



# PACIFIC STORIES

DEVPOLICY  
BLOG POSTS  
IN 2016-18

**DEVELOPMENT**  
POLICY CENTRE

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Edited by Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain

*Cover image: A kastom dancer from the Banks Islands leaps across the stage during the opening ceremony of the 2017 Pacific Mini Games in Port Vila, Vanuatu. 5 December 2017. Credit: Nicky Kuautonga.*

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## Introduction



*Matthew Dornan*



*Tess Newton Cain*

This collection of Pacific Stories brings together Devpolicy Blog posts on the Pacific and Papua New Guinea from mid-2016 to early 2018. It is the third edition of Pacific Stories that we've compiled, with earlier iterations incorporating blog posts from 2013 to 2015.

In putting together this publication, we hope to provide readers with a sample of Pacific-focused commentary featured by the Devpolicy Blog: commentary that canvasses development-related issues ranging from women's participation in politics to the economic impacts of seasonal worker programs. Much of this commentary comes from the region. In this volume, you'll see both interviews with and articles by prominent Pacific islanders, including Colin Tukuitonga, Director-General of the Pacific Community, Beatrice Mahuru, CEO of the Digicel Foundation, and Transform Aqorau, the former head of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Secretariat.

In addition to providing a taste of Pacific-focused commentary on the Devpolicy Blog, we also hope that this volume will serve as an educational resource for the region. Previous editions of Pacific Stories have been used for teaching in high schools in Vanuatu. We would love to see that happen elsewhere in the region. If you are an educator, and would like copies of this publication for teaching purposes, please do get in touch.

Publication of Pacific Stories is made possible by support from the Australian aid program through the Pacific Research Program. As is always the case with the Devpolicy Blog, views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Development Policy Centre or its staff, nor those of any government.

We hope you enjoy reading this selection of opinion pieces and interviews. If you are not already a regular reader of the Devpolicy Blog ([devpolicy.org](http://devpolicy.org)), we encourage you to become one. You may also like to consider becoming a contributor: we are always keen to receive blog posts and comments from the region. Visit the blog ([devpolicy.org](http://devpolicy.org)) or contact us at [devpolicy@anu.edu.au](mailto:devpolicy@anu.edu.au).

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## Blog posts

### 1. Pacific Predictions, what to expect in 2018

*Tess Newton Cain, 12 January 2018*



*Akilisi Phovia, Prime Minister of Tonga (ITU Pictures/Flickr/CC BY 2.0)*

Following an [eventful 2017](#), what does this year hold for the Pacific island region?

Politically, the general elections in Fiji are probably the most significant event on the horizon. The period for [nomination of candidates](#) is now open and the country will go to the polls sometime

between April and October. Unsurprisingly, the incumbent Fiji First government appears confident of being returned. These elections will see the return to campaigning of reformed coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka, as [leader of the SODELPA party](#). Whilst there has been some talk of an alliance of opposition parties, this has been ruled out by both Biman Prasad, leader of the National Federation Party, and [Rabuka](#). Although the successful conduct of elections is one indicator of democratic governance, there remain significant concerns about freedom of the media. The [sedition case against the Fiji Times](#) looks likely to drag on during the lead up to the elections. There are also concerns that moves by the [authorities to control social media](#) have been timed to curb online debate and engagement during the campaign period. In addition, the [ongoing industrial dispute](#) involving Air Terminal Services (Fiji Ltd) is problematic for the Government. [Recent involvement of the military](#) in this dispute is concerning and raises further questions about commitment to democratic culture in Fiji.

In Papua New Guinea, the aftermath of last year's elections will continue in the form of [challenges to results](#) in a number of seats. However, past experience has shown that the PNG courts are very slow in dealing with these cases so it is unlikely that they will have any significant effect on this Parliament. Whilst there will be some attempts from within the Opposition to be influential, it is hard to see that they will be successful. However, this has not deterred Madang MP, Bryan Kramer, from forming a [new political party](#). The [collapse of the fraud case against Peter O'Neill](#) late last year has caused some to express concern about the overall quality of governance in PNG. Although it is technically possible for the case to be resurrected, this does not appear very likely. Another concern carried over from 2017 is about the state of the economy. Whilst Peter O'Neill and his Treasurer, Charles Abel, remain [upbeat](#), others have pointed to some serious issues that [do not bode well](#) for the future. In November, PNG will host APEC in Port Moresby. Whilst the government considers this a significant diplomatic event for the country (with good reason), there are questions being asked more widely about what the overall and long term developmental benefit of this will be.

This year will be the only full one of the Prime Ministership of Rick Hou in Solomon Islands, further to his [elevation to that position](#) late last year. There are great hopes for PM Hou given his past experience and overall commitment to principles of good governance. However, it is hard to see what he can achieve at a fundamental level in the short period of time left before Solomon Islands has its next round of general elections. There are two significant pieces of legislation that have yet to come before the Parliament of Solomon Islands: one relates to a new constitution that creates a federal system of government, and the other is the highly contentious anti-corruption bill. Prime Minister Hou will need to draw on his financial management experience to address issues arising from the government's [apparent cash flow problems](#).

In Vanuatu, the Salwai government will look to capitalise on [surviving a recent motion of no confidence](#) and a [reshuffled Council of Ministers](#) to take forward a range of policy initiatives. Increases in the rate of Value Added Tax (from 12.5% to 15%) and the minimum wage (from VT 170 per hour to VT 200 (AUD 2.40) per hour) were announced during the Christmas period, each to take effect from January 1<sup>st</sup>. More significantly, the government has accepted a [controversial tax plan](#) and undertaken to put in place an enabling framework to allow for the introduction of corporate and personal income tax in the future. However, these changes are very controversial in Vanuatu and there are [divisions within the government coalition](#) about whether these reforms are appropriate at this time.

Following a [turbulent 2017](#) in Tonga, '[Akilisi Pohiva has regained the Prime Ministership](#)'. However, the events of last year will continue to cast a shadow, not least because they revealed (or confirmed) some significant structural concerns about the nature of government in Tonga. In addition, concerns about Pohiva's capacity to govern continue, including some that relate to his [health](#).

Finally, Nauru will celebrate 50 years of independence this year, and will also take over the chair of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The question has already been raised as to whether the prohibitive AUD 8,000 visa application fee for journalists will be lifted for the PIF Leaders' summit to be held later this year.

Whilst the media coverage of Australia's highly controversial asylum seeker offshore processing (such as there is) has recently been [focussed on Manus in PNG](#), the impacts on Nauru should not be forgotten. The country expects to see a substantial drop in GDP as refugees depart Nauru, with the [ADB predicting](#) 'growth' of -4% in 2018 (as compared to growth of 10.4% in 2016).

While there will be fewer refugees and asylum seekers in 2018 in Nauru than in 2017, there will likely still be hundreds by the end of year. Will the Australian Prime Minister, who normally attends the PIF Leaders' summit, want to risk a trip to a country that he'd rather Australians not think about? Will 2018 be the year in which Australia [steps up](#) in the Pacific or trips up?

*Tess's past annual predictions can be found here: [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), [2015](#), [2016](#) & [2017](#).*

*Dr Tess Newton Cain is the principal of [TNC Pacific Consulting](#) and a Visiting Fellow at the Development Policy Centre.*

## 2. The world is talking about migration – so should we!

Giff Johnson, 19 April 2016



Chief Election Officer Robson Almen (2nd from left), Nov 2015 election (Image: PiPP)

Migration from war-torn Syria is consuming Europe and stories of desperate refugees fleeing from conflicts in the Middle East are grist for daily stories in global media, which has put 'migration' high on the international agenda.

In the peaceful North Pacific, a different type of migration

has been continuing steadily to the United States for two decades. Visa-free access to the United States enjoyed by citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau has dramatically impacted islanders from these three North Pacific nations in ways both positive and negative. This provision in the Compact of Free Associations with these countries—that gives Washington control of the defence of this vast region, as well as access to an important military installation in the Marshall Islands—has worked as a safety valve for island economies and governments that do not have the ability to provide jobs, education and health care opportunities to meet population growth.

Most of the '[conversation](#)' about migration from the islands to the US has focused on the out-bound for obvious reasons: there are estimates that upwards of 40 per cent of all Micronesians and Marshallese now reside in the United States and its territories, such as Guam. [There are negatives](#), particularly in Guam and Hawaii where high costs of housing have fuelled homelessness, and the large concentrations of islanders in these relatively small populations have in recent years resulted in their being a target of racism and discrimination. Yet, a similar demographic in mainland US—in northwest Arkansas, where an estimated 10,000 Marshall Islanders reside in a tri-city area—has been largely positive, with islanders being actively recruited by huge poultry packing companies. Meanwhile, in the western state of Oregon, which has thousands of Micronesians, Marshallese and Palauans scattered across various cities, the island community formed the [Compact Action National Network](#), which has successfully gained Oregon State Legislature adoption of important legislation for resident islanders.

Islanders living in the US mainland [do better economically](#), no doubt because of the lower cost of living in many locations in which islanders have chosen to settle. A small percentage of these out-bound migrants run afoul of the law in the US, illegal behaviour that often results in deportation and a red-flag status preventing them from returning to the US. Deportations have escalated, mirroring the increase in the number of citizens of these three nations living in the US. While the number of deportees was generally in single digits annually in the early and mid-2000s, it has

[risen significantly](#). In 2015, 70 Micronesians, 23 Marshallese and 11 Palauans were deported from the US. Since 2003, the Marshall Islands is averaging 16 deportations annually, with a spike in 2013 to 37. While these numbers are small on a global scale, they are big for small island populations, and have had some negative consequences at home.

An editorial in the October 2, 2015 edition of the *Marshall Islands Journal* commented on an assault by two attackers that sent a young man to the hospital with a broken jaw and other injuries. 'The two gentlemen administering the jaw-busting were ... deported from the United States for engaging in unbecoming activities,' the editorial noted. This incident offered 'a view of the dark side of Marshallese easy visa-free access to the US. It is as though we take large groups of our citizenry and transport them off to the States and then, after a period of time, the bad actors are weeded out and returned to Marshall Islands: American employers are beneficiaries of good Marshallese labour while Marshallese citizens here are "beneficiaries" of bashed-in jaws. Is there something wrong with this picture?'

But the in-migration is by no means entirely negative. The Compacts with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands that came into effect in 1986 (and in Palau in 1994) allow islanders to serve in the US Armed Forces. For many young islanders, the US military is their ticket off the island and opens opportunities for post-service education. In fact, by the 2000s [recruitment on a per capita basis](#) from the Compact nations (as well as American Samoa) greatly out-paced enlistment rates of Americans.

An increasing number of U.S. military veterans are returning to Majuro to work. During the past year, we've seen demonstrations of what Marshallese veterans with 20 or more years of service bring to the table when they are put into positions of authority. Robson Almen, a 'lifer' with over 20 years in the military, retired several years ago and applied for and was hired as the Marshall Islands Chief Electoral Officer in 2014. He established a plan with a timetable and proceeded to implement it in the lead up to the November 2015 national election. It was one of the smoothest-run elections in decades, which contrasted sharply with the [chaos of the 2007 vote](#). An editorial in a December edition of the *Marshall Islands Journal* praised Chief Electoral Officer Almen and the Electoral Administration 'for an efficiently managed national election. In contrast to some past elections, there were very few problems associated with the recently concluded vote.'

In the November national election, Majuro voters elected Kalani Kaneko to serve in the 33-seat parliament. Kaneko retired in 2015 after 20 years of service in the US Army. After President Hilda Heine was elected in late January, she named Kaneko as the Minister of Health. Solving [long-standing problems at the ministry](#), and in particular Majuro hospital—which suffers from chronic doctor, nurse, medicine and supply shortages—is a Herculean task. Kaneko does not have a health background. What he brings to the table is 20 years of experience working in the US Army, which inculcated an appreciation of leadership, accountability, systems, and time management. These ingredients are mostly missing at the Ministry of Health and Kaneko is now working to develop them.

The point is, both Almen and Kaneko have an understanding of accountability and systems management from their tenure in the Army, and because of their decades of experience in the military system, they do not seem to have difficulty implementing



requirements that lead to improved services to the public while relegating family relationships to a backseat in government service. While opportunities for jobs, health care and education have been the main motivating factors pushing Marshallese and Micronesians to leave to the US, in recent years the decline in service by a corruption-riddled government workforce has negatively impacted the quality of life of many island residents, and increased motivation to migrate.

