

# Ni-Vanuatu in the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme: Impacts at Home and Away



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## 1. Introduction

In 2007, New Zealand introduced the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. It aims to recruit workers from Pacific island states to meet labour demands for New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture sectors (Bailey 2009; Benson-Pope 2007). This scheme was an industry-led initiative following many years of labour shortages in these sectors. Over four decades, Pacific island leaders had been requesting that Australia and New Zealand open-up their labour markets at Pacific Island Forums (Bailey 2009; Maclellan and Mares 2008). Although the scheme acknowledges that employment for New Zealanders remains a priority, it allows horticulturalists and vineyard owners to recruit up to 8000 workers per annum from the Pacific islands. The RSE scheme is promoted as having a 'triple win' effect — for employers, governments and workers (Ramasamy et al. 2008). I add a fourth to this win count — the New Zealand regions that host migrant labourers, as they too benefit from the arrival of seasonal workers in the region.

This paper covers four areas. It begins by outlining participation of ni-Vanuatu in the RSE. Secondly, it introduces my case study of Ambrym workers who are involved in seasonal contracts in Central Otago. From research in two primary field sites — Central Otago and Vanuatu from 2007–2013 — I have documented the participation and experiences of 22 ni-Vanuatu men in the scheme, as well as their families and communities in Port Vila and Ambrym. Thirdly, this research concerns Central Otago growers, vineyard workers and local community members. Fourthly, due to the length of time spent with the same participants, I have been able to follow and document changes in workers' objectives and analyse various 'developmental' achievements resulting from participation in the scheme.

For ni-Vanuatu, there are costs in participating in labour schemes. These include the initial economic outlay, and the expected obligations to their families and local communities prior to departure and upon their return.

Governments involved in the bilateral agreements of the RSE scheme expect workers to contribute significant investments to be used for 'development' in Pacific island nations, even though the development achieved does not necessarily fit orthodox policy assumptions. Workers' remittances are expected to help fund individual and community projects. Thus, this paper discusses the effects of the RSE scheme in terms of development, the governance of cross-border international labour mobility, and consequent improvement in rural and, to a certain extent, urban, livelihoods in Vanuatu.

The livelihoods of ni-Vanuatu involved in the RSE scheme have improved, and continuing participation in labour programs such as the RSE and Australia's Seasonal Workers Program (SWP) is promoted on the island of Ambrym where my research is focused. Migrant workers do not necessarily hold significant amounts of wealth or goods to demonstrate their income. Instead, their earnings are circulated throughout local communities. The circulation of earnings is associated with the various competing interests of workers incomes from New Zealand and the concept of the ownership of money and personhood within communities. In addition to generating new forms of income in Vanuatu, the RSE scheme has generated development benefits to host communities in New Zealand. This paper reflects on aspects of development for not only labour migrants, but also RSE employers and the local host community, who also experience forms of development through capitalising on the



**Table 1: RSE 'Kick-Start' States Workers 2007–2013**

	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b>Kiribati</b>	69	38	48	149	142	124
<b>Samoa</b>	647	1,228	1,021	1,219	1,162	1,153
<b>Tonga</b>	805	1,355	1,142	1,411	1,398	1,627
<b>Tuvalu</b>	99	49	54	51	88	56
<b>Vanuatu</b>	1,698	2,342	2,137	2,352	2,412	2,794

Sources: Bedford, R (2013) and New Zealand Department of Labour RSE financial year statistics (2007–2013).<sup>1</sup>

influx of cross-border workers in their region.

The RSE scheme presents an opportunity for workers to return in successive seasons. This is termed 'circular migration' (Chapman and Prothero 1985; Mitchell 1961). Workers engage in the New Zealand labour market for seven months, then return to Vanuatu for five months before again working in New Zealand. With many workers now participating for six consecutive seasons, I argue that the RSE has become a career choice and a necessity for migrant workers to enable continuing development on individual, household, and community levels. Workers are continually moving, therefore reintegration processes are important to analyse. Nonetheless, because of multiple entries in their home and destination countries, reintegration processes are managed effectively, with little disruption to workers, their families, employers' schedules, and communities in New Zealand and Vanuatu. This has been aided through improved technological advances, enabling frequent communication between workers, their families and communities in Vanuatu. The final section of this paper examines the sustainability of the RSE and its capacity to promote economic development both in New Zealand and the Pacific in the foreseeable future.

## 2. Ni-Vanuatu Participation in the RSE

### 2.1 The Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme

The RSE scheme began with five 'kick-start' states: Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. For Vanuatu, as a Melanesian country, it was the first opportunity to engage in a bilateral agreement with

New Zealand involving cross-border labour recruitment. Vanuatu now sends the largest numbers of RSE workers from the Pacific to New Zealand, as highlighted in Table 1.

Recently, other Melanesian countries, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have been involved in the RSE; however, their numbers are lower. In the 2012–13 season, 474 RSE workers arrived from Solomon Islands and 32 from Papua New Guinea (Bedford 2013).

Since 2007, some 2000 ni-Vanuatu workers have been annually employed on seasonal contracts in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture industries. From November to May, as many as 300 ni-Vanuatu work in the Central Otago region.

Central Otago is renowned for fruit growing and the production of Pinot wines. In addition to having a low average unemployment rate of 3.24 per cent (compared to 6.2 per cent for New Zealand as a whole), the increase in vineyard tenure conversion and wine production are matched by rising demand for labour in the region. Although New Zealand has experienced higher unemployment rates as a result of the Global Economic Crisis beginning in 2008, this has not severely affected the numbers of workers accepted for seasonal work as part of the RSE.<sup>2</sup> As Richard Bedford (2013) noted in his address at the State of the Pacific Conference at the Australian National University in June 2013, numbers have been steadily rising.

