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Politics of rising tides: governments and nongovernmental organizations in small island developing states

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Introduction

Much of the literature concerned with the politics of rising tides is about the involvement of states and others in the processes of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its annual Conference of the Parties (COP). Although non-state actors, including international non-government organizations (NGOs), are acknowledged as being part of these processes, it has often been claimed that the voices of local NGOs are absent from debates on vulnerability and resilience, as though there were no debates taking place elsewhere. This chapter addresses this absence by explicitly acknowledging that rising sea levels and the consequent changes to local lives are the focus of discussions beyond the UNFCCC. It shows how the politics of vulnerability is clear in messages around mitigation of climate change, where the audiences are foreign governments, institutions at a transnational level, and activists and interested citizens from around the world. It explores the politics of resilience in messages about adaptation to climate change, disseminated by and through local NGOs, sometimes in collaboration with international NGOs, where the key audience is the population of island states.

The focus here is on small island developing states (SIDS) in the Pacific, the engagement of their local NGOs with issues of sea level rise and their involvement with other organizations and alliances, including the international NGOs, specifically the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP) and the Climate Action Network (CAN). CAN is a worldwide organization that aims to promote government and individual actions on climate change, through information flow and the coordination of strategies on climate issues from local to international levels. It operates at the regional level through hubs such as the Pacific Island Climate Action Network (PICAN) and through coordinating local NGOs, through organizations such Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) and Tuvalu Climate Action network (TuCAN). Pacific Calling Partnership is a program of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, an Australian development organization using community education to change the world, beginning with awareness raising and leading to advocacy and social action. PCP's focus is Pacific peoples affected by climate change, particularly in the populations of Kiribati and Tuvalu.

To understand how the politics of rising tides plays out, this chapter uses the framing of narratives to show the key messages communicated by the multiplicity of voices in the debates and actions. An analysis of the narratives of Pacific Island states shows that differing groups express differing understandings of what rising tides mean, that these narratives have specific audiences, and that they tend to exist in defined contexts, such as COP meetings, or local settings (Fairclough 2003). Unlike the perception of the outcomes of UNFCCC COP, where consensus is the expected outcome, in the broader context of local engagement with rising tides at a local level, it is apparent that there can be no consensus narrative. The messages embedded in these narratives of vulnerability and resilience are diverse, each competing for the attention of its audience and evolving as new voices enter the debate and new technologies are used.

Vulnerability and Resilience

Vulnerability and resilience are key terms in debates on sea level rise in SIDS. The work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has become an authoritative source of definitions within the consensus decision-making approach of the UNFCCC (Adger 2006: 273). Here, in 2001, vulnerability is seen as "the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude, and rate of climate change and variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity and its adaptive capacity" (IPCC 2001). This authoritative definition has been modified, with each reporting cycle showing slight variations, although always with a relationship between vulnerability and resilience. This is mediated through conceptions of adaptation and has more recently incorporated vulnerability resulting from loss and damage, which, it is recognized, cannot be mediated by adaptation, but requires an approach based on insurance.

Otto et al. recently reviewed the extensive literature using the terminology of "social vulnerability", in order to highlight that vulnerability is more than the consequence of susceptibility of a system, being "heavily shaped by social, demographic, and institutional factors such as gender, age, culture, education and ethnicity" (Otto et al. 2017: 1658). The narrative of the Suva Declaration (Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) 2015) is one that uses the concept of *social vulnerability*, an approach that shifts the focus of concern to a local level and to the human scale, and that introduces a sense of resilience. Here, although the populations of members of the PIDF may be victims of climate change, including sea level rise, they are not powerless (Denton 2017: 68). The declaration goes beyond the accepted narrative of *disproportionate impact*, an accepted assumption in understandings of vulnerability, to introduce *human rights violations* and *inequality* and *discrimination* into the debate.

