

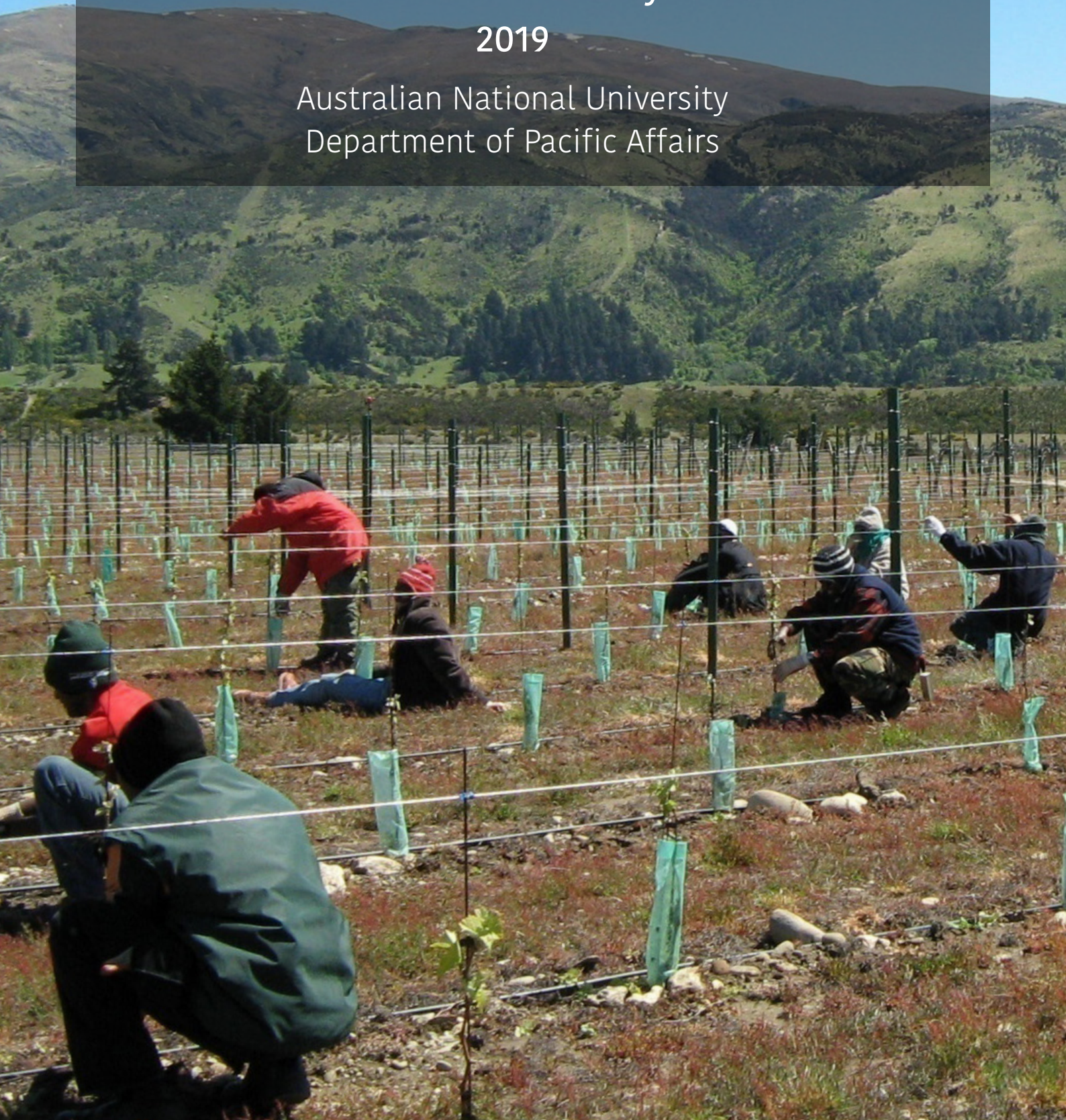
# New Zealand's Recognised Employer Scheme (RSE)

## 10 YEAR LONGITUDINAL CASE STUDY

Dr Rochelle Bailey

2019

Australian National University  
Department of Pacific Affairs







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# Executive Summary

This research stems from a 10-year longitudinal study of 22 ni-Vanuatu temporary migrant labourers participating in New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) established on 30 April 2007. The RSE scheme was a grower-initiated policy and the objectives were two-fold: to fill the chronic shortfall of available labour in the horticulture and viticulture sectors and at the same time, New Zealand (NZ) government officials promoted the RSE as a way forward for economic development in the Pacific region, via remittances sent home. With a lack of waged employment opportunities in their home countries, many families in the Pacific region perceive labour mobility opportunities as an additional source of income that can meet individual and community needs. The positive economic and social outcomes from the RSE makes it attractive for governments, industries and Pacific workers alike, and is the reason why the scheme has seen continued expansion.

The study has focused on three main areas:

- » Identifying the various social and economic impacts for employers, RSE workers, their families, workers' communities, as well as New Zealand communities in which workers reside.
- » Knowing more about the interactions between seasonal workers, their employers and local NZ communities.
- » Tracking how the program has changed and expanded over time, monitoring the challenges and strengthening the positive impacts while mitigating negative unintended consequences.

This report highlights changes, challenges, experiences and opportunities during the first 10 years of RSE and makes several recommendations on possible potential problem areas. Outcomes from the RSE have proven that the 'triple-win' argument has been successful (Gibson and McKenzie 2014). Participating in the RSE has benefited thousands of Pacific families through financial and material remittances and the scheme has aided hundreds of growers in getting their harvests completed, and for many, expanding their businesses. However, as Emeritus Professor Richard Bedford has stated on numerous occasions, this cannot be seen as 'business as usual' (Bedford et al. 2017:49). There is always potential scope for exploitation, especially within the horticulture and viticulture industries and beyond,<sup>1</sup> as discussed later.

The majority of research participants in this case study have returned to the RSE annually and continue to return with the same objectives or for the development of their original goals. Those who have exited the scheme (some removed and others by choice) state they would return if they could and usually do so for targeted motives, such as the payment of school fees. Nonetheless, due to limited placements, once workers leave the scheme it is difficult for them to be accepted back.

This report covers a number of multiple facets of labour mobility. Participation in the RSE scheme has led to a number of challenges and changes for all stakeholders including families and communities who are constantly searching for ways to improve their situation. Host communities have seen the creation of financial and economic relationships in and out of the workplace, and these have reached as far as workers' home islands. As discussed in this report, the impacts of workers being absent from their communities to participate in labour mobility has been mixed.

Overall, this report argues that the positive impacts from participation in RSE strongly outweigh the negative ones, which are often unintended consequences of labour migration. Taken into consideration in this report are the financial and social costs and risks, which are mitigated through the work of support groups in NZ and recently established support groups for workers and non-movers in Vanuatu. These consequences and impacts, both in NZ and participating countries, should be monitored on an ongoing basis. Although there are a number of lessons to be learnt and recommendations for the future, the main purpose of this report is to 'give back' to those who have participated in this study and report on what has been achieved in the first decade of the scheme.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the workers in this case study, the many RSE workers that have joined my research group since, and their families and communities in Vanuatu for their support over the past 11 years. I also extend the same to the Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) research participants. These shared experiences have been invaluable, creating new opportunities and highlighting problem areas. Through dialogue between employers and government new relationships have been forged, making the RSE the success it is today.

My gratitude also goes to the staff at Seasonal Solutions Co-operative Limited (SSCO) and GrapeVision Ltd. Without the support of you all, this research would not have occurred, or would have been severely limited. Working with you has revealed your responsibilities in the operational management of the scheme and the challenges and opportunities that employers face with the day to day processes of RSE. To the many New Zealand growers, I would like to thank for your contributions over the past 10 years, and to Horticulture New Zealand, especially Jerf Van Beek, for providing opportunities for me to present research at conferences and offering open, considerate feedback on the scheme and its impacts on businesses and industry.

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# Abbreviations Used

<b>AIP</b>	agreement in principle
<b>ANU</b>	The Australian National University
<b>AE</b>	approved employer
<b>ATR</b>	agreement to recruit
<b>CCA</b>	Cromwell College Apartments
<b>DPA</b>	Department of Pacific Affairs
<b>EFTPOS</b>	Electronic funds transfer at point of sale
<b>ESU</b>	Employment Service Unit
<b>LDC</b>	Lolihor Development Council
<b>LMAP</b>	Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program
<b>LSU</b>	Labour Sending Unit
<b>NZAID</b>	New Zealand Aid Agency
<b>NZD</b>	New Zealand dollar, currency
<b>RSE</b>	Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme
<b>RSE-SPP</b>	Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme – Strengthening Partnership Program
<b>SDA</b>	Seventh-day Adventist
<b>SSCO</b>	Seasonal Solutions Cooperative Limited
<b>SSGM</b>	State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program
<b>SSWFP</b>	Strengthening Seasonal Workers Family Program
<b>SWP</b>	Australia's Seasonal Worker Program
<b>USP</b>	University of the South Pacific
<b>VSA</b>	Volunteer Services Abroad (New Zealand)
<b>VUV</b>	Ni-Vanuatu Vatu, currency
<b>WB</b>	World Bank

# Introduction

*‘Migration policies are bound to fail if they do not consider the social dynamics and the human side of migration’*

(Castles and Ozkul, 2014:28)

In 2005, industry growth and the reduction of available seasonal labour in New Zealand’s horticulture and viticulture industries led to a collaboration with the government and the formation of a seasonal labour strategy for the future. As a result, in 2007 the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) was launched (Bailey 2009; Bedford 2013; Ramasamy et al. 2008). The RSE scheme was a grower-initiated policy to provide New Zealand growers with reliable labour in the horticulture and viticulture sectors. At the same time, New Zealand government officials promoted the RSE as a way forward for economic development in the Pacific region, via remittances sent home. Therefore, the objectives of this policy were twofold: first, to fill labour gaps of the horticulture and viticulture industries and second, to promote economic development in Pacific Island states by prioritising workers from the region.

Part 1 of this report begins with a brief overview of the RSE policy and modifications, as well as changes undertaken by the Vanuatu government in its participation in the scheme. It is worth noting the warning given by Bedford and colleagues, who state that ‘temporary labour migration programmes can be successful if they are carefully managed and monitored and if there is effective cooperation between sending and receiving countries’ (2017:39). This section is followed by Part 2, an introduction to the research, the recruitment stories of workers, details on their opportunities to participate, and aspects of their employment contracts. Highlighted is the pastoral care policy that is constantly under negotiation. The largest cost for workers is accommodation in New Zealand, however the report also examines accommodation in Vanuatu for transiting workers, as this cost is also not only onerous not only for workers but often the families that they rely on for accommodation. It also discusses other wrap-around services associated with RSE and the concerns academics have brought forward as an area needing monitoring (see Bailey 2014a; Bedford 2013; Underhill-Sem and Masters 2017).

Recruitment practices for seasonal worker programs can be contentious. At Australia’s Labour Mobility Assistance Reference Group meeting in Melbourne in 2017, Richard Bedford discussed the pros and cons of the different recruitment models and the preferences of Pacific countries. A year later, during a panel session at the Department of Pacific Affairs conference in September 2018, *The State of the Pacific*, academic Stephen Howes highlighted that one model was not necessarily preferable over the other, with mixed modelling looking more advantageous for employers. This paper is limited to the examination of recruitment practices and changes in this particular case study and specifically in Vanuatu. Initial recruitment preferences excluded female workers; the response to this by various women in Vanuatu, community leaders, governments, and current female RSE workers will be discussed.

Following the section on recruitment, Part 3 of this report brings in the stories of long-term workers and various aspects of working in the RSE, while Part 4 deals with workers who have exited the scheme and conversations with spouses and people who form community support networks. Research participants in this study stress the importance of access to education through RSE, therefore included is a section discussing educational opportunities (both in Vanuatu and in New Zealand) arising from participation in RSE for seasonal workers and their families.

Although initially hesitant in regards to Pacific labourers arriving in their towns, host communities have found that RSE workers have made positive impacts, both financially and socially. Many have established relationships, bringing about community to community links, most notable both in Australia and NZ after Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu in 2015. Following this, Part 4 also includes a discussion of reintegration experienced by workers, families and communities. It investigates the difficulties in implementing reintegration programs, the progress made so far and emphasises the need to have wider discussions with workers and identify their requirements. This section includes an examination of the plans and investments of long-term workers as their careers in RSE come to an end.

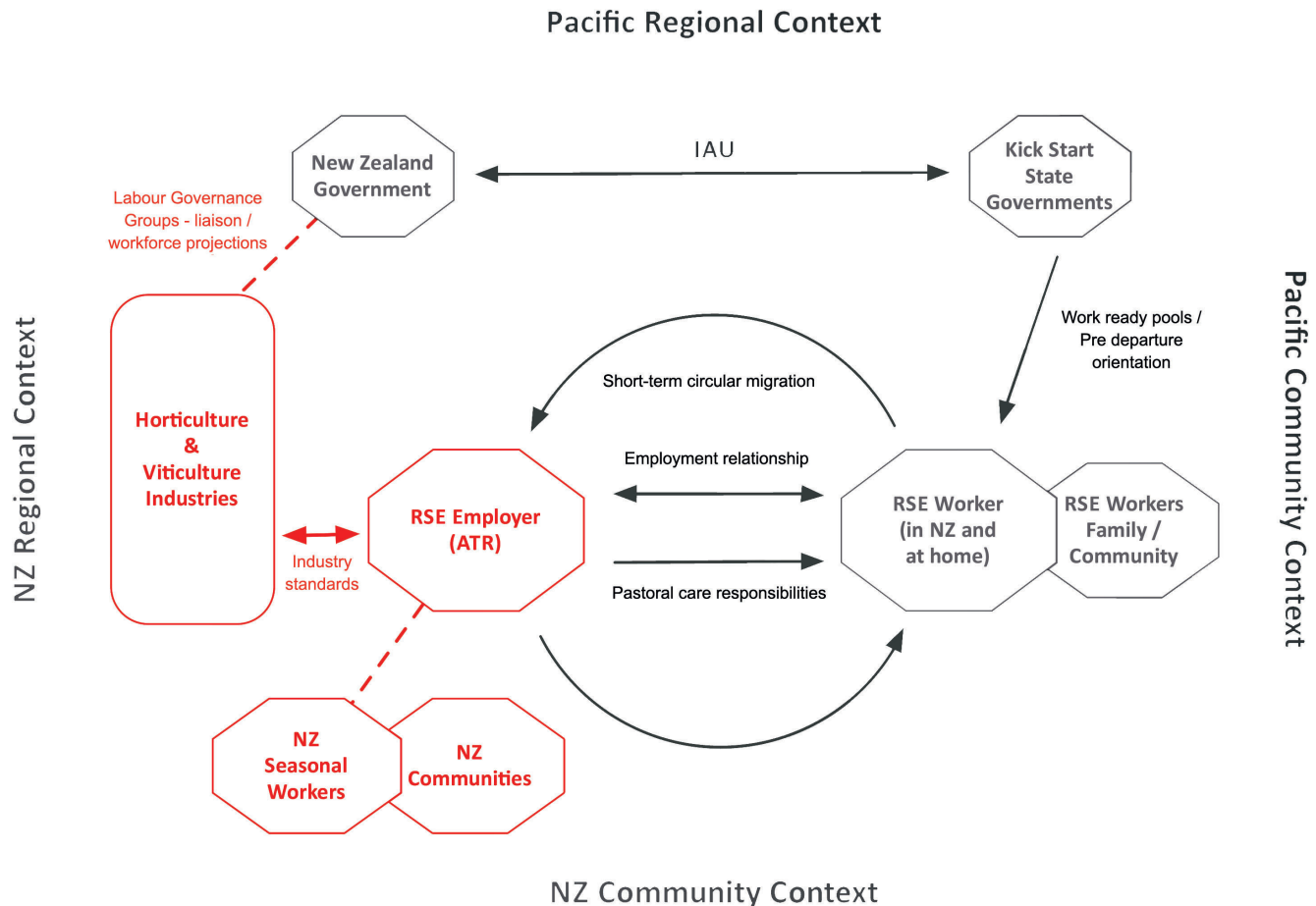
Many RSE workers have been temporary residents longer than permanent local residents in some New Zealand communities. For example, many workers have resided in their host communities for up to seven months per year over a 10 year period, spending more time in New Zealand than in Vanuatu. Therefore there is a question of how RSE workers are seen in the New Zealand landscape and just as importantly how they see themselves.

The closing section of this report sums up lessons that have occurred so far and makes recommendations which should prove useful in the years to come.



# Part 1: An Overview of the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE)

**Figure 1: The New Zealand Employer subsystem**



Source: Bedford, C. (2013:140)

As shown in Figure 1, the RSE scheme is a complex web of relationships and mechanisms. Dr Charlotte Bedford's (2013) PhD thesis examines these systems and processes thoroughly. The system generally works well, with constant dialogue between the various stakeholders such as government departments, academics, media and various community groups, local councils, the industries, employers and seasonal workers themselves, making this a well-managed labour scheme.

In fact, many academics see well-managed labour mobility schemes as a triple win: for employers, governments and workers (Bailey 2013; Bedford et al 2017; Castles and Ozkul 2014; Ramasamy et al. 2008). Many intended and unintended consequences have occurred over the past 10 years and every year there is something new to be considered. Significant changes have occurred in policy delivery since 2007. This report examines why and how they were taken up. In 2007, the RSE was limited to a cap of 5000 participants and at the time of writing this report in 2019 the cap sits at 12,850. To sustain the continued growth of the scheme, new initiatives to mitigate any potential negative outcomes should be sought, and it is imperative to find ways to continue maximising the benefits for all stakeholders. This report discusses the various stakeholders of the RSE and also the 'wrap around' service providers (NZIPR, 2017:63) such as the accommodation hosts, transportation providers and other service providers who benefit from the supply of international labour. Some of these have been widely criticized for charging excessively and for the potential for exploitation has been noted (Bailey 2014b; Bedford 2013; Bedford et al 2017; Rockwell 2014).

## Entering the RSE

### Eligibility of Workers

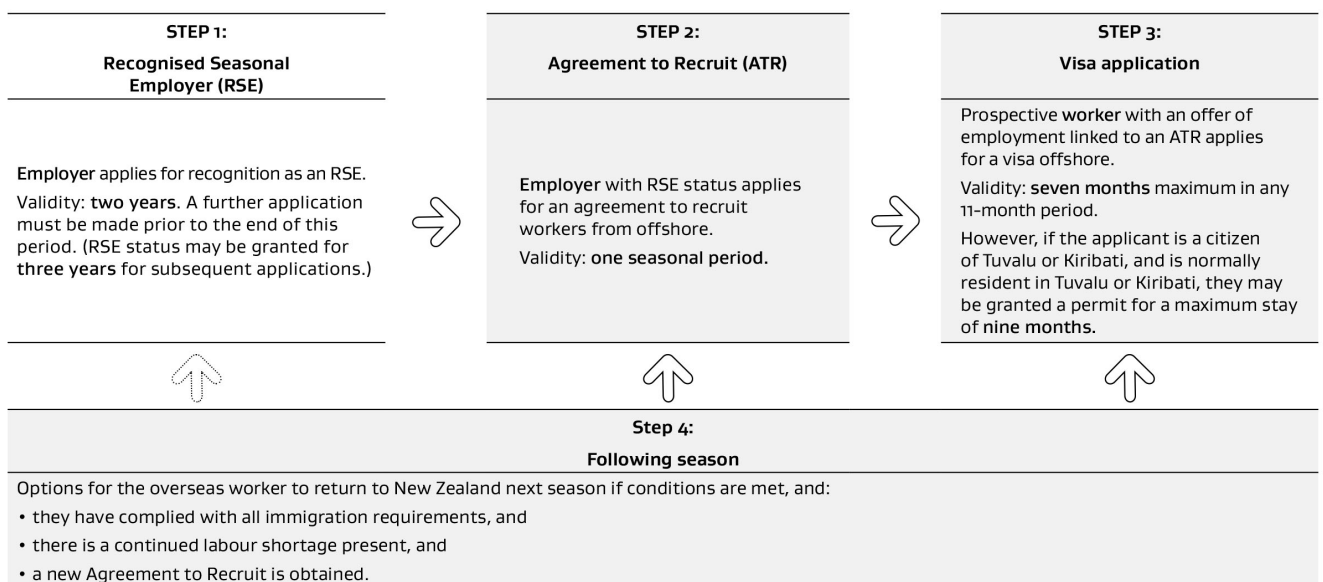
Citizens from all Pacific Islands Forum countries are eligible to participate in the RSE. They must be over the age of 18 and are allowed limited purpose visas up to seven months within an 11 month period, with the exceptions being Kiribati and Tuvalu (nine months) due to the extra distance and costs involved. Workers from other countries are accepted through an initial agreement with employers who had pre-existing recruitment arrangements, predominantly in Asian source countries (See Bailey 2009; Bedford 2013). Potential workers must have good health, undertake mandatory immigration medical examinations that include an x-ray to check for signs of tuberculosis (biennially), and have medical insurance, good character (usually proven with police checks, a letter of recommendation from a chief, family member or pastor) and a job offer (Bailey 2014b).<sup>2</sup>

### Eligibility of Employers

Employers in this study discussed the burdensome red tape applying for Approved Employer (AE) status (Bailey 2009). Prior to becoming accredited, a prospective employer must provide evidence showing that they are in a sound financial position, have good human resources practices, are committed to training and employing New Zealanders (a key factor of the RSE scheme is that it prioritises New Zealanders – see Bailey 2009; Bedford 2013), and have evidence of good workplace practices.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 shows the steps for potential employers, from accreditation to engaging workers in successive seasons.

