

BACKGROUNDER

A new publication:

Community-Led, Human Rights-Based Solutions to Climate-forced Displacement A Guide for Funders

As a 77-year old human rights agency based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) has provided funding, advocacy, research and other support to grassroots organizations using an “eye-to-eye partnership model.”

UUSC has a long history of addressing environmental justice issues and in 2016 turned its focus to climate-forced displacement given the human rights implications and lack of international attention on the issue. In addition to funding frontline communities directly affected by climate change in Alaska and the Pacific Islands, UUSC is organizing a first-of-its kind convening of indigenous partners and stakeholders from around the world in Anchorage, Alaska, in September 2018 to advance a collective strategy for advocacy and action.

UUSC is now urging more funders to engage directly on the issue of climate-forced displacement and to incorporate human rights-based approaches to amplify the voices, advocacy and solutions of frontline communities.

The grassroots organizations that UUSC partners with have been planning, advocating and adapting to extreme climate impacts for decades. Still, their efforts are chronically underfunded and they struggle to have their say in decision-making forums, often being overshadowed by researchers and analysts from major international agencies.

This guide emerged from a year of scoping research, site visits and many conversations with grassroots leaders, funders and other stakeholders and is designed to be an educational tool for funders interested in supporting community-led, human rights-based solutions to climate-forced displacement.

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CORPORATE PROFILE

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE

Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a human rights organization working within the United States and worldwide to advance human rights through grassroots collaboration. UUSC fosters social justice and works toward a world free of oppression.

The organization began its work in 1939 when Rev. Waitstill and Martha Sharp took the extraordinary risk of traveling to Europe to help refugees escape Nazi persecution.

Promoting economic justice, bolstering environmental justice and protecting rights at risk, UUSC's innovative approach and measurable impact are grounded in the belief that all people have inherent power, dignity and rights.

UUSC works anywhere rights are threatened by natural and human-caused disasters, armed conflicts, crimes against humanity, forced migration and systematic injustice.

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PROFILE: EXPERT VOICES

Salote Soqo
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Senior Program Leader
Environmental Justice and Climate Action Program

As senior program leader of UUSC's environmental justice and climate action program, Salote Soqo manages the organization's human rights portfolio focused on advancing climate justice for grassroots communities.

Before joining UUSC, Soqo worked as the San Francisco Bay Area's regional program coordinator in water equity and climate justice for the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water (EJCW) and served as the climate and carbon management fellow with EJCW and the Carbon Cycle Institute (CCI). Prior to her work with EJCW and CCI, Soqo worked as an environmental consultant in her home island nation of Fiji.

Soqo leads UUSC's programmatic work focused on protecting the rights of communities threatened by climate-forced displacement in coastal Alaska and islands in the Pacific.

Soqo attained her undergraduate degrees from the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand and the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. She also holds a master's degree in environmental management from the University of San Francisco.

Amber Moulton, PhD
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Researcher and Lead Author,
Community-Led, Human Rights-Based Solutions to Climate-forced Displacement—A Guide for Funders

Amber Moulton leads UUSC's emergent research program, designed to raise awareness of critical human rights issues and help advance UUSC's advocacy work. As researcher in UUSC's Programs, Advocacy and Action Department, Moulton draws on a wealth of experience in legal and academic research, teaching and writing.

Since joining UUSC, Moulton has provided extensive research on climate-forced displacement, the trauma associated with detention of immigrant families, the human right to water and water affordability in the U.S., workers' rights violations in U.S. poultry plants and the Central American Migrants in-country refugee processing program.

Before joining UUSC, she taught at Harvard University, Northeastern University and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Her professional research experience includes work at History Associates Incorporated, Rockville, Maryland, where she investigated a range of social and environmental issues.

Moulton has a doctorate in African American Studies from Harvard University and has published research on several social protest movements.

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FACTS

Climate-forced Displacement is an urgent issue.