Sea level rise is linked to vulnerability in several ways. While there are still major uncertainties over the level of future sea level rises under various levels of global temperature increases, the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (2014b:11) shows that under the higher levels of temperature increase, sea level rise of almost one meter may occur by 2100. Many of the SIDS are low lying. For example, in Tuvalu the average height of the land above sea level is less than 2 meters, and the country is therefore extremely vulnerable to the impact of rising sea levels. Here vulnerability is related to inundation and loss of land. As Kiribati states in their Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to address climate change, prepared for COP21, "In the long term, the most serious concern is that sea-level rise will threaten the very existence of Kiribati and as a nation" (Republic of Kiribati 2015: 15). Sea level rise also brings with it the threat of erosion and the consequent loss of land, both through the regular actions of the tides and through cyclones and storm surges. Inundation of the land is also a feature of these weather events, giving a foretaste of the predicted longer term effects of sea level rise. A third aspect of sea level rise is salination of the soil and of water, affecting food production and even the habitability of some islands. All three aspects of sea level rise, – inundation, erosion and salination – can disrupt daily lives, impacting the societies and economies of these islands.

Resilience can also be conceptualized in several ways. As noted above, it is often linked to the notion of adaptive capacity, assuming that the system will be able to manage the impacts and keep working in more or less the same way (Gallopín 2006). This has been the approach emerging from the IPCC, where "human systems" have "adaptive capacity", "the ability of a system to adjust to climate change (including climate variability and extremes) to moderate potential damages, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences" (IPCC 2001). Cannon and Müller-Mahn express concern that the increasing linkage of resilience to vulnerability will make resilience part of the scientific debate, whereas in their view it is a concept from the social sciences and its concern for politics and

economics should not be subsumed into technical concerns (2010: 633). Janssen et al. (2006), however, argue on the basis of an extensive bibliometric study, influenced by the IPCC reports, that while vulnerability is linked with adaptive capacity in the literature, resilience is separate.

Placing the concept of resilience firmly in the social sciences, Folke states that "Resilience is an approach, a way of thinking" (Folke 2006: 260). He argues that in any consideration of resilience, social capital is important, including trust and social networks as are "social memory", including experience of dealing with change and knowledge systems, including a variety of types of knowledge (Folke 2006: 259- 262).

Addressing an international audience

The successful use of a particular narrative of vulnerability by SIDS is illustrated by the concept's use over many decades within the global climate change policy process. The vulnerability of SIDS to rising sea levels was scientifically recognized early in the process with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) producing a report in 1989 on "Assessing the Vulnerability to Sea Level Rise "(UNEP 1989). Vulnerability to sea-level rise was reflected in the first IPCC Report (IPCC 1990) and it has been acknowledged in a series of international agreements to address global warming, including the 1992 UNFCCC, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the 2010 Cancun Agreements (formalizing the 2009 Copenhagen Accord) and most recently the 2015 Paris Agreement. However, it must be acknowledged that this recognition of vulnerability has not yet been matched by an effective worldwide agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions to a level necessary to curtail temperature rise to 1.5ºC.

The successes in gaining an audience for their narratives of vulnerability have not been achieved by Pacific Islands in isolation. They are involved in several alliances and coalitions intended to give them greater influence in the UNFCCC processes and elsewhere. These include established coalitions, such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) which has given the small states a "voice in the political arena" (Jaschik 2014: 287), so that they "box way above their weight" (Betzold 2010: 142) in ensuring that their concerns are on UN Climate Conference agendas, and the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), whose very name proclaims the way its members should be regarded. The formation of the CVF, led by Maldives, in 2009 and its Male' Declaration made it possible for new voices to enter the international debates and be heard at COP15 in Copenhagen, where delegates, delivered a message charging members of the developed world with having caused the problem of global warming and calling on them to take responsibility and adopt active steps to fix the problem. Before COP15, Tuvalu was virtually unknown on the world stage, even within global climate change politics, but the term *Tuvalu* entered the narrative of vulnerability, being mentioned in 542 stories related to climate change in December 2009, with 173 of these containing either "vulnerable" or "vulnerability" (according to a search on the global news database, Factiva). In the same time period, posts in CAN International's email list-serve, CAN-talk, mentioned Tuvalu 532 times. At the same COP, Kiribati also rose to prominence, through what Webber (2013: 2728) refers to as an event that was "'scripted' and 'rehearsed' – 'performances of vulnerability'" with dances and traditional costumes.