**Figure 2: Accreditation to Successive Seasons<sup>4</sup>**

#### RSE instructions process



Source: Immigration New Zealand. Reproduced with Permission

After acquiring approved employer status, employers must apply for an agreement to recruit offshore and then offer prospective workers employment contracts. If compliant with the RSE, they are eligible to recruit in successive seasons.

### Pastoral Care

Providing adequate pastoral care is a critical feature of New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. This is not an expectation of employers with other forms of labour. The experiences employers and seasonal workers

have with pastoral care requirements and expectations inform their ongoing participation within, and the success of, these schemes. Both positive and negative experiences are often discussed when workers return home (and not necessarily when still abroad), thus affecting uptakes of future participants from sending countries (see Bailey 2009; Basok 2002). Both RSE and SWP have been criticised for allowing employers to neglect their pastoral care duties. Addressing problems associated with pastoral care is critical for policy success.

Expensive pastoral care requirements can impact on an employer's decision to participate, and undelivered pastoral care often results in unwanted negative media attention and non-returning workers, all of which have serious policy implications. Furthermore, employers who do not meet the required pastoral care obligations face the possibility of losing their status as an RSE employer.

## The Pastoral Care Policy

Below are the listed pastoral care requirements of approved employers. It is extremely important for policymakers to ensure that these aspects of the policy are not neglected.

*Employers will also have to show us that they will provide the following to ensure overseas workers are well looked after (we call this 'pastoral care'). This will include evidence of:*

- » transportation to and from the port of arrival and departure
- » an induction programme
- » suitable accommodation
- » transportation to and from the worksite(s)
- » access to acceptable medical insurance
- » access to personal banking
- » personal protective equipment
- » onsite facilities (toilets, hand washing, first aid, shelter, fresh drinking water)
- » necessary language translation (e.g. for health and safety purposes), and
- » the opportunity for recreation and religious observance.<sup>5</sup>

Only RSE workers have this level of care, whereas workers on working holiday visas, backpackers and local workers do not access this direct well-being approach. During the World Bank pilot seasonal worker project (see Bailey 2009) initiated prior to the establishment of RSE, former chief executive officer of SSCO Craig Howard spent most of his time driving around the region checking the well-being of ni-Vanuatu workers. At the growers' meeting in 2007, he stated that due to the time and the size of the project, it would not be feasible to repeat this, and that accommodation hosts and supervisors would need to fulfil this role. This was due to the pilot project consisting of only 45 workers, whereas in 2007, SSCO had 232 workers. Nonetheless, SSCO still managed pastoral care delivery to workers, and Howard visited the workers on numerous occasions with their payslips and provided advice and explanations in regards to New Zealand's systems such as banking, employment, tax and issues relating to workers' diets and health.

For employers, in the first instance it does not appear advantageous to participate in RSE given the various pastoral care obligations, which are not required for other seasonal workers. Nonetheless, 96% of participants in the RSE Monitoring-2014 Employers Survey Working Report stated that the benefits outweighed the scheme's costs (Research New Zealand 2014). Retaining experienced workers with similar cultural backgrounds not only provides employers with a pool of readily trained labourers, but also aids in the delivery of pastoral care. Ineffective provision of pastoral care can result in poor health, productivity and participation outcomes. Continuous monitoring and facilitation of pastoral care policy requirements is essential for the ongoing viability and reputation of labour schemes.



## RSE Changes

### Flat Tax-Rate

The New Zealand tax system was a new phenomenon for ni-Vanuatu, who at the time of this initial study did not have experience of a personal income taxation system, as it did not exist in Vanuatu at the time. Therefore comments made by workers to their employers, such as 'this is my payslip Craig, see this thing called tax, I don't want to pay it anymore',<sup>6</sup> should not be surprising. Nearing the end of the first season in 2007/8, tax returns were due and this was reasonably stressful for workers. Some had experienced a tax return from the pilot project and were perplexed by the taxation system and how to submit their forms, relying heavily on their employer. This was also exhausting on the company when it came to filing tax returns for over 200 seasonal workers. This is something that they had no responsibility for with other forms of labour. However, in the first season they were responsible for submitting tax returns for 232 ni-Vanuatu workers. It was called 'a nightmare' for the company, requiring many extra hours of manpower from office staff. Therefore, it is understandable that these industries lobbied for a flat tax rate, which was also beneficial for RSE workers to help them save more of their incomes.

Changes to taxation practices for the seasonal workers program were welcomed by workers and employers alike. The flat rate introduced in 2008 dropped to 15% to allow workers to save more and this was reduced further in April 2011 to 10.5%.<sup>7</sup>

### Agreement to Recruit (ATR)

The most significant change to RSE was the joint agreement to recruit (ATR) system in 2009. Prior to the joint ATR system, a single approved employer was responsible for the recruitment and transport costs for their RSE workers, as well as providing guaranteed hours of work. For smaller enterprises, these costs and minimum guarantees of work made participation in the scheme difficult, particularly as employers without work were not allowed to place their RSE workers in other temporary employment (Bailey 2009). As stated on page three of New Zealand Immigration's Application for an Agreement to Recruit:

*The minimum remuneration requirement for employment agreements that are for a period of six weeks or longer, is the greater of the following amounts: payment for 240 hours at the 'per hour' rate, regardless of the actual availability of work, or payment for an average of 30 hours per week at the 'per hour' rate for the period worked. The minimum remuneration requirement for employment agreements that are for a period of less than six weeks, is payment for 40 hours per week, at the 'per hour' rate, over the period of work offered in the employment agreement, regardless of the actual availability of work.<sup>8</sup>*

The joint ATR enables RSE-approved employers to share workers through the period of their visas. They offer employers more flexibility to respond to demand for labour and to seasonal fluctuations in crop production, and they enable employers to share workers and the associated costs.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this change, when employers could not provide work for RSE workers, they could not place them anywhere else.

As Bailey and Bedford (2018) highlighted, approved employers submit joint ATRs to Immigration New Zealand, specifying the number of workers and periods of work on both ATRs. RSE workers enter into individual employment contracts with each employer. Costs of recruitment and transport of RSE workers to and from New Zealand are generally shared by the employers, and each employer is responsible for the workers' pastoral care during the employment period. Once approved, workers are allocated to the employer who requires their labour first. Joint ATRs have to fit into both national and regional allocations for labour, as the worker is counted as one in each region in which they are employed.

Tipples and Rawlinson (2014) argued that sharing ATRs increased numbers of RSE workers, demonstrating that it provided smaller businesses with the opportunity to participate in the RSE, whereas previously under the joint ATR, a single approved employer had to provide for all of the costs and guaranteed hours for RSE workers. This was difficult for smaller industry operations (Bailey 2009). 'Joint ATRs are good for employers who get to share some of the costs,

like half the return airfares, and they're good for workers because they get longer time in New Zealand to earn more money'<sup>10</sup>. The sharing of workers is beneficial when one type of crop ends with one employer and another employer is experiencing a crop entering a full harvest. From this case study, an example is that after workers put nets on the vineyards prior to harvest, they then often work for other farmers picking cherries for the next few months until returning at harvest time.

Just as joint ATRs are beneficial for employers, for RSE workers they prevent the likelihood of periods of downtime during the season that can occur due to weather or crop conditions, when workers are without work. Periods of downtime can cause significant stress as workers still have financial obligations, such as accommodation, food and travel expenses, insurance, and family commitments to pay for, even though they are not earning any money (Bailey and Bedford 2018).

Amongst an array of changes and undertakings to improve the RSE, there are two Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) initiatives that are significant additions. The first is the RSE-SPP Strengthening Pacific Partnership initiative – funded by MFAT and managed by Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) – which assists participating Pacific governments. The second is the training program Vakameasina, delivered by Fruition Horticulture and supported by MFAT, providing upskilling programs for workers.

### **Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme – Strengthening Partnership Program (RSE-SPP)**

The RSE-SPP has been instrumental in building and strengthening relationships with Pacific Island labour-sending countries. As Charlotte Bedford states, 'it was implemented in 2009, [and] has formed a core component of the Department's activities' (2013:191).<sup>11</sup> The RSE-SPP has also undergone a series of self-evaluations.

The 2016 evaluation outlined the current goals of RSE-SPP to be:

1. Strengthen Pacific Island country (PIC) capacity to administer the RSE and wider labour export activities;
2. Scope in-country opportunities for horticulture skills development;
3. Improve PIC process for wider export
4. Assess the impact of RSE in the Pacific; and

Facilitate opportunities for labour mobility in the fisheries and Canterbury trades.<sup>12</sup>

Analysing these objectives, it is clear that RSE-SPP is constantly reflecting on the needs of Pacific countries and future employment opportunities in New Zealand. Personal conversations with Pacific labour sending unit representatives reflect the value of the work done by RSE-SPP and highlight the positive results from this initiative. Furthermore, the RSE-SPP team has established good relationships with New Zealand employers, improving links – links between employers and the New Zealand government, and those between employers and Pacific labour sending governments – which are essential.

### **Vakameasina**

In 2009, New Zealand introduced the RSE pilot training programme, which ran between 2009 and 2011 (Roorda 2011). This was replaced by the current Vakameasina programme, which is delivered by Fruition Horticulture. Vakameasina provides online and in-person training programs to assist RSE workers in developing increased literacy in areas such as English language, financial and computer literacy, as well as many other courses that are discussed later in this report. These courses are designed with dual goals in mind: that they will not only assist workers with dealing with life in New Zealand, but they also contribute to workers acquiring new skills to be taken home, with the aim of contributing to development in their home country.

## Significant Changes in Vanuatu

The three significant changes that the Vanuatu Labour Department introduced and enforced in relation to seasonal workers were as follows: 1. the introduction of the Seasonal Employment Act 2007 (Act No.23 of 2007); 2. a complete alcohol ban in 2009 for all RSE workers and extended to SWP workers, and 3. the increased use of private sector agents for recruitment. In relation to the third change, the Seasonal Employment Act 2007 'relates to the seasonal employment of certain persons outside of Vanuatu and for related purposes' (2007:3). Part 6 (5) of the Act states: 'It is a condition of a license that the licensee must not charge a person for any services provided by the licensee to the person to obtain seasonal employment for the person' (2007:5). This condition was based on analysis of other international labour schemes and the potential for exploitation of workers. Driven by the fact that private sector recruitment agents wish to charge workers a fee, this particular section of the Act is currently being debated among various stakeholders in Vanuatu. Various recruitment methods and issues are discussed further in the report (see *Changes and challenges in recruitment p. 26*). This condition of the Act also reflects the bilateral agreements that Vanuatu shares with New Zealand and Australia.

The alcohol ban was established for two main reasons. Firstly, the influence of alcohol had been noted in the past as a major factor in any trouble that employers and pastoral care hosts had to deal with, therefore it was introduced to assist in preventing any future trouble. Secondly, the ban was seen as a selling point by the former Vanuatu labour commissioner, as it promoted Vanuatu as being the only Pacific country to do so, thus giving an image of an alcohol- and trouble-free workforce. The alcohol ban is difficult for employers and pastoral care hosts to enforce in New Zealand, as the drinking of alcohol by ni-Vanuatu while placed in New Zealand is not against any of the country's domestic laws, unless those workers are under age (which should not occur, as all RSE workers are required to be over the age of 18). Although employers in this case study understand Vanuatu's position on the issue, it is difficult for them to enforce it in practice. Reports on workers drinking while in New Zealand have more impact within Vanuatu and there have been reports that workers use this against each other in order to remove a worker and make a place in the scheme for relatives and friends (Bailey 2014).

Although not resulting in any changes to policy yet, in March 2018, Vanuatu hosted its first Labour Mobility Summit in response to the increasing numbers of workers going to Australia and New Zealand. An outcome of that summit was a call for a National Labour Mobility Policy, which is a timely and innovative step that the current government is taking.

## Part 2: The Research and Recruitment Stories

### Background to the Research

This project was initially undertaken in 2007 as part of a master's project at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand where the objectives were to look at the experiences of workers, employers and communities in Central Otago involved in New Zealand's RSE scheme. The research has been ongoing with regular field site visits since then. The initial master's thesis argued that the RSE scheme had successfully met its core objectives of providing labour for the horticulture and viticulture industries with a new, reliable, compliant, (and at the time of writing) immobile labour force that could not change employers or locations, which was unlike any other labour source in New Zealand. Although it noted the economic development impacts that workers provided within the local communities in New Zealand, it was limited in its scope in assessing any development impacts for the workers' communities in Vanuatu.

After presenting findings of the initial master's research to the workers from Lolihor communities in North Ambrym in Vanuatu, an invitation was made to conduct further research of the social impacts on the communities that sent workers to New Zealand. This was completed in the form of a PhD at the University of Otago, New Zealand. This research not only examined the ongoing participation of the workers from the initial study, but also the impacts on their families and communities, mainly on Ambrym Island and Efate.

That research opened up previously unexplored areas of discussion in regards to the RSE, especially about how income from the scheme is recirculated within communities and among those who do not participate in seasonal worker programs. It highlighted challenges of participation and the cultural, economic, political and social intended and unintended consequences of labour mobility among communities in New Zealand and Vanuatu.

This research has been ongoing through work at the Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA), alongside research on participants in Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) (some of whom are children or family members of these RSE participants and various government officials involved). In December 2017 and January 2018, when the most recent in-depth research was conducted with the longitudinal study workers, nine were in New Zealand, one in Australia's SWP and the other 10 in various locations in Vanuatu. Due to my ongoing contact with the workers over the 11-year period, I was successful in conducting interviews with all but two workers. Even then, due to connections with their families, I was also able to gather information of their whereabouts and their current stories of the remaining two workers.

Of the nine men still working in New Zealand, three participated in the World Bank pilot project prior to the launch of the RSE and have not had a break (that is, they have worked every year in RSE for approximately seven months of the year). One of them is no longer on an RSE visa but as of October 2018 found a pathway to become a permanent resident in New Zealand. Five have participated every year since 2007 and one took a two-year break for family reasons.

The remaining eleven seasonal workers, not in NZ at the time of the last formal study, have participated on and off in the RSE, but as reported elsewhere, due to the high demand for potential recruits and high expectations of employers for workers to be loyal to them, it is difficult to find a position back into the seasonal workers program after a break (Bailey 2014b). However, employers in this research have shown they are accommodating of the workers to have a break, and have allowed them to return when positions become available (see Bailey 2014b).

The majority of this research has highlighted how labour mobility policies affect the everyday experience of people working – and indeed living – in these programs. The research was a combination of participation observation, formal and informal interviews and the documentation of various changes, challenges and opportunities. The information gained can help support these types of labour mobility programs in the future.

This report is based on a case study of 22 men, of which 20 have been involved in a 10-year longitudinal research project since October 2007,<sup>13</sup> examining various impacts of participation in cross-border labour mobility. Prior to the RSE launching in April 2007, 45 ni-Vanuatu men were sent to New Zealand as part of World Bank's pilot project leading into the scheme that involved SSCO. Eleven of the 22 men in this research participated in the World Bank pilot project and three remain in the scheme today.

This research follows the lives of these seasonal workers, their employers, their families and their communities, whether they continued in the scheme or not. Sadly, one man passed away in Vanuatu after two seasons and another man who only participated in one season also passed away. Therefore, for the purpose of statistics the study focuses on 20 men. This report highlights experiences and discusses various impacts on people and communities while participating in the scheme. It draws on stories from a number of stakeholders, mainly recruiters, employers, workers, their families and community members from both New Zealand and Vanuatu. As many in this study are easily identifiable, I have used pseudonyms in an attempt to protect the identities of workers and their families. Other participants have expressed their willingness to be identified.

## First Recruitment Story

The World Bank Pilot project with SSCO consisted of 45 workers and eight growers. The men in this research were initially recruited by a ni-Vanuatu man, John Salong and the Lolihor Development Council, via the late Dick Eade for both the World Bank pilot study and the first season of the RSE.