President Heine in her inaugural address to Parliament in February this year emphasised the [need for government workers](#) to improve services for the public. Kaneko, Almen and other US military veterans who have returned to the Marshall Islands are showing how direction, purpose and motivation can be used to engage government workers to deliver higher quality services.

All of this emphasises that as dramatic as these North Pacific nations' experience is with out-migration, it is not a one-dimensional situation of people simply fleeing their islands for greener pastures. It is changing the lives of many islanders who have moved to the United States, many for the better, some for worse. But it is also beginning to bring back people with decades of experience that they are putting to work for the benefit of the public.

*This post is republished with permission from the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#).*

*Giff Johnson is editor of the [Marshall Islands Journal](#), the independent weekly newspaper published in Majuro.*

### 3. Maximising the development impacts from Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme

*Jesse Doyle and Manohar Sharma, 29 March 2018*



*Apple farm (Nat Tung/Flickr/CC BY-NC 2.0)*

A lot can change within the space of a decade. In February 2009, the first group of Tongan workers set off from Tongatapu for the almond farms in Victoria's north-west. Since then, Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) has gone from a pilot of fewer than 100 arrivals annually to a program

attracting over 6,000 workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste each year. The SWP now offers more employment opportunities than the entire formal sectors of several of its participating countries.

Over the past three years, the World Bank has been monitoring what this growth means for the Pacific region. This has included extensive household and community

surveys in the two largest sending countries – Tonga and Vanuatu – along with hundreds of on-site surveys with seasonal workers from all participating countries.

Some participating workers are employed prior to departure, but the majority are not. The income gains vary by country, but in all cases represent a significant factor increase on their earning potential back home. These workers are remitting approximately A\$2,200, on average, and up to A\$4,000 per season in Australia for some sending countries. Moreover, they are remitting regularly. For many participating countries, the savings accrued (and brought home at the end of the stint away) are substantially higher than the amounts being remitted, and average to A\$6,650 across the Programme.

At the household level, the SWP has demonstrated that it can have positive impacts on food consumption and total household expenditure. The SWP clearly has an impact on home improvements and the ability to purchase major assets. The effects on human development outcomes are significant for school enrolment in the case of Tonga, but insignificant for health improvements. Meanwhile, despite widespread concerns that SWP participation would diminish the motivation to work for remaining family members, it is not impacting household labour supply.

At the aggregate level, the SWP has employed 17,320 Pacific Islanders since 2012 and delivered approximately A\$144 million in net income gains to the region. The Programme is clearly delivering on its core objective of contributing to the economic development of participating countries, as measured in terms of income. The A\$99.4 million that Tonga has gained through the SWP since its inception is more than double the [annual bilateral aid budget](#) from the Australian Government. The A\$26.2 million earned in FY17 also represents more than the A\$12.4 million generated through exports in Tonga.



*The first group of Tongan seasonal workers arriving at Tullamarine Airport (Credit: Rebecca Hallas/Sydney Morning Herald)*

These gains are impressive, but there remain further reforms that could help maximise the development impacts of this scheme. These include: spreading the gains beyond Tonga and Vanuatu, which have accounted for 83 percent of arrivals since 2012; removing barriers to access for poorer and more remote areas; increasing the female participation rate, which remains unchanged in five years; ensuring workers are using lower cost money transfer operators; and looking further into the scope for reducing pre-departure costs.

However, the above recommendations – all of which are detailed in the report – will mean little if the number of arrivals under the Programme does not continue to increase. Reducing pre-departure costs and shifting to lower cost remittance services amount to improvements at the margin, where additional workers have the scope to fundamentally increase the aggregate development impacts of the Programme. The surest way to achieve this outcome is to level the playing field between the SWP and the Working Holiday Maker Programme, a reform which could be achieved through the removal of the [second-year visa extension for backpackers](#).

There has been a great deal of [negative media coverage](#) on the Seasonal Worker Programme over the past 12 months, particularly around the potential for exploitation. The key point to note is that the reported incidents are the exception and not the rule – the vast majority of workers under this evaluation reported being ‘extremely satisfied’ with their experience in the SWP and have improved their living standards in a way that would have been unimaginable otherwise. Many more Pacific Islanders hope to have the opportunity to participate in the near future. The results from this evaluation suggest that the continued growth of the SWP will provide significant gains not just for workers, but for the Pacific region at large.

*The report ‘[Maximizing the Development Impacts of Temporary Migration: Recommendations for Australia’s Seasonal Worker Programme](#)’ was [launched](#) on Wednesday 28 March at ANU. [Listen to the podcast here](#).*

*Jesse Doyle is a Social Protection Economist with the World Bank in Sydney. Manohar Sharma is a Senior Economist at the World Bank.*

#### 4. The long journey: political acceptance of women

Mary Jack Kaviamu, 8 March 2016



*Campaigning at Port Vila market, 2016 elections  
(Flickr/Commonwealth Secretariat)*

My journey started in 2008, when I sought the endorsement of community leaders in my home island of Tanna to contest the Vanuatu provincial elections. I didn’t get their approval. I was told it is against *kastom* (custom, traditional culture) for women to be in parliament, and that I wasn’t prepared to take up

such a challenge. I tried again in 2012, this time paying my candidate fee without the approval of the community chief. When the community leaders learnt of this, they organised a meeting to stop me from contesting. They asked that I give up my candidate fee to a male candidate of their choice, promising in return that they would

support me in the 2016 national general election. I respected their decision and gave my ticket away. Their male candidate failed to win.

In 2015 Cyclone Pam devastated Vanuatu, with Tanna being one of the worst-hit islands. Women bore the brunt of the devastation, forcing them to seek out new ways to survive. A realisation began to dawn that it was time for them to stand up and speak for themselves. After numerous meetings with women groups, the first ever Tanna Women's Forum was held in October 2015. Over 1,200 attended the meeting where women demanded change to a political system that held them down, tied them in poverty, and gave them no opportunity to speak out. It was a breakthrough moment as many of these women have lived under threat all of their lives.

The women put their heads together and agreed it was time someone took the lead. I was nominated. The women agreed that I would contest the next general election scheduled for late 2016. Just days later the government announced a snap election, effectively wiping out our time to put together an election campaign. We moved ahead anyway, with membership numbers now standing at 3,700. We had much confidence that we would secure one of the seven seats in the Tanna open constituency.

With very little time to prepare, I took on the challenge with much confidence. That as a solid membership of women we could succeed, and that even if we failed to win a seat, we would learn valuable lessons from the snap election experience that would better prepare us for the next general elections in 2020. I had so much confidence. I wasn't thinking of losing; our hopes based on the registration figures signed by women across the island.

### *Crossing controversial territory*

The first obstacle was informing community leaders of our decision to field our own candidate – a woman. Working with a chief that I have close ties to, a community meeting was arranged whereby I would declare and launch my candidacy. No one uttered a word, except a female friend who stood up, and much to my surprise, said, 'I am not in support of women being electoral representatives in parliament, and I am also against the policy of reserving seats for women'. I took this understandably as coming from someone speaking from her heart, but it also confirmed that the notion that women 'do not belong in parliament' were not held by men alone.

With no financial backing (other than two small personal contributions totalling 15,000 vatu) I had to dig into my own pockets to fund the campaign. I must say the election process is very expensive, with transportation in Tanna costing 20,000 vatu per day. We hired six public transport vehicles for the campaign.

We managed to visit (and revisit in some cases) 19 communities, speaking with roughly 700 men and women. Our slogan was *Hemi Taem!* (It is time!).

Taking centre stage during the campaigns was the most challenging. The questions and comments raised by communities were not difficult to answer, but there were some tricky ones coming from those who perceived us to be defying *kastom*.



“You have not killed a fly or an ant, how can you prove that you can work like men in parliament. You are nothing but a woman.”

“Our custom and culture perfectly points out your place – which is to look after the children, and mine (male speaking) is to do the talking. Where is your respect for this *kastom*? Are you from Australia that you don’t know our *kastom*? Who has given you this right to contest?”

“Maybe we can vote for you in the provincial council election, but not to parliament.”

“Our fear right now is the domestic violence law; we do not want our women to take those laws into their own hands.”

“We don’t want to vote for women, because we don’t want women to have the right over us men.”

“We don’t want our women to vote for women. If they do, we will divorce them.”

In a lot of places, prior to our campaign meetings, there would be community meetings, usually held in the *nakamal* (traditional meeting place), where a ‘consensus’ was often reached for all community members to vote for a particular candidate. In some cases, I wasn’t allowed to go and campaign – even to speak to just the women. In one case, some women called me and said, ‘Mary, please don’t come to our community as you will not be allowed to speak here’.

### *Discrimination and the threat of violence*

The campaign revealed that culture is a main contributor to the limitation of woman’s influence in politics. I’ve seen how a lot of people are reluctant to vote for a woman. We did not experience discrimination from men alone, but women also. The discrimination we received was more on emotional violence. Discrimination against women in the society was very obvious at the time of campaigning and we observed that discrimination was somewhat based on a woman’s age, her marital status, her level of education, and economic status. And as such, a woman may not be considered to be valuable or worthwhile if she does not fit the collective representation of both men and women.

Personally, I was able to endure a male-dominated political campaign period, but stories of threats of violence experienced by some women have just been unbearable. There are many such accounts, ones that I share with a sad heart. This is one woman’s account of the threat she received from her partner the night before the poll:

“I was already in bed pretending I had fallen asleep for some hours, but my husband came up and woke me up. He held a knife to my throat and demanded that I tell him who I was going to vote for. I was so afraid, I did not speak. He told me to speak or else he would beat me. I started crying. I was short of breath and was shaking. I cried out, ‘please help me ... someone listening outside, please help me!’ But nobody came to my rescue because they were afraid of my husband. He pushed me down, punched me again on

my stomach and head, and said he was giving me a chance to speak or else he would beat me up. He knew of my intention to support women in this election. I begged him to let go of my throat or I was going to die, and I promised him that I was going to vote for the candidate of his choosing.”

Another woman also had a similar story of being threatened by her husband:

“I saw you talking with those women, but I have stated clearly stated my rules and you have to follow them. We are going to vote for a male candidate and not for any woman. If you fail my words and I find out the numbers at our polling station, I will make you pay for it.”

Other women were reportedly threatened by their partners to show candidate photos after they had cast their votes to prove they voted for a particular candidate. In some polling station, men threatened to divorce or physically torture their wives if results showed a significant number of women’s votes from that particular polling station.

### *A way forward*

Political parties, as we know, are the most important institutions affecting women’s political participation. Even though our group knew we could have more support (moral and financial) from political parties if we ran under one of them, we still made the hard choice of running as an independent candidate. We had a few reasons for this, with the main one being that bigger political parties filed their candidates in advance, leaving no space for women to contest under their ticket. Secondly, women still have much to learn about the processes and lobbying involved in politics.

In spite of the challenges women continue to face, I see a new generation of powerful women flourishing in Tanna, women with a strong sense of identity and power. Through our journey, many have come to understand that participation in the electoral process involves much more than just voting. It is time to exercise the democratic rights that have either been ignored or violated over the last 36 years. Through our journey in politics, many have come to appreciate that through political participation women can have the freedom to speak out for the first time in the island’s history, which they’ve done through campaigning, assembling, associating and participating.

I have seen the power of ordinary women who have stood up against injustices. I have seen the faces of those who shed tears because of so much ill-dealing and threatening within their homes and communities. We have started a journey where we will continue to celebrate the united power of women who have taken the first steps to uncovering the multiple forms of discrimination and injustices. We shall continue to seek the empowerment of women to a level where they can think and speak for themselves.

*This post is republished with permission from the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#).*

*Mary Jack Kaviamu is a Manager for Action Aid.*

## 5. Media challenges as Papua New Guinea fights gendered and sorcery-related violence

Michelle Nayahamui Rooney, 1 November 2017



### 'Sanguma' woman rescued in Lae

08:00AM - Lae Police have rescued a woman suspected of practicing sorcery at the Awa Block along the Bumbu River



### Cause of journalist's death to be revealed tomorrow

5:00PM -The mother of late Rosalyn Albanie Evara has finally agreed to a post mortem of her daughter's body which

Screenshot of Post Courier website dated 25th October 2017

### Another week of violence against women in PNG

It was a shocking week, even in what seems to be the 'norm' of gendered violence in PNG. Norms are so entrenched that without thinking many people become silenced, largely because of the despair that it

so difficult to change anything. On October 14, a prominent journalist, the late [Rosalyn Albanie Evara](#), passed away in Port Moresby. At her funeral last week, allegations emerged that she had been subjected to domestic violence. Simultaneously unfolding was another harrowing incident of sorcery related violence in a settlement in PNG's other major urban centre — Lae in Morobe Province. One woman narrowly escaped death when the police intervened, while another woman was found dead the following morning in what police believe might be a related incident. All three incidents, along with other stories depicting the kinds of stress that the police in PNG face, can be seen in the first 15 minutes of this [report](#).