Narratives of vulnerability must be continually performed for these small-island states to maintain the attention of their audiences. In the context of the UNFCCC, they use their INDCs, which are statements from the government of a state, prepared in consultation with civil society, including NGOs. These statements have two audiences, the international audience within the UNFCCC and the local audience through national policy development and implementation. INDCs prepared for COP21 in Paris perpetuate a narrative that describes these islands as *low-lying*, *isolated* and *vulnerable*, *at risk from sea level rise* which is a

catastrophe not of their making and for which they are *in no way responsible* as their contribution to global warming is *insignificant*, their "emissions per capita being amongst the lowest in the world" (Republic of Kiribati, 2015). They further reinforce the narrative of vulnerability, through references to the small populations of these states, and their reliance on external funding to support strategies of adaptation.

The messages inherent in the INDCs and in the statements about the SIDS' plans for the future are, however, more complex than this. They go beyond the technical aspects of erosion and inundation, and in different ways, introduce the consequences of sea level rise. Kiribati refers to "its highly vulnerable socio-economic and geographical situation" (Republic of Kiribati, 2015:15), noting that the state "has a right to develop its economy and improve the well-being of its population" and indicating its need for financial aid. The Republic of the Marshall Islands sees its people being among the most vulnerable in the world to the impacts of climate change, which "inflict damage and impose substantial costs" and which threaten the livelihoods of communities, undermine food and water security and put health at risk. Similarly, it "recognizes that it has a role to play in the global effort to combat climate change", even though its greenhouse gas emissions are "negligible on a global scale" (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2015 INDC). Tuvalu states that sea level rise exacerbates existing cultural and socio-economic vulnerabilities which could "threaten the security of the nation" (Government of Tuvalu 2015 INDC).

The complexity of these narratives can be seen in the recent proliferation of coalitions, each with its own focus. Members of the Coalition of Low Lying Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CANCC) formed in 2014, which includes the nations of Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Tokelau and Tuvalu, state that they bring "a whole new meaning to human rights and the right to a secure future" (CANCC 2014). Their priority is the resourcing of measures to protect the physical environment and to enhance the capacity of their populations through programs of education and awareness-raising (CANCC 2014). The High Ambition Coalition, created at COP21 in Paris in 2015, has been spearheaded by the Marshall Islands, a very small nation but one which is seen to have "moral authority and thought leadership" (Woodroofe 2016). The rhetoric of ambitious action here is embedded in the group's title and they have agreed to tackle some of the more intractable problems, such as taking the issue of shipping emissions to the International Maritime Organization, a significant step for countries like the Marshall Islands, which benefit from a flag of convenience shipping registry.

The V20 group, comprising the Finance Ministers of twenty members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (including Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Republic of Marshall Islands), was established in Lima, Peru, in 2015 at a meeting in conjunction with the 2015 Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund. It similarly frames its narratives in terms of ambitious action in the face of dangers including the health and economic impacts of climate change, seen to encompass human rights issues, as it seeks financial support for economic development and to cover loss and damage from severe weather events. This group took its message to the G20 meeting in April 2017, echoing the narrative of ambitious action expected from G20 members and reinforcing the difference in size and strength through the phrase "David meets Goliath" (Hansen 2017).

In spite of similarities in the narratives presented to international audiences, it would be a mistake to assume that these Pacific Islands have identical narratives. The leaders of Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands have presented conflicting narratives about their long term futures, with Anote Tong, former President of Kiribati "plan[ning] for the worst and hop[ing] for the best" (Weiss in Barnett 2017: 8), whereas the former Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, Tony de Brum said "We will operate on the basis that we can in fact help to prevent this from happening" (Mathieson in Barnett 2017: 9). The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sopoaga, stated that "We do not want to move … Our lives and culture are

based on our continued existence on the islands of Tuvalu. We will survive" (Sopoaga in Barnett, 2017:9).