### Box 1: Initial Recruitment Story

*On February 25th 2006, I conducted a symposium on the Regional Labour Scheme as part of University of the South Pacific's (USP) commitment to community education at the USP Emalus Campus in Port Vila. While I was working in Australia, I was contacted by Evelyn Ng at the World Bank Group in Sydney. She invited me to a meeting with her and Dr Manjula Luthria in Sydney on 21st November. They said they wanted 45 workers from Vanuatu to be part of a pilot to Central Otago. And they wanted the workers to be in Central Otago on December 7th 2006.*

*The timeline was really tight....The World Bank Group paid for my expenses to go to Ambrym where I held a meeting on 2nd December 2006 at the Primary School in Lolihor, North Ambrym. There we shortlisted 45 names.*

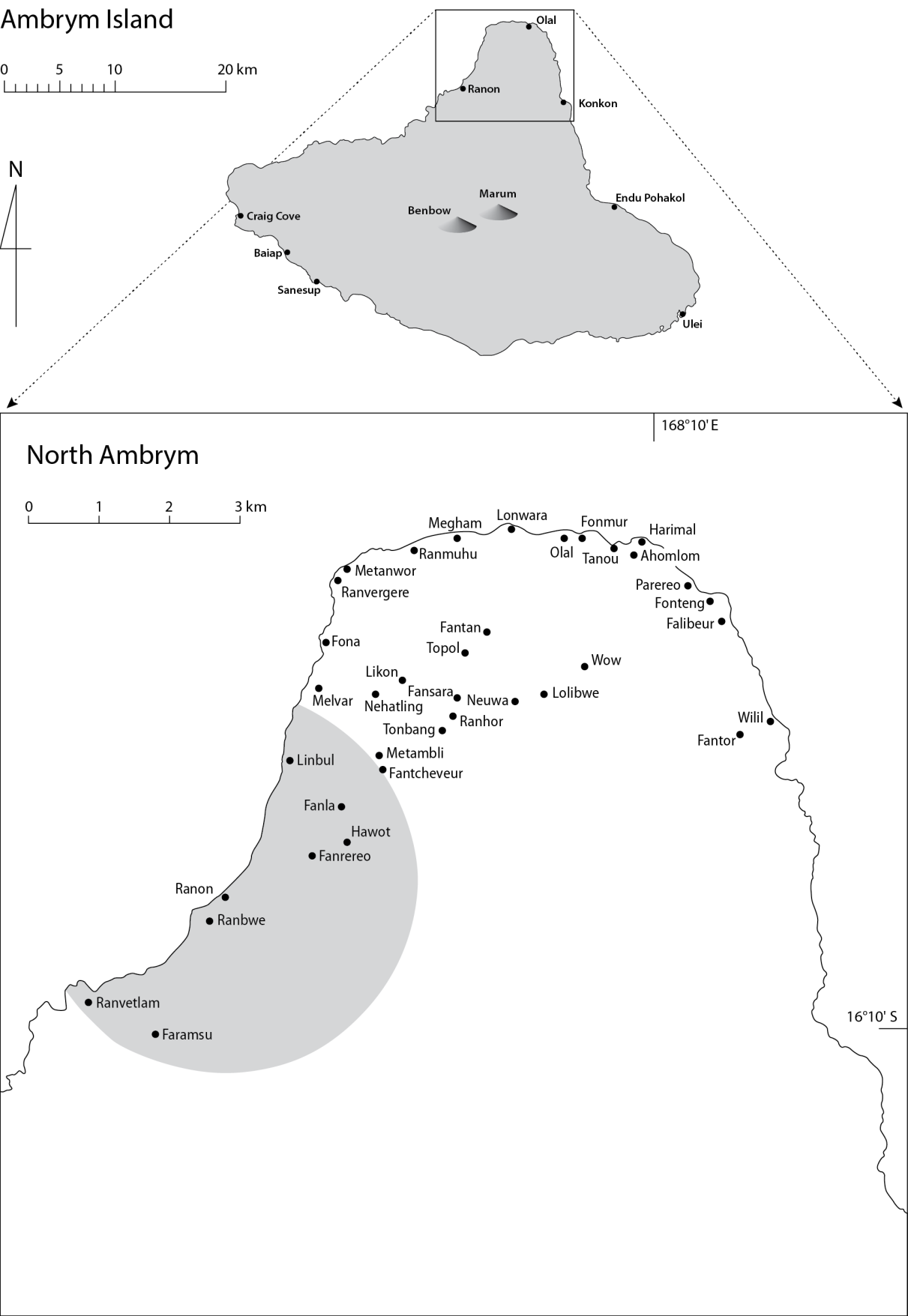
*When I came back to Vila, around 6th December 2006, I met Basil Goodman (SSCO) and Manjula Luthria. There Basil Goodman informed me that Lolihor would only send 15 instead of 45. Dick Eade of Manpower Vanuatu Associates already had an AIP (agreement in principle) with the NZ Government and therefore Seasonal Solutions and the World Bank Group in Sydney gave him 30 workers so they could use his AIP. Dick was kind enough not to exclude the Lolihor 15. So the community had selected 45 people and I further reduced the group to the first 15 based on who could move quickly. I oriented them on cross-cultural competency, OH&S and how to best represent the Lolihor Community.*

*They went to NZ late into January 2007. The World Bank Group in Sydney paid for my trip to go to NZ to meet them in Auckland and take them through to Cromwell where I settled them in.*

**John Salong (personal communication, 2007).**

The Lolihor Development Council (LDC) in North Ambrym was involved in the selection process of the Ambrymese RSE workers in 2007 and the expectations of those selected was that they would be contributing to community-led projects. The aim was strategic recruitment for development. The LDC was established in 1993 with the aid of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to encourage cooperation between villages in North Ambrym.<sup>14</sup> It includes representatives from 12 villages in the Lolihor district in North Ambrym.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 3: Lolihor Region



Source: RIO (200017:12). Reproduced with permission, Berghan Books.



The World Bank pilot project was considered successful both by growers, who were impressed by the work ethics of the ni-Vanuatu men, and by workers, due to the money and experiences gained (Bailey 2009). More importantly, all of the men who were involved in the pilot project (in this study) were asked to return for the following season to participate in the upcoming RSE scheme at the request of their contractor (Bailey 2009:55).

## RSE: The First Year

Prior to the workers' arrival, a meeting for growers, accommodation hosts and community members titled 'Discussion on the Vanuatu Workforce' was hosted by SSCO on 19 September 2007. SSCO called the arrival of the workers 'The Vanuatu Project'. The project began with 232 workers and 30 employers (Craig Howard 2007). In discussing recruitment, SSCO director Basil Goodman told the audience at the meeting 'We choose to do our recruiting outside of the residence of Port Vila. [We are] selecting Tanna and the Ambrym crew who were with us last year'.<sup>16</sup> He stressed the importance of their company's presence in Vanuatu and stated how hundreds of potential candidates were queued outside the hotel before 8am in the morning reflected how much the people of Vanuatu wanted the opportunity to work. He emphasised the financial risk that the company was undertaking in the recruitment the workers.

The financial costs of participating in the scheme were large for both the workers and the recruiting company (Bailey 2009). The company paid for workers' airfares that was later to be deducted from their wages. Fewer than 50 of the 232 recruited could afford the NZD200 visa and fewer than 25 had money to purchase food in their first week. Because of this, Goodman stated the company would assist: 'So we are loaning the prepay NZD100 on their first week wages'.

### Box 2: Recruiting Company's Story

The recruiting company hired 232 labourers from Vanuatu, therefore this was another NZD23,000 in addition to airfares, visas and various associated up-front costs. Only eight of the study participants brought NZD120 for food for their first week. These men had participated in the earlier pilot project and had possibly put this money aside as a result of their previous experiences and on the advice of their employers. The recruiting company took out a bank loan to cover all the costs. I was informed by the company that this loan was in excess of one million dollars, and was a financial risk for them. Therefore, it was in their interests that workers were satisfied with their employment, and that the men got the required working hours to repay their loans.

Both the workers and the recruiting company told me that the process of hiring consisted of a daunting amount of paperwork. However, the most difficult part of the process was the financial aspect of the scheme. Having borrowed and lent money, both groups needed the scheme to be successful, so that they could repay the debts incurred. Both groups are reliant on each other through economic interdependence. The men talk of being constrained by this debt and discussed its repayment as freedom from an economic obligation. The recruiting company needed the men to be 'good' workers and to work long hours, so that they could repay their debts, and the company could pay off their own debt incurred in bringing the men to New Zealand. (Bailey 2009: 56–57).

Most workers had repaid debts to their employers within three months of participating in the program.

At the grower's meeting, Goodman continued to highlight the importance of the project to the Vanuatu government. To illustrate this, he drew on two stories: the first on how the Vanuatu Employment Services Unit (ESU) swiftly stepped in and resolved an issue of the hospital in Vanuatu using the wrong forms for Immigration New Zealand.

The second revolved around the speedy efforts of the Vanuatu government in putting extra police on duty to ensure workers' police clearances were dealt with in a timely manner; and again he emphasised the work and influence of the Vanuatu ESU in ensuring medical and police clearances were dealt with efficiently.

**Figure 4: Arrival of Ni-Vanuatu RSE Workers 2007**



Source: P. Bumseng. Reproduced with permission.

Largely due to compliance and pastoral care measures around the RSE scheme, the new workers were accompanied by their employers from SSCO, who made the journey not only to Vanuatu to select the workers but also to greet the workers at Auckland airport and escort them to the region (see Figure 5). For most of the workers, it was their first time out of Vanuatu and many stated their first time on an aeroplane. Also accompanying the workers were two representatives from the then New Zealand Department of Labour. They arrived by bus from Christchurch at 12.30 am on 14 October 2007 on a chilly wet night, greeted by their accommodation hosts, who would also be responsible for much of the pastoral care.

### Demography of the Workers

Most of the workers were in their late twenties and early thirties. Seventeen had children and with the exception of three men, the rest were either in a de facto relationship or married. Within the first five years, many workers changed their de facto status to married, once they had the finances from their income in New Zealand to do so (Bailey 2014b). Although 21 identified as belonging to Ambrym Island, only 18 resided there at the time of initial 2007 interviews. Four lived and worked in Port Vila at the time of recruitment. All the men were noted to be of 'good standing' in their communities, being either pastors, chiefs, big-men, community leaders or were seen as potential leaders of the future.

Figure 5: Ambrym, Vanuatu to Central Otago, New Zealand



Source: Les O'Neill, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Otago. Reproduced with permission.

## The Decision to Participate

The selection of workers to participate in the RSE was based on family and communities allowing the opportunity. Families and communities cannot be left out of studies of labour migration and reasons for participation cannot be reduced to purely economic reasoning. For the workers in this study, all initial recruitment was based on *community* selection from the Lolihor Development Council. It was a decision based on strategic development goals and workers are still required to produce a letter of support from their families every year. Recruitment acceptance is not an automatic given; for example, one year a wife did not produce a letter for her husband, due to issues in how he spent his earnings the previous season, and he was not able to travel the following season. There have been numerous cases of similar stories.

Unlike other Polynesian states, for ni-Vanuatu this was their first opportunity to participate in a cross-border labour scheme. In New Zealand there are limited opportunities for ni-Vanuatu to access other visas other than the RSE. Reasons given for participation in 2007 were to pay for school fees, contribute to community development initiatives, to enable participation in *kastom* (custom) ceremonies and financing the building of a house or a business (Bailey 2009). Given these goals require ongoing financing and the impact of natural disasters in this vulnerable region (discussed further in *Natural disasters* section), these goals are still current today.

## The Employment Contract and Work Conditions

In 2007, when asking workers their knowledge of their employment contracts, it was clear that most did not understand everything that was in their contracts. The common reply was 'If we did not sign we knew we couldn't go. So we just signed and came', and although they had their contracts and expectations of life in New Zealand explained verbally by the company, the new recruits also expressed how overwhelmed they were with all the information that they had to learn inclusive of the pre-departure training sessions.<sup>17</sup>

RSE workers are the most protected workers in these industries. They not only benefit from New Zealand's employment and workplace legislation, but are also provided pastoral care, which is not compulsory for other seasonal workers such as locals, backpackers, working holiday visa holders etc. This was witnessed first-hand as the ni-Vanuatu workers were living beside a group from Taiwan. On Labour Day 2007, which was a public holiday, ni-Vanuatu workers received the day off with pay, whereas the workers from Taiwan (employed by a different company) stated they had no knowledge of the public holiday – and had also stated that their pay rate did not change for the public holiday either.

There have been times when workers have not been satisfied with particular instructions from their employers and supervisors and as much as most labour schemes keep workers compliant (Basok 2002; Bailey 2014b), workers find various ways to resist and protest work conditions until positive changes have been made (see Bailey 2009). In regards to work conditions, constant dialogue between workers, team leaders, supervisors and employers have made a difference over the years and this was reiterated by the long-term workers in this study and at the Team Leaders Workshop in Port Vila, Vanuatu in 2017.

## Downtime

The main complaints received from workers is unexpected downtime. Given the nature of the horticulture and viticulture industries, this can occur at any time, either through weather conditions or crops not being ready or damaged, and this is where the role of joint ATRs is especially valuable. Downtime affects income generation and has serious impacts on workers' health. For example, one season some workers rationed their food too much to avoid spending money while they were not earning, but in the process of doing so, they became ill. Long-term workers who have experienced downtime and experimented with various responses to it are a source of expertise to assist new workers on how not to fall into the same traps. This can be done through workers using savings, busking for money (See Bailey 2009) or church community members sharing and pooling monetary and community resources for workers to draw upon. On occasion, employers and pastoral care workers have assisted when necessary. Workers experience much anxiety during these times and this issue needs further exploration and possibly to be addressed within the pastoral care policy of the scheme.

## Arrival to Accommodation in 2007

When the 22 men arrived at the apartments, they were given an introduction to their accommodation hosts and SSCO gave a verbal briefing on hygiene and the house rules. Their accommodation hosts had prepared food for the workers with assistance from former Volunteer Services Abroad (VSA) members who spent time in Vanuatu and retained knowledge of food preferences in Vanuatu. Their accommodation host said, in a laughing manner, 'I heard that they love pigs heads, but that will not be on my menu', instead she cooked plenty of rice, mince and provided as much tropical fruit as she could, such as coconuts, pawpaw, pineapples and mangoes.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, as much as the workers consumed these fruits in Vanuatu, they soon learned that it was too expensive to purchase them in New Zealand, unlike 'just picking them for free on the island' (Aaron). Their hosts also provided food for the workers for the following day.



**Figure 6: Cooking Pig's Heads**

Source: Author

Workers who chose to take a small loan from their employer before their first pay were handed out envelopes with between NZD50–100 dollars to assist in purchasing groceries prior to pay day. Additionally, community members and accommodation hosts donated many basics, such as breakfast cereals, rice and beverages such as coffee, milo and tea. Community donations to workers has continued every season. One example can be seen in Box 3:

### **Box 3: Church Community Notice 28 October 2007**

*Welcome to our Vanuatu brothers who have recently arrived back in Chardonnay. Some new ones, some old ones! They are in need of a few things – warm clothing, hats, gloves etc, guitars, ukuleles, gardening tools, any surplus rabbit or goat meat, fish, seed potatoes, gardening tools. Should you have any of these spare at home, you could drop them off at the Chardonnay Apartments or Shiraz Orchard accommodation block. Many thanks from the boys. (Bailey 2009:135)*

The following day, two members from the Department of Labour arrived and spoke with the workers, as did their employers. Immediately after, Damianne Wells from SSCO gave workers instructions about bank accounts, forms to sign and distributed EFTPOS (electronic funds transfer at point of sale) cards. Workers received two bank accounts in the first season: one for everyday use and the other for savings. Initially, their EFTPOS cards could only access the former.

**Figure 7: Paperwork for New Bank Accounts**

Source: Author

Afterwards, the workers were transported to the nearest National Bank ATM (automatic teller machine) to be shown how to use their cards, many having never used such facilities before. As their employer stated 'It is not until you experience something like that that you realise how much we take these facilities for granted'. One worker said 'So many new things to learn.... I do not have a bank account back home, or a black horse machine to get money out of'.<sup>19</sup>

One representative from SSCO said 'The guys are surprised and asked me what kind of magic is it to get money from a hole in the wall'. These comments were stated for two reasons: 1) most of the workers were from the island of Ambrym, well known for sorcery beliefs and practices and 2) the representative was generalising that none of the workers ever had an ATM card before. Although true for most of the participants in this study (who had also never held a bank account prior to RSE), there were workers who lived in the capital of Port Vila and this was not new to them. Access to banking was difficult, given that workers often work six days a week and during normal business hours. SSCO worked with bank managers to assist with after-hours banking for one season, however this did not continue and often workers would rely on their accommodation hosts or people they befriended to make transactions, such as sending remittances on their behalf.

## Climatic Adjustments

There were many new experiences that workers faced in that first season which have been documented, however one of the most difficult adaptations that workers engage with every season is the change in climatic conditions (Bailey 2009; Cameron 2011). Workers were informed of the different climate in New Zealand with its very cold winters, but many did not (or could not) prepare themselves for it. Although arriving in late spring, snow was still present on the mountaintops and as can be seen in Figure 10, morning frosts made a regular appearance.



**Figure 8: Day One - Snow Chills**



Source: Author.

**Figure 9: November Frosts - Examining Icicle Formations**



Source: Author

Workers said that this was the first time they had seen icicles. Cold weather has also been a reason that workers do not return and one worker in this study was a case in point. The temperature was too cold for him and he struggled to adapt. Luke is not the only worker over these years to express this concern or leave the RSE due to the extreme cold. The heat in the summer was also challenging, especially when working in vineyards with little shelter from the wind and the extreme heat rays of the sun. However, in Luke's case, understanding and speaking English was also challenging, compounding his difficulties.

## The Language Barrier

Having difficulties in understanding and communicating in English creates different experiences for workers. Although many workers in this study were schooled in English, there are also francophone workers who are often overlooked in discussions of language abilities of Pacific seasonal workers in both the RSE and SWP. It is important that workers can communicate effectively in English with their employers and the communities in which they settle, or as has been regularly observed, they will often remain isolated due to their shyness in the language (Bailey 2009; 2014b). Recruiters have informed me that as part of the selection process they check workers' competency in English. Recruiters and workers stated that participation in the RSE and communication with local host communities in New Zealand has improved their ability and confidence in speaking English.

## Challenges and Changes in Recruitment Methods

Throughout the Pacific there are a number of labour mobility recruitment models, such as Government Labour Sending Units (LSUs) work-ready pools from which employers can draw workers; direct recruitment, where employers themselves or via one of their team leaders recruit directly; and the private sector agent model. In Vanuatu the agent model is mostly utilised. This private sector approach has proven to be successful thus far in Vanuatu. Important to acknowledge here is that the private sector agent approach appears to be more common in Australia's SWP than in the RSE. The two main reasons given for this are: 1. that New Zealand growers prefer the direct recruitment model, where they also employ their team leaders to assist in recruitment, and 2. the initial governmental structures of Australia's SWP (using registered contractors in regards to recruitment processes) has favoured the agent model. For the SWP, in most cases, workers are recruited and trained by licensed agents in Vanuatu to be ready for Australian contracting companies to place them with employers. As discussed earlier, there have been a number of issues raised in regards to the agent model, mainly relating to charging workers fees for finding them employment in seasonal worker programs. As Hugo (2009:47) mentioned, 'there is often "double dipping" by middlemen taking recruiting fees from both employers and employee'. This needs to be carefully monitored and as Hugo stressed, private sector recruiters need to be regulated, although this is difficult due to capacity limitations in enforcing regulations (Hugo 2009:47). This report in no way advocates for one system of recruitment over another.

Regardless of the recruitment method, all applications of individual workers are overseen by the Vanuatu Employment Services Unit (ESU). The ESU was established by the Vanuatu Department of Labour within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2006. The ESU manages the RSE and SWP programs as well as the domestic labour market. The ESU team has grown minimally since the seasonal worker programs began and it requires further resources to keep up with the yearly increase in recruitment numbers. The need to increase funding for the unit was raised as a priority at Vanuatu's 2018 Labour Mobility Summit.

In this case study, the process of recruitment shifted from the LDC and their agent, and since 2008 employment applications are being approved by staff employed by SSCO in Port Vila. Changes in recruitment procedures have resulted in a change in power relations among the LDC and RSE workers. Workers no longer require the approval of the LDC to travel to New Zealand as they can now apply directly to New Zealand employers. Despite this recruitment change, workers still contributed their New Zealand earnings to the council for another three years until other events occurred. The relationship between the LDC and RSE workers has been complex (Bailey 2014) and even today (2019) still evolving and contributions from workers to the council are intermittent.

High status and leadership qualities were sought after for initial recruitment and this is mostly still the case now, 10 years on. The first group of 22 included a church leader; one Yafu (loosely translated as big-man) and three



chiefs. Leadership is an important dynamic in the RSE scheme and it is also attached to religious and customary social standings in Vanuatu (Bailey 2014b). Even so, as reported elsewhere (Bailey 2014b), local leadership is often challenged by new leadership dynamics that have occurred as a result of participation in cross-border labour mobility schemes.

**Figure 10: Applying for RSE in the Chief's Nakamel, Port Vila 2011**



Source: Author

There are a number of considerations and costs that are often overlooked in recruitment practices, many of which employers are aware of and have taken steps to address, thus reducing financial pressures for their workers. Paperwork and application processes such as police and medical clearances, and the ESU formalities are primarily conducted in Port Vila. This requires potential applicants to travel to the capital and make their application, then returning to their home island, which can cost upwards of NZD200–300 return depending on their location. This cost is borne without any guarantee of employment and can be a deterrent in applying.

In 2011, representatives from SSCO travelled to Ambrym Island and received first hand knowledge of these costs, which they have attempted to minimize for workers by sending a representative to the island with the paperwork, where and when this has been possible. Unfortunately, this only occurred for one season, as the company recruits from multiple islands in Vanuatu.

### **Direct Recruitment**

Figure 13 shows employers recruiting on the island of Ambrym. Not only has SSCO preferred direct recruitment, but through their local engagements, this hands-on model of recruitment has assisted in establishing the relationship that this company has not only with their workers from the Pacific, but also the workers' communities.

