

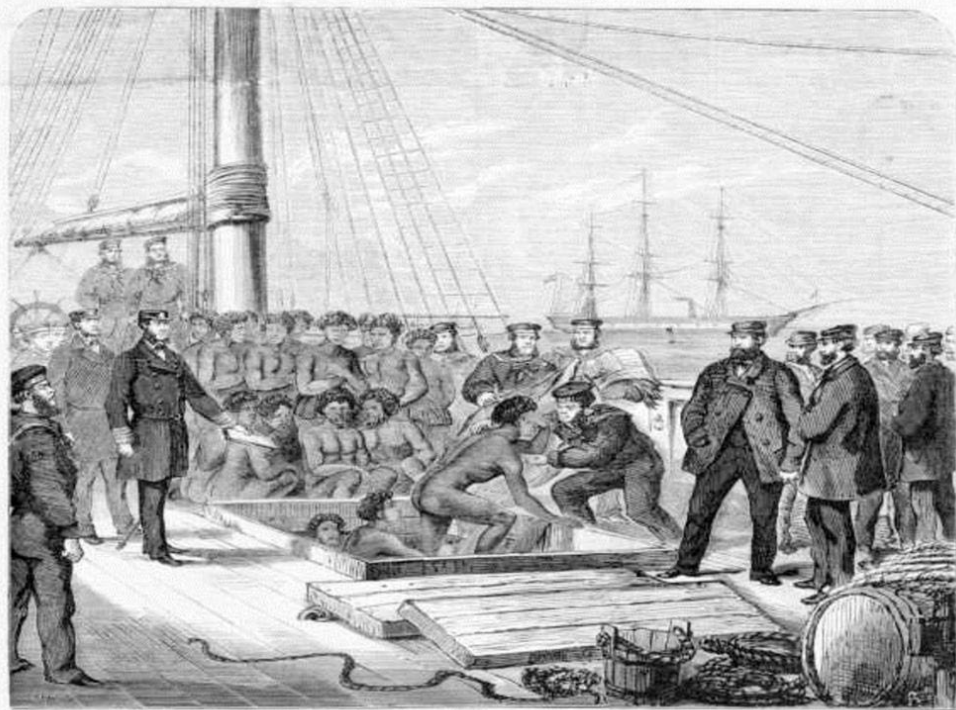


The Seasonal Workers Program in Australia from the perspective of Pacific Nations people, its effects on their local communities and family life, and the impact on Pacific self-determination.

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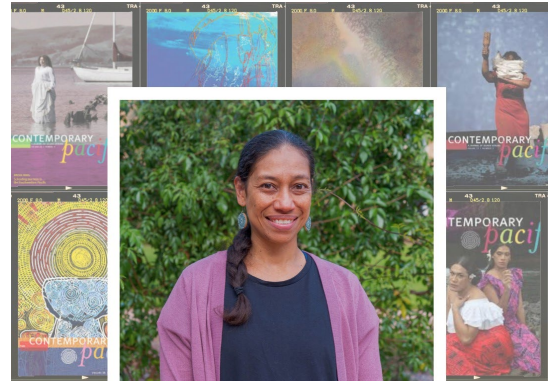
Rev. James Shri Bhagwan

General Secretary – Pacific Conference of Churches



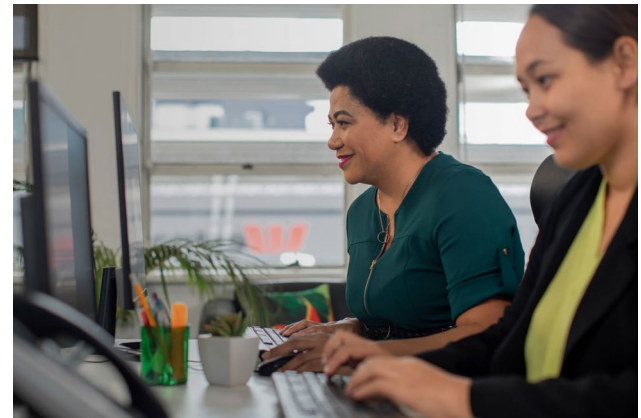
SLAVE TRADING IN THE SOUTH SEAS.—SEIZURE OF THE SCHOONER 'DAPHNE'.—FROM PAGE 120.