Networking and NGOs

Networks such as Climate Action Network and NGOs such as Pacific Calling Partnership have complex relationships with the governments of islands in the Pacific and with NGOs in these countries. They are involved in the narratives with international audiences and narratives with local audiences. KiriCAN and TuCAN are members of CAN and its regional node, Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN). Both CAN and PCP are enthusiastic users of online sources, especially Facebook, supporting the claim that NGOs concerned with climate change and with the environment are "champions of online climate communication" (Schäfer, 2012: 530 - 531). They use technologies to create their networks, thereby disseminating information, including to the media, increasing support for climate change action and even mobilizing local citizens to take action. It is in this context that the narratives they use are considered here.

The Facebook page for PICAN, which provides information and links to resources, demonstrates that the narratives evident through the posts made in 2016-2017, are institutional, representing the UNFCCC agenda and promoting awareness-raising and training to participate in debates at this level, with an emphasis on preparation for involvement in COP23. This is understandable as Fiji, a key country for PICAN, holds the presidency for COP23. Unsurprisingly, given the strategy statement of PICAN which includes an emphasis on fundraising, the Green Climate Fund and its application process is also given prominence and Tuvalu is applauded for its success in receiving money through this fund. The narrative also demonstrates the significant engagement of women in the discussions and actions involving women, with the emphasis on capacity building through women.

The PCP has a much higher profile online than PICAN, with more frequent postings and evidence of face-to-face work with local activists. The Kiribati-Tuvalu-Australia Exchange Program (KATEP) is a key focus of the work of PCP. It is a training program held in Australia and the Pacific that develops the climate change advocacy skills of emerging young leaders from Kiribati and Tuvalu through workshops and practical experience in Australia. It is an example of how PCP works in solidarity with the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu to build capacity to advocate for action on climate change and to raise awareness in Australia of how climate change is affecting Pacific Islands. Its webpage emphasizes its collaborative role in supporting communities in the Pacific to make their voices heard in climate change discussions. Its Facebook page shows this support in action, with photos and reports from Kiribati and Tuvalu from activists closely linked to PCP and its work, as well as from others undertaking capacity-building actions in the islands. The PCP's Facebook page often contains links to opinion pieces by prominent people, especially islanders. The narrative does not ignore institutional links, but includes those relevant to the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu, such as the United Nations pages for International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem, and select scientific and other reports.

Involving the local population

There is no single narrative at a local level. The politics of rising tides at the local level ensures that government processes, NGOs, churches, local communities, traditional leaders, women, youth and so on each have their own narrative which can exist independently of other local narratives. Cultures around belief systems and authority affect involvement in decision-making processes and in implementation of local decisions and national polices, reinforcing the existence of these separate narratives. Local knowledge is important in

understanding engagement with issues of sea level rise. For example, Christian churches in the Pacific Islands are highly influential, with more than 95% of the population being members, according to recent censuses in Tuvalu and Kiribati. Some Pacific Islanders do not believe in the narrative of rising tides because of their understanding of God's promise to Noah, documented in the Book of Genesis, that God would never again flood the Earth (Paton and Fairbairn 2010; Donner 2011). Countering this narrative, the Reverend Tafue Lusama, General Secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu (Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu – EKT), and Chair of TuCAN, said in the context of Cyclone Pam: "Climate change represents a spiritual as well as a physical crisis for our people. We desperately need to educate communities about the fact that God has not abandoned us; climate change is caused by humans and requires a human response" (Uniting Church of Australia 2015).

Another important influence on attitudes to rising sea levels and consequent actions is the politics of local decision-making which may mean that women and younger men (under the age of 50) are excluded from active participation in local decision-making (Paton and Fairbairn-Dunlop 2010). Island Councils may be subordinated to higher-level authorities (Nunn et al. 2014), regardless of the legal status of this council of elders (Richardson 2009). This assertion cannot be generalized across the island states, nor even within a given state as the customs surrounding traditional leaders and their power differ from state to state, and also may vary from island to island within a country (Nunn et al. 2014).