**Figure 11: Employers Recruitment , Ranon Village 2012**

Source: Author

## Agents Models

There are ongoing concerns about the agent recruitment model in Vanuatu and a number of challenges are still being negotiated, such as conflicting domestic laws and international agreements. For New Zealand, in 2018 there were ni-Vanuatu 20 agents and in Australia a significant increase occurred in 2018, from 38 ni-Vanuatu agents in 2017 to 91 agent licensees in 2018. With this increased numbers of agents, there is a concern that workers may not be vetted as effectively as had been done in the past, and only time will tell on whether these fears are justified. Nonetheless from conversations with ESU in July 2018, it appears only 20 per cent of these agents are active. It is difficult to say which recruitment model is the best in the Pacific, as different models are used throughout the region, including the popular mixed model for flexibility. Yet for Vanuatu the agent model appears to be attractive for locals, who are now investing upwards of VUV25,000 for the opportunity to become licensed agents for these seasonal worker programs.

A pressing concern in Vanuatu has been that particular villages and islands have not been able to access seasonal worker programs. A number of agents and villages are alleging that many of the rural and poorest areas of Vanuatu are experiencing extreme barriers to participation in the current labour schemes offered by Australia and New Zealand. In 2018, with the assistance of the Vanuatu ESU, the Department of Pacific Affairs at The Australian National University undertook a mapping exercise to examine from which islands and villages workers of each scheme are being recruited. Once the results are fully analysed, it is hoped the information will assist in determining what further research needs to be undertaken. It should also help identify the barriers for those wanting to participate but cannot or do not, due to lack of information about the programs and the economic and social restraints.

As shown in Table 1, Vanuatu is the largest Pacific sending nation for both schemes in terms of numbers.

**Table 1: Pacific RSE and SWP Worker Numbers 2016/17**

Country	RSE	SWP	Total
Fiji	355	190	545
Kiribati	189	124	313
Nauru	-	-	-
Papua New Guinea	121	139	260
Samoa	1690	309	1999
Solomon Islands	593	87	680
Tonga	1822	2690	4512
Tuvalu	-	-	-
Vanuatu	4171	2150	6321
Total	8941	5689	14630

The number for Vanuatu in the 2017/2018 period is now estimated to be over 8,000 workers participating in both RSE and SWP.

## Female Participation

In the first year of the RSE, recruitment in Vanuatu was limited to male workers. In 2011, the chairman on the Lolihor Development Council discussed why women were not being selected in Lolihor:

### BOX 4: Discussing Women's Roles with the Chairman of the Lolihor Development Council

**Rochelle:** Are any women selected?

**Nabong:** We haven't sent any women.

**Rochelle:** Is there a reason why?

**Nabong:** Well that's a good question, it's basically something with our culture that maybe later on we will think [about]. Because when you come to Ambrym you see that the women do all of the gardening, all the livestock. And when we think of sending the boys to New Zealand we think that the women stay back to look after all these resources.

**Rochelle:** It is a key question that I wanted to ask, because some of the women here in the villages they too wanted to know if they can go to New Zealand.

**Nabong:** It's good because I'm glad too when others Craig and the World Bank have come and asked the same question. We have tried to explain to them that it is part of our culture but when you look, when you come to Ambrym, you see these things around you, you see what happens here. We want the women in the villages to look after the children, the garden, and the livestock. And our plan is when we started the scheme is to tell the boys that when you go you have to do plenty for the women; tell the boys to allocate some funds that's why we have a big market house in there. To help the women later on.



Nabong justified the non-participation of women through reasoning based on social and cultural obligations. In return for leaving women to do all the family's chores while the man is away, upon their return, the men would provide funds for women to use. In 2012, not long after this discussion, women from the area were recruited to Australia's SWP, one of whom was Nabong's own daughter. There has been a slight increase in female participation from Lolihor since then.

Both New Zealand's RSE-SPP and Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP) have strongly encouraged higher rates of women's participation in these schemes (Bedford 2013:192) although there are limiting factors to be considered (see Ball et al. 2015). These include employers' preference for male workers, community selection (which can result in only men being chosen) and the economic and social positions of women applying. The number of women participating has increased over the last decade and not only are women selected for what has often been portrayed as 'women's roles' (such as pack house work), but employers have increasingly seen the value of female workers in various roles and that their work is on par with their male counterparts. However, Rockwell (2015:113) highlighted gender bias related to tasks, noting how one employer preferred men to pick squash and another preferred all women for working the pack house. There have been a number of complaints that by insisting on segregated gender roles, women have not been able to earn as much as their male counterparts on piece rates in the orchards (Smith 2016:88). A number of RSE employers have taken this into consideration and rotated their workers in orchards and pack houses to address this inequality in pay received.

**Table 2: RSE Female Participation 2016/17**

Country 2016/17	Numbers of Females	Total RSE Arrivals	Percentage
Fiji	19	355	5.35
India	0	35	0.00
Indonesia	18	323	5.57
Kiribati	83	189	43.92
Malaysia	192	321	59.81
Nauru	0	17	0.00
Papua New Guinea	42	121	34.71
Philippines	16	66	24.24
Samoa	58	1690	3.43
Solomon Islands	200	593	33.73
Taiwan	10	20	50
Thailand	170	634	26.81
Tonga	199	1822	10.92
Tuvalu	20	80	25
Vanuatu	399	4171	9.57
Total	1426	10437	13.66

Source: Unpublished data from provided by Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment 2017

The table above shows how has been a slight increase in female participation over the years and although these figures are still low, they are increasing. A main concern of growers has been in relation to the housing of men and women together, whilst also being considerate of any cultural barriers that may impact on housing situations.



## Part 2: The Research and Recruitment Stories

### Health and Well-Being

#### Medicals

All RSE workers undertake mandatory immigration medical examinations that include an x-ray to check for signs of tuberculosis (every two years). This is a requirement of their limited purposes visa. The medical certificate required is another cost that workers bear to access the program and the tests are expensive, but also necessary. The medicals that are required are sufficient for the purpose of the scheme and are there for the protection of the workers, growers and their respective NZ communities. These examinations do not cover medical conditions such as heart conditions, pregnancy, or other pre-existing and underlying conditions that have seen the unfortunate deaths of workers both in Australia and New Zealand. Nonetheless, with the number of workers increasing, such issues are becoming more noticeable.

Initially, medical clearance was only available in the capital city of Port Vila, where the only Immigration New Zealand (INZ) panel doctors were located. However, the governments of New Zealand and Vanuatu jointly established the Mobile Doctor Clinic in Santo, officially opened on 23 August 2017 (Bailey and Sorensen 2019).

The Mobile Doctor Clinic trial was the result of the desire of the Vanuatu government to minimise the amount of time prospective workers spent in Port Vila before travelling to New Zealand to work. Extended periods of time in the capital often result in workers incurring more debt as they had no income, often living rough or between friends and family in Port Vila (which often creates additional financial and social pressures on their Port Vila hosts' own limited resources) (Bailey 2014b). Vanuatu's Employment Services Unit investigated other options and the pilot project was introduced and administered by MBIE on Luganville.<sup>20</sup>

It is a mixed model, with a private physician conducting the medical examination and the hospital providing the radiology services. The pilot project was a mobile service where the doctor flew in and stayed for a week, but the service is now a permanent one that provides not only immigration screening but also health services to the general population. Overall, the service is well run, but it faces some issues, such as securing finance to maintain equipment and a reliance on local and government preservation (see Bailey and Sorenson 2019).

Under the pastoral care obligations, the health and well-being of workers continues to be a priority for employers. One employer stated:

*What we really didn't anticipate was the level of health care that was going to be required, mostly through a lack of understanding on our behalves as to the paucity of primary health care in Vanuatu and a recognition of the impact that it had here and the poor diet over there as well. Those issues were spectacularly well handled for me outside of the working week*

(Bailey 2009:101).

For this employer, supervisors and pastoral care hosts managed medical issues of RSE workers by transporting them to medical centres. Health issues have long been a problem. Nonetheless, as many longer-term workers have stated that through experience, they are more aware of health problems that can arise, and are confident in the ways in which employers and medical centres have addressed their issues in a timely manner. The main barrier is the under-reporting of health problems by workers.

Initially dealing with new health systems was somewhat intimidating for workers, even with assistance from supervisors and accommodation hosts. Reasons given were language barriers, not wanting to share an ailment with a supervisor in the treatment room, being asked questions they did not understand and a concern that they would be losing wages by not working. However, after two to three years in the scheme, many workers, especially team leaders, now attend medical appointments with new workers who need attention, so they can explain and often translate for them, creating more informed communication between health providers and patients in regards to ongoing treatment plans.

Vakameasina has a section on their website specifically on health care for workers and included in this is a comprehensive 'Health Toolkit for the RSE workers Scheme' prepared by Hawke's Bay District Health Board in 2013. This guide is to help workers understand common health issues, preventative measures and the importance of taking care of their health while working in New Zealand. Although written in English, there are also images of physical ailments for workers to identify potential health risks to themselves and others.

## Insurance

Health insurance is mandatory for all RSE workers and their policy premiums are deducted from their wages accordingly. In New Zealand, Orbit Protect had the monopoly on the provision of this insurance for RSE, until Southern Cross recently became an option. This coverage is for any medical expense except elective surgery, which was a lesson learned in the pilot phase when a worker had his teeth removed, leaving the company with a bill of NZD500.<sup>21</sup>

A concern that came about after a number of seasons from Orbit Health via RSE-SPP at the 10th Annual Horticulture New Zealand Conference in Samoa, was the fact that employers were encouraging workers to return with existing medical conditions so they could get treated upon their return to New Zealand. Employers were warned not to do so, as they would be putting their RSE accreditation in danger. From an employers' perspective though, much like the case of Trevor's eyes (discussed later in the section titled *Insurance*), the initial injury on a New Zealand orchard may have caused the deterioration and employers may feel obligated to assist, especially if it concerned a long-term loyal productive worker who wanted to return.<sup>22</sup>

## Death

Unfortunately a small number of RSE workers have died while in New Zealand and many of these deaths have occurred out of the workplace, in car accidents and as a result of other unexpected incidents. This is an area that needs to be further researched and is often linked to health and medical concerns raised in this report. As with any type of labourer, there will always be risk and uncertainty. How these situations are dealt with is of upmost priority and perhaps further policy settings should be put into place if they are not so already. There are many questions that grieving families have to deal with, their expectations need to be managed, and the role of employers and government staff from both the host and sending countries needs to be clarified. When one research participant passed away in Vanuatu in 2009, this raised the concern of how to transfer money back home when a worker leaves money in the country of work and they do not hold a bank account in their home country. These are all considerations that need to be taken into account when people are living and working across borders.

## Accommodation

**Figure 12: Accommodation Used by Case Study Participants**



Source: Author

This section is divided into two parts: accommodation in New Zealand and transitional accommodation in Vanuatu. The latter section is included as it reveals an important consequence of participation in the RSE scheme.

### **‘Suitable’ Accommodation in New Zealand**

Accommodation is one of the greatest expenses incurred by RSE workers. The provision of suitable accommodation is a condition of the pastoral care policy. It is the responsibility of employers to source accommodation and it is the worker's obligation to pay for it. The cost of accommodation varies depending on the employer and availability in the area. There have been a number of public criticisms in regards to accommodation supplied to RSE workers. Reports have shown that RSE workers have been placed in overcrowded and substandard lodgings with inadequate facilities and rates being set too high (Bailey 2009). Smith (2016:110) documented that workers were being overcharged and this too was a complaint in this case study when local community members were encouraging workers to source their own accommodation. Rockwell (2015:134) documented eleven sources of RSE accommodation and the main complaints were differences in charges, heating and space. Accommodation is problematic in both the RSE and SWP and although this is being addressed (Bailey 2018b) there is much more research needed in this area.

Accommodation is often scarce in the regions in which seasonal workers are employed, especially in peak seasons. Providing adequate accommodation and pastoral care for RSE workers was considered to be burdensome by many growers, especially those with small-scale operations (Bailey 2009: 41). As has been highlighted in many RSE employer surveys and interviews by the author, finding accommodation that is suitable for workers to live for periods up to nine months and that is reasonably priced has been one of the most challenging aspects of pastoral care.



## Figures 13A & B: Typical Accommodation



Source: Author

Furthermore, there have also been complaints that accommodating RSE workers has resulted in inflated rental prices in various regions, and as RSE worker numbers increase, the scarcity of housing is becoming apparent. Growers have responded in various ways to this and recently Hotus Ltd built their own accommodation for their workers. Owner of Hotus, Aaron Jay, was influential when there were discussions that self-auditing of accommodation for RSE workers could lead to 'dodgy contractors' exploiting workers in overcrowded accommodation.<sup>23</sup>

When initially interviewed, workers were happy with their accommodation, but their responses changed over time and was dependent on the number per room and access to private spaces. Another consideration is how many workers to a room is acceptable in terms of health standards and the possible adverse effects on workers' sleep and comfort. Many in this research are sleeping with six to eight bunk beds to a room, each man paying NZD110 per week, equating to the accommodation provider receiving up to NZD880 per week for a small room with four double bunks. Workers are not always happy about this and do complain. For example, as George said 'there are now seven men in my bedroom. It's too much, all snoring and farting and we can't open the window because it's too cold. I brought myself a mattress, I'm moving to the lounge' (Cited in Bailey 2009:162). However, with the increased numbers of workers, extra accommodation has been sourced where some workers do have rooms to themselves. However, for those who do not, is it fair to have six workers to an average sized room? Are there any rules about overcrowding? How often are inspections being made?

When I asked various accommodation hosts about this problem that workers had raised with me I was told 'that is how they live in the Pacific so it is not a problem for them here'. I was also recently informed by an agent for the SWP in Australia that some of her workers were living in the lounge room (up to six workers) and when this was investigated she received a similar reaction from the Australian investigative team. This is not acceptable as not only does it affect the health and well-being of workers, but it also impacts on the productivity and hygiene regimes on farms, as well as doing reputational damage to these seasonal worker programs.

In 2018 there was a crackdown on workers' accommodation (see Bailey 2018b). New Zealand accommodation hosts have recently been informed that RSE workers must have 4.5 square metres of bedroom floor space per worker.

<sup>24</sup> This rule has always existed, but as Horticulture NZ national spokesperson Jerf Van Beek noted, since 20 June 2018, MBIE has increased enforcement on this rule for RSE workers and has 'been pretty hard-nosed about it. If you don't have the right space you won't get the approval to recruit'.<sup>25</sup> He also questioned the 4.5 square metre rule: 'A New Zealander can stay in accommodation approved by council with around 3 square sqm of floor space'.<sup>26</sup>

Although there has been much tension around this issue by accommodation providers and approved RSE employers (AEs), this particular pastoral care policy needs to be addressed and enforced by MBIE labour inspectorates.

There are many examples of employers making the effort to improve accommodation standards for their workers, with many investing in new facilities themselves, such as the example of Hotus above. Nonetheless, the provision of suitable accommodation is an ongoing complaint of workers and employers. Workers have criticised the scheme because the need for good accommodation has not been met and in many cases with good reason when workers are living in cramped conditions. Employers have criticised the scheme over the need for them to source and build accommodation. As the RSE increases in numbers, and local populations increase, there is an urgency to address the shortfall in the immediate future. Financial limitations and other restrictions also need to be considered, such as council bylaws and guidelines, and responses from local communities in regards to new proposed housing.

### **Transitional Accommodation in Port Vila**

Pressures in regards to accommodation is not only a problem in the host country but also in sending countries and this is something that is often overlooked in labour mobility research. On average, workers spend up to one month on either side of their travel to and from New Zealand in Port Vila for recruitment, police and medical clearances, and organising paperwork associated with their deployment such as for passports, visas, and employment contracts. Most employers recommend that workers from the outer islands arrive in Port Vila at least one week prior to travelling to New Zealand, to avoid any unforeseeable delays that may occur as a result of inter-island travel disruptions (see Bailey 2014b).

These temporary sojourns in Port Vila have caused tensions in relationships between spouses and extended family members. One of many examples of this occurred in 2011 when interviewing Georgia from West Ambrym, who made it clear how upset she was with her husband for spending 'too much time' in Port Vila, when he had left New Zealand more than a month before. She was not the only wife to comment negatively on the length of stay workers had in Port Vila. Caroline who looks after the cattle and the copra business for her absent husband said 'he spends too much time there [Port Vila]. He needs to come home and help me. The work I do is very hard and I am getting very tired by myself' (Interview, Caroline, West Ambrym, 13 June 2011). However, the reasons for Caroline's husband and others were delayed return to Ambrym in 2011 was firstly, the container ship had not arrived from New Zealand and secondly, the regular cargo ship to Ambrym had been out of commission due to mechanical failure. At the time, due to the quantities of material goods that workers had brought home with them from their time in New Zealand, the passenger ship to Ambrym was too expensive, and in some cases unable to take their larger items. Therefore there was a reliance on the cargo shipping sector to deliver these items to the island, neither of which at the time were reliable. Although workers complained that it cost too much to live in the capital during these times, they were not concerned about being delayed in Port Vila.

Many workers from Ambrym have relatives in Port Vila they can stay with. Most are located in Fresh Wota, Mele, Mele Maat and the settlement of Blacksands, where many Ambrymese living in Efate are settled (Eriksen 2008; Lindstrom 2011; Mecartney 2000; Mitchell 2002; Tonkinson 1985). However, hosting workers puts added pressure on these relatives and their living resources and unlike the island, living costs in Port Vila are extremely high. It is unthinkable to deny a kinsperson hospitality, as there are many obligations and reciprocal relationships that need to be met in order for most ni-Vanuatu social relations to be maintained (Eriksen 2008; Hess 2009; Rio 2007). When Ambrymese people leave the island and later return home, they know that to be accepted back there, when living elsewhere they must continue to fulfil their obligations of reciprocity in order to maintain connections with kinspersons and place in Ambrym (Eriksen 2008; Hess 2009; Rio 2007). Ambrymese in Vila are part of these networks and relationships, which extend back to the island, and now beyond to New Zealand. Hosting workers contributes to maintaining social connections and RSE workers' incomes are also redistributed in the households of their hosts in Port Vila.

RSE workers 'wasting their money in Port Vila' was a criticism made by many people, especially by workers' spouses and village chiefs. One story recalled by several Ambrym women discussed how a group of wives met their husbands at Bauerfield International Airport in Port Vila because of their husbands' inappropriate spending behaviour the

previous year. It was said that the men spent all of their New Zealand earnings in Port Vila's kava bars and in paying for living costs such as housing, food and buses in the capital that are substantially higher than on Ambrym. These workers had returned home with little money. Their wives travelled to Port Vila to prevent this occurring again. To avoid workers' earnings being drained in the capital, spouses wanted to limit RSE migrants' time in Port Vila and instead return home to Ambrym to contribute to household needs, such as gardens, children and community obligations.

Because of the importance of Port Vila as a transitional space, there had been talk of plans to build temporary housing with earnings from New Zealand for seasonal workers to offset housing costs in the capital. Former chairman of the LDC, Nabong, informed me:

### **Box 5: Accommodation Prospects in Port Vila**

#### **Former chairman of the LDC, Nabong:**

When they come back from the work in New Zealand they should have put in this amount [so] that we can create a place for them in Vila when they come back.... when they also come from the island to Vila we should have gathered them on one place instead of staying with their families in Vila. Plenty of complaints in Vila when we move the boys to Vila they shouldn't have to stay with their families....When the funds come in, we will try to allocate a piece of land, maybe build some shelter for them to come and stay for a while. When they come from the island or New Zealand, they stay in one place and shift them at the same time. These are the things we think instead of them spending all their money in Vila. (Interview July 2011).

After the workers had an unexpected extension of their stay in Port Vila in 2012, the plan for building a house in the capital for seasonal workers was revisited. Yet in 2018 there was still only dialogue in regards to this. Using RSE earnings to establish housing for workers would be beneficial. However, most workers did not want to contribute to this project and were concerned in regards to such an investment and the management of it long-term. Other reasons given included the possibility of not returning to New Zealand or that their earnings had already been allocated for other purposes. Other RSE recruits mentioned that staying with relatives was convenient. A few workers joked that they had already lived together in the same quarters for seven months, 'time for a break from each other' (group conversation, Ranon 25 June 2011). The RSE has not been the catalyst for extended periods in Port Vila. I was told by many women that their spouses had previously often travelled to Port Vila or Luganville in search of work. Perceived opportunities in the urban areas for work are preferred over the 'small money' available from cash cropping on Ambrym. Yet, income from seasonal work is often referred to as fast easy money in comparison to income gained on the islands.