**KATERINA TEAIWA**

Editor, *The Contemporary Pacific*



# Climate Induced Migration

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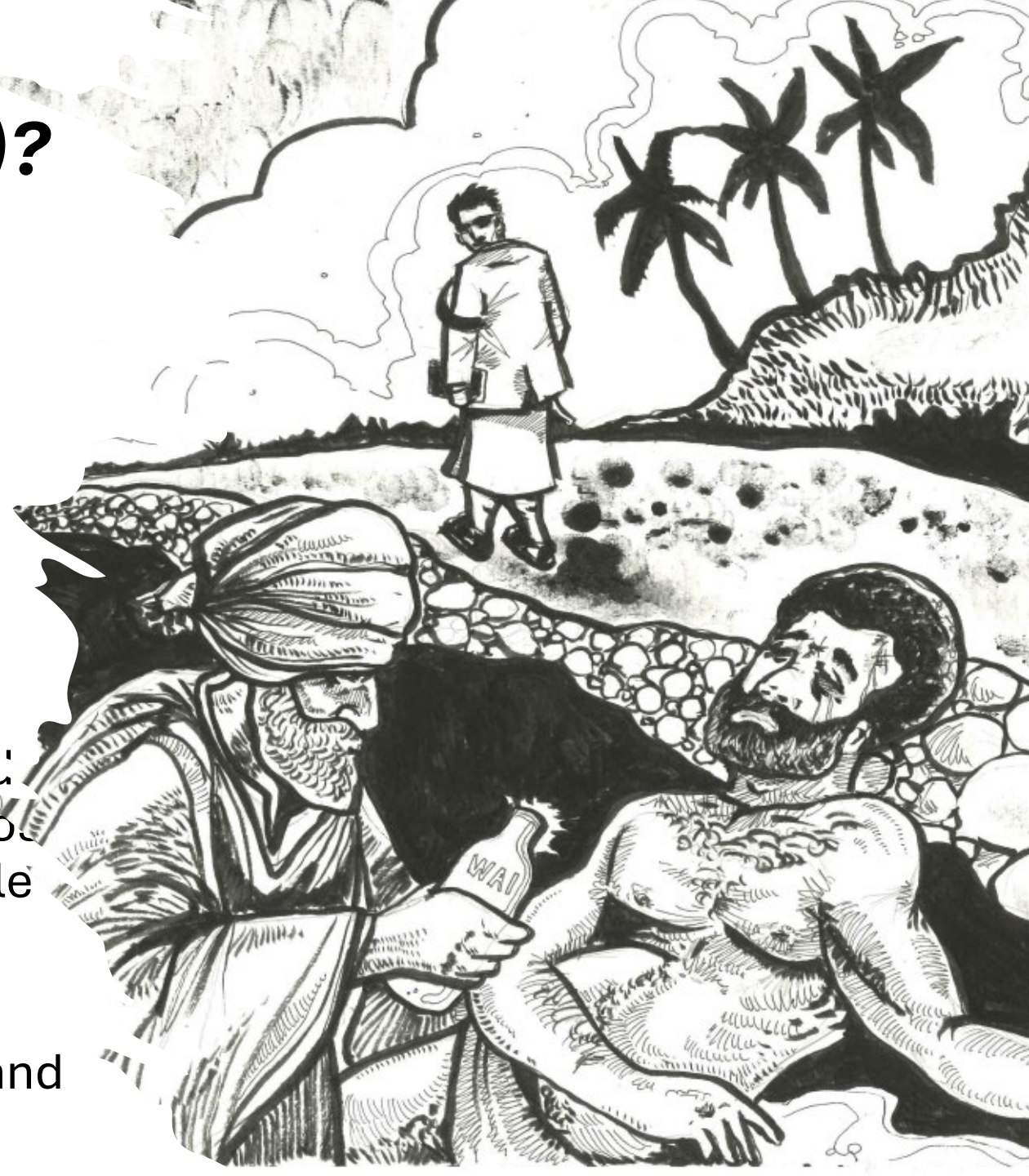
# Who is my Tuākoī (Neighbour)?