- 24.2 million people were newly displaced by natural disasters in 2016. That does not count displacements by slow-onset events like sea-level rise or permafrost melt.
- Recent studies suggest that, if greenhouse gas emissions continue at current rates, Antarctic glacial melt could raise global sea levels three feet by 2100.¹
- At the 2017 Conference of Parties in Bonn, Germany, climate scientists reported that the global temperature has risen 1.1 degrees Celsius, dangerously close to the 1.5-degree rise that will lead to irreversible damage.
- The threat of climate-forced displacement is disproportionately acute in small developing states and indigenous communities in remote areas.

Climate-forced displacement is a human rights issue, with a wide spectrum of human rights implications for communities who are at risk.

- Key rights at risk include: right to food, water, health, housing, property, standard of living, culture and heritage, self-determination and ultimately life.
- Solutions to climate-forced displacement need to be led by affected communities. The human right to self-determination is critical to a human rights-based approach to climate-forced displacement.
- Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities in societies and solutions need to be based in rights and equity.
- Grassroots communities are currently sidelined in climate displacement decision-making forums.
- Funders can use both grantmaking and influence to bring grassroots leaders to the decision-making process.
- Currently there is scant funding (intergovernmental, bilateral or philanthropic) to community-led solutions to climate-forced displacement.
- There is no functional mechanism presently for financing the loss and damage small developing states face due to climate change.
- There is insufficient international financing:
 - 25% of international funds are designated to adaptation; 60% of bilateral funds to adaptation.
 - There is no working mechanism for community organizations to directly access international funds like the Adaptation Fund.
 - To date, there is little grantmaking dedicated to climate-forced displacement, even among human rights funders.

Large and small private foundations can play a key role.

- Both large foundations and smaller philanthropies have an important role to play, filling a void in funding and advancing a human rights-based approach to climate-forced displacement. UUSC's funder guide offers step by step recommendations for how they can:
 - Assess how climate-forced displacement relates to a current strategy or portfolio.
 - Effectively partner with grassroots communities working on issues along the climate-forced displacement spectrum.
 - Advance a human rights-based approach to climate-forced displacement.
 - Act as a bridge and network builder to amplify the voice and impact of grassroots communities.

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¹ Robert M. DeConto and David Pollard, "Contribution of Antarctica to Past and Future Sea-Level Rise," *Nature* vol. 531 (March 31, 2016): 591.

FACTS

UUSC's Environmental Justice and Climate Action Program

- The UUSC Environmental Justice and Climate Action Program is committed to advancing and protecting the rights of populations who are at risk of forced displacement, especially by slow-onset events like flooding, rising temperatures, sea-level rise and permafrost melt.
- The work centers the principle of self-determination, by prioritizing each community's rights to build protections in place and then when necessary, plan and execute their own relocation with dignity.
- Present priorities are focused on assisting indigenous populations in the South Pacific and Alaska.
- These are regions vulnerable to natural disasters and other climate impacts and where communities are particularly at risk because of their geographic isolation, high reliance on coastal resources for their livelihood and limited access to development.
- They are regions that are to date insufficiently supported by broader world body climate change funding and mitigation and adaptation collaborative solutions.

Alaska Profile

- Thirty-one Alaskan Native communities face imminent threats of displacement, while 184 are directly affected by coastal erosion.
- Three communities — Newtok, Shishmaref and Kivalina — are currently actively working to plan community relocations.
- Indigenous communities in Alaska face dire risks of displacement due to reduced Arctic sea ice, permafrost melt and sea level rise. In the last century, the Arctic has warmed twice as fast as the global average.
- Late summer sea ice has been reduced by 40% since 1979, leading to worse storm-related erosion.
- In winter 2017, the temperature in the Arctic spiked by 40 degrees Fahrenheit three times. January 2016 registered the hottest winter on record, with extreme heat anomalies, particularly in the northern hemisphere and the Arctic. The following January registered as the third hottest on record. As Robin Bronen, of UUSC grantee partner Alaska Institute for Justice puts it, "I live in Anchorage, Alaska, and we don't know if we are going to get snow this winter."²
- After visiting Alaskan Native communities, President Barack Obama proposed \$400 million in community relocation funds. Those funds were not budgeted.
- President Donald Trump has since disbanded the related Denali Commission. The commission, established by the U.S. Congress in 1998 as an independent federal agency designed to help rural Alaskans with infrastructure needs, was expanded by President Obama to play a role in assisting Alaskan Native communities adapt and respond to climate change and to assist with community relocations.
- In July 2017 Department of the Interior staffer Joel Clement came out as a whistleblower, claiming he was fired for speaking publicly on the ways climate change impacts Alaskan Native communities.
- Alaskan Native communities face an uphill battle because there is no federal agency tasked with coordinating community relocation and no legal framework to make it possible. Representatives from these communities have presented before the U.S. Congress. They have opened their homes to news media. Newtok has been actively planning relocation for thirty years. A lack of funding and government coordination still stands in their way.