Even so, with more workers coming into the urban centre, and some even settling there, more consideration and planning should be given to establishing housing for Ambrym workers in Port Vila. Initially, workers had no intention of moving to the capital city, but due to increased economic bargaining power, the need to house family for education (there is no tertiary education available on Ambrym), and looking into the future with Ambrym's active volcanoes, workers have purchased land and built homes in the Efate and Santo. Furthermore, purchasing land on these islands, where there are better government services and infrastructure, could seem to be a more astute investment for Ambrymese than purchasing land in other remote islands that are poorer and have little infrastructure or limited investment opportunities (Basok 2003).



## Moving to Port Vila Permanently

With Port Vila becoming an important transitional arena for international labour mobility and a potential source of income for workers who have experienced new waged labour forms, a question in the original research was 'Will the capital become a final stop for RSE workers?' (see, for comparison, Haberkorn 1989). Four participants resided in Port Vila prior to the RSE and three have since moved to Port Vila for paid employment opportunities; yet in most instances their immediate families remained on Ambrym. Additionally, workers are now purchasing land and building not only in Efate but also Santo. The two main reasons given were 1. to provide accommodation for their children's secondary and tertiary education and 2. as investment rental properties.

Only a small number of RSE workers from Ambrym have chosen to settle permanently in Port Vila. The majority of participants have no desire to leave Ambrym. As one chief said, the advantage of the RSE scheme is that the people do not have to leave the village permanently in search of paid work:

*Chief Tallis: The problem is because of money. The ones that were in the village they went out because some of the kids they have gone to high school. So we got a problem for them having to work in Vila, going to Australia and New Caledonia to work for the money for school fees. With RSE they don't have to move, they can go and come back. We don't lose people*

(Interview, Chief Tallis, Sanesup village, 17 August 2012).

The chief from Sanesup village said in the past there were up to 200 people in his village, but because of the search for paid employment for school fees, there are now only 40 people residing in the area. His village consists of a number of empty abandoned houses of those that had left for the urban centres. Circular rural to urban migration is common in Vanuatu, where Port Vila and Luganville are the popular destinations due to perceived opportunities of waged labour that are often lacking in other islands.<sup>27</sup> Since the interview with this chief, he has himself now relocated to Efate, for the benefit of his family and their transportation business, which was made possible by RSE earnings.

## Transportation

Many employers are currently deducting amounts from workers' wages to pay for transport to and from work sites. There has been much discussion over the years in regards to the fairness of the amounts deducted. The amount needs to be scrutinised and constant oversight is needed, as the potential for exploitation is great. The amounts charged to workers for transport to get to work varies between employers – some are minimal and others are excessive. In the author's New Zealand and Australian case studies, employers do not charge a fee for transporting workers to and from work. It is only when workers wish to borrow the vehicles for personal use that a charge is understandably applied. Many employers/labour contractors hire vans for the duration of their workers' stay, which is an extra cost to be recouped. Nonetheless, what needs to be settled is 'what is an acceptable charge for transport?' and more consideration can be given to the idea of employers purchasing vans and charging until the repayments are made or to cover the basic costs (as some employers are indeed currently doing).

In one case in Australia, a large group of workers complained that they were paying AUD60 per week for transportation. It was a 20 minute drive to the pack house. There were over 20 workers in this group who travelled in two vans (which they all stated were old vehicles) and some travelled by car. Assuming it is a standard eleven-seater mini-bus (as often used for seasonal workers in both countries) and if those vans are full, that is AUD1320 per week to the labour company, who own the vehicles.<sup>28</sup> These workers were contracted for 20 weeks paying at least AUD26,400 in transportation fees during this time. This was the worst case of excessive charging I have come across and I have not identified the contractor or workers to protect the identities of the workers. One would think that purchasing vans instead of renting a van would be more appropriate. Clearly the charge above demonstrates that a AUD10,000 van would not be out of the question, even with on-road costs.

Upon further investigation, a number of RSE and SWP workers from Samoa, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu have stated that transportation costs charged to them vary from NZD30–80 per week. Understandably there are on-road

costs, however there needs to be some type of monitoring in place that examines these particular charges. Often government officials state that that is 'what workers sign up for'. However, the reality is workers do not necessarily know what the exact payment is for and will sign their contracts in order to gain the opportunity to participate in labour schemes (Bailey 2009). It is important that workers do not find themselves in a situation of being exploited by unscrupulous operators who charge excessively for profit. Discussions on the fairness of extra costs imposed on workers need to happen. Transport options for workers in their periods of downtime is also varied across the scheme. Lack of access to transportation can hinder participation in local community and church activities.

## Religion

Religion is a central part of life for most people in the Pacific and given that the Pacific region is targeted for the RSE, the importance of religion should not be understated. As noted in the pastoral care policy, employers must make provisions for RSE workers to access religious observations. The location of churches and need for transportation is also a factor. Most workers in the RSE are located in rural areas with limited access to transportation during their down time. For example, in this case study, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) workers in New Zealand had to travel 60 kilometres to attend service. Many remained at home while others opted to work. Church communities in both countries have been generous in providing support to workers through offering transportation to church as well as other support (Bailey 2009). Workers form relationships with church members from their host communities (Bailey 2009; Bailey 2014b; Cameron 2011; Smith 2016). Many working groups in both countries have included church leaders, who have led services in their accommodation.

A number of employers respect and understand the importance of workers receiving a day off. As one employer said, 'unless they have one day of rest they would be useless to me'.<sup>29</sup> This same employer hires workers from various religious denominations and realised that SDA workers did not receive the same working hours as other workers. The following season he rostered SDA workers off on Saturdays and rostered them on Sundays, and the reverse for those whose religions required Sunday as a Sabbath. Thus he ensured his crops were worked on seven days a week and that his workers had the opportunity to observe their respective Sabbaths (Bailey 2017b).

This is a change from the initial reactions to SDA workers in 2007 when it was stated at the growers meeting that 'We've limited the number of Seventh Day Adventists guys purely because in New Zealand Saturday is a working day. ... There is a few that probably won't [work]. I think there is only about half a dozen' (Craig Howard 2007). However, from conversations with employers and workers, SDA workers are often not recruited due to the Saturday Sabbath and recruitment agents have told SDA workers that they just have to work the Sabbath and not make any complaints. Bedford (2013:171) said that hiring SDAs was 'met with mixed responses' but 'a strong incentive to employ SDAs would appear to be their rejection of alcohol and other intoxicants'. Overall, Bedford (2013) argued that there was flexibility on this issue.

Awareness and flexibility are needed to accommodate the needs of both employers and workers in seasonal worker programs. Although it is a requirement for employers to provide the opportunity for religious observance, they may not be aware of the various Sabbaths of their workers or the emotional and spiritual impacts of 'breaking the Sabbath'. It would be ideal for approved employers to be aware of this issue during initial recruitment, and workers also have a responsibility to make their employers aware of their Sabbath requirements. Nonetheless, many workers will not share this information through concern it may become a barrier to their participation, leading to the appearance of employers deliberately hindering workers from accessing their religious observances. As shown above, when employers are aware of the situation, mutually beneficial arrangements can often be made. Like all matters arising from participation in seasonal worker programs, constant dialogue between parties is needed to make them successful. When this communication is lacking, there is a risk of exacerbating the issue.

## The Economics of Seasonal Work

In 2011, costs to workers participating in the RSE were documented by following groups of workers from various villages (see Bailey 2013). On average, a first-time worker from the island of Ambrym invested approximately NZD2000 to participate in the RSE. Bedford et al (2017:47) argue the question remains: are workers are earning

enough to 'cover the full costs of participating (including living costs in New Zealand), as well as having a good return on their labour to compensate for the lengthy absences from home'? Workers in this study removed themselves when they did not think the monetary rewards were enough, nonetheless there are others who argue there are no other options to earn money for pressing needs such as family and community obligations. I agree with the aforementioned authors that further studies are needed to analyse whether the financial benefits outweigh the costs for the workers.

These costs have increased over time and are often a barrier to participation in labour mobility. However, this does not always mean the seasonal worker who does participate is already better off than those who do not, sometimes this can be a misperceived argument, often lacking in-depth knowledge of the individual migrant and their circumstances. Most of the workers in this study were either partly funded by their incomes from being in the World Bank pilot program, or through assistance (loans) given by their employers. Alternatively, as most of the first-time 2007 participants stated, the funds were often raised by their family members, extended kin and community, and as a last resort, by obtaining a loan from local loan provider, the microcredit group Vanwoods (with a 25% interest rate). Therefore there was always an expectation by participants of the need for repayment in various forms: monetary, goods or services. In examining both schemes, I have noted workers tend to favour loans from employers over loan systems in Vanuatu.

## Cash into Host Communities

Workers initially had NZD60 spending money per week. With the original 22 participants, this equated to NZD1320 per week going into local businesses. In addition to this is the NZD2090 spent on their accommodation per week. These amounts are separate from other purchases made when workers requested more money from the company out of their savings accounts (Bailey, 2009:148). After the first season, the system changed and workers were able to have one bank account where they could access their money without any oversight by the company. Cell phones, cameras and laptops were the main expensive items that workers purchased, with less expensive items such as suitcases and clothing (mainly second hand) for their wives and children were also a priority in the first season. Purchasing hunting equipment such as guns was another hope of many workers, but they were banned after the second season by Vanuatu customs. Workers spent less on material goods in their first season due to the uncertainty of being invited to return for consecutive seasons. This changed after season three when they secured access to a container to ship material goods home (see Bailey 2015).

As for monetary remittances, this varies by individuals year to year and is dependent on the various farms at which participants work, how much they spend on general consumption, and the list of material goods requested from families and communities back home. From discussions with the workers in this study, they are taking home between NZD10,000–12,000 after all expenses in New Zealand after the entire season of seven months, though I have also noted both much larger and smaller sums in the past. Workers are on variable pay rates, depending on the number of seasons they have worked, their skill level, status as a supervisor, and particular skills held (such as driving). Nonetheless, the skills workers can gain and the jobs that workers can undertake are restricted by their visa conditions.<sup>30</sup> Economists Gibson and McKenzie (2014) argue that on average on a national basis, RSE seasonal workers are remitting between NZD5500–6500 of their earnings per season. Although workers do remit some of their earnings via remittance providers, many in this study initially avoided doing so for a number of reasons: 1. to avoid remittance fees, 2. because of their distrust in banking systems, and 3. because they did not have bank accounts in Vanuatu. This has changed over time and workers have become more confident in remitting money more frequently. However, the majority are still returning home with large sums of cash and exchanging the money upon arrival in Port Vila (often for a much better exchange rate). Nonetheless, this does have consequences. Workers can be targets for theft and often the preferred monetary exchange companies do not have enough money to accommodate great numbers of large transactions.<sup>31</sup>

## **Proposal to Leave Money Behind**

In 2009, SSCO encouraged workers to retain money in their New Zealand bank accounts to cover initial expenses such as airfares and domestic transportation for subsequent seasons. The company proposed that workers leave an estimated NZD850 in their high interest savings accounts to fund their return trips and visa costs. Workers discussed the benefits of this but were reluctant to keep money in New Zealand when they returned to Vanuatu. This was primarily because of the uncertainty of participation in successive seasons.<sup>32</sup> Although a number of employers argue that returning workers should fund themselves, the subsidy of half the return airfare remains in place as per RSE policy obligations. Nevertheless, employers have stated in person and through annual employer surveys that the advantages of having RSE workers have outweighed the costs of participating in the RSE and even though most workers choose not to leave money behind to assist in covering their costs, employers continue to invest in lending workers money to have them on their farms.

## **What Happens When Workers Leave Bills in the Country and Never Return?**

An issue that is not discussed in much detail with RSE employers, with the exception of the example on page 28, is that occasionally workers will leave a farm owing money to the employer or have debts that have occurred within the greater community. Private communication with SWP employers revealed that in some cases community members have come to them to collect on debts that their workers have left behind. This is a concern needing further attention and protection mechanisms should be put in place to address this problem. Many of the debts are left behind due to incidences such as leaving the area with or without permission, unrecovered health care costs<sup>33</sup> and because of removal from the scheme.

## Part 4: The Impacts of RSE

### Workers' Achievements and the Allocation of Earnings

As shown in table three, paying for school fees is a priority for workers, followed by family and community obligations, church donations and *kastom* ceremonies. Purchasing land and building homes or repairing existing homes has also been important for workers. As part of this longitudinal study, workers are asked annually about how they allocate their earnings. Workers' goals today remain remarkably similar to those of 2007. Importantly, many of these goals involve ongoing costs for workers. As part of the hope for economic development through labour migration schemes, it has been anticipated by many government stakeholders that RSE workers may initiate their own businesses in order to achieve economic independence and development. This has not always been the case, as discussed next.

Starting a small business with RSE earnings was an intention of most workers in 2007. They referred to this as a *smol bisnes*. The concept of business is culturally specific and refers to business (*bisnes*) in the context of Ambrym. Although called *smol bisnes* by participants, they should be viewed as significant achievements. Like individual RSE workers earnings, *bisnes* operators in Vanuatu are affected by obligations that can extend to those outside everyday operations. In addition, they operate in restrictive business environments where dual economies exist (cash and customary, see Bailey 2014), and there is limited infrastructure and transportation.<sup>34</sup> Although 71% of participants have invested in some type of business, whether it is transportation, tourism, cattle farming, power generation or other enterprises, the majority did not initiate these businesses until after *three* seasons of participation. Three reasons were given for this. First, the repayment of loans for participation in the scheme was necessary; second, they felt more secure about their employment after longer participation and third, they produced greater savings over time and anticipated new income-generating opportunities at home. What was interesting was how 71% said that they had purchased material goods in New Zealand for starting a business. These goods include outboard motors, kitchenware for bakeries, second-hand clothing (as stock for sale), chainsaws and other items that workers use or occasionally rent out to other community members. Additionally, another 32% have provided start-up funds for a spouse or an extended family member's business, (discussed further in *Funding businesses for family members*).

**Table 3: Earnings Allocations in a 10-Year Period**

Expense	Percentage of workers
School fees	95%
Land for house or business	57%
House	85%
Business	71%
Material goods for starting or improving a business	71%
Church donations	90%
Community obligations	90%
Community wells	81%
Built a church	38%
<i>Kastom</i> ceremonies	90%
Bride price	66%
Cattle	38%
Start-up funds for spouse/family member's business	32%

In past discussions amongst stakeholders and academics, it was argued that seasonal workers do not necessarily have the capability to be entrepreneurs, with the reason given that usually their level of schooling is too low. This case study shows the reverse to be true. Within weeks of participating in RSE, many workers had begun small business trading, despite nearly all of the workers not having been schooled past grade six (Bailey 2014b). Much of the 'lack of business initiative' is in fact associated with the local business environments, restrictions that workers have at home and the

other factors stated above. Popular businesses initiated by participants ranged from accommodation provision, bakeries, cattle ranching, stores, tourism ventures and transportation (buses, taxis, trucks and being a tour guide).

In regards to whether participating in labour migration schemes improves development in Vanuatu, my argument in 2014 still stands:

*The main objectives of development that have been drawn out by the participants of this study, in order of importance, were education, housing, water sanitation, and community projects, such as re-roofing churches, building water wells, and engaging in tourism ventures for the island. Development has very pragmatic and grounded local meanings and is associated with improvements to health and school services, infrastructure such as church buildings and community wells.*

(Bailey, 2014b: 222)

Although the rankings of workers' priorities have been found to be different by other researchers (Cameron 2011; Smith 2016; Rockwell 2015), overall they are the same. Differing priorities on various islands reflect, and are dependent on, the particular existing infrastructure and social services available prior to participation and this has a strong influence on financial priorities.

Although payments for bride price shown in table three are part of the *kastom* (including wedding) ceremonies percentage shown, this category was included to show how they make up the greatest proportion. A number of workers were able to marry through earning incomes in New Zealand, a luxury they could not afford previously. Contributions to *kastom* ceremonies are just as pertinent for various forms of development: 'Exchange is a central part of ni-Vanuatu relationships. The transactions that ni-Vanuatu make between each other have consequences for wider economic and social relations' (Bailey, 2014b: 222). These also create safety nets for workers once their time in seasonal programs have finished.

*Kastom* ceremonies and tourism ventures are promoted by workers to their non-ni-Vanuatu work colleagues while in New Zealand. In their first year, workers came with brochures and DVDs of Vanuatu with the hope of promoting tourism there. Workers even assisted in funding a tourism information center for Lolihor, located in Ranon village. During a community meeting in Ranon in July 2011, it was discussed how increasing tourism could generate income to improve livelihoods. A proposal to increase tourism numbers to the northern region was to build an airport in North Ambrym with funding from seasonal workers. This has not occurred due to ongoing discussions about land use and a lack of any potential returns that workers may receive from such an investment. Workers mentioned how many of the backpackers they worked with in New Zealand have stayed with them in Ambrym and that prior to meeting them, Vanuatu was not on their travel itinerary. Smith (2016: 116) also documented RSE workers inviting others to Vanuatu. This demonstrates how successful RSE workers are in promoting their country as an international tourist destination.

## Long-Term Worker Stories

Of the original 22 participants, nine workers are still participating in the scheme (in the 2017/18 season), seven of the nine have participated every year since 2007 and two had a short break from RSE between 2009 and 2011. When asked if any of them would consider stopping, their various responses were similar: 'It is my job now', 'I hope my job continues so I can keep helping my community' and 'I need it to continue paying for school fees'. It is due to a combination of targeted employment (employment with specific targets associated with earnings) and meeting continued ongoing costs that many consider the RSE to be their career. The possibility of not being able to return in the future keeps most workers locked into the scheme. Two of the workers in the study are the sole representatives from their village in either RSE or SWP and there was concern that if they stopped participating, the income generation to the community would cease.

Tom, a father of four, has participated for 10 years and has made significant contributions to his family and community during this time. He has built a new home for himself and a home for his parents, a new kitchen<sup>35</sup> and a community



well, purchased two trucks for his transportation business, paid VUV 100,000 for bride price, paid school fees and provided the start-up money for his wife's successful business. He said that without the RSE this would not have been possible, because they had no money and now with his trucks he provides income opportunities for drivers in the village. Tom's major complaint is that there are many people in his village wanting the opportunity to participate in RSE and SWP but they do not have the connections or finances to join: 'I want more opportunities for others in my village'. His concern was if he leaves the RSE then who will continue making contributions to the village?

John from Sanesup village is married with three children. He came to New Zealand due to limited opportunities to earn wages at home. Since he began he has been able to support two of his children through their education, purchase additional cattle and fencing for his land, build a house and a church, purchase two buses and land in Port Vila, and build another house in Efate so his children had a home to reside in while undertaking tertiary studies. He is also currently building a rental property to generate income for his family. John has a son who also joined RSE in 2009, but works in a different Central Otago township than his father. His son exited in 2013 when he acquired enough funds to get married and purchase a bus. Recently his son has reapplied to RSE to earn money for his children's school fees.

Ronald participated for eight seasons. He has two young children and has used his RSE earnings to pay for school fees, purchase cattle, build a house and a shop, a community well, a truck and he has provided finances to help others in the community, including hiring community members to help manage his gardens and assist his family.

Chris is a father of four children and his oldest has recently joined him in the RSE. This situation differs from the other research participants in both RSE and SWP, where participants' children usually choose to work in the opposite seasonal workers program or in a different region or town of New Zealand when they can. However, in this situation, Chris's team leader requested that Chris's son assist for this season. Prior to this Chris had covered the costs of his son's marriage, so it was an obligation that his son needed to fulfil.

**Figure 14: RSE-Funded Wedding, 2017**



Source: Author



Chris was also involved in the World Bank pilot study. He has two children still attending school and has used his earnings for school fees, to build a house, a shop, a community well and for *kastom* ceremony contributions. He hopes that the opportunity to work will remain so he can continue to support the children's education and community projects.