The traditional knowledge which has sustained life on the islands since time immemorial has recently been acknowledged as an integral part of the process of adapting to climate change (IPCC 2014a: 26). In Tuvalu, for example, traditional forecasting techniques for anticipating extreme weather events are still relied on, and traditional knowledge has been adapted to match contemporary conditions, – for example, when women from the Nanumea community on Funafuti bury germinating nuts and taro in plastic drums to keep them safe from rising saltwater (Nakashima, 2012: 93-95). Yet Maria Tiimon, Pacific Outreach Officer at the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney and a native of Kiribati, noted that an important aspect of specialist traditional knowledge in Kiribati is that it is not part of a narrative for the community but remains secret, in the custody of the family who have over generations, developed this specialist expertise (Teaero 2003). Such knowledge is lost if there is no one to pass it on to (personal communication 25 May 2017).

The voices of scientists are rarely heard in local narratives. This may be because the islands lack the education systems and sound knowledge-sharing infrastructure necessary to engage in climate change discussions in a nuanced way (Abeysinghe and Huq 2016: 198). An exception may be seen in a book by i-Kiribati man, Riibeta Abeta, hailed as the "first i-Kiribati international publication on climate change by a single author" and resulting from research undertaken for a Masters' degree (Office of the President, Republic of Kiribati 2014). Given his involvement at the time in the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development, it is clear that the work contributed to local debates.

NGOs may also engage in so-called citizen science, a useful tool for collecting data and for awareness raising (Johnson et al. 2014). In Tuvalu, the NGO Alofa Tuvalu has used islanders to collect scientific data, both for local projects and for international projects. Further, Kelman (2010: 607-609) points out that peer-reviewed scientific journals do draw on SIDS perspectives and that SIDS scientists have played a crucial role in establishing and contributing to organizations such as the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). People employed in government roles are involved in regional projects funded through organizations such as the Asian Development Bank, and contribute their knowledge and expertise to a wider audience through the reports of these projects. However, there are obstacles to sharing scientific knowledge. The Asia Pacific Adaptation Network notes the

impact of "differences in language, perceptions and interests" with constraints on capacity and knowledge which are compounded by the difference in scale of member countries, ranging from Bangladesh and Indonesia to tiny Tuvalu (APAN 2017). Occasionally, competing narratives of the government itself and its bureaucracy may arise as a barrier. An anonymous informant to this study noted "the work that I have published has not been utilized much. As the projects are mostly planned and executed by top down centrally controlled institutions, the expertise outside the government institutions [is] seldom utilized".

NGOs are important in the development of local narratives. Both Kiribati and Tuvalu have an active NGO network engaged in climate change actions. KiriCAN and TuCAN have the challenging tasks of both being the voice of NGOs in external fora and coordinating actions within these island states. Although the narratives of the NGOs may be different from those of the government, it would be naïve to claim that they are not significantly influenced by the wider context of the scientific community and UNFCCC debates (cf Rudiak-Gould 2011). Although projects may be part of a state's plan for adaptation, and they may be funded as such by an external donor, the narrative is likely to be distinct from that of the government and the INDC. The narratives of local NGOs can be seen as narratives of resilience, tending to focus on improving the conditions for communities.

Food security has been a significant narrative across the islands of the Pacific. In 2014, the Tuvalu Council of Women ran workshops on home gardening and in 2015, it ran a competition on food security based on the knowledge and skills acquired in this workshop. They have also been involved in other projects to help villagers develop skills and expertise in growing staple foods such as *pulaka* (swamp yams) in pots which help to protect them from salination and the effects of inundation from storm surge. In Tokelau, a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand, as in other parts of the Pacific, the development of keyhole gardens is being funded as a strategy to improve food security. This project, supported by the Fatupaepae (traditional local council of women) in the three villages of Tokelau, also engages youth.

Fresh water and sanitation constitute another narrative found in the work of NGOs. In Kiribati, a number of years ago, the Kiribati Women's Centre (Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati – AMAK), the peak body for women's organizations, was involved in a waste management project, the longer term aim of which was to improve health outcomes and to return cultivable land to production. AMAK and other NGOs have been engaged in the planting of mangroves as part of a soft-barrier plan to prevent erosion by the sea. The Tobwaraoi Community Nanikaai (2017) established a committee to clean up the beach, which was being used as a public toilet as well as a dump for rubbish, and to install a water tank. In Abaiang, KiLGA, the Kiribati Local Government Association (2016), an affiliate of KiriCAN, was involved in the installation of rainwater harvesting tanks, to help to solve the problems with access to clean drinking water, caused by the rising sea level as well as by pressure of population.