UUSC's partners and support in Alaska

^o In Alaska, UUSC is supporting the Alaska Institute for Justice's (AIJ) Rights, Resilience, and Community-Led Relocation program. AIJ is working with 15 Alaska Native Tribes to develop coastal monitoring systems and advocacy strategies to enhance their ability to adapt to a radically changing environment and to ensure the protection of their human rights.

² Interview with Robin Bronen, October 27, 2017.

Pacific Islands Profile

- Climate-forced displacement is already happening in the South Pacific. The South Pacific is the world's barometer to climate change impacts due to the small sizes of its islands, their development challenges, their geographic isolation, their high reliance on their natural resources and their limited adaptive capacities.
- The region, which consists of 20 sovereign states and territories is expected to see between 665,000 to 1.7 million climate migrants by 2050 – about 20% of the region's estimated population. Most relocations are happening internally. This is not feasible in the long term for low-lying atolls such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, where people will have to leave their islands.
- In Fiji, the state has started to relocate its most vulnerable communities, with an additional 40 out of 676 threatened communities planned for relocation within the next 10 years.
- The Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea is currently relocating its 2,600 village members to mainland Bougainville as their island is no longer feasible to live in due to rising sea levels.
- Tuvalu, with a population of around 10,000 people, is hoping most of its citizens will be able to migrate to New Zealand as a last resort.
- The Solomon Islands, which consists of six major islands and 900 smaller islands, lost five of its uninhabited islands in 2016. Six other inhabited islands are experiencing loss of land due to sea level rise that has destroyed entire villages and forced people to relocate.
- Currently, planned relocations are often state-led and done without proper community consultation.
- Indigenous Pacific Islanders prefer to remain on their land. Climate change threatens their sovereignty, nationhood, culture, livelihoods and control over land and sea territories. Forced migration or resettlement is the last resort.
- Regional advocates demand that the international community enforce global mitigation plans to reduce climate impacts and also include an increase in funding and adaptation mechanisms to help Pacific islanders survive on their existing lands.
- Pacific activists are also leaders in the movement to create a robust financial mechanism for the “loss and damage” small developing states incur as a result of climate change.
- If relocation to customary land occurs, residents and advocates require the free, prior and informed consent of tribal groups. This can be contentious and arbitrary for potential host communities, particularly due to differences within tribes and state influence.

UUSC's partners and support in the Pacific

- In Papua, New Guinea, UUSC's partner has been working for the past decade to relocate households from the Carteret Islands to areas in mainland Bougainville. UUSC's support is strengthening our partner's advocacy at the local provincial and national levels to raise more awareness about their communities' experiences and needs.
- In Kiribati, UUSC partners are working to enhance dialogue about climate-forced migration in the climate change debate, while advocating for rights-based responses and the humane treatment of climate migrants. They are also working to raise awareness about the unique needs of people living with disabilities in disaster risk reduction planning and responses.
- In Palau and Micronesia, our partner is strengthening the capacity of remote rural villages to build protections against climate change hazards, to help communities self-organize and to advocate for assistance from their governments and the international community.
- In the Solomon Islands our partner aids communities in remote coastal areas who have already been impacted by the effects of climate change and rising sea levels to access safe water, build new homes and advocate for their rights.

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