The need for labour in the horticulture and viticulture sectors originates not only from a lack of unemployment in the region but also the char-

acteristics of the work. Ni-Vanuatu enter a geographically harsh environment, working in some unforgiving climatic conditions in New Zealand. Mares and Maclellan (2006:2) labelled these jobs as the three D's: 'Dirty, Difficult and Dangerous'. They work on vineyards, pruning, thinning, and harvesting; and when the harvests are ready, picking fruit such as apples, apricots, nectarines, and cherries, among others. My previous research (Bailey 2009) documented the experience of work in Otago by ni-Vanuatu and my current research extends this by examining the effects on RSE remittances on rural development in Ambrym.

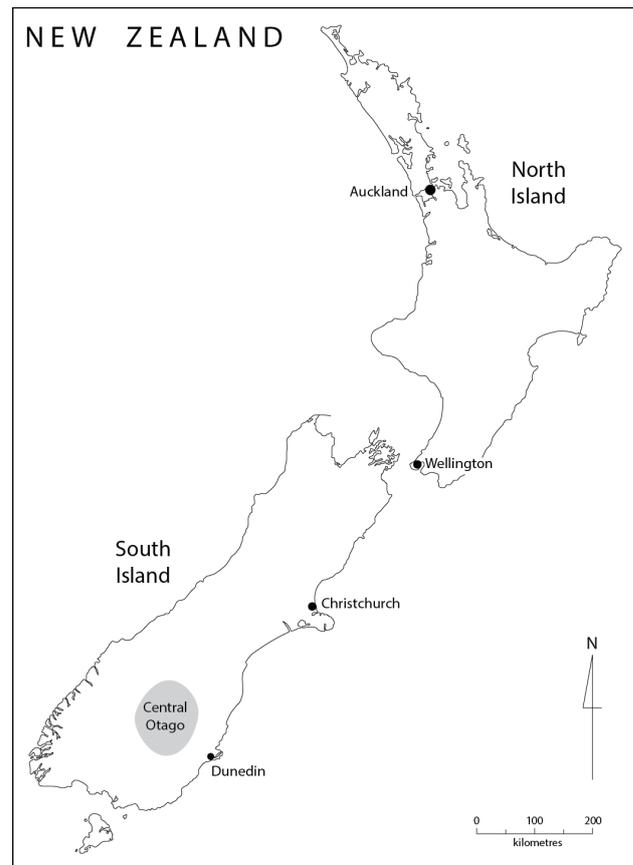
## 2.2 Ambrym, Vanuatu

Ambrym is located in the Malampa province of Vanuatu. There are three main inhabited areas on the island — North Ambrym, South-West Ambrym, and South-East Ambrym. The island has received anthropological attention in the past, especially by those interested in kinship structures in the region. Social organisation based around kinship is still debated today (see Eriksen 2008; Patterson 2001; Rio 2007).

Kinship, grade-taking (a ceremony where usually men are given their rank or names in Vanuatu) and other *kastom*<sup>3</sup> ceremonies, gift-giving, individual and communal subsistence agriculture, reciprocity, and sharing are important social structures on Ambrym. They affect the social life of Ambrymese while living in New Zealand, and govern workers' ambitions and opportunities to participate in the RSE and earnings (Bailey in press; Eriksen 2008; Patterson 2001; Rio 2007).

Ambrym — also known as the 'black island' or the 'island of fire' — has a population estimated in 2009 to be 7,275 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009:3). The island is well known for the active twin volcanoes Mount Marum and Mount Benbow, the traditional Rom dance, the annual festival 'Back to My Roots' held in Olal, and its notorious reputation for black magic and sorcery. Opportunities for earning money are limited on Ambrym; the main sources for generating incomes are the cash cropping of copra, cattle raising, production of carvings, and the small tourism industry that revolves around the annual 'Back to

Figure 1: Central Otago, New Zealand

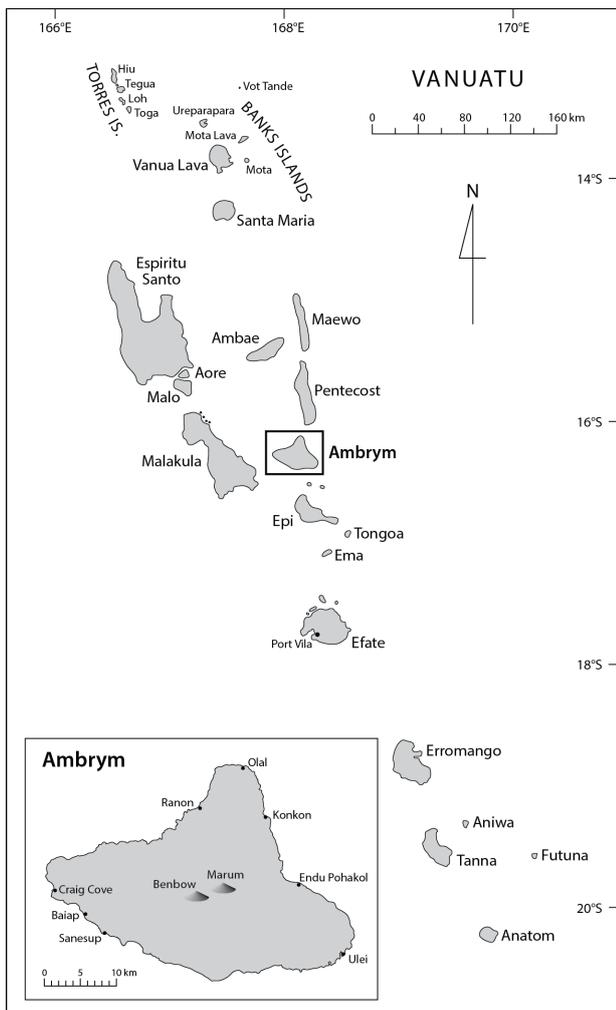


Map: Les O'Neill

My Roots' festival, volcano trekking, and visiting tourist yachts. However, the same factors that draw tourists to Ambrym are also highlighted as being negative for those who live on the island:

North Ambrym is one of the most disadvantaged areas of Vanuatu in terms of access to government services. Factors contributing to North Ambrym being designated as "disadvantaged" include topography (ravines and plateaus), geology (volcanic activity) and cultural factors (the belief that it is the area of black magic in Vanuatu.) Lolihor is a part of North Ambrym where problems are most acute. It has the village of Fanla which is known in Vanuatu to be the black magic village. It has very steep ravines so that there are no roads and no trucks. It is closest to the volcano and suffers regularly from the effects of volcanic activity such as acid rain that destroys crops (Salong 2007).