Bob is a father of two and has been participating in RSE since 2007. He calls New Zealand his 'second home'. While in the scheme, Bob has built two houses, a preschool, a kitchen, a community well and recently he purchased land in Santo for VUV 1,300,000 (NZD 17,600) where he is planning on building a rental property to generate extra income for the family. Santo is also where he sends his children for their last years of secondary school education.

**Figure 15: A New House Funded by RSE, Ambrym Island 2013**



Source: Author

Michael has four children, three of whom are at school. He took time away for two seasons between 2009 and 2011 to spend time with his family. Like many others, Michael built a community well, and has used his earnings for school fees, to build a better home and a store, and has contributed towards community obligations.

Within the first two years of RSE, every worker in this study had either built or contributed funds for a well in their villages. These stories of community contributions are consistent and found with most of the RSE and SWP workers in this study. Many workers are also using their earnings to rebuild much of what was destroyed during Cyclone Pam and other cyclones that have passed through, which is discussed further in this report. When workers do not contribute to such community projects it is a matter of discussion in the community. In the few known cases of this, the workers were seen as not being good contributors and were shamed and named by many, and often did not receive a letter from community leaders to allow them to return.

Clearly, the benefit of the scheme is that earnings provide ongoing financial support for entire families and communities. Additionally, communities have been able to source and obtain material goods from New Zealand that workers bring back with them. Often workers are given a list of shopping wants from families, churches and communities, ranging from school books, laptops, solar panels, household goods and in one season even an organ for the church (Bailey 2014b; Smith 2016). These family and community expectations create further pressures on workers' finances while they are in NZ, as communities often do not consider the costs that workers also face while working in RSE.

## Moving to New Zealand Permanently

### 'How do I Change my Visa?' 'Do I Have to Marry a Maori to Live Here?'

Under the contractual agreement and the limited purpose visas used, there are no options for RSE workers to migrate permanently to New Zealand. The SSCO employs a rule that RSE labourers must leave New Zealand within three days of either their work visa or contract expiring (Bailey 2009). With a temporary and specific purpose visa, an RSE workers' length of stay is largely determined by their employers. Some workers leave earlier than the seven months of their temporary visa and rarely are visas extended. In conversations with employers and community members, workers temporality is normally only discussed in the context of workers' time in New Zealand. Even though most workers are home in Vanuatu for five months a year – that is, usually less than the time spent in New Zealand – their temporary status in New Zealand has never been in doubt. They are seen as temporary visitors by local New Zealand communities and their Vanuatu communities stress the temporality in general conversations. This temporality is noted in time of absence, not in a sense of belonging, as no matter where ni-Vanuatu are, or the length of their absence from home, they are still of place (Bailey 2014b; Hess 2009). Nonetheless, while in Vanuatu, there are conflicting opinions expressed by workers in regards to time spent in each country. For example, many workers often spoke with regret of only being home for a short time, while others complained about being in Vanuatu for too long and were eager to return to New Zealand.

Philip Martin stated 'there is nothing more permanent than temporary workers' (2007: 14). He argued that when labour scheme migrants begin to become familiar, employers and workers begin to take risks with overstaying visas. Primarily due to workers being allowed to return annually, this has not happened in the context of the RSE scheme. For RSE employers, visa enforcement is predominately a financial matter. Immigration New Zealand set a NZD3000 (VUV204,000) bond per worker to be paid by RSE employers to deter workers overstaying visas. These security bonds are used in similar schemes in Canada, Greece, Israel and Singapore, regulating employers and employees through financial means (Agnunias 2007; Basok 2002; Yeoh et al. 1999). If found to have overstaying workers, employers would lose their bond and potentially have their status as an RSE employer revoked (Bailey 2009). Fears of workers overstaying their work visas have been unfounded. Few workers have any intention of moving to New Zealand permanently, as Hugo argues, 'circular migration is a preferred strategy' (2009:31)

## Blacklisting

Blacklisting in labour schemes is a grey area. Although workers have been blacklisted for justifiable reasons, there are documented cases of when this has not been the case (Bailey 2014b). Tanya Basok (2002) wrote extensively on how blacklisting was a powerful tool in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers programme (SAWP). Many similar examples have been witnessed within RSE and SWP, especially the threat of being blacklisted, which is used to ensure workers are compliant while participating in the programs. If workers do not follow the rules of the employment program, then they are penalised through blacklisting: 'The controlled nature of their recruitment, their fear of losing an opportunity to participate in the employment program, makes workers acquiescent' (Basok: 2002: 15). For example, Mark stated when they returned to New Zealand in 2008, their employer told them 'not to complain as there were plenty of others that would be happy to replace them', demonstrating the powerful effect it has on keeping workers not only compliant, but also hard-working, while on the farms (Bailey 2009; 2014b; Cameron 2011).

Three of the participants have been blacklisted and another two recommended not to return due to what was considered unacceptable behaviour while in New Zealand. However, what is becoming an issue with blacklisting is the monitoring and tracking of workers who have been considered unacceptable for employers. Many are moving from New Zealand's RSE to Australia's SWP or vice versa after failing to obtain renewed contracts. As noted in a recent publication (Bailey 2018a), strengthening application processes for these schemes is paramount not only for the reputation of the labour-sending country, but also for maintaining the supply of reliable and honest workers that growers are expecting to receive (Bailey 2018a). The use of reporting templates for employers and team leaders on workers who have either not worked satisfactorily or conducted themselves inappropriately during their time should be mandatory, and they should be available to sending units to manage and monitor. Workers should also have rights to discuss any reports made against them with the labour-sending units, with a mediator if appropriate. With the

increased number of workers entering into RSE and SWP, stronger systems should be in place so that workers and employers can be confident in both the management of these schemes and of positive outcomes in participating in them (Bailey 2018a).

## Overstaying

Initial concerns of RSE workers overstaying have never eventuated. Between 2007 and 2013, fewer than one percent of RSE workers overstayed their visas.<sup>36</sup> There are many reasons for this, such as careful selection processes and the obligations workers have to their families and communities to represent them and return with not only money, but also a good reputation to enable future employment opportunities. Furthermore, when any overstaying of visas has occurred, employers and authorities have largely been swift in dealing with offenders, sending them home immediately as an example for others not to follow their example. As discussed in the *Moving to New Zealand permanently* section, compliance measures assist in preventing overstaying. This is monitored at the family, community, and government levels.

Most workers do not want permanent migration and the circular nature of the scheme enables them to improve and diversify livelihoods practiced and valued in Vanuatu. Nonetheless, since earlier writings of participants in this study, one worker and his family, with the assistance from his employer, have become permanent residents. As the opening quotes of this section show, recent conversations with a couple of workers have revealed that there is interest in changing their status from temporary to permanent. Changes occur when

*the motives, goals and orientations characteristic at the beginning of labor migration – that is, the firm intention to return home – cannot be regarded as static or constant. They come under the influence of conditions in the new society and the perceptions of the country of origin from abroad*

(Heckmann et al. 2009: 6).

These motivations often stem from the pressures many seasonal workers receive from family and communities upon returning home. Even though workers miss their homes and families while working from home, they also enjoy a certain amount of freedom they do not have while in their villages (Bailey 2009).

Long-term workers have been given promotions after acquiring new skill sets (see Bailey 2014b) and academics have argued that temporary labour mobility schemes could lead to possible pathways to residency:

*Where Pacific workers are performing skilled work, and wish to pursue careers in these industries longer term, the seasonal work policies need to be flexible enough to allow for some carefully managed transitions to permanent residence in Australia and New Zealand*

(Bedford et al, 2017:50).

Because temporary labour schemes do not allow for a pathway to residency, they are usually depicted by governments and sold to the general population as being more desirable than incoming workers using other types of working visas, due to the strict temporality of their limited purposes visa. This often keeps host country citizens content in regards to labour mobility programs, however, when these programs are seen as a 'permanent welcome mat', citizens will start to protest against them (Pritchett 2006). As argued above, a well-managed pathway could be possible and the fact that few workers are considering this option (even after 10 seasons) is an indication that the desire to become a permanent resident may not be as prevalent as expected. Further, it should be remembered that the demand for workers is employer driven.

## Life without RSE

This research documents not only those people who participate in RSE but also those who do not, due to reasons such as not being eligible, not wanting to participate, not affording to participate, and being unsure of how to access recruitment agents. But equally it is important to understand what impacts occur for those who stop participating in



the RSE, why they stopped and what their future goals were. This section highlights stories of these men.

In 2009, five workers left the RSE due to the fact that that year their wages were lower than anticipated because of weather conditions affecting crops, which created extra downtime. As one worker said, 'I can sit at home and do nothing. I am not coming back next year' (cited in Bailey, 2009: 162). At the same time, the change in recruitment practices on Ambrym was also a contributing factor to workers deciding not to return. Workers felt tensions created from this change and the associated social and political tensions at the time, some of which were even highlighted in the national newspaper, where local chiefs accused New Zealand employers of being insensitive to their customary practices and decisions in regards to recruitment (see Bailey 2014). Therefore, there were considerations to obligations and constraints in participating. These workers discussed this freely but did not want it reported in full detail due to concerns that it may jeopardise relationships or future opportunities returning to the scheme.

A few of these non-returning workers have been able to sustain their livelihood and attain their goal of putting their children through education without RSE, through selling carvings, copra and kava. Participants referred to incomes generated from this as slow money, whereas they said earning in the RSE was 'quick money and easy work', referring to gaining large incomes in a short time. Family priorities have been another reason for departing the scheme. Two of the workers stated that their wives had asked them to stay behind for a season and another two workers said they left because they had gained paid employment in Port Vila.

### Those Who Have Exited the Scheme – Workers' Stories

Matthew worked 10 seasons and only stopped in 2017. He is not the only participant who, after seven to nine seasons, started getting frustrated with 'doing the right thing to please everyone else'. Living and working in a large seasonal worker group can be reasonably frustrating, especially when you have limited personal time. It has also been noted by other observers of the RSE, such as employers, government officials and team leaders, that quite often it is long-term workers with over five years' experience who are causing problems (see Bailey 2017a), which has been argued by various growers and pastoral care hosts to be associated with workers adapting to the 'kiwi lifestyle' of being carefree and resistant to employers/supervisors instructions. For Matthew he said it was time to stop. He accomplished all of his goals, built a house, paid for school fees and in May 2017 he purchased a truck for VUV4.7 million (NZD63,000), which is now his primary source of income. Matthew said he would only consider returning to either RSE or applying for SWP if his new business does not provide enough money to pay for his children's school fees.

Trevor worked four seasons until two reasons prevented him from returning. The first was a problem with a child in his village and the child's father needing to leave and, as Trevor stated, 'it is inside of *kastom* that I stay here and look after the child. I made a bigfella home with RSE and now mi gat two bigfella problems and can't go to New Zealand'. During that period Trevor's eyes had begun to fail him, with what looked like cataracts. Trevor accomplished many things in his four seasons of RSE: he built a house, a small store, paid for his wedding ceremony, adopted the child discussed above and managed to buy land for a garden. Even though Trevor wants the opportunity to return to RSE, he said his eyes would not be good for the vineyard ('mi no luk gud'). In his first season of RSE Trevor had an accident with wire from the vineyard getting caught in his eye and although he was seen and treated by an optometrist immediately following this (covered by his insurance at the time), there was concern that this has led to permanent damage that Trevor is now experiencing. Any further claims may be difficult to argue as Trevor continued working for a further three seasons after this injury. Workers' medical insurance covers them for treatments while in working in New Zealand but does not extend to when they return to the Pacific. Trevor has no paid employment on Ambrym and works in his subsistence garden.

Aaron participated in four seasons plus the World Bank pilot study, primarily to pay the school fees of his four children: 'school fees are very expensive in Vanuatu that is why I decided to go to RSE'. During his time in the scheme, he managed to pay for the school fees for all of his children, two of whom completed tertiary education. Without the RSE, Aaron said, this would not have been possible. For example, three years after leaving the RSE scheme, he struggled to finance his daughter's last years of secondary school. Because the last two years of secondary schooling is not available in North Ambrym, this was financially difficult and one of his sons who participated in SWP helped to

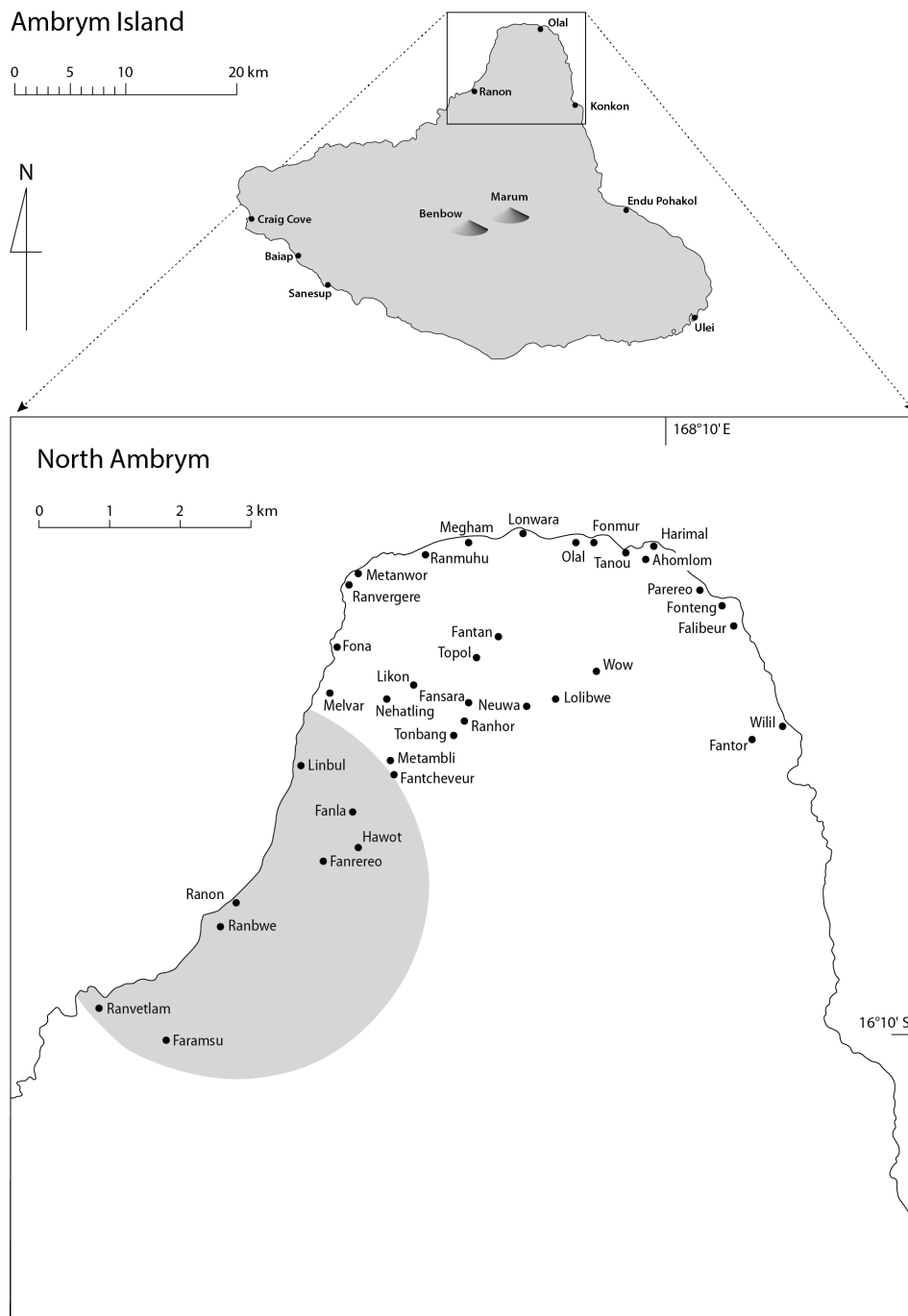
pay for her school fees. Now that she has completed secondary school, like her brothers, she wishes to participate in tertiary education and Aaron is applying to participate in both schemes to source income for her schooling. He is aware that licensed agents have been given age limits of under 35 for many workers going to Australia, which will limit his opportunity. This has also recently been a discussion amongst New Zealand growers in the RSE. Even though subject to New Zealand laws in terms of anti-discrimination, selection preferences in-country, such as Vanuatu, will overlook such legal requirements.

In the four seasons of RSE, Aaron managed to achieve the following: pay for school fees for his children; purchase land to plant kava (his crops will be ready in the next two years); he combined his RSE earning with his son's SWP income and they now have a joint boat transportation business; he provided the start-up funds for his wife's initial business; he contributed money and services to the church; and he provided financial and material contributions to community groups and numerous *kastom* ceremonies.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, earning from his investments are not sufficient to pay for the necessary fees his daughter needs for further education.

James participated in eight seasons of RSE plus the Work Bank pilot study. He has decided that he will not return to New Zealand. In his time he paid for his sibling's school fees, built two houses (one for himself and one for his parents), started a cooperative store, and paid for *kastom* ceremonies, including his own wedding. He now has a daughter and says that although he did not achieve everything he wanted to with his time in New Zealand, he is very happy to stay at home now ('No don't think about it, finished now, and happy to stay at the house. I have too much to do here' [indicating his village]).

James said he did not achieve everything he wanted to, and when further prompted he said that he wanted to build an evacuation centre for his community and a new permanent building for the kindergarten. The kindergarten was completed later with assistance from other RSE and SWP workers. The kindergarten started in 2018 – prior to that, children had to make the arduous journey from Fanrereo to Fanto village located near Ranon Bay. The journey from Fanrereo varies depending on weather conditions, taking between one to two hours down a steep hillside.

**Figure 16: Ambrym Island, with Lolihor District Highlighted and the Journey Fanrereo to Fanto**



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The shaded section of Figure 16 shows the area of Lolihor and the arrow indicates the journey from Fanrereo to Fanto village. A five minute walk from Fanto is Ranon village where the primary and secondary schools for the area are located.

Because of James's experience in RSE, many in the community look to him for advice and guidance. Many workers from both schemes have said that their standing in the community improved after their participation (see Bailey and Wells 2016). James discussed at length the issues he sees his community facing and talked about the nine seasonal workers who travel to RSE and SWP from his village. Although James had much success in RSE, he also talked about issues that have been exacerbated, noting:

1. younger recruits are coming back with drinking problems;
2. unlike when he was part of a group, (meaning the 22 in this study), not all other workers are contributing to their communities and they were becoming individualistic;
3. workers are sending money back to their wives and it's all gone before they come home;
4. many workers are not as satisfied with the incomes that they are bringing home as they were at the start.

James actively encourages workers to think of different ideas for themselves so they do not enter the annual 'in and out' cycle that he and many of his friends and family have been involved with. As he said, 'I have to challenge them to find something here. Everything [seems to be about] money. Money is not the only thing, we got a lot of other things that are important as well'.

The real challenge is how to meet the needs of workers' families in a region that has limited opportunities for earning money, and where there is demand to use cash for school fees, store-bought goods and reciprocal obligations (Bailey 2014b). James started a council with seasonal workers, and when they return in 2018/19, they will each contribute VUV5000 (NZD68). These funds are earmarked for the evacuation centre, a community garden, and a safer road for trucks to travel to the village.

Simon participated in the first two seasons of RSE before being blacklisted for inappropriate conduct. Unlike most blacklistings, this was not a serious offence, as he was welcomed back by his employers three years later for another season. His earnings built a house and a store, school fees for his three children and he purchased land and cattle. He only returned for one more season and has not returned due to wanting to spend more time with his family.

**Figure 17: Typical Store Set Up by RSE Workers, West Ambrym 2012**



Source: Author



Mark left the scheme in 2009 after being accused of causing problems by a supervisor, something that was never substantiated. He is a strong leader and one of the hardest workers of the group. Nonetheless, he was not welcomed back after challenging a New Zealand supervisor: 'I went to employment [Vanuatu ESU] and asked why I had been blacklisted but no reason, no reply'. In his time in the scheme, Mark was able to start a new shop and make extensions to his house, as well as contributing to school fees. Mark did consider returning to RSE but was concerned he would not be successful in his application.