Why is this week any different? This week marks a pivotal moment in media coverage of gender violence in Papua New Guinea. It is a point when the stark realities facing PNG journalists were foregrounded, leading many in the industry to reflect critically on the ethics of the media in reporting gender based violence. But importantly, the fact this happened at the same moment that the sorcery related violence in Lae occurred also opens up other questions about the role of the media and the powers we can unintentionally or intentionally exercise in our individual and collective silences.

### *Silence of the educated, empowered woman*

During her funeral, the late Rosalyn's bereaved aunt broke the silence, publically alleging that Rosalyn had been the victim of domestic violence and expressing remorse that she had not done more to help. In doing so, with images of the deceased's bruised body, she cast a powerful spotlight onto the journalist's life: from being a journalist who told 'others' stories, to the 'other' whose important story needed to be known.

This triggered a series of [debates](#) and [outrage](#), including calls for an investigation; reflecting on their own [ethics](#) in journalism; and interventions by numerous people including [colleagues and friends](#). One news article [reported](#) that the national Minister for Religion, Youth, and Community Development called for a proper investigation into her death, and that the Governor of Port Moresby had intervened to ask for a

post mortem to be undertaken. In another [report](#), the media council of PNG also called for an investigation.

People soul-searched. Why did they not do more to help? What was the duty of care in reporting her story by her colleagues in the media?

Regardless of what the post mortem results are and the outcome of the ensuing investigation, the late Rosalyn Albariel Evara's story exemplifies the sad irony for many educated, employed, empowered Papua New Guinean women – women who are often expected to be strong and presumed to be in a position to leave. The fact is many suffer long periods of violence and abuse. It is difficult to speak out when everyone around you – your family, your colleagues, your friends – relies on you for strength and for support. Women fear being labelled weak, 'not coping' or being stigmatised for being a burden to others. We feel that it is better to keep suffering in silence and being loved for being a strong person, than to threaten the fabric in which we are a thread that keeps the social net together.

### *Silence of marginal victims of sorcery-related violence*

This week, news also began emerging on Facebook of a sorcery-related violence incident, and police responded, [saving](#) the life of a woman. In the process, police [urged people](#) to refrain from posting on social media and instead contact the police, but the following day another woman was found dead at the same location. Yet, as Lae based reporter Scott Waide notes in [this report](#), social media has come to play a strong role in giving voice to the marginalised and to bringing such cases to the attention of the police, authorities and general public. The media also needs adequate resources to report difficult cases, including cases that occur in remote places. But for [Scott Waide](#), these incidents may never have made it into mainstream [media](#).

Overall, the response from national leaders and influential actors to recent sorcery cases has been subdued. No public calls for investigations. No public outcry for inquiry and action. In 2013, a woman accused of sorcery was burnt in Mt Hagen, prompting a national and international outcry and the *haus krai* movement. But this time, perhaps it was over shadowed by the media's focus on their colleague.

### *Support for the media*

The contrasting responses to these events point to the challenges of sustaining media coverage on these issues, and to the need to give voice to all women who face the threat or often the reality of violence. They also highlight the vulnerability of journalists working in this space – as victims of violence as well as from ongoing exposure and pressure to report on these issues to the public. In recognition of the importance of gender based violence, the government of PNG and its development partners have formulated the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence](#) and the Sorcery National Action Plan (See [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). In view of the challenges faced by journalists, consideration must be given to allocating some funding to the media industry to support timely, accurate and independent reporting on these issues in ways that also support journalists.

*Michelle Rooney is a Research Fellow at the Development Policy Centre, working under the partnership with the University of Papua New Guinea.*



## 6. Priced out of the market: informal settlements in Honiara, Solomon Islands

*Meg Keen and Luke Kiddle, 17 January 2017*



*Lord Howe settlement football field, Honiara (Flickr/DFAT/Irene Scott for AusAID CC BY 2.0)*

Informal urban settlements are rapidly growing in the greater Honiara region, including peri-urban areas in Guadalcanal Province, with some areas growing at rates as high as 12 per cent per annum (SINSO 2012:21). Most informal settlements' residents do not have legal land tenure and usually lack

services, adding to urban inequalities. Government-led responses have been limited; the main initiative to date has been to offer informal settlers 75-year leases on state land (that is, 'fixed term estates'), but the process has many bureaucratic steps and often ends with an insurmountable hurdle when most cannot afford the lease price, which can be over five times median incomes. Adding to frustrations, the process has also suffered from a lack of transparency.

Responding to growing pressures, the Solomon Islands Government is expanding its urban agenda to address deep-seated urban management challenges. For example, the Commissioner of Lands, who had sole responsibility (but little accountability) for allocating urban land, has been replaced by a Land Board of 12 voting members, in an effort to depoliticise land allocations. An informal settlement upgrading strategy, supported by UN-Habitat, is also taking first steps to address the nexus between land, services and governance issues, although progress has been mired by unclear roles and responsibilities from the local level up and concerns about how interventions may affect (informal) land access and power relations. National framing documents, including a national urban policy and a national housing policy, are also being developed, adding to the paper commitments. Getting traction will depend heavily on community engagement, political will and resourcing — all currently patchy.

This post reports on recent work, supported by UN-Habitat and donors, aimed at creating a profile of Honiara's informal settlement situation and the challenges ahead. We then focus on one key missing element: the critical need to improve housing affordability.

### *Mushrooming informal settlement*

Best available information emerging from UN-Habitat's profiling suggests there are close to 4,000 informal settlement households within Honiara's municipal area: that's about 28,000 people or around 40 per cent of Honiara City's population (UN-Habitat 2016). Many of these informal settlers live in 36 'informal settlement zones' mainly

on state land, a delineation created by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey (MLHS) for administrative reasons. For most residents the boundaries between formal and informal parts of the city are irrelevant. A recent survey of residents from seven of these zones found that only five per cent had a temporary occupation licence; all the other respondents either didn't know what tenure they had (44 per cent), forgot (9 per cent) or claimed the information wasn't available (42 per cent) (Pauku 2015:7).

The most rapidly-growing informal settlements outside municipal Honiara are on peri-urban customary and registered land in Guadalcanal Province. Numbers are unclear but likely in the hundreds, if not thousands, of households. There is little support for customary landowners wanting to develop their land, and there are few legal protections for those with informal agreements. Melanesian studies have found that adaptation, not replacement, of customary tenure is the preferable approach because it builds on existing arrangements ([Fingleton 2005 \[pdf\]](#)). Social acceptance of customary tenure is evident from Honiara's housing investment patterns. Investment is correlated most strongly with time in place rather than legal tenure — particularly in informal settlements — which suggests de facto or perceived security of tenure is a key (but neglected) driver of investment; as in Fiji ([Kiddle 2010 \[pdf\]](#)).

### *Informal settlements are here to stay*

The MLHS is now committed to upgrading informal settlements through subdivision planning and converting state tenure to leased land. There are plans for most informal settlements within the Honiara town boundary. The government has accepted the permanence of many informal settlements on state land. Evictions are extremely rare; actions reminiscent of the recent tensions related to ethnicity, land and economic benefits disputes — most intense between Guale and Malaitan ethnic groups on Guadalcanal, especially in Honiara — are avoided. The majority of informal settlers in greater Honiara are Malaitan.

Infrastructure and services — particularly better sanitation, solid waste collection, and access paths and roads — are rarely available in informal settlements. Refreshingly, both the major utilities are taking a more pro-poor, progressive attitude to informal settlements. The utilities have, for example, been piloting and planning ways to reduce costs of connections (Solomon Power) and introduce prepay mechanisms (Solomon Power, and soon Solomon Water) to boost services to informal settlements. Even so, one utility executive noted they would be 'chasing the people' for a long time yet.

Other opportunities for better urban management exist. Coordination between key agencies — including national government, Honiara City Council, the utilities and non-government organisations — could be greatly strengthened. Financial shortfalls mean that development partners, both private and donors, will be needed for a timely and comprehensive settlement upgrade program, although cultural fit and sensitivity will be key. Importantly, Guadalcanal Province must be engaged much more. Concerned about the lack of inclusion in urban planning, one senior Guale politician made clear that process mattered for constructive relationships: 'It's not about opposing development, it's about how government recognises [our] customary land ... about getting revenue resources'.

### *One missing element: improving housing affordability*

Tellingly, at the inaugural Solomon Islands National Urban Conference in June 2016 local delegates referred to informal settlements as ‘affordable housing areas’. This is no surprise. Honiara housing is expensive; a situation worsened during the RAMSI period and its large influx of staff. Solomon Islands Home Finance Limited (SIHFL) — charged with developing affordable homes — has been selling dwellings at SB\$495,000 (AU\$82,500) to SB\$735,000 (AU\$122,500) (SIHFL 28/6/2016) — that’s about 50 to 70 times the median wage. These costs are far, far beyond the reach of even the most senior civil servants. The result is that 97 per cent of SIHFL homes built in the past six years have been sold to the government to house public servants. Opening up more land for development, although difficult, is part of the answer, and that will mean working with Guadalcanal and customary landowners for sustainable solutions. Housing costs could be cut by requiring more modest, but safe, standards, and creating higher density housing — all steps taken in Suva (Phillips and Keen 2016 [pdf]). New options are also needed: the MLHS is preparing legislation to allow strata titles, hoping to increase accommodation supply and reduce costs. There is also a push for cheap modular and pre-fabricated housing to cut expenses. Low-income public housing is needed, too, as provided elsewhere in Melanesia, but this is likely to need donor and/or non-government organisation partnerships to meet costs.

For most residents in greater Honiara, there currently remains no option but informal settlement because of high land and housing costs. Perhaps the forthcoming informal settlement upgrading strategy and national housing policy will generate new options. But progress will depend on addressing hard issues about locally appropriate ways to address the rapidly rising urban demands on customary land for which there are next to no formal supports, and on expanding affordable housing options. Without targeted and sustained action many more citizens will be ‘priced out of the market’.



*This post was originally published as [SSGM In Brief 2016/28](#).*

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## 7. Skills transfer through infrastructure

*Richard Curtain, 26 August 2016*



*Gulf Province, 2016 (Image: Matthew Dornan)*

According to the World Bank, one in five firms in manufacturing and services in Port Moresby and Lae in 2015 identified lack of skills as a major constraint on their current operations. This skills gap has in part been filled by some 41,000 foreign workers in PNG, many of whom are working in trade occupations. The number of foreign workers in PNG with trade

occupations in 2014 ranged from 12 to 26 per cent of all work permits. The latter estimate includes trade coordinators and supervisors, an occupational category favoured by employers as the job does not have to be advertised.

Implicit in the work permit system is the requirement for foreign workers to transfer their skills to domestic workers. However, under PNG's employment of non-citizens legislation, mechanisms to do so are missing. The government and development partners who invest in public infrastructure investment are highly prescriptive about the requirements for successful tenders. But the provisions do not include contractual requirements to ensure skills transfer from imported to domestic workers.

A recent [report](#) commissioned by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) examines how to incorporate skills transfer arrangements into the design and implementation of large infrastructure projects. The report draws on six case studies of construction firms in PNG to identify two broad skills sourcing strategies: one that minimises costs, and the other that minimises risks.



The first skills sourcing strategy uses a small number of highly skilled staff recruited from high-income countries such as Australia, with some skilled staff recruited from lower-cost economies, such as the Philippines. Under this approach, most of the workforce are either skilled PNG workers with a long track record of employment with the company, skilled PNG workers recruited from the local labour market, or unskilled PNG workers sourced as a group from local communities.

The second skills sourcing strategy used by foreign construction firms is to reduce the transaction costs of managing work on a complex construction site. Where a language barrier exists, there is a strong chance that work directions are misunderstood, causing delays and accidents. This skills sourcing strategy seeks to limit the number of PNG workers in jobs as supervisors, trades workers, equipment operators, and heavy truck drivers, with preference given to experienced workers from the company's country of origin. PNG workers are for the most part recruited from communities next to the work site for work that can be done with skills learnt quickly on-the-job and performed with simple directions.

