

A comparative analysis of media Coverage on Labour Mobility in the Pacific and Australia

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Research Synopsis & Objective

This study conducts a comparative discourse analysis on Pacific labour mobility media reporting (across online, print and radio) from both Australia and the Pacific in the 6-month (March to September 2019) lead up to the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) (held on October 2018 in Honiara Solomon Islands)

The findings, whilst not intending to be conclusive, present a few key differences in the framing of labour mobility news and its broader developmental impacts between the Pacific and Australia

It encourages researchers, policymakers and relevant stakeholders to consider the nuances in how labour mobility is presented and deliberated as an issue of public and policy debate

The findings of this research suggest that whilst there are inevitable differences in focus, labour mobility reporting in both Australia and the Pacific share an important common thread with key public significance:

In sampled media reports, we discovered a separation between policy and practice in the framing and communication of labour mobility media content, with both subjects not necessarily discussed/deliberated together.

Research Rationale (Time-Frame and Sampling)

Focus was on media reporting in the 6-month lead up to the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) (held on October 2018 in Honiara, Solomon Islands)

The PLMAM is an annual meeting for reviewing progress against the Arrangement on Labour Mobility's objectives to enhance labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand for the Pacific

It is intended to cover the intersection between policy and social discourse/practice around labour mobility

ABC International Development (ABC ID) as part of Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), hosted a Labour Mobility Economic Reporting Masterclass (in conjunction with the PLMAM) aimed at training Pacific based journalists on the interpretation, understanding and reporting of labour mobility policies and programs in the Pacific context

This study focuses both on articles produced by Pacific journalists through the workshop and independent media reporting located within Australia and the Pacific

The 6-month lead up to PLMAM was selected due to it being a period of heightened media coverage where the public visibility of labour mobility is a significant part of the media reporting cycle

Methodology

The media content from Australia was specifically sourced through the **Factiva** and **ProQuest** and **Google News** databases

Media content from the Pacific was sourced from **Google News** and the log of content produced through the **PACMAS Labour Mobility Economic Reporting Masterclass**

Selection criteria for and analysis of the articles were based on the following perimeters:

All media articles had to be related or relevant in full or in part to labour mobility in the Pacific. Relevance was determined using the following search terms, “Pacific”, “labour mobility”, “labour”, “mobility”, “seasonal”, “agriculture” and “facility” as a starting point. The keywords above were extracted based on an analysis of most frequently used words in the labour mobility space through an initial review of a randomised sample of 15 media articles on the topic of labour mobility

Articles were analysed through ANTCOINC and NVIVO using concordance. The most frequently utilised words were then analysed in terms of their respective context of usage. Words with similar contexts were grouped together to form key themes. These themes were then synthesised into specific findings

49 Australia based media articles were identified relative to **54 Pacific based media articles**. Given that the difference in the number of articles was only N=5, there was no dedicated weighting required to prevent over and/or under representation of articles either from the Pacific or Australia

Pacific Country	Number of articles
Cook Islands	5
Fiji	8
Tonga	11
Solomon Islands	17
Vanuatu	13



Research Findings

The table below indicates the specialist nature of article topics on labour mobility across Australia and the Pacific. Articles were classified as **‘policy-based only’** if there were only discussions on labour mobility legislation, visa and processing news without any reference to participant experiences and/or sentiments

Contrarily, articles were classified as a **“social impact article”** if they primarily revolved around labour mobility participant experiences without **reference to policy** (e.g. church community participation by local workers when working in Australia)

Framing	Policy	Social Impact of Labour Mobility	Both
Australia Based Media (49 articles)	45	2	2
Pacific Based Media (54 articles)	21	33	0

Pacific Country	Number of articles
Cook Islands	5
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PACIFIC MEDIA FRAMING 1 – Australian seasonal workers policy and the joint benefits of labour mobility

Media coverage of labour mobility in the Pacific largely adhered to 2 broad frameworks:

The first involves the repurposing of Australian policy focused articles on the Pacific Labour Mobility and Seasonal Worker's Program, primarily with the aim of educating the public on the strategic, political and economic value of labour mobility as a regional initiative

A key feature of such narratives is a focus on the wider infrastructural benefits labour mobility brings to developing economy – increasing the capacity for participants to build houses and invest some of their earnings into community initiatives

(Key Words: policy, ties, regional, economic, money, transfer, remittance, development, capacity, infrastructure) **(405 references)**



PACIFIC MEDIA FRAMING 2 – On equitable social working conditions and Pacific led and owned narratives on labour mobility

The second framework is less prominent but it speaks towards the need for more equitable working conditions for women, specific social challenges, more regional collaboration towards sharing labour mobility knowledge (and skills) and more Pacific led and owned research into the social impact of labour mobility on participant and participant families

(Key Words: Gender, female, participation, challenges, experience, struggles, happiness, exchange, region, skills, women, staff, bank, money, New Zealand, reset, awareness) **(327 references)**

SOLOMON Islanders continue to benefit from the Seasonal Workers Scheme (SWS) in Australia. Since its establishment in 2012, the number of farm workers from Solomon Islands has more than doubled from 42 in 2012 to 87 in 2017.