***“We as churches in the Pacific must not fear speaking truth to power, we must not be held hostages on issues that we did not cause. We should seek to keep industrialized countries, our global neighbours - for neighbours are now nearby and far away in this interconnected planet - we should seek to keep them accountable for their actions.”***

*(Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Environment and Climate Change for Tuvalu, Dr. Maina Talia)*

# Who is my *Tuākoī* 'Lei (Good/Loving Neighbour)?

- A good neighbour to one another;
- A good neighbour within creation;
- A good neighbour to communities experiencing and at serious risk of the impacts of climate change;
- A good neighbour to those who were here, are here now and are yet to come;
- A good neighbour to countries whose lifestyles and economic models are based on the fallacy of unlimited growth and whose denial and culpability are taking our people and planet beyond the red line of 1.5 degrees;
- A good neighbour to those who stand up and fight injustice.





# A Sense of Exile

## ***Psalm 137***

**1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.**

**2 There on the poplars we hung our harps,**

**3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

**4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?**

**5 If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.**

**6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.**

**7 Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell.**

**“Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!”**

**8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us.**

**9 Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.**

A tropical landscape featuring a vibrant rainbow arching over a vast, calm ocean. The foreground is filled with lush green palm trees and other tropical vegetation. In the distance, a small island or headland is visible on the horizon under a sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

*From Exile  
To Exodus*

## **Jeremiah 29:4-7 (NJPS):**

**4 Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon:**

**5 “Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit.**

**6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease.**

**7 And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the LORD in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.”**

- **Migration is our story**

**The story of humanity is one of movement and migration; we are all migrants! That is who we are! We constantly participate in the ongoing cycle of departure, travel and arrival. And we never settle!**

**Once we arrive, we depart! That's what makes life exciting!**

**The stories recorded in the Bible are migrant stories—of people seeking refuge, of people looking for a new life, of people exploring new possibilities, of people seeking new opportunities, of people venturing into the unknown for its own sake, of people being forced to move, of people whose only option is to escape from slavery, violence and oppression, and so forth.**

**Amongst these people is a Migrant God whom we find in their midst—a God who moves with them, wanders with them, crosses boundaries with them, confronts oppression with them, breaks traditions of death with them, shares bread of life with them, dwells with the least of them, resists hegemonies amongst them, endures hardships with them, and ultimately dies and lives for them!**

- **Leviticus 19:9-10 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. <sup>10</sup> Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.

- **Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV)**

<sup>33</sup> “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. <sup>34</sup> The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

- **Luke 10:26-28(NIV)**

<sup>26</sup> Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” <sup>27</sup> The man answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” <sup>28</sup> “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!”

*(Good Samaritan parable follows)*

# Indigenous Protocols and Spiritual Processes

- Not just lip service
- Transplanting not Uprooting
- Sovereignty of Indigenous (First People)
- Inclusion of Traditional Leaders
- Free Prior and Informed Consent
- Accompaniment and Affirmation
- Role of Diaspora Communities





**PACIFIC AUSTRALIA LABOUR  
MOBILITY (PALM) SCHEME**  
Seasonal Worker and Longer Term

# Concern about Extractive Nature of PALM

08 May 2024

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

## The dark side of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme



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Posted by Griffith Asia Institute | Published 23 May 2024