Figure 2: Location of Ambrym, Vanuatu



Map: Les O'Neill

Ambrymese rely heavily on the subsistence sector; livelihoods are self-sufficient through agricultural and hunting practices. Regenvanu (2009) has invoked the idea of the 'traditional subsistence economy' for ni-Vanuatu subsistence. Ambrym has a successful traditional economy, which exists in most areas of the island. At the same time, the demand for cash employment has been increasing. Therefore, ni-Vanuatu consider other avenues to access money. The RSE provides an important additional source of income to individuals, households, and communities.

### 2.3 Women's participation

The Central Otago town where my fieldwork is located hosts no women RSE workers from Vanuatu. However, the recruiting company does hire female ni-Vanuatu for work in nearby townships. According

to many who I spoke to on Ambrym, women from the island did not volunteer for the scheme because they were required to stay on the island and 'take care of things' as this 'is their role'. This was emphasised by Nabong, the former chairman of the Lolihor Development Council on Ambrym, who argued that women from the North Ambrym region should not participate due to cultural reasons and obligations:

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. 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 (Interview at Fire Mountain, North Ambrym; 10 July 2011).

It is worth noting that women's participation in waged work within Vanuatu itself was not discouraged. However, the absence of women in the scheme appear to be isolated to this area of Ambrym. Women accounted for 18 per cent of the workers from Vanuatu in the 2011–2012 season. Given attitudes in North Ambrym to women's participation in international work schemes, they may have limited opportunities to obtain the cash resources needed to participate.

### 2.4 Costs in participation

Debts are incurred in order to finance participation in the labour scheme but, ironically, such debts create a barrier to partaking in it. Cross-border labour schemes are costly for employers as well as workers. Some international studies indicate that hiring off-shore labour is more expensive than hiring locally (Basok 2002; Binford 2002; Reed et al. 2011). Here I focus on the costs for workers.

In 2007, eleven of my participants were sponsored by the World Bank to participate in a pilot project in Central Otago. The majority involved in the pilot project did not save any of the earnings from this three-month period in New Zealand and had to borrow money to participate again the following season. Individual costs to enter the schemes

**Table 2: Individual Costs of Participation in the RSE (2011)**

Expenses	Vatu	AUD
Sanesup to Craig Cove return by truck	3,000	34.12
Boat Craig Cove/Ranon to Port Vila return	15,000	170.00
Birth certificate	1,050	11.94
Passport	7,000	79.63
Visa	17,940	204.00
Medical	1,500	17.00
Police clearance	2,000	22.75
Subsidised airfares and domestic bus trip within NZ	102,00	1160.34
Medical insurance	30,368	345.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>VUV179,858</b>	<b>AUD\$2045.24<sup>5</sup></b>

such as the RSE and Australia's SWP vary. For some participants, costs are upwards of AUD\$2000. Initially, workers borrowed travel expenditures from VanWoods — a microcredit scheme in Vanuatu charging interest rates of 25 per cent per annum on their loans. There are few options for migrants to source funds for initial travel. Borrowing money from local banks is problematic, especially when there are no jobs or job security in much of Ambrym. New Zealand recruiting company Seasonal Solutions Co-operative Ltd (SSCO) has provided worker loans at market rates — under 20 per cent per annum. Loans at market rates in New Zealand can vary between 10–29 per cent per annum. SSCO encourage workers to retain money in their New Zealand bank accounts to cover their initial expenses for subsequent seasons. But workers are reluctant to keep money in New Zealand when they return to Vanuatu. This is mainly because of the uncertainty surrounding participation in successive seasons (Dustmann 1997).

Table 2 highlights the various initial expenses for workers travelling from Ambrym. These figures vary depending on workers locations on the island. It is essential for workers to endure long working hours to recuperate their initial investments and start making returns. Earnings gained within the

first three months of participation have more than compensated for their initial investment, therefore encouraging workers to re-enter the scheme on an annual basis. Unfortunately, for others, their initial investments of approximately AUD\$400 to apply for positions in this scheme have not been recovered. This money includes return travel from Ambrym to Port Vila, birth certificates, passports, police and medical clearances. I met with several unsuccessful applicants who applied to work in RSE and SWP, who were left with significant debts they did not know how to repay.<sup>4</sup>

Additional to the expenses shown in Table 2 are accommodation and living costs. The participants in my study pay NZD\$110 (AUD\$98.75) per week for their accommodation — over a period of 29 weeks this amounts to NZD\$3190 (AUD\$2805). Most try to spend as little as possible on food in order to increase their returns to Vanuatu and, in the past, this has led to dramatic consequences on their health. Through pastoral care responsibilities, employers have emphasised the importance of ni-Vanuatu workers consuming nutritional food.

### 2.5 Port Vila costs

Workers from various islands travel to Port Vila up to one month prior to their departure to New Zealand, and on their return to Vanuatu. Because of

the importance of Port Vila as a transitional space, there had been talk of building 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:

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. That 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 (Personal Communication 2011).