## Stories from Spouses

When asking RSE workers' spouses and family what life is like while they are absent, often the answer is usually 'We are good. RSE i gud tumas'. These replies, although genuine in most circumstances, often mask the concern that if they give a different answer their family may lose a chance to keep participating (conversation with women's group, Ambrym, Vanuatu August 2012). There are varying impacts and considerations that cannot always be captured in surveys or one-off visits to the site. Regular visits and maintaining relationships and understandings are necessary to get to the heart of the situation. Over the years of repeat visits, the refrain from families has altered from the 'we are good' to 'here are some of our problems'. Yet the 'we are good' stories are still strongly echoed throughout. One story that has always stood out for me was Jade's story:

### Box 6: Jade's Story

Jade is in her late forties. She is married to an RSE worker and has four children. At the time of her fourth interview with me, her eldest child was completing his degree at the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher's Education (VITE) in Port Vila, the next child was participating in his first season of the Australian Seasonal Worker Programme, another son began university in the Kingdom of Tonga, and her youngest daughter had commenced secondary school education on an island nearby. Jade was happy that because of the RSE and SWP, her children had been afforded these opportunities. Nonetheless, this left Jade with an empty house and no one to assist her with the daily chores and commitments that she had in the village. Sometimes Jade would ask a relative to stay with her and other times she would go home to her natal village for the company of her family. Jade has also considered applying to the seasonal worker programs to break her loneliness.

Unlike Jade, Tania is frustrated that her husband returns annually and insists that now he has accomplished their initial goals that he should stay back in the village and help her. Even so, it is the goals of providing money for education, housing and other needs that keep wives supporting their husbands' repeated participation.

### Box 7: Tania's Story

Tania is a mother of four. Her husband has been participating without a break over several years, to her disappointment. When she and I first spoke, she talked of the burden of not only raising the children, tending to the household chores and garden but also the fact that she looked after her husband's family and it was too much for her. Although her husband always leaves her enough funds until he returns, Tania started her own successful business with funding from RSE earnings that has been successful. Yet she still wants her husband to take time off with to be with their new baby.

As discussed in the *Transitional accommodation* section, the main complaint that spouses mentioned was the length of time that their husbands spent in Port Vila.

Families of workers said that at first it was difficult for them, but now they are familiar with the annual transition. One wife said 'it's been five years now, we now know what to expect' (Jen, 18 April 2011). When asked about their children's responses to their fathers being absent, the majority said that their children would cry, but this changed over time. Spouses do have input into their partner's participation. As stated earlier, this has been in the form of the need for an approval letter and also in the fact the workers have been asked not to participate in seasons. As in the case of Tania above, some workers have chosen to ignore requests to stop participating.

Communication while the men are in New Zealand is the most effective way to help cope with absence. As the women have said, by workers telephoning, 'they remember us', 'I can ask for help or school fees' or 'he tells me he's good, work is good and he is warm'. Georgia told me she would keep her husband informed about their copra business and discuss the difficulties of his absence, 'reminding him who has to do the work'.<sup>38</sup> Spouses are filling in the labour void of their absent husbands, which is often burdensome (Bailey 2014; Smith 2016). When spouses are away, they pay for extended family or community members to assist by performing their duties, and often these costs are omitted in research.

Only one spouse of this group has participated in a seasonal workers scheme. She followed her brother to Australia to participate in SWP. The following season, she joined a group of eight other female workers who began working in the RSE where her husband was located. Although only one spouse from this initial group of 22 is participating, many spouses had enquired in regards to participation. The following section discusses some of the additional responsibilities of business management spouses and extended family members undertake while their partners are working overseas in seasonal worker programs.

## Funding Businesses for Family Members

It is hoped by many stakeholders that seasonal workers will use their earnings to initiate their own businesses, however, what is often missing in this equation is the fact that spouses and extended family members can also use workers' earnings from these schemes. In this case study, 32% of workers contributed to business initiatives (see Table 3). Dr Alisi Koutoke-Holani also argued how this is also the case for Tonga. She informs that spouses of Tongan male participants in her study were the strong driving force behind household entrepreneurship and income diversity (Bailey and Koutoke-Holani 2018). In Vanuatu, many spouses or other family members of RSE workers have initiated businesses. Even within this small sample of 20 workers, four wives began businesses and have operated them successfully for the past eight years. Although the number may be larger than my research revealed, I found another three extended family members also created businesses from incomes of the workers in this study. Considering the high rate of participation in the scheme today, it would be worthwhile for a larger study to examine the bigger picture and how many such businesses are still operational after five years, for example.

The most interesting finding is that most businesses *established by spouses* have remained viable longer than those established by seasonal workers themselves, who are often returning to RSE to continue paying for loans for their businesses (especially buses) or to keep financing their business. Whether this is due to constant absence or not should be investigated further.

## Looking After Businesses While Away

As shown in Table 3, 71% of workers in this study have established a business using earnings from the RSE scheme. However, being an absent business owner can be difficult. Many businesses are managed by family members and friends in the community and it can be frustrating for those who are managing to keep the business operating as well as complete their own daily work. For example, I was at the home of one worker while he was in New Zealand when he rang to speak with his wife. His mother joined in the conversation and they had a heated argument in regards to who was allowed to drive his vehicles for him. His mother was angry because she felt pressured by those who wanted to drive the trucks and was frustrated that her son was in New Zealand and not in the village dealing with the situation. An additional problem that is often spoken about is how people can take advantage of workers

who return so that they can either use a service for free, or in many cases for workers who have set up shops, where relatives and friends start accumulating debt that they struggle to repay. Even though workers have participated in business courses to manage these new investments (for example, with Vakameasina), family and community obligations will always override monetary practices – after all maintaining obligations is a central part of identity and relationships in Vanuatu. If these are not met, then any support for a business investment of any type will fail. This has been witnessed and discussed on several occasions (Bailey 2014b).

**Figure 10: Buses Crowding the Main Street of Port Vila, 2018**



Source: Author

## Strengthening Seasonal Worker's Family Program (SSWFP)

The Strengthening Seasonal Worker's Family Program (SSWFP), was established in 2011/12 by research participants to support families of RSE seasonal workers. This self-funded support group directly responds to the concerns of seasonal workers with spouses at home. Knowing their families are being supported gives workers confidence, allowing for not only a better working environment but also supporting their spiritual and material well-being while absent.<sup>39</sup> SSWFP has expanded significantly since its establishment and now includes SWP workers.

SSWFP has a 15-member committee in Port Vila overseeing the program. They hold monthly fundraisers, which bring families together to support each other and share their experiences. They also organise and deliver three main programs to their members, focusing on social, educational and spiritual ideologies. These are all important aspects of life in Vanuatu, and the balance of these three elements is fundamental to assisting workers and their families cope with the separation.

SSWFP provides counselling programs for both workers and spouses. Several issues regarding marriages and finances have surfaced and in recognition of this, additional support processes are now included in the program. For example, some workers were encouraged by team leaders to stay at home during the 2015/16 season to work on their relationships and restoring the necessary work-life balance before participating again. Local chiefs, and recruiters in particular, shared stories of extra-marital affairs and the alleged misuse of monies remitted. Some expressed their concerns that workers' wives are now being targeted for extra marital affairs.<sup>40</sup> This is not unfounded; workers and their spouses have confirmed the veracity of such reports.

Mitigating the negative social impacts arising from seasonal work has become an important issue for chiefs. Many acknowledge that localised forms of support have proven beneficial. Nonetheless, one chief mentioned the need

for the capacity building of chiefs, especially in terms of mediation, conflict resolution, and a better understanding of seasonal worker programs: 'It's been a capacity building exercise for us as chiefs...there is a need to train chiefs (especially the older ones) about these social changes and the different languages and intersecting cultures'. He advocated for training about the social changes workers and families face in regards to RSE and SWP.

Chiefs complained they are 'taking care of issues coming from these programs with little support from churches'.<sup>41</sup> Despite tensions between the church and local leaders in regards how to best support families through 'periods of crisis',<sup>42</sup> research shows both groups are making a valuable contribution (Bailey, Bumseng and Bumseng 2016). These support networks are critically important as they not only provide localised support but also regulate access to the schemes.

## The Culture of Migration

A 'culture of migration' is often referred to when people moving for waged work becomes the norm in society (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). This phenomenon was already noticeable in Vanuatu prior to RSE, with people moving to Port Vila or Santo to look for employment. However, what I am adding to this understanding of the culture of migration in Vanuatu, is that relatives – specifically adult children – are following their parents into these labour mobility schemes.

As mentioned earlier, Jade's husband is an RSE worker and her son works in SWP. I also mentioned earlier how Chris's son is participating in RSE. Four workers from this study have adult children participating in either RSE or SWP. Given that this is a small sample for research, what would be interesting to investigate is how many of the nearly 8000 workers from Vanuatu do the same.

The reason I have been given for children following their parents in seasonal worker programs is that it is due largely to the lack of employment opportunities at home. Like their parents, the adult children have the ambition to improve their lives and help their family and community. Often they are contributing to a sibling's education, want to purchase land, build a house and in this case study, enter businesses such as cattle farming, shopkeeping and transportation.

One father in RSE and his son in SWP pooled their resources to create a transportation business. While working in New Zealand, one purchased a boat while the other purchased an outboard motor and other parts necessary. Another advantage to having more than one family member in labour schemes is illustrated thus: the father withdrew from RSE and still he managed to keep up the payments for school fees for the following year, however he could not generate enough income on the island for future years. However, the son in SWP continued to pay the school fees for his brother and sister. The son also carried home second-hand clothing for his mother's business that she had established using the clothing her husband previously shipped from New Zealand. Second-hand clothing is a particularly popular business venture for workers and their families, not just in the Pacific but also in other labour-sending areas, the most documented being a study in Africa by Karen Hansen in 2000. Workers in this study have been collecting clothing for personal use and business since 2007. Often clothing taken back to the village was used, sold or exchanged for other goods. In Vanuatu, clothing from Australia and New Zealand is sought after and is perceived by many as being of superior quality compared to that available in many local clothing shops. In 2010, one worker's wife made NZD1000 in less than an hour with a stall she set up selling clothing purchased in New Zealand. In addition to clothing, between 2008 and 2010 I documented large numbers of New Zealand school books being taken back home for children.

## Education

### Working to Educate Family and Themselves

It is often asked why workers return annually. The answer is the continual need to fund school fees. This is where both labour schemes have made immense contributions, yet it gains little recognition in the academic literature on labour mobility schemes. In the case of Vanuatu, the World Bank report argued that impacts on education outcomes was not significant with the SWP workers interviewed (World Bank, 2018:47). This does not resonate with what workers have stated in both this study and the extended SWP research data collected, nor McKenzie and Gibson's 2014 study. Bailey (2014), Kautoke-Holani (2017) and Bailey and Wells (2016) have all documented school fees as being



a priority for most seasonal workers. Their combined findings for both Tonga and Vanuatu in both schemes showed that education was a priority for the majority of workers. Many workers were either paying for school fees for their own children or extended family members. Kautoke-Holani (2017) found that 56% of workers invested in education. A study of a combination of ni-Vanuatu workers from RSE and SWP conducted by Bailey and Wells in 2016 showed that 91% of workers invested in education. A similar number was found in Gibson and McKenzie's study (2014:17): 'In our baseline survey 85 percent of Tongan RSE households and 98 percent of ni-Vanuatu RSE households said that earning money to pay for school fees was a very important or somewhat important motive for participating in the RSE'. Fees for primary, secondary and tertiary education vary in Vanuatu, and are charged on a partial to full cost-recovery basis. A resounding comment from all workers has been that without earnings from New Zealand, their children's education would have been limited.

School fees are not the only consideration. In Vanuatu, many children have to migrate to further their education. Below is a picture of mothers sending their children to Santo where they will continue their final two years of secondary school study, which is not available for children being educated in the English system on Ambrym. It is an emotional time due to the necessary family separation, but without earnings from RSE and SWP, participants said they would not have been able to provide this opportunity for their children. The majority of research participants did not have the opportunity to go past year six and like all parents, they want their children to succeed and be able to have the educational opportunities that they did not have.

**Figure 19A & B: Sending Children to Santo for School**



Source: Author

Children of workers are often reminded at church and in school that they need to work hard at school, given the sacrifices their parents are making by participating in seasonal worker programs. Four of the workers in this study have had children attend and complete tertiary education. In regards to development impacts, the number of children gaining access to increased levels education because of incomes from labour schemes should be captured, as well as those university students who participate in order to pay for their tertiary education. How many children will be able to accomplish this goal because of incomes generated from RSE and SWP – not just tertiary education but also completing secondary education? This will not be an easy study but it is one of importance and strongly recommended in regards to assessing development outcomes from the RSE.

## Education and Up-Skilling in New Zealand

The education and up-skilling of workers was noted early on in the RSE scheme. During interviews with workers in 2007, many who were involved in the World Bank pilot project assumed this was going to be an important part

of the RSE policy. These workers discussed the internet and computer courses provided in during the pilot project but questioned their value because at the time there was no electricity (let alone the internet), on the island. When asked, workers said they would like to be provided the following skills: 1. two-stroke motor courses (this was mainly for being able to conduct repairs on generators when they returned home), 2. English skills and 3. computer literacy courses. The World Bank pilot funded a two-stroke maintenance course at the local polytechnic college. However, half way through the 2007/8 season workers realised that courses were not going to be on offer. Leaders were disappointed and indirectly complained about this to the company:

*Today before I had my interview [with the employer] I approached the leaders and asked them if there was anything that they wanted raised with him. Unlike when I had asked them previously, this time they had many questions for me to ask him ... They asked me to discuss if there were going to be any training courses for them to do like last time. Ron stated that because they are only working a forty hour week that they had plenty of time on their hands and would like to do something constructive in their free time. And one of the reasons for coming to New Zealand was to gain extra skills to take back home. They told me that last time they were here they kept asking when will the courses start and were told by the company 'soon'. Michael said that the courses did not start until staff from the World Bank came to visit and stopped shortly afterwards and they wondered if the courses were only for show for the World Bank.*

(Fieldnotes, 7 November 2007)

It was not that their employers did not want to provide extra training, but that it was largely due to financial constraints, workers' hours and finding tutors that could work around the RSE workers' work schedules.<sup>43</sup> This went both ways; often workers were too exhausted to attend courses after work. However, years later a flexible training program was designed for RSE workers that has had success in terms of its delivery and the respect that workers have for the program.

## Vakameasina

In 2009, New Zealand introduced the RSE pilot training programme for the period 2009 to 2011 (Roorda 2011). This was replaced by the current Vakameasina program that is delivered by Fruition Horticulture. In 2014 I was invited to review the Vakameasina program and the impacts it had on workers who had participated in it. At the time, the research participants had only received one year of Vakameasina training in Central Otago. Since then, all of the long-term workers in this study have attended the business course that Vakameasina provided, and other courses on offer too. For example, Tom said Vakameasina helped him plan ahead through learning about both short term and long term priority setting and management skills. All workers in this study noted the value of Vakameasina and its accessibility. This was also due to workers being given access to computers and the internet to access Vakameasina's website.

The greatest advantage of Vakameasina is that many of its modules are online for workers and their families in the Pacific to access at their own convenience.<sup>44</sup> Vakameasina is flexible and innovative in its approach to workers' needs and training:

*Vakameasina coordinators have taken this training scheme further than just simple literacy training and incorporated practical life skills education that is relevant to RSE workers' everyday lives in Vanuatu. Meeting needs of students in such innovative ways is a credit to the programme and shows a partnership with not only New Zealand growers but with the workers from the Pacific whose voices are often suppressed in policy implementation. These innovative training methods and courses make Vakameasina meaningful*

(Bailey 2014 b).

An example of this innovation was when Vakameasina coordinators observed workers were purchasing chainsaws and approached the local Mitre 10 hardware store to assist in providing them courses on chainsaw use, safety and maintenance. The former labour commissioner in Vanuatu noted how after Cyclone Pam devastated the country, these workers with the chainsaws and skills to use them immediately made a significant contribution in clearing off the debris and allowing road access for many.

### Cyclone Pam's Effect on New Training Opportunities

The most difficult and challenging period for the workers was during Tropical Cyclone Pam in March 2014. The stress of being over two thousand kilometres away, only receiving visuals from news broadcasting channels and desperately waiting to hear from families and friends was most definitely a time of feeling helpless. The generosity shown by host communities in both Australia and New Zealand was inspiring and also sparked new educational opportunities for the workers.

Some New Zealand employers, including the one from this research, arranged for his workers to participate in a polytechnic course on how to strengthen houses. This project was done with the aftermath of Cyclone Pam in mind and it revealed the generosity of both the employer and the lead carpenter lecturer employed to teach new techniques in building reinforcing. The project was funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and materials were provided by local building firms.<sup>45</sup> Although these workers already had the skills for building homes, Mark Hathaway from ONENEWS reported the course was, 'to refine the skills the guys already have, so when they get back to Vanuatu, what they build is a lot more sturdy and stronger than it has been in the past....skills such as how to strengthen buildings against cyclone strong winds, doing it on a budget and with limited materials is part of the thinking during the weekly classes in Cromwell'.

One of the workers sent an email of his experience of the project:

#### Box 8: Worker's Story on Building

'Hi Sis, hope yu oraet wetem nis blo mifala. Hemia Sam smol storian blo ol boe long building projek. In the building workshop we learned a lot. We saved more money when we builded house that it's just enough space for the family. Also we used our local materials which is not expensive. Now we know how to start from foundation of a house with the right measurements, which we know nothing about before. Saved money as well by helping each other as we build which is good for us to keep the unity back home. Before Cyclone Pam came one of us builded a house. The house was unfinished. He managed to finish the wall and the roof. He was still in New Zealand when Pam completely destroyed the house because he builded it cheap, with cheap materials which wasn't strong enough to survive the cyclone. He learned a lot in the building workshop, went back and rebuilded the house that he know it will survive the cyclones. Again lots of Chinese materials coming in the country. We've learned to have good strong house we have to use good materials. At the end the boys builded two houses and both were sold. The dollars are kept for another workshop to involve the other boys to have the same skills.

Great thanks to James Dicey for the ideas....

Cheers....

Pete



Often, workers have returned to Vanuatu and built bigger homes, many modelled off what they had seen in New Zealand. However, community leaders commented that they did not necessarily take into consideration the reinforcement of the larger structures they were building. These are new skill sets that most workers have taken home and shared with their communities that are practical and useful for development. When discussing this project with the workers, they found these new skills useful in designing and repairing homes damaged by the cyclone.

## Natural Disasters

Post-Cyclone Pam there were notable increases in applications to enter Australia and New Zealand's seasonal work schemes. Vanuatu operations manager for SSCO received requests and applications from ni-Vanuatu who had no previous interest in participating.

The New Zealand government responded by making concessions for existing visa-holders for those in affected areas. Visas were extended and Immigration New Zealand waived the visa fees for RSE workers.<sup>46</sup> The New Zealand national coordinator for seasonal labour said that only 130 ni-Vanuatu returned after Cyclone Pam and he was impressed by:

*the level of responsibility of the workers themselves understanding that rebuilding will require funding, will require money, and therefore the vast majority has chosen to stay on and work, and we as employers really support that...*<sup>47</sup>

At the time Cyclone Pam hit there were 170 ni-Vanuatu working in Australia, and 2059 in New Zealand. With seasonal workers absent from Vanuatu, pressure on limited resources is relieved and they are earning money to rebuild homes and community infrastructure which are a priority. Ongoing remittances are critical not only in the short term, but as part of a mid- and long-term rebuild and emergency natural disaster response strategy.

**Figure 20: Fundraising Sign**



Source: Author

Contributions from host communities in delivering assistance after Cyclone Pam highlighted how valued workers are in their respective host communities and how well established the relationships that had become through both the RSE and SWP.

