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## More Pacific people opt to migrate due to climate change

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By **Samisoni Pareti**, Islands Business Editor in Paris, France

Seventy per cent of households in Kiribati and Tuvalu, and 35 per cent of families in Nauru would migrate if impacts of climate change worsen in their islands, a survey on the three Pacific islands have shown.

It's the first and largest survey of its kind to be done in the Pacific by the United Nations University, and the results were released at the margins of the UN's 21st Conference of the Parties currently underway in Paris. A total of 6,852 individuals in the three islands participated in the study, who represented 852 households in Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu.

Of those surveyed, almost 100 per cent in Tuvalu and Kiribati, and nearly 80 per cent in Nauru are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, either droughts and irregular rain, sea level rise, cyclone, saltwater intrusion, storm surge or flooding. It also says that 10 per cent of people in Nauru and 15 per cent of those in Tuvalu have already migrated overseas for the 10 years between 2005 and 2015. And if the impacts of climate change worsen in these islands, international migration for Kiribati and Tuvalu, the survey shows, will increase by 35 per cent and 100 per cent respectively.

For these migrants, economic and cultural reasons were given as motivations for settling abroad. About 37 per cent leave to find work, 26 per cent for education opportunities and some 18 per cent give climate change as their reasons for migration. Medical or other reasons were the motivations for 19 per cent of those surveyed.

The United Nations University survey which it conducted with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, was funded by the European Union under its Pacific Climate Change and Migration project. A disturbing result of the study is that of those wanting to migrate in the three islands, only a quarter of them have the financial means to do so. It shows that only 26 per cent of people across Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu believe they have the money to migrate. The median per capita monthly income for the three countries, the survey says, was 12 American Dollars.

For the two countries of Kiribati and Tuvalu, people have the choice of internal and international migrations. Nauru, being a one island country experiences overseas migration only. Fiji, not Australia, New Zealand or the United States is the migrants' popular choice. In Tuvalu, 63 per cent of those that migrated between 2005 and 2015 settled in Fiji. Only 16 per cent went to New Zealand. Same story exists in Nauru; Fiji is the country of choice for 45 per cent of their migrants, while 24 per cent went to settle in Australia. As for Kiribati, 29 per cent settled in New Zealand, and 21 per cent opted for Fiji.

Internal migration for those living in Kiribati and Tuvalu is not a durable solution, the survey also shows. Overcrowding, unemployment and stresses in the water and power capacities in their towns make migration internally untenable.

In Kiribati, 7.7 per cent moved internally, while 1.3 per cent moved overseas. Nine per cent however say they wanted to migrate but could not afford it. As for Tuvalu, 12 per cent moved internally and 15 per cent moved internationally. Some 8 per cent say they wanted to migrate too but could not. There is no internal migration in Nauru but 10 per cent moved internationally and 7 per cent say they could not afford to migrate.

"The results from this unprecedented survey shows us empirically what we already know, a statement released today by the United Nations University quoted Enele Sosene Sopoaga, Prime Minister of Tuvalu as saying. "Pacific islanders are facing the brunt of climate change impacts and are increasingly finding themselves with few options."

Dr Koko Warner, senior expert at the United Nations University said the results of the study have a lot of implications for delegates at COP 21. "In Paris, we call on world leaders to address climate change and human mobility in the new climate agreement. This issue is not only a Pacific issue, it is a global issue. All countries will be affected by people on the move in relation to climate change, whether they are origin, transit or destination countries."

Addressing a media conference at COP 21 today, Dr Koko said the survey results show how unprepared the world community is when it comes to climate migration. Working on a more visa entry arrangements as well as training of affected islanders in medicine, education and related fields could be some options policy makers and leaders should consider.

"Without improved access to a comprehensive climate risk management strategy that includes options for mobility, a significant proportion of people from Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu could be 'trapped' by worsening environmental conditions, declining local well-being and few opportunities to either migrate or generate income necessary for adapting," added Dr Warner.

SOURCE: ISLANDS BUSINESS/PACNEWS

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