Both strategies have limitations for PNG workers. Although the first strategy employs more PNG workers in skilled jobs, the skills transfer process from foreign workers, if it takes place at all, is informal. The second strategy avoids employing PNG workers in skilled jobs. This means that PNG workers in these firms have few, if any, opportunities to gain skills from foreign workers.

The report proposes several options to facilitate skills transfer through large infrastructure projects. The underlying principles used to frame the recommendations are: the need for positive incentives for enterprises in addition to a contract requirement, the need to involve stakeholders in addition to the construction company; the value of considering a range of skills transfer options; and the importance of seeking prior feedback from stakeholders on the proposed arrangements.

The initial step in setting up the arrangements is to identify the types of skills to be transferred: basic skills, trade skills, and technician, professional or organisation-wide skills. The next step is to specify the nature of the contract obligation. The options for obligating a contractor can vary from the simple to the more complex. The contract could require simple inputs related to training in the bill of quantities such as number of training places to be provided. Another option is to require outputs such as the type of skills training provided. The most demanding contract provision is to require a performance-based outcome such as training in specified skills to an assessed quality standard.

A sole focus on a contract obligation with penalties for non-compliance, however, has major limitations. The threat of penalties encourages enterprises not to go beyond the letter of the law or even to pay the penalty to avoid the obligation. So the report proposes, in addition to the use of contractual obligations, the use of a country-level or regional framework agreement between governments or development partners to provide positive incentives for construction firms to earn a “social licence” to operate. One concept used by some large companies in PNG is ‘creating shared value’. This involves a company using enterprise resources to solve social problems as a by-product of its normal operations. For example, in its [Annual Report for 2015](#), the Oil Search Foundation reports on working in partnership with PNG Health Department in a number of ways, including training and mentoring staff

to deliver better health services in relation to malaria prevention, HIV and maternal and child health.

Government articulation of a stronger policy statement, backed by changes to the work permit legislation, is also needed. Political leaders need to make it clear that foreign enterprises employing foreign workers with middle-level skills have an obligation to transfer skills.

Finally, as contracts are of limited duration, skills transfer intermediaries are needed. Professional associations can play a valuable role in the skill formation process. These associations in PNG are the Institution of Engineers PNG; Institute of Architects, Surveyors Association, and the PNG Human Resource Institute. With additional resources, they are well-placed to help professionals and technicians continue their skills development through work opportunities on a number of contracts.

*Richard Curtain is a Visiting Fellow at the Development Policy Centre.*

## 8. The expensive Pacific

Stephen Howes, 2 March 2018



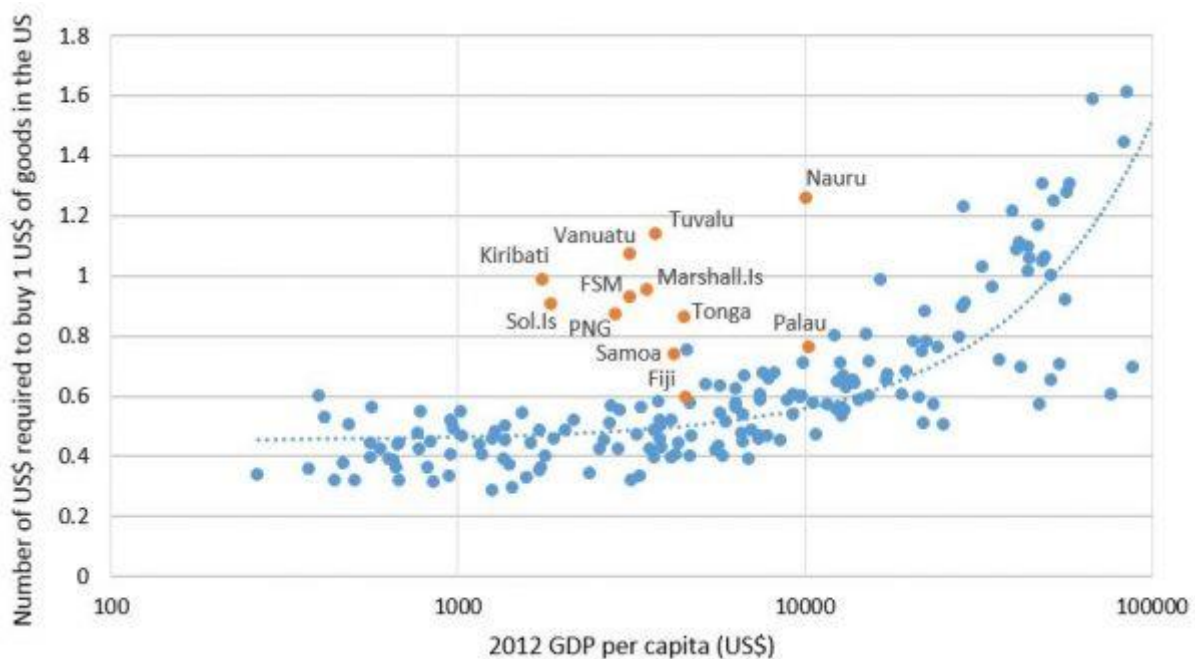
*Bunnings Warehouse slogan (Scott Lewis/Flickr/CC BY 2.0)*

At a lecture last year to DFAT graduates, I was explaining why developing countries are, as the hardware chain Bunnings claims to be, characterised by lower prices. It's known as the Penn or the Balassa-Samuelson effect. And it means you can buy more with a dollar in a developing country than a developed one. The

economic reasoning is simple: labour costs are lower in poorer countries because wages are lower. Traded goods might be subject to the law of one price (their price should be similar across countries) but non-traded goods are not. Because workers are paid less, restaurant meals, haircuts, and taxi rides are all cheaper in Hanoi than Sydney.

I had a picture to prove my point. In the graph below, with data from the World Development Indicators, each dot represents a country. The horizontal axis shows (on a log scale) each country's per capita income, measured in US dollars. The vertical one is an estimate of the number of US dollars needed to buy one US dollars' worth of goods in the country (this is measured in studies of what are called purchasing power parities). Obviously, that value is one in the US. But, as you can see from the graph, it is more than one for many rich countries, and much less than

one for poorer countries. In fact, it is only half or less for many poor countries. While there is a lot of variation, on average, purchasing power falls with income: the blue trend line has a positive slope.



In the graph I showed to the students, the dots were all blue. One of my students asked about the group of dots with income between US\$1,000 and 10,000 that sits well above the others. It turns out that those countries are nearly all from the Pacific – in the graph above, coloured in orange. It is remarkable how clustered the Pacific countries are on the graph. And how expensive they are, given how poor they are. Pacific countries are fundamentally different to other developing countries in this regard. Only Fiji is anywhere close to the trend line.

Why does the Penn/Balassa-Samuelson effect not hold in the Pacific? Why are their prices so high? One reason is their remoteness and small size. Trade costs are expensive, and even non-traded goods have traded inputs. Electricity is non-traded, but the generator used to produce it needs to be imported. Land is also very expensive in the Pacific.

A second reason is the dominance of aid and in some countries, remittances. These sources of foreign currency push up the demand for domestic currency and/or domestic prices without necessarily raising GDP.

A third reason is the highly dualistic nature of these economies. If you live in the informal sector, prices are cheap (e.g. for the food you grow yourself). But the prices measured here are probably much more representative of the formal sector. Here, prices are often set for multinationals and for aid-funded consultants.

I'm not sure how important each of these three reasons is. But Fiji seems to be the exception that proves the rule. Fiji is larger than most Pacific economies. Aid is not that important (though remittances are). And the Fijian economy is one of the least dualistic of the Pacific. There are few big resource projects.

What can the Pacific do about this? Those countries which have their own currencies could consider devaluation. (No Pacific countries have floating exchange rates.) Some of the gains in terms of competitiveness would be lost via domestic inflation, but by no means all. However, while this may be good policy advice, it is of limited value. For a start, many Pacific islands use another currency: only six have their own. Moreover, urban elites dominate Pacific politics, and will resist depreciation unless there is a compelling argument for it. As there is with Fiji: its reliance on tourism is made possible because its prices are relatively low, and this gives it a strong incentive to keep its exchange rate competitive.

Pacific countries also need to get non-traded costs down, from energy to land to law and order. That would be possible by reform, but it's a tough reform agenda.

Visitors to the Pacific often comment on the high prices, and others have [found](#) that Pacific countries have overvalued exchange rates. But the international perspective is useful, and I'm grateful to the curious DFAT student who asked the question in class. The comparison also shows just how poor some Pacific countries are. Using US dollars, the poorest Pacific country, Kiribati, is only the 48<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world. Using purchasing power parities, it is the 20<sup>th</sup> poorest, and the poorest outside of Africa after Haiti.

Source data [here](#).

*Stephen Howes is the Director of the Development Policy Centre and a Professor of Economics at the Crawford School.*

## 9. Manna from heaven – cyclones, cash transfers, and the role of social protection in disaster response

Jesse Doyle, 20 March 2018



*Some of the destruction wrought by Tropical Cyclone Winston along Kings Road on Viti Levu, Fiji (Flickr/UN Women/Murray Lloyd/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*

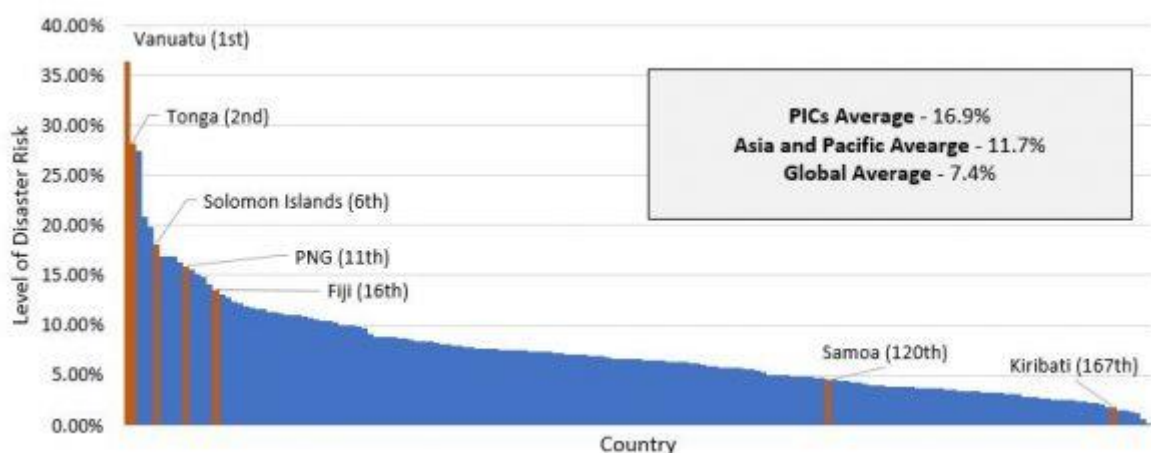
Last month, after Tropical Cyclone (TC) Gita devastated Samoa with severe flooding, it made an unexpected turn and hooked back towards Tonga. I happened to be located in Tonga at the time and my usual sense of calm quickly vanished as the system strengthened from a Category 2, to a Category 3, and ultimately a Category 4. As I frantically stocked up on bottled water and food supplies, I was struck by the sense of calm that permeated the streets of Nuku'alofa as this system was rapidly approaching – many locals were drinking their morning coffees at Friends Café, reading the daily newspaper, or walking the waterfront path that lines Vuna Road.



Some had lived through TC Isaac in 1982 or been impacted by TC Ian in 2014, so knew what to expect.

Pacific Islanders are certainly no strangers to natural disasters. If you rank countries globally by their level of natural disaster risk, all Pacific Island countries - aside from Samoa and Kiribati - sit on the dangerous side of the distribution (see Figure 1). Globally, Vanuatu sits at the top of this index with the highest level of disaster risk of any country in the world, whilst Tonga (2<sup>nd</sup>), Solomon Islands (6<sup>th</sup>) and Timor-Leste (10<sup>th</sup>) fall within the top ten. This exposure to natural disasters leads Pacific Islanders to have a higher level of resilience, one necessary to withstand such devastating and repeated shocks.