### Labour schemes, remittances and the Pacific—what about financial capability?



## Who benefits from Australia's Pacific labour scheme?

15 February 2023 Vinil Kumar SHARE



## Updated Pacific labour hire scheme prompts concerns from industry and advocates

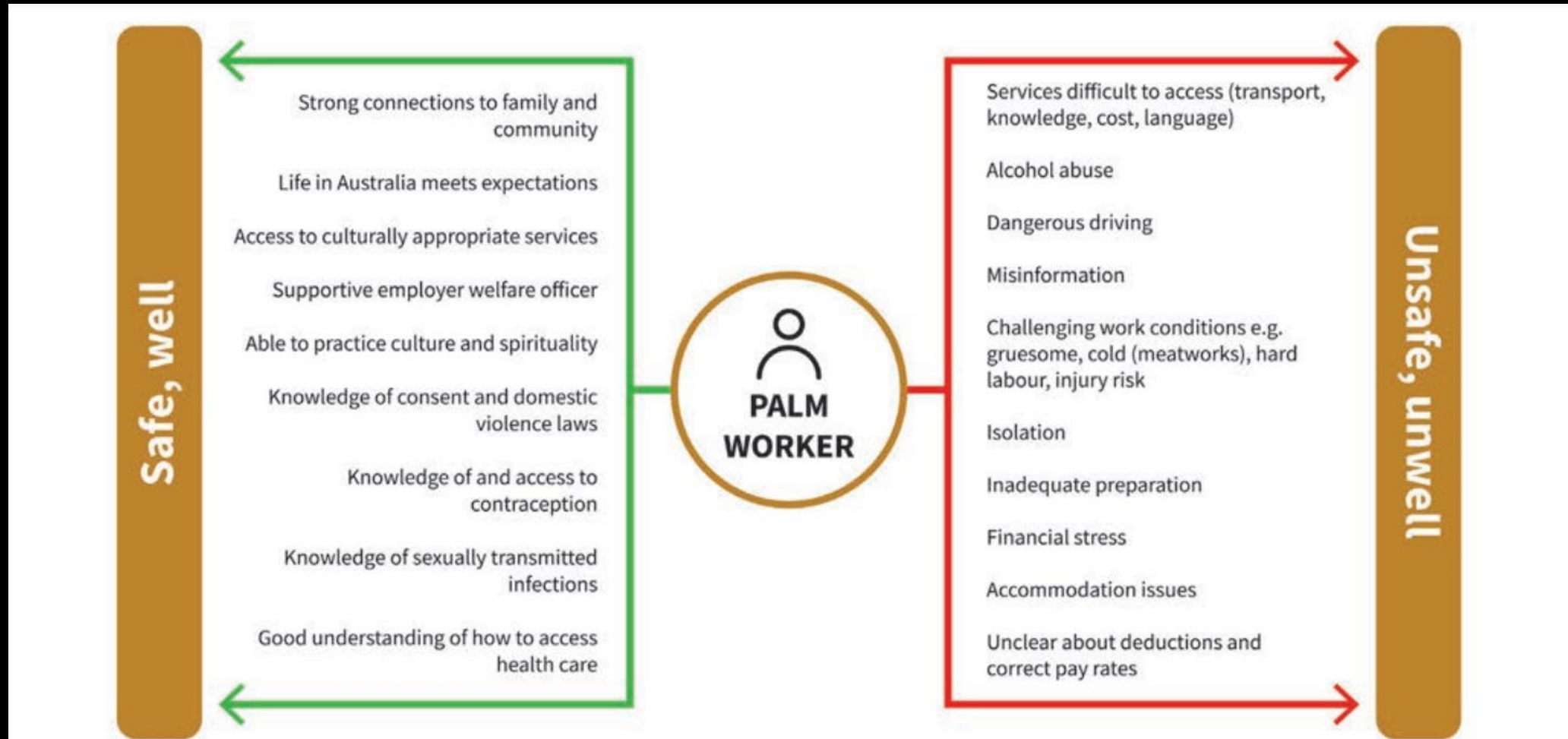
ABC Rural / By Abbey Halter

Posted Tue 16 Jan 2024 at 7:05am



# Safety and Wellbeing in Australia's Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme

- Research report by Lindy Kanan and Judy Putt (Australian National University Department of Pacific Affairs)



Source: Lindy Kanan and Judy Putt. Graphic design by Georgina Ryan.

# **Safe, Well**

- Strong connections to family and community
- Life in Australia meets expectations
- Access to culturally appropriate services
- Supportive employer welfare officer
- Able to practice culture and spirituality
- Knowledge of consent and domestic violence laws
- Knowledge of and access to contraception
- Knowledge of sexually transmitted infections
- Good understanding of how to access health care

# ***Unsafe, Unwell***

- Services difficult to access (transport, knowledge, cost, language)
- Alcohol abuse
- Dangerous driving
- Misinformation
- Challenging work conditions e.g. gruesome, cold (meatworks), hard labour, injury risk
- Isolation
- Inadequate preparation
- Financial stress
- Accommodation issues
- Unclear about deductions and correct pay rates