I was informed that because the workers had spent too much time in Port Vila in 2011 awaiting the arrival of the cargo ship carrying their material remittances from New Zealand, this idea may be revisited again. Many workers from Ambrym have relatives in Port Vila with whom they can stay. However, hosting workers puts added pressure on these relatives and their living resources; unlike the island, living costs in Port Vila are extremely high. With the RSE scheme and possibly SWP being long-term, I suggest there should be future investment in temporary accommodation for transient ni-Vanuatu in Port Vila.

Accumulating large earnings is the central goal for workers, and the following sections discuss remittances and their impacts in relation to RSE workers. It highlights how earnings from New Zealand's labour scheme have generated 'self-development' for workers, families and their communities, all the while noting there are multiple claims to workers' incomes and tensions on the management of remittances.

### 3. Migration, Remittances and Development

#### 3.1 Remittances aiding economic development

There are multiple theories why people participate in labour schemes such as the RSE. Theorising migration can be limited in scope if only one theory is used to explain participation. Migration and development theories must be flexible. Reasons why migrants participate in cross-border scheme change over time, as do the individual and collective notions of what development is. Many theorists have argued that participation originates from either individual or household strategies (Castles and Miller 2009; Massey et al. 1993). In regards to ni-Vanuatu involvement in labour schemes, I argue that research should include community strategies, as there are various community groups throughout Vanuatu who strategise how to use earnings from the RSE. Furthermore, the tensions between the individual, the household and community are ever present in the consciousness of RSE workers.

In the last two decades, there has been increasing attention paid to the use of remittances to fund economic development. The World Bank has estimated that global remittances have reached US\$529 billion in 2012 (World Bank 2013). In the same year, Vanuatu's Labour Commissioner, Lionel Kaluat, estimated that the RSE scheme has brought in VUV3.8 billion, (approximately AUD\$42 million) to the country since it began in 2007 (Marango 2012). Participants in my study have reported taking home between AUD\$5800–8400 (VUV505,497–732,099) after tax each year within their seven-month period in New Zealand.

Remittances are assumed to increase local and national development for the migrant's country, families and communities. Labour migrants have an important role in development — as Bedford, Bedford and Ho (2009:4) noted: 'Migrants are seen to be 'agents of development' for their home societies as they not only supply economic remittances but also return with social and human capital in the form of additional skills and knowledge that may benefit home communities'. However, it is important to note that 'Migrants are change agents, but not always in the ways hoped for by those who want to link migration

with development as part of the larger project of managing migration' (Brettell 2007:55). Various stakeholders involved in labour schemes need to be aware that remittances and their development potential should be placed in the context of workers and their place in society.

The different remittances that workers take home may not reflect the social, political, economic or environmental dynamics that first encouraged them to participate in the scheme. De Hass (2009:1) emphasises that 'Despite their development *potential*, migrants and remittances can neither be blamed for a lack of development nor be expected to trigger take-off development in generally unattractive investment environments' (de Hass, 2009:1). Various islands in the Pacific region face challenges in terms of relative remoteness, transportation difficulties, poor infrastructure, and a lack of resources that can hinder investment opportunities (Borovnik 2003).

For RSE workers, their incomes have allowed them to experience development and conceptualise its effects directly. It has provided participants with agency for development. In order of importance, this is reflected in the ability to provide education for their children, improve housing and infrastructure, start new businesses such as eco-tourism ventures, and finance community projects such as market houses and medical clinics.

### 3.2 Self-development

RSE workers are facilitating their own development. The majority of my research participants told me that the primary reason they became RSE workers was to fund education — without their earnings from New Zealand, their children's education would have been limited. Fees for primary, secondary and tertiary education vary in Vanuatu, and are charged on a partial to full cost-recovery basis. Workers have been able to finance children's primary education, and have had their children continue into secondary schooling. For many on Ambrym, to complete the last two years of secondary schooling involves leaving home and boarding on the neighbouring islands of Epi and Malakula, and for tertiary education, the University of the South Pacific (USP) Emalus Campus in Port Vila.

Participants now have children at USP and their incomes from the RSE have made this achievable. I was informed that without the option of labour migration, this would have been very difficult.

### 3.3 Housing and infrastructure

RSE workers from Ambrym have used their earnings to construct permanent homes intended to withstand cyclones and volcanic eruptions — two natural disasters that Vanuatu is susceptible to. RSE workers from the south-western parts of Ambrym have also built homes in Port Vila for, in their words, 'when, not if the volcanoes erupt again in the near future'. Workers have built homes for their immediate families and extended kin. In the 2012–2013 season, one worker was saving to build his third home for relatives. Since participating in the scheme, he has constructed two family homes, an indoor kitchen and a community well.

Obtaining improved access to a clean water supply was a priority, and several workers have built community wells in the northern and south-western parts of Ambrym. The construction of homes and wells are accomplished in teams, thus keeping the costs associated with building low. Building homes varied between VUV100,000–450,000 (AUD\$1137–5119.16) for each bungalow (the amount depends on how much concrete is required). Additionally, several workers have invested in building bungalows, to enter the tourism industry at a cost of VUV40,000–60,000 (AUD\$445–686).

Participants residing in Port Vila have had the opportunity to purchase land. One worker who resides in south-east Ambrym told me that he had purchased land in Port Vila in anticipation for the next volcanic eruption. Having a base in Efate is not unusual for people from Ambrym; Mele-Maat is an example of earlier relocations (Tonkinson 1985). He informed me that he was born on the neighbouring island of Malakula due to a series of eruptions of Mount Benbow in the 1950s. For now, having his house in Port Vila means reduced living costs for him while transiting to and from New Zealand, and for his son who is studying at the USP in Port Vila.