*Figure 1: the Pacific region faces the highest level of natural disaster risk in the world*



Source: World Risk Report 2013

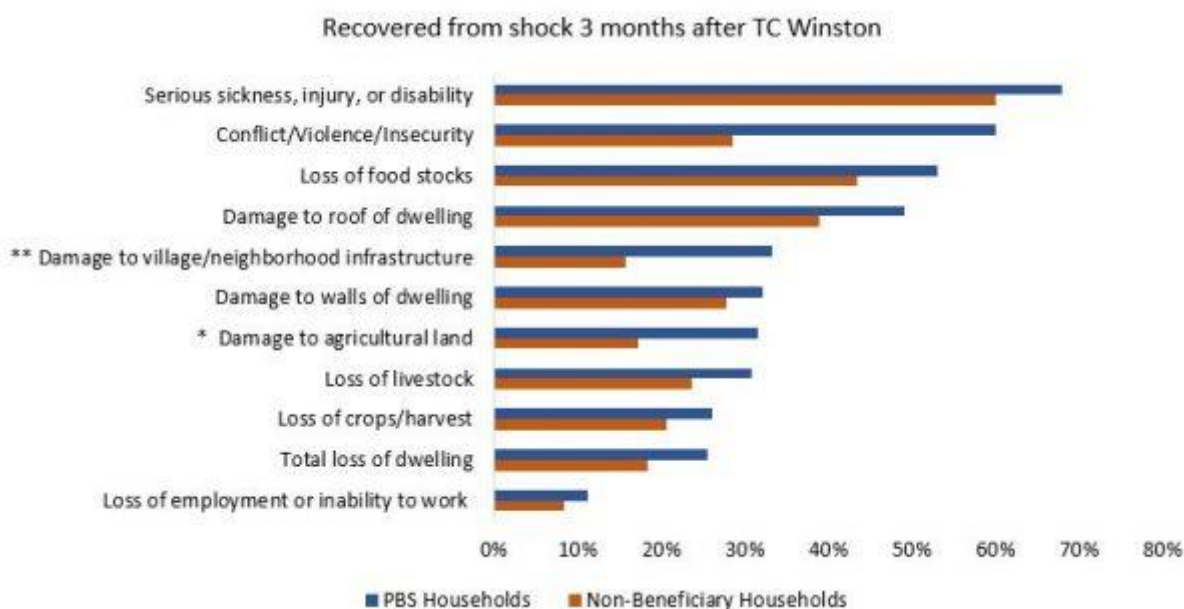
TC Gita ultimately passed directly to the south of Nuku'alofa and severely impacted large parts of the main island, Tongatapu, and neighbouring 'Eua. The following morning, before the cyclone had fully cleared, Tongans were out on the road clearing the debris from the night before. The response from the people and Government of Tonga was swift. The UN Humanitarian Cluster system was quick to activate and the major donors provided rapid assistance. However, one element of the response was particularly noteworthy: the Government channelled nearly a million Tongan Pa'anga (\$A500K) through their Social Welfare Scheme for the Elderly and the Disability Benefits Scheme – the Government's two core social protection programs. These are two vulnerable groups that weren't in a position to rebuild the following morning. The cash was quick to be disbursed, given the programs are already operational, and provided funds for their immediate post-disaster needs. The financing was provided by the Australian Government, but drawing on the Government's SP systems.



*Elderly Tongans arriving at the National Retirement Benefits Fund office in Nuku'alofa to collect their top-up cash transfers (Credit: Aisha Mansur/World Bank)*

This was only the third time that social protection programs have been used for disaster response in the Pacific region, but already there is a strong body of evidence building around the impact this type of response can have. In 2016, following TC Winston, Fiji channelled post-disaster top-up cash transfers through its existing social protection programs. An impact evaluation carried out by the World Bank and the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, which was funded through DFAT and released as a Devpolicy [Discussion Paper](#), showed that three months after the cyclone took place, beneficiaries were more likely to have recovered from the shocks they faced, relative to comparable households that did not receive the additional assistance. This includes having recovered from sickness or injury, repaired their dwelling, replenished their food stocks, remedied the damage to their agricultural land, and repaired village or neighbourhood infrastructure.

*Figure 2: beneficiaries of shock-responsive social protection are quicker to recover*



Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics; World Bank TC Winston Impact Evaluation

Many beneficiaries referred to the top-up cash transfers in Fiji as *manna from heaven* – both unexpected and hugely beneficial. For the Government of Fiji, this was a well-planned and considered response. Fiji's social protection system has

been built over many decades and contains a reliable registry of the poorest and most vulnerable households. Meanwhile, natural disasters will continue to impact large swathes of the population in any given year. Using these systems, which effectively provide assistance to vulnerable populations in normal times, makes even greater sense in the wake of a shock.

The lessons learned from Fiji and Tonga are of great interest to policy makers from across the Pacific. This week the World Bank is jointly organising a conference on shock-responsive social protection with the World Food Programme and the Government of Fiji from March 20<sup>th</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> in Nadi, which is being supported by DFAT. The conference is bringing together a set of stakeholders from Pacific governments, provident funds, NGOs, and civil society, to set an agenda on the role that social protection, including cash transfers, can play in disaster response. Natural disasters are here to stay, but this type of *manna from heaven* may well provide a guide as to how Pacific Island governments can help the most vulnerable help themselves.

*Read the Discussion Paper "Cash transfers for disaster response: lessons from Tropical Cyclone Winston" [here](#).*

*Jesse Doyle is a Social Protection Economist with the World Bank in Sydney.*

## 10. Knowledge of sickness and healing, medical pluralism, and health seeking in Vanuatu

*John Taylor and Lana Elliott, 20 February 2017*



*Diabetes check-up, Norsup hospital, Malekula Island, Vanuatu 2007 (Flickr/DFAT/Rob Maccoll for AusAID CC BY 2.0)*

Knowledge and belief systems combining Christian and indigenous spiritual contexts are often central to causal explanations for illness and death in Vanuatu. As throughout the Pacific region, these are linked to a heavy reliance on what are typically described in public health and related development literature as “traditional healers.” Even so, very little systematic research has been done on the diversity of healing approaches and practices that fall under this broad term, or how and why people seek out and use such services in addressing problems of health and wellbeing (see e.g., [Tynan et al 2011](#), [Viney et al 2014a](#), [2014b](#)). This post reports several key findings from a survey conducted in Luganville, Vanuatu, undertaken as a part of an Australian Research Council Discovery

Project (DP140104244) examining the relationship between spiritual beliefs, medical pluralism and health seeking behaviour. Concentrating on the increasing prevalence of type 2 diabetes [\[1\]](#), and including the role of herbal, spiritual and other

complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) and healing techniques, this study examined how local understandings of disease aetiology and perceptions of healing efficacy impact upon the decisions individuals make in seeking treatment.

Luganville, the capital of Sanma Province, was chosen for its relatively large and heterogeneous population of approximately 14,000 people (at the time the survey was carried out). Taking into account population diversity, including island of origin and related socio-economic factors, seven primary survey sites were targeted. A survey tool was developed in collaboration with indigenous health professionals, community leaders and enumerators over four days of workshops and trials. The survey included sections on basic demography, attitudes and use of formal (state-administered) and informal (CAM) healthcare providers, and knowledge regarding illness and disease aetiology, including the role of sorcery in ill health and healthcare seeking behaviour. The process of survey development included extrapolating the vague, locally inappropriate and often monolithically applied term 'traditional healer' into categories more commonly employed in the national *lingua franca* - Bislama, namely: *man blo prayer* (loosely, Christian faith healer), *man blo lif* (loosely, herbalist), *kleva* (loosely, diviner), as well as massage, bone setter, and self-administered treatments.

In total, eight enumerators completed 313 surveys in Bislama between July 1 and 8, 2015. Results obtained indicated that 255 respondents (81.5%) had sought the assistance of CAM healthcare sources in the 12 months prior to the survey being carried out. By comparison, 205 (65.5%) of the same cohort had utilised the formal health system.

The results showed that cost of services may not comprise a primary disincentive to formal healthcare utilisation, as is often assumed by members of the public and healthcare workers alike. While formal health services were cited as most likely to require payment, respondents consistently reported spending considerably more money on CAM providers. The average cost of seeking treatment through formal services was 435 vatu per consultation (roughly AU\$5). By comparison, those seeking treatment through a herbalist were charged the most, paying 1,909vt per consultation (AU\$22.50), while use of diviners and the purchasing of leaves and herbs for self-medicated remedies cost on average 1,429vt (AU\$17) and 1,318vt (AU\$16) respectively. Given that Luganville is home to the nation's second largest referral hospital—which for most residents is within an AU\$1 bus ride, if not walking distance—these figures indicate that a more complex set of factors contribute to health service choices than cost and proximity.

Related to this issue, clear distinctions were made in terms of relative levels of satisfaction regarding healthcare provision by category. Although all providers ranked considerably high in terms of satisfaction and perceived efficacy, services provided by faith healers were held in highest regard, with 96.3% of respondents who'd engaged in this service indicating positive association. While charging an average of 600vt (AU\$7) per consultation, faith healers were the second cheapest provider, being slightly more expensive than formal services. Conversely, responses indicated that services provided by herbalists were not only the most expensive, but also considered the least effective of all providers, with positive association noted by just 85.4% of respondents. Perceived efficacy aside, such findings are consistent with the widely-held moral and spiritual conviction that money, and in particular



healers who are seen to charge too much, can interfere negatively with the healing process.

A case study focusing on perceptions of diabetes was included to provide greater understanding of how and why people make decisions regarding healthcare options. Perceptions regarding diabetes indicate significant community awareness of rising non-communicable disease (NCD) trends, with 228 respondents (73.3%) considering the disease to be of significant concern. Participants identified 23 potential causes of diabetes: the most common responses included the consumption of store purchased foods (49%), eating too many sweet foods (37%), inadequate exercise (31.2%), lack of dietary balance (26.3%), drinking too much sugar (18.2%), and genetic causes (15.9%). Reflecting rigorous NCD health promotion over the last number of years, these responses indicate a moderate community-level understanding of diabetes determinants.[\[2\]](#)

Less positively, the widespread identification of *suka* (“sugar”) as a cause of diabetes is reflective of Bislama terminology for that condition, *sik suka* (literally, “sick sugar” or “sugar sickness”). Our findings strongly suggest that this lexicon contributes inadvertently to the identification of sugar as the sole determinant of diabetes onset, creating a false sense of risk reduction amongst community members who may continue to engage in other lifestyle-related behaviours that are risk factors for diabetes.

In addition, 23 respondents (7.5%) cited *kastom* (loosely, traditional knowledge and practice, but in health-related discourse more often referring to sorcery) and a further seven (2.3%) *posen* (“poison”, a common sorcery-related technique), as a primary cause of diabetes. While these figures were somewhat lower than expected, when asked directly, 196 respondents (62.6%) considered sorcery (in Bislama, *blak masik* or “black magic”) a plausible cause of diabetes onset.

Answering further questions regarding instances where illness was considered to have resulted specifically from sorcery, just over half of respondents (53%) considered CAM sources to be the most beneficial in providing an initial diagnosis, above formal services. Likewise, 54.2% identified CAMs to be the most effective in the subsequent treatment of sorcery-induced illnesses. Results also indicated significant trust in the efficacy of faith healers (58%) in treating sorcery-induced illnesses. By comparison, just 48.8% considered formal services to be effective in treating sorcery-related ailments. As these findings indicate, despite considerable confidence in the effectiveness of the formal health system, individuals are more likely to source alternative treatments, especially in the form of Christian prayer, in instances where an illness is believed to have resulted from sorcery (for Papua New Guinea, compare Cox and Phillips 2015, in [Forsyth and Eves \(eds\) 2015](#)).

The rapidly changing cultural and socio-economic contexts of urban Vanuatu fosters diverse health seeking practices. Framed by locally-specific knowledge and beliefs regarding illness causation and healing efficacy, this corresponds to a highly pluralist healthcare setting in which formal contexts of provision operate alongside diverse complementary and alternative forms. Indeed, as shown in the diabetes case study, this research suggests a complex context in which indigenous and Christian-related understandings and practices relating to health and illness causation are merged with biomedical knowledge. Held in similarly high regard, these intersecting contexts are often utilised sequentially and/or in conjunction with one another. It is essential

that healthcare practitioners, public health educators and researchers take better account of this dynamic integration of formal and informal treatment options, and diverse knowledge around illness causation and healing, including as related to sorcery and the integration of indigenous and exogenous knowledge. In relation to NCDs such as diabetes, such contexts affect timely patient presentation to formal service providers, adherence to biomedical treatment regimes, and healthy lifestyles. It also underlines the need, currently largely unmet across the Pacific region, to engage more meaningfully with both healthcare consumers and a wide spectrum of informal healthcare providers in seeking to bring about positive public health outcomes ([Ibell 2015](#), [Viney et al 2014b](#)).