Globalizing and localizing ethical practices

The politics of rising tides emerges from narratives described earlier. These narratives, which have changed over time, show messages aimed at a variety of audiences. The proliferation of coalitions involving small island states, especially in the lead-up to COP21 in Paris, shows the complexity of the issue of rising tides and the importance of having access to a range of key audiences, who have power in different aspects of global governance. At the international level, the small island states have to acknowledge that their success in gaining acceptance of the statement at COP21 in Paris to hold global temperature rise to well below 2ºC above pre-industrial levels has not led to policies sufficient to prevent some currently inhabited atolls of Kiribati or Tuvalu disappearing in the next fifty years. This is leading to the emergence of

other narratives. The emphasis on isolation, distance from centers of power, which for so long set these islands aside and helped to create their vulnerability, is being replaced by the idea that they are the forerunners, *on the frontline* of a catastrophe which will affect everyone in due course (CANCC 2014). This is the *global scale* that the Republic of the Marshall Islands (2015) refers to in its INDC. Implicit in this narrative is the reminder that the threats faced by the populations of these islands will sooner or later affect the citizens of some of the heavy emitters.

This narrative is closely linked to the use of the *global citizen* narrative – that everyone has a responsibility towards the other and to the agreed processes that make a common or shared life possible. This narrative brings with it ideas of *global effort* in minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. It is this narrative that is in play for the High Ambition Coalition, whose message is clearly that many emitting countries are not ambitious enough in their targets, and that they are not putting in enough effort. What that effort might be and how ambition might be measured is a moot point. Some members of the High Ambition Coalition have been charged with hypocrisy because of their continued high level of reliance on fossil fuels, for example, as they transition to other forms of energy. Yet the point remains that small-island nations such as the Marshall Islands, through the High Ambition Coalition for Shipping, are taking steps towards actions that others have so far found too difficult (Climate Policy Observer 2017).

This sense of *high ambition* is matched with the notion of *moral leadership*, which was introduced by the CVF in its Male' Declaration at the same time as other terms in the narrative of vulnerability. *Moral leadership* does not seem to have been adopted as widely as other terms in the debates on rising tides, although Kiribati refers to its own *moral imperative* to contribute to limiting global temperature rise in its INDC 2015.

This proliferation of messages at the level of international institutions now approaches the multiplicity of narratives at the local level, but the strength of these narrative intended for international audiences could prevent local narratives of resilience and resourcefulness from being heard (Farbotko (2005: 289). The question that might be asked about local narratives not being heard is whether they are narratives aimed at outsiders; if local narratives aimed at outsiders are not being heard, that would indeed be a cause for concern.

The concern here, then, is with the distinctions in content, purpose and audience for narratives emerging from local populations and in particular from NGOs and intended for local audiences. Civil society arising through formal organizations is potentially at odds with traditional structures of decision-making and implementation in Pacific Island cultures. Claims that women's voices are missing from local debates are not entirely borne out by the evidence that women's NGOs in the states considered here are influential in leading a range of adaptation strategies. However, it may be the case that women have been successful in using the channels of action available to them, not the channels of traditional leadership, but those opened through links to the international community, the channels of NGOs. In the urbanized areas of these island nations, many overseas NGOs have staff working or even offices which provide a support structure for women to be involved in debates and to take action, giving women access to power and status of a kind not available to them through traditional structures.

Involvement with NGOs based overseas, such as PCP, influences local narratives in two ways. First, they bring the consensus narratives of climate science to the islands and train people in how to use them in local contexts; second, and importantly, they train young leaders to take messages based on their experiences to others in their community and into wider discussions. As Jill Finnane, the PCP coordinator, recently said: "We should never lose sight of the fact that this is about more than just science. It's about people, their cultures and their right to a just and secure future" (SciDev.Net 2017).