### 3.4 New businesses opportunities

New business opportunities have been generated from the RSE scheme. On Ambrym, investment in bovine livestock production and expanding cattle grazing has been a priority for at least six of my participants. RSE remittances have thus been able to provide the capital necessary for the expansion of commercial agricultural ventures. Thirty-one per cent of the men have set up stores, which are located either in or beside their newly built homes, selling general grocery items and petrol. Not only have workers set up businesses for themselves but also for their immediate family and extended kin. Some spouses of RSE workers have opened bakeries. One wife invested money into the distribution of rechargeable mobile phone cards. Her husband's RSE earnings were used for her initial investment of VUV5000 (AUD\$56.90) in 2010. When I spoke with her in 2011, she has since invested VUV20,000 (AUD\$227.51) — reflecting the growth of her business. This has also been aided by the recent cell towers that have been installed in the region in the past three years.

While in Port Vila, I spoke with many RSE workers who have purchased buses and taxis. These are usually noticeable because of the silver fern symbol (from New Zealand) they place on their vehicles. This has led to new employment opportunities for ni-Vanuatu in the transportation sector, in the greater Port Vila region. Others have used earnings for small stores that have names such as the Kiwi Store, Four Square, or Super Value, which are the names of stores that many shop in while in New Zealand. During the seasons 2009–11, electronics were a popular choice for RSE workers to sell in Port Vila. Although workers are beginning new business ventures, they continue to participate in the scheme.

### 3.5 Reciprocal relationships

Having new sources of income has supported exchanges in reciprocal relationships, for example a number of workers have been able to marry with their earnings. This too has a flow-on effect. RSE incomes have funded an increased number of weddings, which also generates obligations in return.

Workers are expected to contribute more to local kastom ceremonies. As some workers observed:

Sonny: The money I earn, is good to pay for my sister's wedding and school fees for her children.

Bob: I'm ready to go back to work in NZ, all of these ceremonies are costing me too much money.

Ron: Yes everyone thinks that because we go to New Zealand that we have much money and expect more from us ... It's a burden sometimes.

Another use of earnings is that it has given opportunities for RSE workers, who do not reside on Ambrym to bring their children home to learn Ambrym kastom and language. One worker told me that without his earnings his children may not have had the opportunity to connect with his lands or his kin — as they lived in Port Vila they would otherwise not have had the financial means to travel to the island. Therefore, unlike various claims of development lending to the decline of custom and knowledge for participants, labour migration is aiding in the development and continuation of reciprocal and kastom practices.<sup>6</sup> Cultural and social influences control workers' incomes. The expectation is that workers will return and circulate earnings within their communities to encourage various forms of local development, through contributing to community-led projects or to ceremonial obligations.

### 3.6 Multiple claims on income

In the northern region of Lolihor, there are competing claimants to RSE workers earnings. For example, in 2007, the Lolihor Development Council (LDC) in North Ambrym selected the workers. In return, workers were expected to contribute a percentage of their wages to the council in order to fund community projects. In the first two seasons, workers contributed money to the LDC. Various projects were started with their earnings such as the market and tourism house, a microcredit scheme, and scholarships for schooling.

In 2009, I was made aware that the LDC no longer participated in the selection of workers and workers had ceased contributing to it. The argument given to me by the former chairman of the council was that by working in New Zealand

the men had been influenced into thinking individualistically instead of maintaining their promises of working for the community. There is a tension between the individual and the community. However, from the workers' point of view, the reason was the council itself. Although there was a change in contributions to the council, this did not have any impact on other community developments. In addition to the LDC, there are other claimants such as kinsman, church and social groups, and island-based networks that are sustained with earnings from New Zealand. Workers' contributions continued to the church, schools, local fundraisers and *kastom* ceremonies.

This situation between RSE workers and the council changed in 2011. After meetings between the council and workers in 2011, it was decided that the men would each give VUV10,000 (AUD\$113.75) to the council upon their return in 2012. When I returned in 2012, I was informed that workers kept their promise and the council had made laid the grounds for the health clinic project.

Upon their return, workers incomes are scrutinised by various groups, such as the Vanuatu Department of Labour, local community groups and family members, as well as between each other while in New Zealand. There are some tensions and accommodations between individual spending preferences in New Zealand (such as purchasing cellphones, laptops and cameras) and the expectations for sharing and redistributing earnings for community needs and customary obligations. My PhD thesis explores these tensions and accommodations between completing claims on incomes as a way of theoretically conceptualising the RSE in terms of migration, work and development.

### 3.7 Ownership of money

Ownership of workers' earnings varies between groups. Workers have multiple motivations for participation, and how workers earnings are distributed reflect this. However, the majority of participants informed me that at least half of their earnings from New Zealand belong to the community, as exemplified by George:

When I come from New Zealand I take that money, that money is not mine it is for the

community. When the community come I give it to them and they ask for [VUV]500 or [VUV]1000 I just give it to them.<sup>7</sup>

This act not only supports the continuation of reciprocal relations, but also increases the status of migrants in their communities. During fieldwork, I often observed people approaching George for money and, as he told me, he gave to those who needed it. George was not the only RSE worker to stipulate that 50 per cent of his earning belonged to the community. With the exception of two workers, this appeared to be the norm on Ambrym. Although there are community expectations on workers' earnings, there are tensions in the ownership of money and its distribution. For example, workers also conceal earnings. As one worker told me 'they know about some of my money, but I have kept some aside for if I need it'.<sup>8</sup>

While in Ambrym in 2011, there were numerous complaints in regards to workers' earnings not being redistributed in the prescribed ways agreed upon during workers' previous selection processes in 2007. Complaints were made from previous RSE workers, the Lolihor Development council and various community members. This is because participation is not seen as an individual act but as a strategy of the wider community. There are tensions regarding workers 'misappropriating' their earnings. Employers are included in the various groups who have expectations for the management of workers' earnings, and there are ambiguities from New Zealand employers about workers' contributions to local communities. Various employers believed that the men should not be 'forced' to give their money to the wider community, and others stated that hiring ni-Vanuatu helps communities — in return there is a 'feel good' factor in recruiting workers from 'disadvantaged communities'. Therefore, they believe earnings should aid community development.