## Notes

[1] *Albeit noting erroneously inflated WHO STEPS data relating to this condition* ([Zimmet and Taylor 2016](#))

[2] *Vanuatu Ministry of Health, 2016. Vanuatu Non Communicable Disease Policy and Strategic Plan 2016-2020, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, Vanuatu Ministry of Health, Port Vila.*

*John Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at La Trobe University. Lana Elliott was a Health Promotion Adviser with the Vanuatu Ministry of Health at the time of research.*

## 11. Diabetes remains major health challenge in the Pacific

Colin Tukuitonga, 26 October 2016



2016 Pacific NCD Summit (image: SPC)

A recent study has identified methodological errors in the surveys conducted through the World Health Organization's (WHO) STEPwise approach to non-communicable disease (NCD) surveillance (STEPS) in some Pacific Island countries. The study is published in the [Journal of Diabetes](#) and summarised in [this Devpolicy post](#).

The error stemmed from a change in the technology for blood glucose testing for Type 2 diabetes. In early STEPS surveys conducted in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga between 2002 and 2004, glucose meters reported glucose levels in whole blood. In later surveys conducted between 2011 and 2013, the glucose meters reported glucose levels in plasma. However, the researchers found that when WHO analysed the later surveys, the incorrect whole blood glucose cut-off (6.1 mmol/L) was used instead of the correct plasma glucose cut-off (7.0 mmol/L). When the data were re-analysed using the correct cut-off point, the rates of diabetes were lower than previously reported.

This means that results from STEPS surveys carried out in 2011 (Fiji), 2012 (Tonga) and 2013 (Samoa), showing that Type 2 diabetes rates had doubled, are not accurate. Instead it appears that when compared with STEPS surveys conducted in these countries 10 years earlier, diabetes prevalence had actually decreased by 0.4% in Fiji and 3.4% in Tonga, and increased by 2.8% in Samoa. The researchers warn this methodological error may also have implications for STEPS results in other countries, both in the Pacific and globally. It appears only two additional Pacific countries – i.e., Niue and Vanuatu – may be affected by this methodological error. At this stage, WHO is yet to issue an official response to the research findings.

Nonetheless, these revised statistics do not change the fact that diabetes is still a major problem in the Pacific. The revised rates of diabetes in these three countries are still very significant – 15.6% in Fiji; 19% in Tonga; and 24.3% in Samoa. These figures are three to five times higher than in neighbouring Australia, where [approximately 5% of people have diabetes](#), and much greater than the estimated global prevalence of 10%.

Pacific Island countries are still among the top ten countries with [the highest prevalence of diabetes](#) [pdf] in the world. Results from other studies confirm that the prevalence of diabetes is [extremely elevated in some Pacific countries](#), with approximately 40% of people over the age of 40 having diabetes. [STEPS results from other Pacific countries](#) that used the correct glucose cut-off point also showed very high prevalence of diabetes among the 25–64 age group – e.g., 47.3% in American Samoa; 33.6% in Tokelau; 28.1% in Kiribati; and 23.6% in Cook Islands.

The prevalence of diabetes-related complications in Pacific Island countries is also substantial. This was among the issues discussed at the [Pacific NCD Summit](#) hosted by the Kingdom of Tonga and the Pacific Community (SPC) in Nuku'alofa in June 2016, in collaboration with partners including Australia, New Zealand, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) and WHO. For example, in some Pacific Island countries, up to [69% of people with diabetes have retinopathy](#), and [11% have diabetes-related amputations](#) [pdf], which can lead to disability, premature death and lost productivity. Despite the need for increased support, specialist care services in the Pacific countries are very limited. For example, limb prostheses, rehabilitation, renal dialysis, and low vision care, are not readily available in many Pacific countries, further exacerbating the underlying disability. In some Pacific Island countries, diabetes care consumes approximately 20% of annual [government health care expenditure](#), which is much higher than the [global average](#) (12%). The cost of treating NCDs has overstretched government health budgets, and placed a burden on national economies more broadly. Even providing essential care services such as cholesterol-lowering drugs is not available in many Pacific countries.

NCDs – including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer – are the leading cause of death in Pacific Island countries, accounting for [between 60 and 80% of mortalities](#) in the region. A significant amount of work remains to be done, particularly around pervasive NCD risk factors, such as obesity, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, poor nutrition and physical inactivity among both adults and children. The twelve countries with the highest prevalence of obesity in the world are all located in the Pacific. Obesity increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes for both [men](#) and [women](#). SPC is among the partners implementing



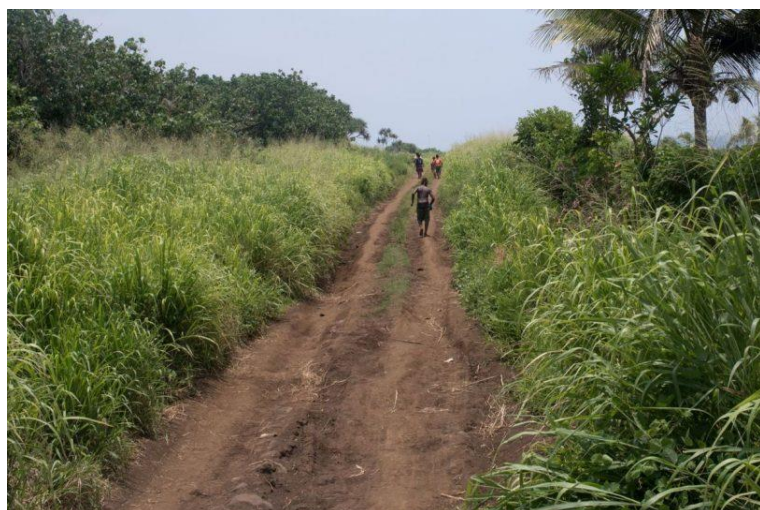
initiatives to prevent and combat NCD risk factors in collaboration with Pacific Island health ministries.

Diabetes and NCDs remain major health issues in the Pacific. The outlook for the Pacific is concerning, as the current high prevalence of NCD risk factors is likely to lead to increased NCD burden in the future. The current investment by donor agencies and countries to fight NCDs is still disproportionate to the scale of the problem. Increased investment and escalated actions on the [Pacific NCD Roadmap](#) [pdf] by all partner agencies and countries is urgently needed to prevent and control NCDs, and to meet regional and global commitments, such as the [Healthy Islands](#) vision and [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

*Dr Colin Tukuitonga is the Director-General of the Pacific Community – the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region.*

## 12. Postcard from the ‘road to nowhere’

Dan McGarry, 11 January 2018



*The southernmost section of the south Tanna road system, still a muddy, bumpy track (Credit: Dan McGarry)*

Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Australia’s Minister for International Development and the Pacific, yesterday fired a salvo across China’s bows.

On [Radio Australia](#)’s Pacific Beat program, the government front-bencher

accused China of funding the construction of ‘useless buildings’ and ‘roads that go nowhere’.

She’s hardly the first to do so. In Vanuatu, people have questioned the terms of a raft of loans taken out beginning in 2011, when lobbyists acting for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) succeeded in changing finance legislation, making it possible for ministers to sign off on loans without Parliamentary oversight.

We are right to question the design, implementation and price of some of these projects. The Santo Wharf Project is a striking example, where failure to consult and coordinate with local and industry stakeholders resulted in a drastic reduction in cruise ship arrivals for 2018. The end result has thrown Luganville’s tourism development plans into a cocked hat, and caused millions of dollars of lost revenue.

It will take years to bring cruise ship arrivals back to 2014 levels, let alone to start tapping into the northern port’s full potential.



One of the greatest criticisms lined up against China's infrastructure projects is the Export-Import Bank of China's (EXIM Bank) not-so-concessionary loans. The terms are substantially less favourable than those offered by the World Bank or ADB, for example. These issues have been raised with China. In a Beijing meeting with senior Foreign Ministry officials, the Daily Post was assured that "China will not force Vanuatu to pay its debts."

But a population whose New Year's Day hangover was sharpened by a 2.5% rise in the Value Added Tax (VAT) is not so optimistic. The nation spent all of 2017 wrangling with the question of how to service our increasing debt load. The issue threatened to split the cabinet and was the subject of heated debate throughout the country.

We have a right and a duty to question our Chinese-funded infrastructure investments. But Australia should think twice before chiming in.

These roads are not 'roads to nowhere'. They lead to our homes.

This is a surprisingly tone-deaf flight of rhetoric. Ms Fierravanti-Wells has travelled our rural roads numerous times, and has always warmly engaged with the people who live on them.

Last week, I circled the entire southern half of Tanna. Half of the drive was on a Chinese-funded road. The other half was on rutted, dangerous tracks, some of them fit only for goats. South Tanna is a stunningly beautiful and — until recently — largely inaccessible place.

Rough seas along the weather coast make travel over water difficult. The terrain, a seemingly endless succession of steep hills and rills running into the sea, is difficult to traverse.

Some transport vehicles servicing this end of the island have metal cages over the back, so that people don't get thrown out of the truck as it lurches back and forth.

When we returned from our circuit of the southern half of the island, I had bruises on my arms, hips and ribs from being tossed about. Twice I had to help the driver line the wheels up while crossing 'bridges' that consisted of bare logs laid over a creek. At one point, our truck literally teetered in the air with only three wheels touching the road as we navigated a nasty bit of hillside.

Enter the China Civil Engineering and Construction Company. Many people have levelled criticisms at them, but on the Tanna road project at least, their engineering should not be questioned.

The new road to south Tanna features dozens of large-scale cuts across countless hills. It includes switchbacks and concrete bridges. The road is broad, has been properly canted to make driving easier, and features extensive concrete drainage systems. The \$50+ million project extends from White Grass airport about two thirds of the way down the island.

The project has faced difficulties. Land issues and concerns over respect for *kastom* (custom) have caused rancour. But in July 2015, chiefs and ranking members of

Tanna society performed a reconciliation ceremony under a painted banner saying 'Tanna road project must go on'.

Now, people are universally supportive. The road project has unlocked the economic potential of about 25% of the island, a part that until now was largely isolated. South Tannese trying to improve their lot inevitably drifted to Lenakel and Port Vila seeking opportunity. Today, there's a chance that opportunity might follow them home.

China's record with infrastructure projects is spotty, to be sure. And we are right to criticise. But Ms Fierravanti-Wells should do more homework before diving into the debate.

Australia's major roads project in Vanuatu, proudly unveiled in 2013 by then-Foreign Minister Bob Carr, is a laughing stock. This shambolic operation, which should have been completed by now, is still lurching along with no end in sight. Traffic in the capital is a shocking mess. Questions are piling up about its budget. The design and planning phase was a comedy of errors, according to whistle blowers directly involved in the project. This newspaper has raised a number of concerns about road safety on several occasions. Some were addressed quickly, but many were simply ignored.

This isn't the first Australian infrastructure project run into the proverbial ditch, either. About half a decade ago, government officials were so incensed with one project manager arbitrarily re-writing the project specification documents, that he came within a hair of receiving what's known locally as a 'green letter' — in effect a notice to leave the country forthwith.

The government of Australia might want to put down those stones it's throwing at China and learn a thing or two from its own mistakes first. And talking over our heads about our shortcomings isn't going to win them many friends here either.

Infrastructure is integral to Vanuatu's development, and as a member of the Lenakel municipal council said last week, "It all begins with roads." If Australia is serious about helping, it should do more, do it better, and gripe less.

*This piece was [first published](#) in the [Vanuatu Daily Post](#).*

***Dan McGarry is Media Director of the Vanuatu Daily Post.***

### 13. PACER Plus is not much to celebrate

Matthew Dornan, 5 June 2017



*A port in Tonga (US Pacific Fleet Flickr CC BY-NC 2.0)*

In April this year, trade ministers from Australia, New Zealand and 12 independent Pacific Island states agreed to a regional trade agreement, the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, to be signed in June—thereby bringing to an end almost a decade of sometimes acrimonious negotiations.

Dampening the celebrations somewhat was the fact that Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji—the two largest Pacific island countries—did not attend. PNG had already signalled it would not sign the agreement, preferring to pursue bilateral deals with Australia and New Zealand, as well as a multilateral trade deal already negotiated with other Melanesian states (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). Fiji's inclusion remains uncertain. After some initial confusion, Fiji's Trade Minister [clarified](#) that Fiji has not withdrawn from the agreement, but neither has it agreed to sign it in its present form, with ongoing concerns regarding infant industry protection and most favoured nation measures.