Currently, RSE and SWP are schemes intended to encourage economic development for Pacific Island states. These schemes could develop further as a possible adaptation strategy in times of natural disasters. The European Union recently proposed temporary labour migration as an adaptation to climate change.<sup>48</sup> Spain currently offers Columbia



such a scheme targeting vulnerable communities (De Moor 2011). The Spanish Temporary and Circular Labour Migration Programme (the TCLM project) could be a possible model for RSE and SWP to adopt (De Moor 2011). As noted by Bedford et al (2017:40):

*The seasonal work schemes in Australia and New Zealand, which have provided temporary work visas for about 70 000 Pacific workers during the past decade, could become one of the most significant policies for facilitating adaptation by Pacific families to changing environmental conditions in their own communities.*

This is already occurring, with workers using incomes to rebuild or to relocate after Cyclone Pam, and one of many examples in Vanuatu has been the relocation of people from Ambae Island displaced after volcanic eruptions in 2017–2018. During this period there were increased applications to these schemes from ni-Vanuatu, with recruitment agents helping in finding them employment to earn incomes to assist.<sup>49</sup>

Earnings from RSE contribute to rebuilding infrastructure after natural disasters such as Pam, but also to help prepare communities for the regular annual cyclones that pass through the region (and in some parts of Ambrym, to repair damaged infrastructure from volcanic acid rain) (Bailey 2014b). Research participants have funded various community rebuilding infrastructure projects, from wells in each of their respective villages, to kindergartens, primary schools, churches and numerous others and in many cases have also received assistance from their respective host communities.

## Host Communities

Various forms of integration and interactions with host communities affects workers' experiences of seasonal work, although there are often difficulties in doing so due to language barriers and the long work hours worked. Within days of arrival, RSE workers were contributing economically to their host communities and a month later, I noted the contributions that they made in other areas, such as community associations and church groups. In the initial years of the scheme, there was an encouragement of a 'culture of saving' with RSE scheme workers and their employers. This culture of saving was enforced by home communities, employers and government officials, discouraging the workers from spending money on goods that they depicted as wasteful (Bailey, 2009:23; Bedford 2013:208). Smith (2016:122) and Cameron (2011:100) also noted that workers were cautioned against overspending. At the grower's meeting in 2007, employers highlighted that they would encourage workers to save their money, raising the point that it may make some local business owners unhappy to observe workers taking their money home and not spending it in the local community. However, this fear was unwarranted, as workers were requested to bring goods back by their families and communities.

In the 2007/08 season, the recruiting company had considerable control over the workers' wages. The men's weekly wages were divided into two bank accounts, one for their weekly spending money, and the other for their savings. Each man received NZD60 a week in spending money. This was not a stipulation in their contracts and the men were aware that if they needed more than this then the funds would be available. SSCO discouraged the workers from using the money in their savings account in two ways: 1. the men's ATM cards did not give access the account and 2. the men had to fill out a company request form to withdraw money from their savings account – and, as some of the men told me, justifying to the company why the money was needed. Workers did not like to approach the company to request their own money, and as such, rarely ever did. When I discussed this system with a SSCO representative, he informed me that workers could have money out of their savings account at any stage but he would prefer it was after they had repaid the company their travel expenses (Bailey, 2009:93).

As such, in the beginning, the culture of saving could be said to have been imposed on workers, who were told by both their employers and their Ambrym communities to save as much money as they could to take back home for their families. An example of this comes from my field notes on 23 October 2007:

*Today [the employer] explained to the men how important it was for the men not to waste their money on unnecessary items such as alcohol, cigarettes, packs of chips and fizzy drinks. He gave the men a calculation on how much these products cost and told the men that was money that their families would be missing out on.*

This culture of saving was regularly reinforced by the employers. Comments made by SSCO representatives served to remind the men they were in New Zealand to save money; the more they saved, the more successful the scheme looked. Although the company suggested to workers that buying these goods mentioned in the above quote was wasting money, it did not stop the men from purchasing them. In this situation, SSCO had limited to no control over the men's weekly spending, however they had control over the men's savings accounts (Bailey, 2009: 95–96) up to 2009, when their worker's card could then access both accounts. When the employer changed banks, workers were reduced to having one bank account, to save money from the fees they were being charged in having two accounts. After this time, workers had full access to all of their incomes with no limitations or restrictions by the company. As stated earlier, these initial restrictions were established to not only protect the workers but also company interests.

## Workers' Downtime in New Zealand

*I really encourage you guys not to just look at these guys as hands on the orchard. I mean I know that is what they are here for, but look after them as human beings and get them out because they are good buggers and they are enjoyable people to be around and it's really rewarding to have them around your house for a meal or whatever it might be*

(Craig Howard 19 September 2007).

The interactions between Pacific seasonal workers and their employers and local host communities in Australia and New Zealand generate new relationships. These interactions have been complex, involving both language and cultural differences. Relationships have strengthened partnerships between workers and their employers. One of the most significant changes, observed working with SSCO and from my discussions with employers at RSE conferences, is how many employers have formed relationships with workers that go beyond the scope of the scheme, creating new partnerships with workers, their families and communities in the Pacific. The course of these relationships can be summed up in one phrase: *from paternalism to partnership*. But as discussed earlier, and in previous writings, much of the initial paternalistic attitude shown at the outset of the RSE scheme originated from risks that employers undertook to participate, genuine concern for the RSE workers' wellbeing through pastoral care obligations and the constant presence of watchdogs, for example, the media, academics and local community members (Bailey, 2009; 2014b).

## Figures 21A & B: Employers Visiting Communities 2012



Source: Author

*This is a partnership between our company and your communities. The more our company grows, the more workers we will take from your communities. A relationship of mutuality*

(Employer, Ambrym Island, 2012).

Much of the initial paternalism showed by employers was due to the major economic and social risks they undertook in participating in the program and the high degree of responsibility for the welfare of RSE workers that they had taken on, which is not a concern with other forms of labour. Nonetheless, it did not take long before relationships formed and new partnerships began, community to community – employers to workers and their communities (Bailey 2014b; Bedford 2013), many of which involved community development projects in Vanuatu. This resonates with Rockwell's (2015) findings. Rockwell's survey asked about employers' involvement in development projects in the Pacific, he said '32% claimed some form of development and a further 17% claimed to be in discussions about a project' (2015:142).

These links have extended beyond employer relationships with RSE workers and their families and specific communities in Vanuatu. For example, there are now community links being made between the general Central Otago community over in islands in Vanuatu, assisting in development projects such as medical centres, contributions to infrastructure and school donations. One that needs a special mention is the team from *Its not about us*,<sup>50</sup> based in Alexandra, Central Otago, which came about through links with ni-Vanuatu involved in the RSE scheme. *Its not about us* has assisted with many projects, for example installing water pumps in various places in Vanuatu. Furthermore, the responses of New Zealand host communities when Cyclone Pam devastated Vanuatu in March 2014 was inspiring and highlighted the importance and strength of these relationships that had developed since the initiation of the RSE.

## Reintegration Programmes and Development Objectives

The reintegration process is a significant and often neglected part of migration studies (Agunias 2006; Ammasari and Black 2001; Cassarino 2004; Rigg 2007; Skeldon 2004; Toyota et al 2007). There are two main perspectives of reintegration this study has examined: 1. the reintegration of workers returning to and from their home and host communities and 2. assisting workers with establishing goals and economic assistance with their earnings. The former has been the central focus, where I argue that to date (2014) participants' reintegration has been successful due to connections and financial and social obligations being maintained with home and host communities. Assisting workers with financial advice has been a role of team leaders, SSWFP, various financial institutions and government groups in New Zealand and Pacific sending nations. This is a difficult and complex space with many considerations, as workers require varied support, depending on personal circumstances and the number of years of participation. It is difficult to assess how participation in labour mobility schemes will contribute to positive development outcomes in the future. More conversations with workers, families, communities and other in-country stakeholders are necessary to see if further improvements can be made in regards to potential reintegration services and if there is a demand for workers and families requiring such services.

**Figure 22: Workers Returning to their Families May 2011**



Source: Author



Internationally, there are many examples of reintegration programs but how effective they are will depend on the specific goals of workers, families and their communities. There is evidence that workers are returning from these schemes and are unsure on how to invest in a new type of business (Bailey and Holani 2018). Measures to address this with government-funded programs could prove useful, and there is also a role for the private sector here.

## Workers Looking to the Future

Recently, long-term workers have been discussing what their futures will look like after they leave the RSE scheme. There have been a number of informal meetings and discussions about how workers can set themselves up for life without the RSE scheme. One team leader said that they have observed how others who left the scheme have managed and that is a good start into looking at lessons to be learned.

There have been discussions on planning a voluntary superannuation program for workers. Although Vanuatu has a superannuation program, workers have stated that they want a program run through a different organisation solely for the seasonal workers.

The group in this study have also discussed investment options, not only in Vanuatu, but in New Zealand and specifically in the viticulture industry that they have worked in for the past eleven years. In 2007, workers would collect real estate brochures and often joke that they would pool their money and purchase land in the region. This has transformed from joking to recently seeking advice on how they could do this (although at the time of writing this report they were still organising this meeting). However, the fact that workers are considering investment outside of Vanuatu is possibly due to a lack of success of investing within Vanuatu. Many have participated in various investments, with the outcomes of those investments often having been minimal at best.

## Lessons Learned, Future Outlooks and Recommendations

### The First Objective of RSE – Addressing Labour Shortages

For New Zealand industries it has been proven without a doubt that the RSE has assisted in addressing critical labour shortages, however there are still reports of severe labour shortages in many regions.<sup>51</sup> Through the number of workers participating and the quality of their labour, RSE has given growers the confidence for expansion, as reflected in the significant growth of both the horticulture and viticulture industries. However, as I noted in 2014 following Basok's (2002) observation of Mexican workers in Canada, workers from the Pacific are also becoming a 'structural necessity' for New Zealand growers.

What has been crucial to the success of the scheme so far has been the constant monitoring, evaluations, communication and negotiations amongst the numerous stakeholders in what Charlotte Bedford (2013) rightly calls a complex system of relationships. The responses to changes over the 10-year period have been significant and well thought out to meet the needs of everyone involved.

### The Second Objective of RSE – Encouraging Economic Development in Labour-Sending Countries

The secondary objective of encouraging economic development is evident through a number of developmental lenses, whether this has been through education of workers and their families, creating new infrastructure or establishing businesses. Overall earnings from the RSE have contributed to improved livelihoods of workers, their families and extended communities.

Development on Ambrym in Vanuatu has occurred through the RSE scheme. Incomes generated have supplemented household incomes, where previously there were limited opportunities available. Workers, families and their communities have allocated these funds to projects that they consider development priorities. This additional source of income has also allowed for the establishment of small businesses in communities, though their success is dependent on the social and economic environments in which they exist. Although some workers have enjoyed success with their business investments, other have been disappointed and are looking at new forms of business ventures outside of their island (and now outside their own country) for future investment returns. This is something that governments have not considered – but is a reality that is now taking place – and will be a new area of research to examine.



## Recommended Areas of Further Study

There is still much research needed in evaluating the impact of the RSE and a few that I want to highlight here are:

1. What is the impact of RSE earnings on education? This report has established that education has been a priority for many Pacific seasonal workers and the consequences of this long-term for each nation should be assessed.
2. A concern has existed since the initiation of the RSE and has increased notably in the last couple of years in Vanuatu and elsewhere. It relates to those who see seasonal workers as an opportunity to make easy money. They range from scammers selling non-existent placements in the schemes to legitimate business practitioners who have found new consumers in their existing or opportunistic markets. There is too much scope for the exploitation of workers both in and out of their workplace – something that needs further exploration.
3. An examination of whether the scheme is increasing further permanent migration into capital cities of Pacific Island nations is suggested. With additional financial capital, are workers now migrating to urban centres? How will this impact on land ownership, urbanisation and other economic and social outcomes of new internal migrations?
4. The impacts on non-moving family members is important. What social barriers and opportunities are there for non-movers in comparison to internal migrants? Can we use non-movers to measure the impact of internal migrants when there are a number of individual, family and community needs factored into workers' reciprocal obligations? Further demographic studies are required to map where workers are (and are not) being selected from, to assist in examining high and low levels of participation in particular regions.
5. Further investigations into businesses established by seasonal workers (including businesses established by others using RSE earnings as start-up funds) and their viability should be conducted. This would involve looking at positive and negative systems and business environments in which workers are investing.
6. There should be more studies conducted on workers who cease to participate in the RSE and the impacts of this. With many leaving the scheme after long-term participation, discussing the challenges and opportunities of leaving the scheme could assist in RSE workers' future plans once they leave the programme.
7. There is an opportunity here for the RSE to assist in disaster response. A study looking into the possibilities of linking a disaster response component into the RSE policy would be valuable.
8. Many studies of financial remittances have been conducted in relation to the RSE, but what would be a value-add to this would be a study conducted on *material* remittances. Workers take home a considerable amount of material goods. By doing so, they contribute to community needs, those of the workers and their families and also assist in establishing businesses. This study would be a complementary contribution to the study of labour mobility.

## Concluding Remarks

Experience has shown that lessons are regularly being learned in these schemes. Employers, workers, pastoral care hosts and recruiters have noted that every year new situations have provided new opportunities, and often challenges, that had not been considered in the past. Communication, negotiation and partnerships have been the key to the success of this case study and also the key to the success of the RSE.

Through seasonal work in New Zealand, ni-Vanuatu RSE workers are reaching their development-specific goals. The RSE scheme has benefited the livelihoods of ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers by enabling continued school education, housing and infrastructure projects, new business opportunities and an additional source of income to meet *kastom* exchange obligations embedded in culturally significant reciprocal relationships. There are competing interests in the ownership of workers' wages and how these are distributed, and workers continue to participate due to the ongoing benefits that motivated them to initially participate.

What is often noted in academic research is the *tangible* development, such as workers purchasing new buses, creating new stores and building infrastructure such as houses and wells. But there is much positive development that is *intangible*, such as contributions to education, and the economic and social empowerment for workers and their

families, that needs further research. Nonetheless, there are other hidden costs to workers and their families that also needs much attention. Dependency theorists such as Reichart (1981) and Binford (2003) argue that the costs of migration outweigh benefits, whereas examining workers' and their families' points of view in this study, I argue that any costs, whether economic or social, have been outweighed by benefits, which is evident in workers returning for several consecutive seasons (not because of failure [Cassarino 2004], but due to positive outcomes from their work in New Zealand). However, in the future, this situation might change and the costs might begin to outweigh the benefits, and the research would need to be revisited. There are mixed effects in various villages, dependent on the number of workers participating and the workers' own personal ambitions. Overall, this scheme has enabled ni-Vanuatu workers and their families to obtain an additional source of income to improve livelihoods and achieve self-development goals, whilst simultaneously contributing to family, community and customary obligations.

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1. Bailey 2014 highlights the prevalence of exploitation in these industries as being equal to those seen internationally.
2. See <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/apply-for-a-visa/visa-factsheet/recognised-seasonal-employer-limited-visa#criteria>
3. See <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/employ-migrants/hire-a-candidate/employer-criteria/recognised-seasonal-employer/apply-rse-status>
4. RSE Guide to Becoming an Employer: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/employ-migrants/hire-a-candidate/employer-criteria/recognised-seasonal-employer/apply-rse-status>
5. See <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/forms-and-guides/inz1145.pdf>
6. Personal communication 19 September 2007.
7. See <http://taxpolicy.ird.govt.nz/publications/2010-ris-sop-187-gstrm-bill/non-resident-seasonal-workers-tax-rate>
8. See <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/employ-migrants/hire-a-candidate/employer-criteria/recognised-seasonal-employer/apply-atr>
9. See <http://www.devpolicy.org/joint-recruitment-20181012/>
10. See <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-orchardist/20171101/282243780873735>
11. RSE previously fell under the former Department of Labour, now the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).
12. See <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/SPP-Vak-Evaluation-Final-Report2016.pdf>
13. Unfortunately, two are now deceased.
14. Personal communication, John Salong, November 2007. Anthropologist Penelope Schoeffel (1997: 2) highlights that there have been a significant number of development projects initiated by aid agencies in Melanesia, which have often failed to consider traditional and cultural aspects that can influence outcomes.
15. The LDC is one of three councils in North Ambrym, the other two being the Lonali and Wawanfanhol councils.
16. Personal communication, growers meeting, Central Otago September 2007.
17. Initially the workers contracts were in English but by 2008, SSCO had all employment contracts translated in Bislama.
18. Interestingly, a butcher from the local supermarket said with the arrival of workers from Vanuatu they now had a market to sell pigs heads, which was not a common cuisine choice of the locals of the area.
19. The 'black horse machine' that Aaron is referring to is the National Bank automatic teller machine.
20. Personal communication, Michael Sorenson 2017.
21. This was mentioned at the growers' meeting in 2007.
22. This was not the case for Trevor – he never returned for any medical treatment.
23. See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/agribusiness/77627719/selfauditing-worker-accommodation-could-lead-to-dodgy-contractors-in-marlborough?rm=m>
24. See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/107588850/Minimum-bedroom-space-rule-applies-to-some-seasonal-workers-but-not-others>

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25. See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/107588850/Minimum-bedroom-space-rule-applies-to-some-seasonal-workers-but-not-others>
  26. See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/107588850/Minimum-bedroom-space-rule-applies-to-some-seasonal-workers-but-not-others>
  27. Lindstrom (2011: 2) also tells the story of a man from Tanna moving to Port Vila, so that he could pay for his brother's school fees. While living there he had his own children, and in order to pay for their school fees, he had to stay in Vila. In his concluding argument he states '[O]vertime circular migration of men from village to plantation or town and back has given way to the movement of entire families to Vila's peri-urban settlements' (Lindstrom, 2011:12).
  28. Personal communication, group meeting with SWP workers, Port Vila, April 2015 with documentation cited by author. It is important to stipulate here that it was not the employer enforcing this fee. This company is no longer in existence, assumedly due to many issues with the letter of offer not matching fees deducted from workers.
  29. Personal communication, grower, Central Otago, New Zealand. November 2007.
  30. Personal communication, grower, Central Otago, January 2013
  31. Personal communication, Goodies Trading staff member, Port Vila, July 2018.
  32. For more on return migration and precautionary savings see Dustmann 1997.
  33. Personal Communication, George Rarere MBIE, 2019
  34. This is not entirely specific to Vanuatu.
  35. Kitchens are usually in separate building structures in Ambrym.
  36. Personal communication, Anne Masoe, senior advisor for the RSE scheme, New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 11 September 2013.
  37. In 2011 he used his RSE income to purchase a grass cutter which he used to maintain the church grounds, the road and other community areas.
  38. I interviewed Georgia on several occasions. The first time (June 2011), as reflected in many of her quotes, was while her husband was in Port Vila. She was less than positive in regards to her husband's absence and her having to shoulder the responsibilities at home. In the second interview (August 2012) in the following year, she was more positive towards her husband's absence as she was assisted in her work by her daughter-in-law during that RSE season.
  39. While discussing reintegration programs with 63 seasonal workers, the majority stated that they would rather see funding available for supporting their families while they were absent than for helping them reintegrate, as they thought this would be more useful.
  40. This can also apply to men, however, female participants were highlighted during interviews.
  41. Personal communication, village chief 29 May 2016.
  42. A term used by one chief, 29 May 2016.
  43. Personal communication, Craig Howard, 2007.
  44. See <http://www.vakameasina.co.nz/>.
  45. See <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/vanuatu-orchard-workers-in-central-otago-learning-carpentry-skills-help-post-cyclone-rebuild-back-home>

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46. See [http://www.dailypost.vu/news/article\\_642dd990-881c-51ec-9954-c01120dc6209.html?mode=print](http://www.dailypost.vu/news/article_642dd990-881c-51ec-9954-c01120dc6209.html?mode=print)
  47. See <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/20172519/ni-vanuatu-seasonal-workers-in-nz-prepare-for-cyclone-rebuild>
  48. See <https://www.sprep.org/climate-change/europe-proposes-seasonal-workers-scheme-as-adaptation-options>
  49. Personal communication, agents and statistics from Vanuatu ESU 2018.
  50. See <http://www.itsnotaboutus.co.nz/>
  51. See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/102243731/here-are-some-of-the-jobs-that-kiwis-cant-or-wont-do>





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