

# Climate Resilient Islands Programme

## Case Study: Community Resilience Images, Fiji

Each community participating in the Climate Resilient Islands programme was asked to discuss and agree on an image that symbolises the community's resilience. This symbol is closely linked within the Community Resilience Profiles to resilience visions (what future resilience will look like). This case study gives examples and explanations of resilience pictures from the participating communities in Fiji.

Levels of community resilience are related to their capacity to deal with threats. Capacity is related to local systems rather than just individual resources. Conceptualising systems is a way of thinking about the community holistically, and symbols are a helpful way of summarising these systems, in a way that is different to fact-based or scientific capacity analysis. A fishing net is an example given to communities of a resilience image that emphasises strong connections. Resilience images chosen by the communities will serve as reminders of goals of communities throughout the resilience planning process.

### Choices and meaning of symbols

Communities tend to use positive images that symbolise cooperation, and images taken from surrounding ecosystems or traditional practices. Some were more literal than others. Rice, for example, was used as an image because it is central to one community's wellbeing, providing income and food security. The community grows newer rice strains adapted to local conditions, and which thrive in a variety of conditions. The image of rice symbolised its adaptability, as well as the adaptability of the community.

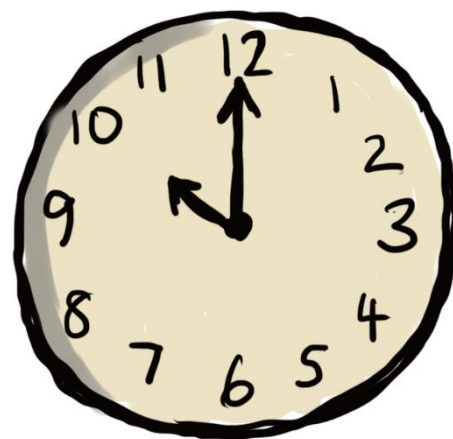
One community used the image of the local mountain with the corresponding word 'Tuarewa', which means: 'lifted up high on a mountain and overlooking all





others'. The mountain can have two symbolic meanings, depending on whether one is viewing it from its base, or viewing the countryside from its summit. It symbolises resilience by protecting the village in the valley from storms. It also symbolises the need for a holistic perspective on where the community is situated within the surrounding ecosystem.

Community cohesion can be linked to shared religious belief. One community used a clock to symbolise their ban on kava consumption nightly after 10pm, which they strongly link to Christian beliefs. There is an implication here that the community is proud of its commitment to a disciplined working schedule, which contributes to resilience.



Resilience is dependent on the health of the local environment. One community uses the local Dome fish, which is unique to the area and dependent on pristine waters, to symbolise resilience. Locals have instigated a ban on fishing to conserve the fish. But it is also endangered because of forestry upstream, which is polluting the river, indicating that resilience must be multifaceted. Resilience is dependent on conditions both within the community and outside it. Resilience cannot be isolated to what the community itself has control over.

One community chose an image of a pond to indicate how resilience is connected to nature-based solutions. The local pond diverts floodwaters from the low-lying community. This community is vulnerable to floods because of the siltation of waterways and the degradation of coral reefs. The pond symbolises the need for surrounding ecosystems to moderate the effects of storms and floods, exacerbated by climate change.





The pond also more widely symbolises the need for communities to have in place systems that can absorb pressure during times of stress. Surrounding ecosystems have traditionally supplemented incomes, provided materials for building and also moderated effects of storms, droughts, tidal surges and the like. Community members linked their ability to be resilient to absorbing the pressure of land loss.

Further, the pond is the subject of a traditional story, which involves a demi-god. Traditional stories are a way for important environmental information to be held and passed on within the community, in this case the importance of the pond for flood mitigation:

*The pond would open its mouth towards the sea, [...] diverting floodwaters away from the village.*

A land crab known in Fiji as *lairo* is the image for one community, and has a traditional story attached which suggests the land crab is the waste secreted by the community's demi-god 'Reba'. There is an associated tabu within the community on selling the crabs for income. The local chief strongly emphasises the importance of keeping this tabu, ensuring the sustainable harvest of the resource.



Another community also has a tabu on the resource they use as their resilience image – in this case, freshwater mussels. When the mussels were not declared tabu, they were overharvested and disappeared from the river. Since they have recently been declared tabu and the tabu respected, the freshwater mussels are appearing again, but still not in the numbers previously seen. For the community, this demonstrates loss of some Indigenous knowledge concerning livelihoods and food security. But it also symbolises the links between traditional knowledge and maintaining local resources.



Two communities used the image of traditional weaving. The patience and persistence in weaving symbolises the community's need for persistent work towards resilience. The bringing together of many strands symbolises individuals working together to strengthen community. The image of weaving, which is work done by the women, is also important because it recognises the contribution of women for the resilience of communities.



Local traditions inform the look of the community's weaving. The individuality of weaving designs can symbolise the fact that community resilience should encompass the individual needs of each community. Further, communities traditionally have their own ways of being resilient, through farming practices, ways of cooperating and local environmental knowledge and stories.

Weaving is also dependent in these communities on local resources – reeds and pandanus. The resilience of local handicrafts is dependent on resilience of the local environment. Therefore, nature-based solutions that focus on conservation of forest and waterway resources help with the resilience of local traditions.



## Resilience planning

Understanding how a community sees itself as resilient informs the next phase of the CRI programme – establishing community resilience plans, which involves noting assets most at risk, especially from the impacts of climate change, community capacity for making changes and strategies for increasing resilience.



Climate Resilient Islands aims to strengthen community resilience and adaptive capacity to the impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions working with rural communities in Vanuatu, Fiji, PNG, Tonga, and Tuvalu. The project is a New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade initiative implemented by Live & Learn Environmental Education.