Since the outset of negotiations, commentary in relation to PACER Plus has been polarised. The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG), which has featured prominently in the regional press, [describes](#) the agreement as 'unbalanced' in favour of Australia and New Zealand. The Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry [has said](#) that the agreement will result in 'loss of government revenue, loss of policy space to support ni-Vanuatu industries, and the loss of the right to protect its people and natural resources'.

Listen to the governments of signatory countries and the narrative is very different. The Chief Trade Adviser for the Pacific islands, Edwini Kessie, said in a [recent interview](#) that 'PACER Plus offers a unique opportunity for the Pacific Island countries to deepen their trade and economic links with Australia and New Zealand and enhance their participation in international trade to achieve robust economic growth and sustainable development'.

Such polarisation is not uncommon when trade agreements are negotiated. In the case of PACER Plus, there are a number of reasons to think that claims by both advocates and critics are overstated.

PACER Plus is an agreement between two (relatively) large developed economies—Australia and New Zealand—and a collection of small, developing states. Some rank

in the smallest countries globally: five countries have populations of under 20,000 people; Niue has less than 1,500 people. These states, PNG and Fiji excluded, will never achieve the economies of scale necessary for most export industries, which explains why exports to date have been negligible. A trade agreement is unlikely to address these scale constraints, nor will it completely address an important barrier to exports of agricultural products from these countries—stringent quarantine measures at the border.

But neither will PACER Plus undermine nascent infant industries. Outside of Fiji and potentially PNG, there simply isn't scope to leverage domestic demand. Successful export industries from the Pacific are more likely to be niche (such as Fiji Water), and are unlikely to develop in such a manner. In most countries, a combination of tourism, remittances and foreign aid will remain the dominant source of foreign exchange.

Pacific Island countries nevertheless have some reason to be lukewarm toward PACER Plus. These states already enjoy tariff-free access to the Australian and New Zealand markets, courtesy of the previous South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (itself a relic of the post-independence era). What is to be gained by the Pacific Islands in joining PACER Plus is therefore unclear.

Australia and New Zealand have always insisted that PACER Plus is not a traditional free trade agreement, but rather a comprehensive development agreement. Sweeteners were to include provisions on development assistance and labour mobility, both of which are important to the Pacific. Foreign investment provisions were also said to be important.

The recent release of the [text of the agreement](#) allows us to examine the extent to which these sweeteners have materialised. PACER Plus will include a chapter on development assistance, which commits Australia and New Zealand to providing A\$19m and NZ\$7m respectively to implement a work program designed to assist Pacific Island countries implement the agreement. In addition to this, Australia has committed to providing 20% of official development assistance (ODA) to the Pacific in the form of 'aid for trade'. New Zealand has committed to providing 20% of its total ODA in the form of 'aid for trade' to the Pacific. Neither commitment is overwhelming. In Australia's case, the 20% aid for trade target was already in place for the aid program as a whole.

PACER Plus does not feature a chapter on labour mobility, despite lobbying from the Pacific on this issue. However, a related Arrangement on Labour Mobility has been concluded, committing participants to explore "possibilities of operational improvements and expanding labour mobility opportunities to new occupational areas where there are labour shortages in the receiving countries". The agreement does not include a binding commitment from Australia or New Zealand to provide labour mobility opportunities—something that is sure to disappoint Pacific Island countries, which had [pursued](#) this rigorously in negotiations. However, there is reason to celebrate. Australia and New Zealand have moved over the last decade to provide Pacific Islanders with temporary employment opportunities for unskilled labour. Both now have seasonal worker programs in place in the horticulture industry (Australia's was uncapped and expanded to other sectors recently), and Australia has introduced [new opportunities](#) for a number of Pacific Island microstates as part



of its Northern Australia strategy. The negotiations for PACER Plus can be credited to some extent for the establishment of these programs in recent years.

What of other controversial issues? PACER Plus advocates have highlighted the potential impacts of the investment provisions in the deal (which, not surprisingly, opponents view with disdain). Again, the impact is likely to be limited. In most countries the real barriers to investment—partial or outdated legal systems, lack of confidence in regulatory frameworks, the absence of economies of scale, and limited (complicated) access to land—cannot be addressed by a trade deal. Government revenue lost due to tariff reductions has been a valid concern, although change in this area is widely considered inevitable. The continued use of tariffs as a primary form of government revenue is simply not feasible for small states in a globalised world. Other forms of taxation will need to be developed.

In sum, the impacts of PACER Plus have been overstated by both advocates and critics. PACER Plus will not undermine export industries. But neither will it resolve the deep-seated development challenges in the region. Without strong labour mobility provisions, the impact of a PACER Plus agreement on Pacific Island states is likely to be limited. There is not much to celebrate, beyond a deal being struck.

*An [abridged version](#) of this post was also published on [East Asia Forum](#).*

*Matthew Dornan is Deputy Director of the Development Policy Centre.*

## 14. RAMSI chapter ends in Australia's Pacific story

*James Batley, 16 June 2017*



*RAMSI military welcomed on arrival, 2003 (Gary Ramage/Australian Defence/DFAT/Flickr CC BY 2.0)*

On 30 June this year, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) will come to an end after 14 years. RAMSI was deployed in mid-2003 at the invitation of a desperate Solomon Islands government following several years of conflict between armed militant

groups, a collapse in law and order and in the state's capacity to deliver services, and a disastrous decline in economic activity.

Although it was from the start a regional operation, from the first RAMSI was underwritten by Australian financial and human resources, costing Australian taxpayers [AU\\$2.5 billion](#) over its duration. Australian leadership and Australian thinking essentially determined RAMSI's direction.

RAMSI was nothing if not ambitious. Then-Prime Minister John Howard took the decision to mount an operation of such scale in the face of advice from Australian government departments and agencies, which continued to advocate an incremental and risk-averse approach until late in the day.

RAMSI was conceived, designed and operated as a broad and long-term state-building exercise, not simply as a security or peacekeeping operation. Apart from its military and policing components, it also included (at least until 2013) substantial civilian elements that operated in key areas of government such as the Ministry of Finance, the courts system, and a range of public service agencies. At its height, RAMSI exercised unprecedented reach into, and control over, key aspects of the public sector in Solomon Islands.

RAMSI's departure from Solomon Islands raises the question as to whether we are seeing the end of an era, or even a form of strategic retreat by Australia, following a period of activism and intervention.

Quite apart from its cost, RAMSI has certainly been a sobering lesson for Australia in the challenges and difficulties of state-building.

To be sure, the mission can point to many successes, including the restoration of law and order and of government finances in Solomon Islands. RAMSI will withdraw in June almost as popular with the general population as when it started — no small achievement compared to other interventions around the world.

Even so, that very popularity might also be taken as evidence that ordinary Solomon Islanders still have little trust and confidence in their own institutions. And this points to a broader issue: RAMSI has not changed the basic dynamics of Solomon Islands politics. Addressing the underlying drivers of the conflict that emerged in 1999 remains very much a work in progress.

Regionally, the picture in 2017 is very different from 2003 when RAMSI was launched. A number of Pacific Island countries (notably Papua New Guinea and Fiji but also Solomon Islands itself) have become more diplomatically assertive and ambitious. External players such as China and Indonesia are vying for a greater role in the region. The regional diplomatic architecture has grown more complex with new organisations and regional and sub-regional groupings becoming more active.

This trend, described by some commentators as the '[new Pacific diplomacy](#)', poses a range of challenges for Australian diplomacy in the region.

But it would be an over-reading to see the end of RAMSI as marking a retreat from Australia's sense of [regional leadership](#). Australia is not abandoning Solomon Islands, which will remain the recipient of a very large aid program from Australia including a large follow-on policing support program. Moreover, it [recently emerged](#) that Australia and Solomon Islands have been negotiating a 'security treaty to enable operational assistance in the case of a major security crisis in the future'. While we are yet to see the terms of this treaty — it will presumably give Australia the discretion to determine whether to intervene or not — the willingness to contemplate a formal arrangement of this nature represents a strong reassertion of Australia's continuing relevance in the region.

Such a bilateral agreement would be consistent with the forward-leaning language contained in the 2016 [Defence White Paper](#), which restates Australia's intention to remain the principal security partner for Pacific Island countries and indeed comes closer than earlier White Papers to declaring an Australian 'Monroe Doctrine' in the Pacific.

We are yet to see the 2017 [Foreign Policy White Paper](#). But it is striking how regularly Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop uses the term 'responsibility' in describing [Australia's role](#) in the [Pacific](#). This is not the language of strategic retreat.

Declaratory policy is one thing, but the allocation of resources is another. Yet in these terms the current government has maintained, and in some areas increased, funding directed towards the region.

The Pacific was largely quarantined from the huge cuts to Australia's aid program in 2015, and the government has launched a major new Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) worth up to AU\$2 billion over 30 years. Australia's Prime Minister [described the PMSP](#) last year as 'the centrepiece of Australia's defence engagement in the South Pacific'. And recent Australian governments of both hues have promoted Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme for Pacific Islanders and increased Australia's influence and reach in the region through [deepened police cooperation](#).

While RAMSI may well have represented a particular high tide in terms of Australia's role in the region, the end of RAMSI is more the end of a chapter than the end of a story. Natural disasters aside, it is not hard to envisage situations in which Australia may again seek to play a direct role in the affairs of a regional state. Don't count on Australia walking away from the Pacific any time soon.

*This post is [republished](#) from [East Asia Forum](#), a platform for analysis and research on politics, economics, business, law, security, international relations and society relevant to public policy, centred on the Asia Pacific region.*

***James Batley is a Distinguished Policy Fellow at the ANU Department of Pacific Affairs.***

## Pacific Conversations

### 15. Corporate philanthropy in PNG

*Amanda H A Watson and Beatrice Mahuru, 30 May 2017*



*Beatrice Mahuru crossing the Buka passage*

Ms Beatrice Mahuru is head of the [Digicel Foundation](#) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). As part of the [Pacific Conversations series](#), she spoke to Dr Amanda Watson about the organisation's areas of focus, its relationship to the [Digicel](#) business and her heart-warming experiences in the role.

*You were previously in corporate roles. Was it an adjustment to join the Digicel Foundation?*

Beatrice: Moving into the development space was very new, but one of the things I brought was a corporate approach, so a 'no-nonsense, get your business done, report on the outcome' approach.

*What do you do on a day-to-day basis in your role?*

We have 34 projects at present, plus eight in collaboration with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). My role is to watch over the foundation's operations to ensure that our finances are managed well against our targets. I'm very hands-on, making sure program impacts are documented and that projects are progressing to the agreed timelines, because we have PNG Board and Global Board meetings every month and they are kept across our investments. I have a small team and sometimes development work can be overwhelming so I want to be there for them, to motivate them and keep them committed to the cause. I continue to build and foster relations with Digicel every day and grow goodwill with our marginalised communities. And every other day, I'm connecting with members of parliament or corporate organisations to seek possibilities for public-private partnerships.

*You mentioned building goodwill ... is that the main aim of the Digicel Foundation?*

Prior to last year (FY14/15), we responded to community applications and we operated very separately to the business. We're still a separate entity but our strategy is to work more collaboratively with Digicel. Although Digicel has invested in many towers across PNG, the business still receives negative feedback, especially through social media, on the cost of service. We grow goodwill through our development impact projects and lay the foundation on which business can follow.



Last year, we probably put 40% of our investment into promoting goodwill and the rest was responding to applications received.

*Some may be unclear as to the relationship between the Digicel Foundation and the Digicel company. Could you please explain the governance arrangements and the relationship between the two entities?*

Although we're funded by Digicel, we're a separate entity because we're set up that way and we have a separate board. But to ensure due diligence and sound financial management, our finances go through the business.

*Digicel operates in 26 countries in the Caribbean and Central America and also six countries in the Pacific, but it has foundations in only four countries. Why was PNG picked as a country to have a foundation?*

In the United Nations Human Development Index, we're 156th out of 188 countries. That's quite low, despite being a resource-rich nation. The Digicel Group Chairman Denis O'Brien believes that as Digicel grows, its communities must too. And when Digicel successfully entered the PNG market, Mr O'Brien felt it was necessary to invest back into the community, and that's what we've been doing since.

*The Digicel Foundation has spent over US\$25 million in PNG. Does all your funding come from Digicel?*

We are funded wholly by Digicel. This is the first year in which we received grant funding from DFAT to implement education projects for them in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. 15% of my budget goes into administration, such as staffing and travel.