This emphasis on daily life and the efforts involved in maintaining it are key elements in the local narrative. However, these efforts are not ones concerned, at one level, with preventing or minimizing rising tides; they are mainly concerned with ensuring a supply of safe drinking water or a staple food crop. In Tuvalu, in particular, they are concerned with recognition of the importance of traditional local knowledge and the use of *social memory*, a strong indication of a narrative of resilience (Folke 2006). Local knowledge is not only knowledge about the environment and about the skills in living between the land and the sea, it is also knowledge of the social and political processes through which decisions can be made and implemented (Lebel 2013: 1071).

The young leaders in the PCP KATEP program bring their own experiences to the narrative of rising tides, ensuring that although key aspects of innovation and adaptability in daily life and an emphasis on the importance of traditional culture are part of this narrative, it is not a narrative that becomes ritualized. It is constantly renewed by these new voices, ones which have had the opportunity for experiences outside of the very local context. The KATEP program gives the opportunity for local experiences and practices to be shared, so that innovations in one island can be considered for adoption in another island. It is a program dependent on the creation of personal and social relationships – social capital (cf Folke 2006) – which can be added to the network of relationships already existing within families, islands and states.

This emphasis on sharing experiences is seen to build on local approaches to learning and building new knowledge. It is also a way to overcome the narratives of isolation and distance. Distance and isolation, caused in part by "intermittent and irregular boat trips" (Paton and Fairbairn 2010: 689), have often meant that the inhabitants on individual islands must be able to meet their own basic needs. This reliance on self may have meant that people are unaware of the policies and plans of the government, located in some far-off atoll (Nunn et al. 2014), reinforcing the particularity of the very local narrative. The online presence of NGOs such as PCP and CAN help to overcome this sense of separation, even though the Internet is accessible to between 14.6% of the population (Kiribati), 37.6% (Marshall Islands) and 50.1% (Tuvalu) as at March 2017 (Internet World Stats 2017).

Social media and the Internet have the capacity to overcome perceptions of distance and isolation and to bring much greater immediacy to interactions, and through this facilitating the access of the very local and very personal into institutionalized discussions, as Mattlan Zackhras, a former government minister from the Marshall Islands, has argued. At a preparatory meeting for COP22 in Marrakech, he used Twitter to let his fellow attendees know about the situation at home: "This is personal. Hard being at Pre-COP as king tides hit my island home. Powerful reminder of why we all need to do more. Fighting for all those affected" and accompanied the tweet with photos showing the flooding (Koekoek 2016). This use of the local in the context of institutional meetings may signal the beginning of a new narrative for international audiences. This new narrative is developing in parallel with the conventional narratives, reinforcing the human rights narratives of food security and access to clean water, and demonstrating the ways that local populations use traditional knowledge, contemporary technical knowledge and social customs to manage the problems caused by rising tides.

Conclusion

There are two particularly important narratives that are widely used by both by the governments of these small-island developing states and NGOs in relation to the politics of rising tides. At a superficial level, it can be asserted that the first relates to the SIDS' vulnerability. The focus for this is primarily international audiences. The second narrative relates to resilience where the focus is primarily on local NGOs and citizens. That said, this

overlooks the complex ways in which the narratives for international audiences have evolved since 2009, from ones which brought a spotlight to the notion of victim, through a series of moves which gives these *victims* the opportunity to point out that they are just part of *an early warning system* for the rest of the world, and to claim the moral high ground as they call for global effort and greater ambition. It also overlooks the forces at play in the narratives for local audiences, which focus on everyday life issues and where conflict may arise between beliefs based on religion and the secular, traditional leadership and modern legislated processes of government, between traditional community and civil society enshrined in NGOs, the roles of men and women, and traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge.

The claims of *high ambition* and *moral leadership* may signal a significant shift in the politics of rising sea levels. Understanding local issues and problems as human rights issues will inevitably broaden both audiences and those developing narratives, especially through the immediacy of social media. These changes highlight the importance of maintaining a social justice perspective on sea level rise.

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