## 4. Host communities

### 4.1 RSE employer/worker relationships

Central Otago-based company, Seasonal Solutions Co-operative Ltd (SSCO), recruits workers in Port Vila. Once in New Zealand, SSCO places workers

with growers/contractors for the duration of the season. RSE workers are only 13 per cent of the total workforce on orchards and vineyards in Central Otago.<sup>9</sup> With the exception of one man, the same recruiting company has employed all of the participants in my study. Workers have pledged their loyalty to the contractor who they work for. For example, in 2010 two workers who reapplied for the RSE, declined new contracts offered to them, as they had anticipated working for their previous contractor. I have observed employer and employee relationships since 2007 and they have changed significantly. Ni-Vanuatu workers have become instrumental in the workforce, and the relationship has been beneficial. As one contractor highlighted:

business has actually become a lot easier for me. You just asked me why I was looking less stressed (here he is referring to a personal comment I made prior to the interview). The reason is because I don't have to find, recruit and I train less people. Six years ago before the Vanuatu workers came to us we had staff turnover on a regular scale. So the constant retraining was a huge drain on resources particularly when we are focused on quality and the consequences of the ni-Van working for us have been that they are at speed within and I'm talking full-vehicle speed within a day, requiring little retraining, rework or reshaping.<sup>10</sup>

The RSE scheme is increasing the productivity of New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture sectors, where previously production was hampered by the inability of retaining trained and reliable workers to complete seasons (Bailey 2009). It has introduced a new workforce that is, to an extent, immobile (local) and reliable. Workers realise their limited opportunities in Vanuatu for income without the scheme. Therefore, to remain in the scheme they are aware they must abide by New Zealand laws and regulations imposed by employers. This creates compliance among workers. Furthermore, annual work progress reports determine a worker's re-entry into the scheme. These aspects govern the workers' behaviours at work and during their down time (see Bailey 2009). Participants who return

for successive seasons cost less in terms of training and productivity, and this has been emphasised by various New Zealand growers — even those who at first had resisted the implementation of the scheme have begun to recognise the benefits of investing in RSE workers.

Relationships between employers and workers are not limited to the workplace. RSE employers have made links with communities in Vanuatu by donating goods such as water pumps and hospital beds, and contributing to various community development projects, which they see as valuable. These relationships strengthen partnerships between workers and their employers. In addition, social connections made within local communities in New Zealand have had similar results. Community groups such as Rotary and Lions clubs and local church organisations in Central Otago have contributed to development projects within Vanuatu because of new relationships that have emerged from ni-Vanuatu participation in the RSE scheme.

#### 4.2 Community gains for host community

Attention to cross-border labour schemes is largely focused on migrants, communities in sending countries, and the industries of the host countries they work for (Basok 2002; Binford 2002; Bedford 2013). Labour mobility schemes also generate development in the communities of host countries (Bailey 2009; Basok 2002). For the past thirty years, I have observed Central Otago develop. The small townships have increased in size and population and the viticulture industry has successfully become internationally renowned for its pinot wines (Bailey in press). During the harvest months, October–May, the injection of tourists on working holiday visas and New Zealanders obtaining summer work (usually students and travellers) increase the population and contribute to local economies in the region.

While ni-Vanuatu workers are in New Zealand to obtain financial capital to increase opportunities of development in Vanuatu, they are significantly increasing productivity and development in the Central Otago region. Here, I focus on advantages to local communities through hosting migrant workers by analysing basic living costs and purchasing practices.

Costs of living vary between ni-Vanuatu working in different locations in New Zealand. On average, SSCO have annually employed over 200 workers for the Central Otago region. The return of RSE workers earnings into the host community is significant. Over a 29-week period, each participant paid AUD\$2805 for accommodation, and each worker spends approximately NZD\$70 (AUD\$61.56) per week on food and living expenses. Over 29 weeks, living costs equated to AUD\$1785.24. With more than 200 workers in the region, the revenue for hosting workers is worth over one million New Zealand dollars to local economies. This amount only includes basic living costs and excludes other significant purchases.

An example I wish to highlight is the local Salvation Army store in Cromwell. Most workers purchase clothing, household goods such as cooking utensils, mattresses, pillows and sheets from this store to send home. Within a two-year period, this store has expanded its operation due to the increase in business. The operators stated that their ni-Vanuatu customers contributed to their expansion. This highlights that increased revenue from RSE workers has added to local economies.

#### 4.3 Temporality to permanence

The RSE scheme is based on the fact that workers are in New Zealand temporarily. There is no limit to recruitment for seasonal participation in the scheme, but workers are not permitted to remain in New Zealand at the end of each season. Of the 22 participants in my study, 44 per cent have participated annually since 2007, and currently 68 per cent men are still participating. Of the remaining 32 per cent, with the exception of one man who is now deceased, three have been blacklisted,<sup>11</sup> two left after the first season because of the cold, dry climatic conditions of Central Otago, and one because of a medical injury. A reason for participating annually is the concern that if a worker withdraws from the scheme, they will lose their place and may not have the opportunity to return. In 2009, several participants took leave from the scheme for various reasons. However, when they reapplied to return in 2010 there were no vacancies, highlighting the risks in not continuing par-

ticipation. This changed in 2011, due to an increase in workers needed by their previous contractor. Not all seasonal workers have had the opportunity of re-entering the scheme after a leave of absence.