# COMMUNITY OF CARE

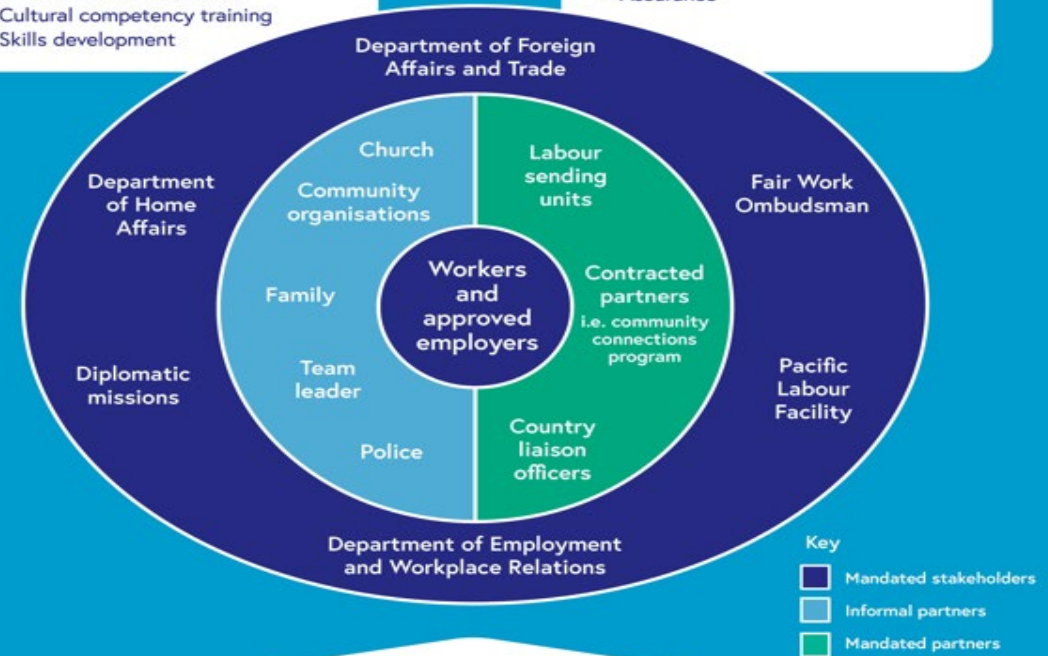
# WORKER COMMUNITY OF CARE

## PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

- Pre-departure briefing
- On-arrival briefing
- Connecting workers and AEs to local services and supports
- Information and education
- Cultural competency training
- Skills development

## RESPONSIVE ACTIONS

- 24/7 1800 support service line
- Targeted welfare interventions
- Critical incident management
- Statutory authority interventions
- Assurance



## COMMITMENTS

- Shared welfare responsibility
- Strength focused approaches
- Developing worker knowledge and self-agency
- Take a rights-based approach to worker welfare
- High quality of standards and accountability
- The inclusion and diversity of workers
- Fostering culture, connections, and relationships



# Pacific Church Engagements with PALM Workers

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **ORIENTATION AND INTERVIEW (home country)**

- The orientation is done within three days or a week by the aligned ministry were in most cases very basic information that does not clearly outline the contracts and the conditions that is expected of the recruits.
- Information shared during the orientation and what recruits read and had signed onto are often not met once arrived in their various workplaces in Australia.
- There is a general assumption that Pacific Islanders coming on this labour scheme understands and speaks English, which has often caused more problems as they come into Australia.
- Information regarding the different seasons and conditions of work in the different sectors is important to be understood from orientation stages. In some countries, workers in the tourism sector, farms, abattoirs, etc. are all given the same orientation, which according to one worker was very irrelevant.