The most common goal of these workers is to have a house, a decent living and to be able to support their family. From a village close to Tambea, Joseph Cheka is a new dad. He left home in March this year (2018) to work under the SWS in Australia leaving behind his six month old child and new wife.

The daunting future of not having a roof over their head drove Joseph to leave his home to earn money for his family.

"I used to sell copra. I started the foundation of my house through selling copra. At that time, a bag of copra was SBD\$4.00 per kilo. You can imagine how much hard work I have to go through in order to save money. I used to earn SBD\$400.00 at the most per market".

Drying coconut to make copra takes time. The method used for most rural Solomon Islanders is drying where the kernel or coconut meat is left in the sun to dry. It can take a week at the most to dry the coconut. Prior to that, they have to collect the coconut fruits, remove the husks and then remove the kernel to be left out to dry. Depending on the amount of coconut dried, a villager can get SBD\$400.00 to SBD\$700.00 (AUD\$70.00 to AUD\$120.00) a fortnight.



AUSTRALIAN MEDIA FRAMING 1 – Soft diplomacy and ‘staying ahead of the game’

Media coverage of labour mobility in Australia revolved around firstly the political significance of the program both as a soft diplomacy exercise and in keeping abreast of growing international influence in the Pacific. There was a distinct focus on the impact of labour mobility in extending national influence within the Pacific international development space

(Key Words: China, diplomacy, strategic, Australia, Influence, growing) (570 references)



DEVPOLICY

AUSTRALIAN MEDIA FRAMING 2 – Labour Mobility and the Australian agricultural labour market

Balancing this international outlook, was a broader discussion on labour mobility as being closely entwined with Australia’s network of employers and job availability on farms. The economics of the Australian seasonal labour market, specifically the rates of demand for seasonal labour in Australia’s regional agricultural sector was, at times, raised as a key focal point

(Key Words: government, Partnership, Productivity, Seasonal, diplomacy, strategic, Australia, Influence, growing, trans-pacific, minister, ministerial)

(51 references)

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Key Insights (Policy based Vs Social impact coverage)

- There is a heavy skew towards policy-based articles on labour mobility than on social narratives of participant experiences in the program in Australian media coverage – Ratio: 45:2
- However, the opposite holds through in the case of Pacific media coverage with greater attention directed towards the social impact of labour mobility on the livelihood and narrated experiences of labour mobility participants – Ratio: 21:33
- There is a more balanced representation between policy based stories and social impact narratives on labour mobility in Pacific media than there is in Australian media coverage
- There was a higher propensity for Australian media coverage (in the sampled analysis) to frame labour mobility as a broader facet of Australian foreign policy/strategy than as an initiative with community-level resonance for migrant workers and Australian employers

Key Insights (Depth and breadth of focus of social impact stories in Pacific media)

- Listed below is the frequency distribution of most popularly referenced words in the concordance analysis of Pacific media stories

Words	Frequency	Most Utilised Context (KWIC)
Female + Women	113	In the context of increasing opportunities for female participation and providing equitable conditions of employment for female workers
Skills	48	An emphasis on skills development both before and after the program to secure longer term jobs in Australia and the Pacific
Money	28	In regard to the reliable revenue stream from labour mobility that allows participants to meet local expenses and family demands

Implications and Steps Forward

- There is an inherent separation between policy and practice in the framing and communication of labour mobility media content, with both subjects not necessarily discussed/deliberated together in Pacific and Australian media
- Media play an important role in contextualising stories on broader policy change and national strategic interests upon the narratives of key labour mobility stakeholders at grassroots level who are at the frontline of policy impact (e.g. Participants, and Participant families).
- Media as Knowledge Brokers?

How can media facilitate knowledge brokering – a connection between policy and practice

- Fostering meaningful discussion around the social impact of labour mobility policy at a very granular narrative-level both from the perspectives of employers and participants
- Employers should be represented not only as institutional stakeholders but as ‘faces’ and ‘personalities’ that connect and respond to individual participant narratives
- Conceptually, the media have a crucial role to play as key intermediaries in localising policy within the context of social challenges and experience of labour mobility stakeholders
- In other words, the media in both the Pacific and Australia have the ability to broker and connect policy and social narratives, because only then would we be able to appreciate the operational strengths and challenges posed by labour mobility
- The SWP and RSE schemes have an interesting policy-parallel of the above with their appointment of in-country liaison/relationship managers
- These contracted consultants work closely with employers and labour sending units on matching their needs to the supply of labour from the region
- They are central policy intermediaries, ensuring policy is collectively understood and implemented, in an effort to acknowledge the strategic concerns of government representatives, employers and participants

What does this mean for media reporting on labour mobility?

- Fundamentally, it involves adapting **a regionally consistent media reporting approach that synthesizes policy information and its operationalisation in different hyper-local contexts**
- This would mean for example, featuring first hand stories from employers and workers from a labour mobility registered farm in rural Tasmania against current measures underpinning worker welfare and employer eligibility for the program
- Alternatively, it could also involve exploring how labour mobility recruitment policies affect the overall economic and social wellbeing of a particular remote sending community in the Pacific, at a very granular level
- **Ultimately, labour mobility is a program that cultivates a rich tapestry of narratives born out the overlapping systems of policy and social experience. The media have an important role in telling that story**

Thank you.