



A New Veraibari Village

An Introduction and Report to Mr Uno Jeremaiah Konisimo

PNG SMU Coordinator

Written by Yolarnie Amepou on behalf of the Veraibari Community Development Program
Committee responsible for the Veraibari village relocation project – May 2022

AN Introduction to Veraibari Village

Veraibari village is located at the mouth of the Kikori River in the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea. Veraibari village, like a lot of villages in the Gulf of Papua, is facing the destruction of their village by sea rising, river flooding and storm surges made worse in the storm season (June – September). These environmental impacts to the villages in the Gulf of Papua are made worse with climate change. While many villages of the Gulf of Papua have given up fighting the sea and climate impacts and have moved away to higher ground and settlements in Port Moresby, the people of Veraibari continue to fight to keep their village together in the face of climate impacts and destruction.

Relocation to a New Veraibari

In 2020, the sea destroyed teachers houses as well as houses in front of the village and forced the local school to close. The Gulf Province has the lowest standards of education after the other 21 Provinces in Papua New Guinea, in 2011, recording a 4% literacy rate. Although education is a basic service that is very hard to get in the Gulf Province, Veraibari Village has a strong emphasis on the importance of education to their children. The village led by local village leader, Mr Ara and his wife, decided it was time to relocate the village to a safer place, a few meters away from where the village now stands. The village established a Village Development Program committee who is also responsible for the Veraibari village relocation project. They designed the new model village, counted the nuclear families and designed the area to cater for 178 houses, a graveyard, churches and the basic necessities of the village. This will be the fifth time in fifty years that Veraibari is forced to move because of the rising sea and storms. This is the fourth time the school building will be carried to a new location since the time it was first built less than 20 years ago.

The village drew their model village and purchased a sawmill from money they make from fishing. The young men travel up the river to cut mangrove cedar for the new houses. Mangrove cedar is a hardwood tree, it has natural insecticide so termites and other insects are unable to attack the wood, the wood is also better at resisting salinity, so will last longer even when exposed to the sea and salt. The village relocation committee has divided the relocation site into blocks for each house. They have already allocated each block to each family and a few people are already fixing their little blocks.

Challenges faced with relocating to a New Veraibari

The sea continues to rise, houses in the current village continue to be destroyed. The storm season is approaching in June, travel in and out of Veraibari is made difficult in the storm season. The villagers can't fish as much and income is lowered. Relocation needs funding. Currently their relocation is being funded by their fisheries with the new and lucrative swimbladder (fishmaw) fishery. This fishery is currently unregulated and the National Fisheries Authority is still working on a management plan. Every family has been tasked to finance parts of the relocation from their fishing earnings and partners outside of Kikori and PNG have been brought into Veraibari to partner up for this fishery to enhance funding and finance for the relocation. While the fisheries remains unregulated the fisheries resources and this form of income remains at risk.

The village also needs plans and methods of shoreline protection so when they are building the sea does not threaten the new village as well. They need technical assistance with this aspect. The village would like to provide renewable energy for their houses at the relocation site. The village needs food security and as a matter of priority, to revive their health center and school as soon as possible. The Veraibari relocation committee hereby kindly requests and seeks technical and further assistance from the Saemaul Undong (SMU).

The History of Veraibari and its relocation in pictures



Picture 1. Veraibari village as seen from air, April 2022.

Picture 1. Veraibari village as seen from the air in April 2022.

Veraibari village of the East Kikori LLG, Kikori District, Gulf Province is relocating itself due to its destruction by the flooding Kikori River, rising seas in the Gulf of Papua and the increasing intensity of storm surges faced by the village each year between June and September.

Front view of Veraibari village January 2020



Front view of Veraibari village March 2022



Picture 2a and Picture 2b. Mr Ara's double story house in January 2020 and in March 2022.

The houses in front of the village were destroyed, the coconuts are gone, leaving houses previously in the middle of the village (like Mr Ara's double story house) now standing in the front line with the sea.

