about the role that systemic injustices play in these processes.

Other aspects of envisioning roles returned to the idea of continuing to build platforms where these discussions can be had and recognizing that everyone is related somehow and that we share the same general goals. Collaboration and empathy are pivotal roles and continue to make connections amongst both tribal and non-tribal groups, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups alike will be essential.

### **What is the role of science when it's driven from this vision?**

The main responses surrounding this question focused on the need to train Western scientists, or Western-focused sciences in general, on how to work with communities, the need to acknowledge Indigenous knowledges and sciences, and a continued emphasis on the need to insert ourselves, people of color, into these fields.

Paulette Blanchard (University of Kansas/UCAR) discussed how science is one of the three pillars of colonialism and largely dominated by white-men, and pushed for the need to build up representation within this field. She emphasized how education is valuable but it “does not matter in decision making unless we have a place to be involved. Systemic and educational transformation [is needed].” There is a necessity and demand for more people of color to join these fields and conversations and in turn, more mentors, visibility, representation, and cultural competence will be built.

The role of science should be to aid and support communities in finding methods and building up resilience against climate change, but they must first be taught to hold community knowledge on the same spectrum as Western knowledge. They must also understand that it is not simply a matter of applying a one-size-fits-all solution to all communities and as Kukuya mentioned, to stop thinking that these communities are a science project that needs to be completed and afterwards discarded, as if there were no human aspects involved in these decisions.

### **Closing plenary**

Aranzazu Lascurain and Bill Thomas reflected on and gave brief summaries of the main topics discussed during the breakout sessions. Aranzazu began by reflecting on the conversation and sharing that much of it was sobering as well as helpful, while Bill reflected on how the conversations illustrated the complex and multilayer aspects of relocation. Both agreed that these continued conversations are only the beginning of informing us of where we go next and how we will go forward. Through the conversation, there was again emphasis on land acquisition and sovereignty, the need to train Western scientists on how to engage and collaborate with communities, data sovereignty, the challenges faced by institutions and colonial mindsets, and the need to continue empowering communities to be the leaders and decision-makers. Bill noted Dan Wildcat's comments on building relationships with the African Diaspora and other communities who may not be tribes but are still Indigenous, because ultimately, we are all fighting the same battle and facing injustices being imposed by the institutions in power.

Aranzazu added that many of the participants suggested making a connection with [Thriving Earth Exchange](#) as it is an organization that many are familiar with and intersects with Rising Voices. During the breakout sessions, she also reflected on the need to include inland communities in the conversation so as to ensure that the various community voices being affected by relocation challenges can be included and a more complete knowledge base can be formed. Other topics included food sovereignty and resilience, language, and as both Aranzazu and Bill noted, the reminder once more that this is only the start of a change that needs to be pushed through to change the policies, institutions, power dynamics, and much more. Bill ended by reminding everyone that they are welcome to participate in the Community Relocation/Site Expansion Working Group's bi-monthly calls.

Hank Fergerstrom (Na Kupuna Moku O Keawe) closed the session by thanking everyone for joining in this conversation and "listening, but more importantly [thank] our ancestors. They have certainly been with us [and] I can see it on our faces. So, rather than just ending, we are just going to close [this] little section because we want to leave those pipelines open now that they're here."