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **ORIENTATION AND INTERVIEW (home country)**

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

- Orientations must not only include the expectations and objectives of the aligned govt. ministries but also the main employer and recruiting agent.*
- Aligned govt. ministry dealing with the labour scheme must conduct site inspections of the various conditions provided on the contracts that the employer is providing prior to the workers departing their home islands.*
- Contracts and orientations from home islands must be translated to be read and understood by recruits and the program must ensure translations support is provided once recruits arrive in Australia.*
- The church must be included in the orientation to provide pastoral support from the initial phases of the recruitment processes.*

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **WORK CONTRACTS (orientation in Australia)**

- After orientations are conducted in Australia, recruits signed either the same contracts or new contracts altogether from what they signed from home.
- Contracts would highlight conditions in terms of what the employer is providing however does not clearly articulate the arrangements of accommodations, transportations, tax, insurance processes, salary, work leave etc. that most recruits felt were unfair to what they have to endure upon arriving at their accommodation and having to negotiate with employers on other related issues.
- Work contracts are often negotiated by recruiting agents that in most cases are problematic as the employer may follow requirements and labour laws but recruiting agents often bully the system and the workers too.
- CLARITY – If deductions made by a worker is completed, should the worker now own the visa? If so, are they able to work directly with the employer and not the recruiting agent and are they eligible to find another place to work.

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **WORK CONTRACTS (orientation in Australia)**

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

- The sending country must ensure the recruiting agents are genuine and all procedures must be followed thoroughly and communicated to the workers in the presences of the aligned Govt. Ministry, church and other relevant stakeholders to ensure recruiting agents are accountable to both the employers and the workers.*
- How can sending countries work directly with employers instead of recruiting agents who often bullies the systems and workers for their own benefits?*

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **WORK CONTRACTS (orientation in Australia)**

### *RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)*

- *There is problem with the recruiting agents in all the communities that were visited. They manipulate the systems and have been unfair in the following areas:*
  - i. *Deduction of tax- Some workers do not receive their tax numbers and always get penalized when the govt. recognizes they are being paid a wage/salary without having a tax number.*
  - ii. *Deduction (Visa, Phone, Transport, Insurance) - There has been cases of the recruiting agents deducting costs that they cover when recruiting workers from visa, phone, transport and insurance –health but do not provide updates to the workers on the status of their deduction and sometimes it pressures workers to avoid accessing necessary services as they feel pressured in terms of the cost of service.*
  - iii. *When deductions are fully paid by workers, workers should be eligible to move to another sector or workplace as they now own their visa given they have fully paid the expenses off. Can the visa offered to workers be open visa but not limited to the work the recruits have signed up for?*
  - iv. *Employer and sending country must continuously monitor and evaluate the recruiting agents and conduct visitation along with the churches providing pastoral support and care to workers.*
  - v. *Leave entitlement- Workers from orientation stages to when they reach Australia must be able to understand what they are entitled to according to leave days under the visa contracts. When workers are sick, or on leave, their recruiting agents must not bully them or threaten them about returning home or deducting salary to make workers return to work. Fair treatment of workers must be paramount in all work places.*

# PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS

## HEALTH INSURANCE

- Concerns were raised on the deductions were made from the workers for their health insurance under an insurance policy that requires the workers to pay cash to access health services and later get reimbursed for the cost of these services. ■ Workers were not advised of how to access the health insurance through the app. that needs to be downloaded and in some cases workers do not receive the full reimbursement as 30% of the total cost of the health services is deducted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *The procedures of accessing health services and the reimbursement processes must be clearly articulated during the orientation to ensure workers understand how this process works and that it must highlight the importance of valuing people's lives especially in these very physical and manual labour employment.*
- *Recruiting agents and sending country must ensure support is provided to those that need medical attention.*
- *If the scheme is supporting Australia to earn 200 m/billion a year, they must consider issuing MEDICARE insurance to those recruited under this scheme as well to ensure the workers wellbeing are looked after well.*

# PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS

## ACCOMMODATION

- The arrangement of accommodation is of big concern given the location of the farms and there are limited options especially in cases for those coming to work farms and abattoirs. In some cases 3 or 5 people are sharing a room with a bathroom & toilet and kitchen facilities. In these arrangement if workers are being accommodated in the hotel, according to one of the workers in Riverdale- each of the occupant of the room pays \$210/week.
- For accommodation, the workers know there is a paid person to clean their rooms and change beddings, etc. and in most cases this paid person does not do as expected of them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Employer along with the recruiting agents must secure accommodation first prior to bringing workers across to Australia.*
- *For health and safety reasons, rooms must only be allocated to two people as most need their own privacy with proper ventilation, a space to think, to recover and re-energize and also safe for individual occupants.*
- *Workers in their orientations must be taught how to keep their accommodation clean, organizing their tool, and rooms and main a level of responsibility for themselves and others as well.*