The perceived or actual possibility of migrant workers overstaying visas influence policy for cross-border labour schemes in the OECD. Policy makers in New Zealand have considered this when examining other global labour mobility programs. Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) was considered the 'best practice model' due to its administration (Basok 2000, 2007; Luthria et al. 2006), as it proved to have an extremely low rate of migrants overstaying their contracts. New Zealand has also experienced a low incidence rate of less than one per cent of RSE workers remaining illegally. Other than the legal frameworks of the policy, there are various other reasons preventing ni-Vanuatu remaining in New Zealand on an expired visa. The majority of ni-Vanuatu workers have no intention or aspiration to live in New Zealand. Working to benefit livelihoods of themselves, their families and communities in Vanuatu, are the reasons for workers coming to New Zealand in the first instance. However, I am not suggesting none of the workers want to stay in New Zealand permanently. I know of workers that do and have enquired into how they can stay. These numbers have grown over the past three years, and it is important to draw attention to these changes in attitudes. The ability to earn money was the main argument for those wanting to remain in New Zealand, not permanent residency, and because of the scheme's policy design, there is no allowance for workers to change their visas.

#### 4.4 Labour schemes: career choice or necessity?

With limited income opportunities on Ambrym, participating in labour schemes is a road that many see as viable. Motivations for working in New Zealand include ongoing financial obligations such as school fees and community contributions, and monetary exchanges in reciprocal relationships.

Participation in labour schemes was encouraged on Ambrym, as the wages from the New Zealand and Australian schemes were depicted as a method for generating cash for community development on the island. In a meeting on Ambrym in July 2011,

community member John Salong argued that for the Lolihor communities to develop they ‘must work together for a better life — *Omanukar tone ruan gerwuten*’. He stated four main themes that would improve livelihoods in the region:

- Every village has access to good water supply.
- Relocating the medical clinic to the coast for easier access.
- Improving transportation in the region.
- Generate more income through increasing tourism and working in NZ and Australia to pay for goods and services such as (education, solar lighting, water, housing and community projects).<sup>12</sup>

Although Salong briefly mentioned New Zealand’s RSE scheme, he did emphasise how men who had gone to Australia were returning home with ‘good cash’ and accentuated that these overseas employment opportunities would help with Ambrym’s development. In 2011, Salong was recruiting workers for the Australian scheme, whereas in the past he had recruited for the RSE. The point he highlighted and recommended strongly at the meeting was that men from the region should participate in either the Australian or New Zealand work schemes, earn money, and share their new resources and income with the Lolihor communities for the greater good.

Initially, in 2007, the men said they were planning on working for one or two seasons. Workers highlighted their individual motivations and emphasised their obligations to family and community. However, the scheme has become both a necessity and a career choice. When I asked workers if they viewed the scheme this way, Aaron, a worker in Central Otago stated: ‘at the moment yes, me and some of the boys, no jobs at home, so we come here. It’s hard, but it’s what we do now.’<sup>13</sup> Several workers have been promoted as van and tractor drivers, and supervisors by their employers. Other ni-Vanuatu I have spoken to also have ambitions of being promoted within the company, strategising for long-term employment gains — workers talk about the RSE as their career.

The promotion of participating in international work schemes on Ambrym demonstrates that labour

migration is becoming integrated into rural livelihoods. With limited opportunity to earn an income on Ambrym, it is not surprising that a ‘culture of migration’ would possibly develop in the region (Cohen 2004; Massey et al. 1993). It is too early to determine if such a culture exists or to what extent it will emerge. Nevertheless, with the small percentage of RSE workers in my research, already there is a noticeable trend in the number of ni-Vanuatu who now have children participating, or have ambitions to participate, in the New Zealand and Australian work schemes. Other ni-Vanuatu on the island also view this as an opportunity. As I was told by a truck driver in West Ambrym: “The scheme gives us somewhere to go, something to aim for after school, as we do not have much, no work here”.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. Further research Possibilities

### 5.1 Reintegration

It has been argued that there is a lack of focus in the process of reintegration in migration schemes (Alkema 2012). I have observed workers reintegrate both at home in Vanuatu and in Central Otago. The reintegration processes are an important area for future research. Workers arrive in New Zealand within one to two days of their work start date. Because workers have been travelling to the area for many years now they know what is expected of them, and resettle into the region without much aid of the recruiting company. Workers in this study travel in a large group. Therefore, new workers who enter the scheme have the benefit of being inducted into the new community and given the information necessary for working and living in New Zealand by other experienced ni-Vanuatu.

Similar to their arrival in New Zealand, returning home to Ambrym is also becoming routinised. Regarding Melanesian migration, Sillitoe (2000:63) observed ‘going off to work somewhere else for money is merely an episode of their lives’. This ‘episode’ of migration has various consequences. Through ethnographical research I have found, corresponding with Sillitoe, that on the surface migration is downplayed by migrants and their families. Nonetheless, there are deeper responses to the ‘episode’ that are often overlooked

when only taking a snapshot of villages and groups that have labour migrants.

There are important debates on migrant reintegration processes that draw attention to how migrants are received and settle upon returning (Agunias 2006; Borovnik 2003; Rigg 2007; Skeldon 2004). Agunias and Rigg both note that migrants may return with different attitudes and may not return to their previous ways, and Skeldon (2004) also highlights that families and migrants go through a process of self-transformation. Changes do occur while migrants are absent. Two examples highlighted by participants were the temporary change in leadership when a chief was absent, and the extra responsibilities and work that spouses and family undertook. Borovnik (2003:255) observed that seafarers in Kiribati are expected to return and adapt to the ways of their communities or they will suffer ridicule. From observations, I agree with Borovnik that it is important RSE workers return to the villages and resume their daily routines they had prior to migrating. Although there may be exceptions, the general consensus amongst participants was reintegration was just another process of their migration — nothing more, and nothing less.

### 5.2 Maintaining connections

A possible reason for the ease of reintegration is how relationships are maintained across space and place. In the early years of the RSE scheme, communication with relatives on Ambrym was limited due to a lack of resources in communication technology. This changed with the arrival of new cell towers on the island and improved network coverage. This has enabled RSE workers to be informed of happenings at home and to be included in making decisions and having influence in their communities in Vanuatu while absent.

