

Hello everyone. My name is Raed Ali and I am the project officer in a local NGO called the Alliance for future generations Fiji and also a member of YOUNGO Oceans WG [Which is the official youth constituency of the UNFCCC]. We champion the voice and meaningful participation of youth people in Fiji and the Pacific, towards sustainable development efforts. We do this by mobilizing, engaging, educating and empowering young people in becoming protagonists of change, in their individual lives, homes, communities and nation. We undertake strategic projects, activities and campaigns that create a ripple of effects and benefits for all people, including the marginalized in society.

Today our ocean is an epicentre for some of the most severe impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise, ocean acidification, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion and extreme weather events. It is clear that the climate crisis conversation cannot happen without the discussion of Oceans. Fiji, alongside other large ocean states, is at the forefront of climate and ocean change. Here in Fiji, there are communities that have already had to relocate as a result of sea-level rise, inundation of tides, increased intensity of storm surges and coastal erosion. We have had four village communities already relocated as a result of sea level rise and close to 80 more communities that have been identified and are earmarked for relocation - which will redirect much-needed Government resources.



Coping with and adapting to the challenges of climate change is a daily reality for many communities in Fiji, as elsewhere across the Pacific. And communities respond with a variety of adaptation techniques –using indigenous knowledge systems. Among these different approaches, planned relocation in Fiji is a relatively new response to the effects of climate change, and one that is viewed as an option of last resort. Relocation is a complex process and often traumatic for those involved - no-one wants to leave their home. And it involves much more than simply rebuilding houses in a safer location. It involves providing the right conditions for people to rebuild the lives they knew, such as equitable access to resources and services, social capital and community infrastructure. Full and engaged community participation is essential in any relocation project. And we must be culturally sensitive and hear the aspirations and concerns of our people.

To the people of Fiji and the Pacific, the ocean is of great cultural significance - as we share a symbiotic relationship. The ocean is us and we are the ocean. We have always relied on it as a source of sustenance and means of connection from one island to another, and to each other.

But now, our ocean is heating up, and in Fiji - we have seen the impact of mass coral bleaching. Fishes are migrating to deeper oceans, and our fishermen and fisherwomen now must go to into much deeper waters to find sufficient catch for their daily sustenance - often at the risk of their lives. Plastic pollution is another compounding threat - a study by a University of the South Pacific; Master of Science student, found that more than 65% of fish in Fiji waters contain microplastics! A separate study by student from the University of Adelaide found that 50.8% of fish sold in Fiji's municipal market contain microplastics.

As custodians of the oceans, young people here have recognized the important role of the ocean, not only as a sustainer of life and ecosystems, but also as a regulator of our climate. We mobilize and empower young people to take actions within their communities and ensure that the most vulnerable are not only consulted, but are also part of the development, implementation and monitoring processes.

So far, through the mangrove planting initiatives that we conduct - we have planted over 50,000 mangrove plants working with communities and villages throughout the country, and all this in the efforts to strengthen and build natural buffers, mitigate the effects of the climate crisis, and lastly because we know that the mangrove ecosystem is a breeding ground to many marine organisms, which our people depend on for food.





We also undertake monthly coastal clean-up activities, that raise awareness on ocean pollution; and host talanoa sessions, to discuss how communities can work together to address ocean pollution and ocean change. We also use the large amounts of rubbish collected from the clean-up campaigns to make unique forms of artwork which are then displayed in a public arena during occasions such as the Fiji earth hour celebrations. Art is one of the most creative and visible forms of communication that can help highlight the current global concerns, such as climate crisis, in a unique way. I strongly believe that a visual message, makes it much more appealing and, in turn, it has a stronger cognitive impact in changing mindsets, as compared to complex data or information which may often get ignored.



Members of the Alliance for future generations Fiji were also instrumental in policy change. In early 2016, a major “Ban the Plastic Campaign” was led by young people, and later gained support from CSOs. It called on the complete phase-out of the single-use plastics in Fiji. The campaign then saw Government in its 2017 National Budget announce, steps to completely phase out single-use plastics by 2020. The government also implemented a 10 cents levy on each single-use plastics, that had increased to 20 cents [2018 Budget Announcement], to discourage consumers from using single-use plastics, and increase awareness for the use of recyclable bags. Early this year, Fiji has completely phased out the use of single-use plastics with less than 50 microns in thickness.

We also organised a major campaign last year in partnership with 350 Fiji, in support of the global September climate action week. In a place like Fiji, it is very important to take into account the political and cultural context before organising. In light of this, we localized the event in the context of Fiji to create visibility amongst young people and support the global movement. We called it the “Niu Pawa” Festival, with the word ‘Niu’ meaning (coconut), which is viewed as the tree of life in the pacific, and ‘Pawa’, representing people taking back power and building resilience. As such, our mantra for the event was “we are not drowning, we are fighting”. It was the first of its kind in Fiji and was a completely youth led initiative. On the day, we organized a beach clean-up, mangrove planting, information booths, presentations, demonstrations, and performances by local artists. We once again incorporated art as the fundamental means to engage and inspire young people during the event. This is because, not many leaders, politicians or communicators manage to bring up a relevant topic, that is in the back of people's minds, and depict it in a way that is surprising and engaging, while simultaneously, representing generally accepted values. The campaign was a success and as such, we believe that art is an effective form of activism, especially within the Pacific since it is ingrained within the cultural system.







From our experience, organising in Fiji is successful when we empower the local people and communities to use what they already have, in order to bring about the change you want.

There are still gaps and lack of coherence between policies, and implementation & monitoring in the region, when it comes to the enforcement and regulation of laws to protect our oceans. Ocean litter and/or pollution also remains to be an issue in the Pacific. This requires work on attitudinal and behavioural change, which necessitates awareness at a level that begins from individuals and moves up to how corporations use and manage our oceans resources.

We recognize the critical role that oceans have to play – in fact has played for generations of our people. As such, we hope to mobilize urgent collective action by all stakeholders in the Ocean's well-being, including Governments, the United Nations system, civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector and local communities. We also hope to raise global consciousness on the state of the Ocean and the need for humanity to take remedial action, during the Oceans conference.

The experience and skills amongst our nations are vast and diverse. Let us all share capacities, technologies and resources to increase the momentum towards Ocean action.

I'll finish here by saying that we are the first generation to feel the REAL impact of climate change, but we are also the last generation to be able to do something about it. Sea level is rising, and it is time that we do as well.

Thank you.