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **WAGES/ SALARY AND TAX**

- In the contracts and also during orientation especially in Australia most are informed and that they have a starting salary which as they develop into higher levels, would be adjusted according to the level they move up to which has not happened for most of these workers.
- Complains and concerns over the notion of making money on the scheme to support individuals, families, communities when clearly after deductions what is left for workers are what they can only survive on until the next pay.
- For farm workers, there was no information regarding not working when there is bad weather system and workers do not get paid for these days. Some workers who had faced this, mentioned that despite not being paid for those weeks, the deductions continues.
- Workers upon arriving in Australia are given forms to sign which has the details of their bank accounts, tax numbers and other important deductions.
- Some workers described that they started getting paid while they have not received their tax number. Because they have not received their tax number but seen getting a salary, they are penalized and pay in one case \$400.00. The worker must not be penalized but the employer or recruiting agent as they must ensure these are also provided for to the worker.

# PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS

## WAGES/ SALARY AND TAX

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Contracts must clearly indicate these responsibility by the employer to pay the worker accordingly, which is based on the level of work they are doing. Each worker must have a folder and every new tasks and agreement must be in written forms, signed by both parties and added onto the workers folder as proof of different employer and employee.*
- *There should be a clear indication of the role and deduction of the recruiting agents and if this is best handled by the employer, the recruiting agents do not need to continue in the duration of the work.*
- *From orientation to the signing of the contracts there must be a representatives from the legal and financial institutions to provide a clear understanding of contracts along with labour laws and other laws that governs workers working under the labour scheme while the finance individual can provide guidance for workers on issues around financial policies and entitlement for workers, tax deduction and claim, deductions for rent, transport, insurance and why they must utilize these services they are deducting for, etc.*
- *The sending country and ministry must ensure contracts are followed by employers and recruiting agents which means sending country must monitor agents and have on-going support for the people sent from their island countries.*

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **COMMUNITIES UNDER THE PALM SCHEME**

- Married workers are often pressured with the expectation coming to work under the scheme that money is big and should be able to cover costs in Australia and also the responsibilities at home. The reality is not the same.
- As islanders, the conversation of trauma, stress, pressure from work and home and commitments or expectations are suppressed and often can take its toll on the workers to drinking and having affairs.
- Contracts do not recognize pacific communities and how Sunday is an important day to worship together and be with families and friends.
- Growing number of divorce cases and abortion by women in this program.

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **COMMUNITIES UNDER THE PALM SCHEME**

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

- *PALM Scheme providing family visa for those wishing to be part of this program is important and welcomed. However, there must be orientation done to couples and children and given time for those participating in this program to psychologically prepare themselves well.*
- *For those married already in the program and might not have their families joining them anytime soon, there must be a program conducted in their communities to ensure they are coping both professional and personal lives and are also able to share their problems with someone. It is important to provide a safe hub with pastors/ islanders who can provide the counselling if needed or support to those that require this services.*

# *PACIFIC CHURCHES PASTORAL VISITS*

## **COMMUNITIES UNDER THE PALM SCHEME**

### *RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)*

- As safe communities are created through the PALM Scheme, there is also a need to provide similar engagement with spouses of those in Australia back in the home islands. They must understand some of the struggles of workers in the program. If there is a case that needs to be dealt with, support hub must reach out to individuals or spouses of those affected and provide counselling or pastoral support to both parties.*
- Sunday as a day for worship and services which is common among Pacific islanders, should be considered in the different contracts and also for employers to understand when recruiting workers from the Pacific. In addition to this, there is also a request to have a service in the local language for the different communities led by ordained ministers either in Australia or those visiting from the Pacific Island countries. It is indeed a great initiative to have church leaders from the Pacific visiting workers and the diaspora community in Australia. ■ With the high number of abortion, there is a great need to include Sexual Reproductive Health and Gender program in the orientation stages and the safety hubs can continue to monitor workers when they come to Australia.*



# Pacific Labour Mobility

## Pastoral & Practical Pathways

### Training

#### Sending & Hosts

*Communities enabled to support & assist, identify potential issues, recognize and respond to red flags.*