Long-distance phone calls are one of the hidden costs of migration (Binford 2002:12). The costs of ringing Vanuatu from New Zealand using the main telephone network, Telecom, is AUD\$0.88 per minute. From Vanuatu, off-peak calling rates to New Zealand is VUV36 (approximately AUD\$0.40) per minute.<sup>15</sup> Although improved technology has allowed greater access to communication with home, the associated costs affect the frequency of

calls. RSE workers continually investigate competing sources for telecommunications.

### 5.2 Is the RSE sustainable?

Recently, New Zealand growers have called on the government to increase the cap of 8000 workers (Doyle and Howes 2013; Watson 2013). Although this was declined, it demonstrates the reliance on RSE workers by New Zealand. Basok (2002) argued that in Canada seasonal workers have become a 'structural necessity' for growers, and that without migrant workers, industries would not succeed because of the limited willing labour. Central Otago grower Stephen Darling told *Otago Daily Times* reporter Sarah Marquet (2013), 'We are very, very dependent on the RSE workers scheme and if we are going to expand the industry in Central Otago we need to expand the RSE scheme ... New Zealanders' jobs are absolutely dependent on it'. Darling's argument resonates with numerous growers in the region and beyond. New Zealand's RSE is still in its early stages compared with Canada's SAWP, which has been in operation since the 1960s. Nonetheless, parallels can be made between the two on the reliance of growers on workers and vice versa.

The sustainability of the RSE is of concern to ni-Vanuatu, both those who participate and those who do not. The Vanuatu Department of Labour aims for an increase in cross-border labour schemes and has suggested future proposals for ni-Vanuatu employment in other industries in Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand's RSE has been a quadruple win for workers, their families and communities, as well as New Zealand employers, national governments, and the communities who host migrants. These various stakeholders are invested in the scheme and have argued that the benefits and outcomes should ensure the continuation of the seasonal program long-term.

## 6. Conclusion

Through seasonal work in New Zealand, ni-Vanuatu RSE workers are reaching their 'development'-specific goals. The RSE scheme has benefitted the livelihoods of ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers by enabling continued school education, housing and infrastructure projects, new business opportunities and an addition-

al source of income to meet *kastom* exchange obligations embedded in culturally significant reciprocal relationships. There are competing interests in the ownership and distribution of workers' wages and how these are distributed. The reasons that workers continue to participate are because of the ongoing costs that motivated them to migrate in the first instance. Labour migration is becoming integrated into rural livelihoods in Vanuatu, where a possible culture of migration may develop. Ni-Vanuatu view the RSE as a necessity, and a career opportunity to gain financial and material goods for themselves, families and their communities.

The need for Pacific labour in New Zealand is increasing. Recruiting labour from Vanuatu has been beneficial for growers. Acquiring RSE workers enables growers to gain a different category of labour force than previously sought. Unlike other labour sources, such as working holiday visas or New Zealand citizens, workers from Vanuatu are a reliable and fixed source of labour. Growers have become somewhat reliant on the uptake of RSE workers. They have argued that RSE workers are becoming a necessity to increase productivity and growth in the horticulture and viticulture sectors.

### Author Notes

Rochelle Bailey is a PhD candidate in the department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Otago, New Zealand. She is conducting ethnographical fieldwork in New Zealand and Vanuatu, where her research investigates social and economic outcomes of the RSE. Research for her Masters degree in Anthropology from the University of Canterbury also involved ni-Vanuatu migrant workers and their employers participating in New Zealand's RSE scheme. Rochelle is a recipient of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade NZAID Post-Graduate Field Research Award, and her research interests are the Pacific region, labour, migration, politics, and development.

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### Endnotes

- 1 Figures calculated from Charlotte and Richard Bedford's presentation Seasonal Work Scheme Like RSE and SWP — Just A Band Aid. State of the Pacific Conference, Canberra, June 2013 and the New Zealand Department of Labour.
- 2 With the exception of the 2009–2010 season, where there was a reduction of approximately 200 ni-Vanuatu RSE workers.
- 3 *Kastom* is the Bislama term for custom or tradition (See Crowley 2003; Tyron 1987).
- 4 There are various reasons for seasonal work permit applications being unsuccessful. They range from applicants not providing sufficient forms such as letters of approval to work by their chiefs, families or pastor. Having a criminal record for drinking or fighting was also a reason given by the company in this study, as were poor work practices and social behaviours from previous seasons in New Zealand. Through the approved letters mentioned above, families and communities do govern the ability of applicants being successful. Workers have been declined approval letters after not sharing or using their previous RSE incomes 'appropriately' in accordance with families' and community leaders' expectations.
- 5 All currency conversions for this paper are based on the exchange rates on 15 August 2013: AUD\$1=VUV 87.90 NZD\$1=VUV75.13. AUD=Australian dollar; VUV=Vanuatu Vatu; NZD=New Zealand dollar.
- 6 See Jolly 1992 and Sahlins 1999.
- 7 Interview with George, personal communication, May 2011.
- 8 Interview with John, personal communication, June 2011.
- 9 Craig Howard, General Manager SSCO, personal communication, 20 November 2012.
- 10 James Dicey, Director of GrapeVision, personal communication, January 2011.
- 11 Blacklisting is the term used for workers who are prevented from re-entering the scheme for upwards of five years, if not longer, depending on the reason for the decision. It is also used as a means of

enforcing compliance and regulations. (see Bailey 2009; Basok 2002).

- 12 Information accessed from a community meeting in Ranon, North Ambrym, 1 July 2013.
- 13 Interview with Aaron, personal communication, July 2011.
- 14 Personal communication, July 2011.
- 15 Digicel Vanuatu. Select Tariffs and Rates. <[http://www.digicelvanuatu.com/en/plans/digiselect/select\\_tariffs](http://www.digicelvanuatu.com/en/plans/digiselect/select_tariffs)>, viewed 12/5/2013.

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