Breaking the Mentality of Dependence to one of Independence

A mental change was needed in Veraibari for the community to recognize their potential and ability to take charge and be the change they would like to see in the village. Mr Ara and Mama Lucy realized this, so in 2019, the couple built a double story house in the middle of the village. The house has indoor plumping, indoor bathroom and two indoor toilets upstairs and downstairs.

The house has electricity provided by a genset during the day and solar at night. They wanted to demonstrate that if they could do it, so could everybody else. They did this with money from the fishmaw (swimbladder) fishery. Mama Lucy also has a small trade store in front and a market and encourages a circular economy in the village. The women in the village take turns at selling different items and produce to each other at different times to lessen competition but also increase each household income.

Mr Ara has registered a small business group with PNG Investment Promotion Authority called the **Kaumo Business Group**. Funding for the Veraibari Relocation Project is managed through the Kaumo Business Group Bank account. They have a motto for the work they do and with the Veraibari relocation project: “Joining hands to work together to build a new Veraibari”

Mr Ara says, “Put God First, then his people and then yourself last.” Mr Ara is also an elder of the Seven Day Adventist Church in the small congregation in the village which is predominately made of a United Church congregation and a few members of the New Apostolic Church.



Picture 3. Mr Ara and Mama Lucy in front of their newly completed house in January 2020.

Community Destruction: In 2020 the Veraibari Community School had to close because the storm and sea had destroyed the only teacher's house.



Picture 4a. Year 2014. The students in school at the Veraibari Community School.



Picture 4b. Year 2020. Rising sea levels and the storm season storm surges destroyed teacher's housing and resulted in the school closing



Picture 4c. The school from the beach in October 2014. Teacher's houses and school were behind a line of trees, all which have since been destroyed.



Picture 5. Logs are placed in front of houses to stop the sea's damage to houses every year. At night the men and boys will stand under the houses to protect house posts from the waves, winds and whatever the sea throws at the house.



Picture 6. The Veraibari Village Development Program Committee also responsible for the Village Relocation Project.



Picture 7a and Picture 7b. On the village public notice board there is a list of families and materials needed for their Village Relocation Project.



Picture 8a and 8b. The site for a new Veraibari has been selected and blocks for each family allocated. A sawmill had been purchased to cut timber for the new houses.



Picture 9. The boys and men from the village cut mangrove cedar in the forest and drag it back to the village sawmill.

This is how they source timber for the houses. They need corrugated roofing iron sheets for roofs and roof caps for the 178 houses. This also for water catchment to provide water where freshwater sources are limited.

Picture 10. The Veraibari Relocation Project by the village is currently being financed by their local fish catch. This is still not enough to cover all the costs of the village and so the Village Development Program Committee and Relocation Project are seeking assistance elsewhere if they can.



REPORT SUMMARY

Village: Veraibari Tribe: Pai'ia Ward 9 East Kikori LLG Kikori District Gulf Province	
Number of Houses to be built in Relocation site: 178 houses	<p>Other projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar electrification of village – pending • Reopening of Veraibari school – In progress • Reestablishment of community health centre – pending • Expansion and development of fish plant – in progress • Food security – In progress with the Piku Biodiversity Network and Veraibari women for iron rich plants to supplement diets especially during the storm season. • Sustainable livelihoods and household income through fisheries – <i>in progress</i>
<p>Village Project: Building a New Veraibari</p> <p>Relocating the current village inland after the destruction of the village due to climate change impacts. Increasing livelihood options and household income for members of the village. Building Veraibari to better standards of Living and ensuring basic services are available to the people of Veraibari and Damaibari (immigrants who lost their village to climate change some 50 years ago)</p>	



- The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) of Papua New Guinea assisted the Veraibari community in 2020 with their documentary “New Veraibari” a copy of this documentary can be made available.

Picture 11. The villagers are preparing their individual blocks for building at the new relocation site.

For more Information Please Contact.

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We are building a new Veraibari and we can only do it if we join hands and work together.