

Using temporary migration schemes to build adaptive capacity in sending communities: a case of Vanuatu and New Zealand's RSE scheme

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New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) migration policy has been heralded as a 'best practice' migration scheme that provides significant developmental benefits for Pacific Island states. That it could also be a valuable strategy for reducing vulnerability to climate change is implicit in the existing literature, but not explored. But do developmental gains translate into an increased capacity to adapt to climate change? Perhaps, but this should not be taken as a given. This paper outlines an analytical model for understanding the linkages between climate vulnerability, adaptation and the process of migration, with particular attention to how these play out at the community level – and presents findings based on three weeks of fieldwork in Vanuatu to show how these linkages work in practice. These findings demonstrate that migration processes and trends are closely linked to adaptive capacity, as both an influence on vulnerability and as an outcome of adaptation. Large-scale migration has an influence on a variety of social, economic, cultural, political and institutional factors that can both constrain and facilitate adaptive capacity, depending on local conditions. Understanding the connections between migration, development and adaptation can facilitate greater understanding of climate change vulnerability more generally, and provides important considerations for migration policy programs targeted at building adaptive capacity or increasing development in the Pacific.