### Prepare

#### Safety first

*Pre-departure Workers prepared to ID potential problems and seek assistance.*

### Pastoral

#### Connect to help

*While workers are overseas their families at home are supported, expectations are managed. Families know how, when and what help is available.*

### Support

#### Protect rights

*While workers are overseas their wellbeing, health, housing, rights & pastoral needs are supported by the hosting communities to reduce isolation & vulnerability.*

### Reintegration

#### Program integrity

*Debrief - check hours of work & wages, assist with superannuation, financial advice, continue study, start a business.*

# TRAINING

- Community Information Session to include presentation from Government and PALM returnees and other stakeholders.
- Those who return from the scheme must be involved to provide that information sharing to those who depart.

## **Pre-Departure - Community and Family Awareness (Talanoa) talking about:**

- Positive and negative sides of participation
- Consequences for family, e.g. separation, loneliness
- Risks – Talk about safety
- Realities of living in Australia– Day to day (remoteness)
- Financial Literacy and Numeracy: Superannuation/Pension Fund/Provident Fund, Tax, Budgets in a cash economy – Accommodation, food, transport
- Spirituality, resilience, mental health (self-care): Managing risks like alcohol abuse and gambling, Talking with couples about separation, particularly longer term (3 years with no home visits) E.g., what happens when there is a death in family while worker is in Australia

## **Arrival**

- Community Connections Awareness: Understanding support and services available, Cultural differences living in Australia (How to shop, wash, clean house (DIY living))

# PREPARE

- Recruitment: Intentional team recruitment (inclusive of church recommendation).
- Include pastoral counselling especially for married workers.
  - Can do group fellowship on long distance relationship etc.
  - Local ministers to provide information on participants' suitability
  - Maturity levels, responsibilities, work ethics
  - This is a shared responsibility between village chief, elders, pastors and families.
  - Couples' suitability to manage long-distance relationship
  - And impact on children
  - Include former PALM and RSE workers to share their knowledge and experience.

# PREPARE

- Creating advisory group in each country that consists of: Returning workers, Families, Government representative, Church leaders, Village representatives and other stakeholders.
- Recommend workers giving feedback on their experiences in PALM/RSE to the churches and communities (provide that safe space for workers)
- Capturing the experiences of former workers to inform and better prepare the new workers.
- Evaluation with all stakeholders.
- Exit strategies to be implemented.
- Approved Employers network.

# PASTORAL – Sending Country

- Create support network for wife/husband at home.
  - Fortnightly gatherings to share and learn from each other.
- Church and the village will need support and be equipped with appropriate information.
- Create family information sessions to them of the challenges of working abroad and the reality.
  - Realistic expectations
  - Sending country helpline
  - Talk to LSU to provide support line for families left behind

# PASTORAL – Sending Country

- Managing Expectations for:
  - Worker before they leave
  - Families to be part of training
  - On-going pastoral care for families through men's or women's fellowships.

# PASTORAL – Receiving Country

- Community Connections (RLOs) have a *registry* of churches and Diaspora communities respond to workers and employers when requested.

# SUPPORT

- Empowering and strengthening diaspora communities: Raise understanding of Diaspora communities and local churches about services available to give support to workers.
- Develop support groups for workers:
  - Maintain team approach – Law Enforcement (Australia)
- Partnership between the diaspora community and the local community:
  - Local church, employer, sports club, etc
  - Culturally appropriate services, medical, mental health, legal aid
  - Employer and Regional Liaison officers (Community Connections), CLO (from sending country) for each state (also include/involve church leaders in Australia), Australian government agencies (Fair Work, DEWR)
- Community connection/cultural awareness for local police, local health, local council etc

# REINTEGRATION

- There is a lot of negativity when they come back to their own countries.
- They do not feel like they belong to their own societies or communities.
- It is hard for the seasonal workers to adapt back to their communities when they come back to their own countries.
- Restoration, Reconciliation, Reconnection, Repentance, Resolution, Reengagement  
- Utilising family and church structures to assist in family reconciliation and healing.
- Change in social status which impacts behaviour
- Healing from broken relationships i.e., abortion, marriage issues...
- Returning workers can start businesses with help from AE + skills training while in Australia/New Zealand.
- Returning workers sharing their experiences with new workers. To be done in a controlled, safe space.