*The foundation initially focused on health and education. Do they remain important areas?*

They remain core areas of focus. 60% of the foundation budget is spent on [school infrastructure](#) - classrooms with desks, plus office space, toilets, water tanks and solar lighting. The DFAT project in Bougainville will include Wi-Fi and an intranet containing educational materials. When a school requests infrastructure, they have to demonstrate good governance and community ownership. In fact, all potential partners are assessed using such criteria. We also have [mobile health clinics](#) that do their rounds and treat patients.



*Children with Digicel Foundation Project Manager, Mr Haro Gomara, at the Sambio Rural Health Aid Post launch in remote Menyamya District, Morobe Province*

*You have now added three other key focus areas: the elimination of violence, special needs, and community building. Why was violence a concern for the foundation?*

As a Papua New Guinean, I'm very passionate about advocating against violence. It's a social scourge. When they say that all men are violent, it gets me very upset because my father wasn't. He believed in me before I realised my potential. I believe every PNG woman who holds a good role has had an amazing father behind her. So it's in acknowledging those good men that we decided to start the [Men of Honour awards](#). There are honourable men out there - let's bring their stories forward.

*What is the foundation doing in relation to special needs?*

We work in close collaboration with [Cheshire](#). We fund their community-based rehabilitation program in communities, settlements and villages. So many amazing stories have come out of that. I met a little girl who had her disability as a result of meningitis, so she wasn't able to feed herself, talk or walk without aid. Six months after the program, the girl was walking without aid, and 18 months after the program, she's able to read and has started school.

*The fifth pillar of the foundation is community building. What is meant by community building?*

Did you know that 60% of any urban population is made up of youth, aged between 16 and 25? We developed a program in partnership with [Ginigoada](#) called the Life & Business Skills Program, to address this age group and the problems associated with unemployment. It's a community conversation in the first week around violence, personal health and wellbeing, and a basic business skills training in the second week. Though poorly educated, our people are very entrepreneurial. We've completed the program here in Port Moresby and we are fortunate to have a 'Men of Honour' finalist run the program in Lae.

*What has been heart-warming for you at the foundation?*

I think the calibre of stories that come through the 'Men of Honour' awards is pretty heart-warming. But what really pulls at my heartstrings is the smile on the face of our communities, and especially our little children, when we lay down education or health infrastructure. You see so much hope in their eyes and feel deep appreciation in their embrace.

***Dr Amanda H A Watson is a Lecturer at the Development Policy Centre, working at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) as part of the ANU-UPNG partnership. Beatrice Mahuru is Chief Executive Officer of the Digicel Foundation.***

## 16. Pacific tuna fisheries: an interview with Dr Transform Aqorau

Matthew Dornan and Transform Aqorau, 1 March 2016



*Tuna fishing in Apia, Samoa  
(Flickr/ADB)*

*The eight Pacific Island members of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) control waters where over 50 percent of the world's skipjack tuna is caught (skipjack is the most commonly canned species of tuna). For many of these countries, tuna is their most valuable economic resource. Their return from this*

*resource has increased significantly in recent years as a result of the vessel day scheme.*

Matthew Dornan spoke over the phone with Dr Transform Aqorau, the CEO of the PNA Office based in Majuro, Marshall Islands, to discuss the vessel day scheme, the Pacific Islands Forum's Fisheries Roadmap, and efforts by Pacific Island countries to move up the value chain.

*Transform, could you begin by telling our readers, the majority of whom don't work in the fisheries sector, about the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and the vessel day scheme?*

The Nauru Agreement is between eight Pacific Island countries and dates back to 1982. It was effectively aimed at maximising returns for those countries from the skipjack tuna industry, which is the most economically significant tuna species. In the Pacific, the bulk of fishing is done by fleets that are owned and flagged to countries outside of the region – what are commonly called 'distant water fishing nations'. At the time the Nauru Agreement was reached, Japan was the most important such player in the region. It had played these Pacific Island countries off against one another in order to extract low licensing fees (the fees that distant water fishing nations pay to Pacific Island countries to fish in their waters). The Nauru Agreement sought to address that imbalance in power by enabling Pacific Island countries to come together.

The Parties to the Nauru Agreement are simply the countries that are signatories to that agreement: the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

If you look at the total catch of the PNA member countries plus Tokelau, which participates in the vessel day scheme, it makes up about 95 per cent of the total catch of all Pacific Island countries.

I guess the experience of the PNA group is now largely shaped by the vessel day scheme, which has generated increased economic returns, particularly in the last six

years (licensing revenue accruing to PNA members under the vessel day scheme increased from \$64m USD in 2010 to \$357m USD in 2015).

The strengthening of securities rights under the scheme has also improved flexibility and improved transferability for vessel operators. And it has enhanced one of the underpinning strategic goals and visions of this particular group: self-reliance. So what we've seen in the last six years is an increase in the returns that countries have received, driven by a sense of self-reliance. It is really transforming in many ways.

In the PNA, we also work towards having a reduced role for the secretariat, which is now based in Marshall Islands (having previously being located in the Forum Fisheries Agency). So instead of trying to build up the secretariat, we actually decentralise a lot of the roles, responsibilities and functions. Because as rights holders, really the power should remain with the countries that own the fisheries resources: it should not be taken away and invested in some regional agency.

We also work to reduce our dependency on donors, and to that extent, we have very little donor support. The office itself is totally self-funded. So we don't have any reliance on donors, unlike other regional secretariats that operate in the region.

On the vessel day scheme itself, it is a cap and trade instrument under which a total allowable effort is set in terms of the number of days that vessels can fish in the region. And then each year we meet and there is a formula that's used to divide up the total allowable fishing effort between the eight member states. The allocation is known as the 'party allowable effort'.

*I understand that part of the increase in the revenues to which you refer are the result of a greater fishing effort, and associated with that, increases in the total catch among the PNA member states. So I wanted to ask you, to what extent is that sustainable?*

I'd like to correct some of that because I think that's some of the misinformation that's going around about the increase in the catches in the PNA.

The increase in revenue has been largely driven by demand for the days, because the days are now a valuable commodity. The minimum benchmark has been set at \$8,000 a day (the price paid for one vessel to fish for one day in PNA waters), but the actual value of the days has been much more than that. Vessel day scheme day prices are now on average around \$11,000 to \$12,000 a day, and that is likely to increase, despite falling tuna prices, given the growth of the domestic fleet of PNA members and reductions in the number of days available for foreign fishing fleets.

In terms of catches, yes, there have been increasing catches overall in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, but that includes catches in the high seas (areas over which no country has sovereignty) and catches in non-PNA waters (such as in the waters of Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Cook Islands, a non-PNA member). We've seen catches relatively stable in the PNA region, except for in 2014.

And so the misinformation that people have that the PNA is responsible for the increase in catches and increase in effort is not actually true because you need to look at the whole picture in the Western and Central Pacific, not just the PNA waters.



On the question of whether it is sustainable, we have it on record that skipjack tuna, which is our primary resource, is very healthy. There's no issue at all with regards to the biological health of skipjack tuna. I think from what the scientists say, it is capable of sustaining—supporting increased efforts—and so there is no issue at all about fishing for skipjack.

[The problem is] when you're fishing for skipjack and using the fish aggregating devices, which tend to take juvenile bigeye tuna, which is the top species of tuna that is overfished. There are serious issues surrounding bigeye tuna, and unfortunately, those countries (such as Japan) who are most affected by bigeye tuna and whose vessels fish for bigeye tuna, [they are] the ones who have been the least interested in ensuring its sustainability.

*My next question is about the Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries agreed at the Forum Leaders' meeting in Port Moresby last year. Under that roadmap, I understand that a quota-based system is being advocated. Do you support that move away from an effort-based system, such as the vessel day scheme, to a quota-based system based on actual catch volumes?*

If I could just premise my response by saying this. If we look at the revenues that have been generated from the vessel day scheme, in 2010, it was about 60 million. And six years later, it's about 400 million. And this is largely driven by the vessel day scheme.

Now, my response to critics of the vessel day scheme is this: show me another system where you have been able to generate the kind of revenue we've been able to generate in the last six years. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has said that transferable effort shares are a weaker form of rights than catches. But they've also cautioned that from a population dynamics perspective, an effort-based approach tends to be favoured because it's easier for you to cut back on the effort than it is to cut back on the catch when you need to, and it's more complex when you try to do it in a multilateral context.

There's no perfect system out there, but for me, I'm just disappointed that there's been criticism of the vessel day scheme, which has delivered so much, and which is an initiative of the island countries themselves. But, we're participating in the process [the Roadmap], the task force that's put together by the leaders. Because that's what the leaders want.

*Pacific Island leaders have spoken repeatedly about the need to be more involved in the processing of fish, in other words, to move up the value chain in the tuna fisheries industry.*

We see that's already happening in countries like PNG with a new processing area in Madang. Do you think there's potential for smaller countries to also be involved in processing? Countries like Kiribati or Tuvalu, or Marshall Islands, countries which don't have those economies of scale that are present in PNG?

What we've seen is that the vessel day scheme has also contributed to those developments. So in PNG, they use the vessel day scheme to develop processing. Countries now have more choices. They're really thinking seriously about whether

they can use the vessel day scheme to support processing, and whether they will get more money by processing the catch.

Now we've moved away from that, within the PNA, because we have tried it. When we first started, we talked about cross-border investment. We talked about processing hubs. We talked about contract processing. But look, it becomes more complex and more difficult for countries to do these things as a group. It's really up to individual countries, whether or not they want to do that. If a country wants to do it, then by all means they can and they should do it. But we can't force that. We can't force industries to relocate and start processing. As I said, it just becomes increasingly difficult for countries to implement as a group.

There are also costs in terms of licensing revenue. And that applies with local crewing requirements as well – something I know you've [written about](#), Matt.

We've been saying we need to participate in the value chain, but I don't think you can do that as a collective group. What I'm seeing now on the ground is that countries will work well together in defining their rights, and they can use their rights in whatever way they wish. It's not for anyone else to tell them how to do it.

More broadly, I think the innovations that you're going to see, Matt, are not so much in terms of processing, but maybe using their days and working with the brands as part of the value chain. I think that's what you'll possibly see in the future.

*Matthew Dornan is Deputy Director of the Development Policy Centre. Dr Transform Aqorau is CEO of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office based in the Marshall Islands.*

## 17. [Green growth, activism and Pacific regionalism: in conversation with Fe'iloaitau Kaho Tevi](#)

*Tess Newton Cain and Fe'iloaitau Kaho Tevi, 22 February 2016*



Maavulu Blue Hole, Vanuatu  
(Andrew Lynch/Flickr CC by 2.0)

To reboot [Pacific Conversations](#), Tess recently met with Fei Tevi over coffee in Port Vila. You can hear a podcast of their conversation [here](#) and read a transcript [here](#). For the highlights of what they discussed, read on...

I started by asking Fei to fill us in on his background and participation to date in development in the Pacific. Fei is now based in Vanuatu as a result of his wife Eleni's position at the Melanesian Spearhead Group. He is working as a consultant to the governments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, assisting them in developing

sustainable development policies, and brings with him a wealth of experience in diplomacy, international relations and civil society activism and advocacy.

“I am trained in diplomacy and international relations. I worked for the churches for a number of years, over a decade, both in Geneva, Switzerland and also here in the Pacific ... prior to that, I was with the Pacific Concerns Resource Center, which is the secretariat to the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. Very formative years, '96 to 2000.”

During 2015, Fei participated in the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) in Suva and was also in Port Moresby for the Pacific Islands Forum leaders' meeting. So I was keen to find out what he thought the relative strengths and weaknesses are of those regional groupings. In relation to the Pacific Islands Forum, Fei was quick to acknowledge the leadership input of [Dame Meg Taylor](#) and said he was watching with interest to see what the further impacts of that would be. He then told me categorically that he thought the issue of West Papua would be critical for the Pacific Islands Forum in the future:

“And so this is what I'm saying. The Forum itself, the issue will be a determining factor how they treat West Papua and how they are able to get the political support around the issue. And it won't go away.”

In relation to the PIDF, Fei felt that it had achieved significant success in 2015 by providing a space for Pacific Island leaders to caucus around key issues, especially a joint position for the COP 21 talks in Paris, ahead of the Forum meeting in Port Moresby:

“But I think PIDF had a role to play in harnessing the collective momentum of the countries, to stand together and say, “Yes, this is what we need.” And not to be pulled apart ... We had one meeting after the other, and people saying the same things and coming right through and holding their stance at the Forum, saying “This is what we want, and this is what you get.” Despite all the pressures, despite all the checkbook diplomacy, everything was up to try and get the Pacific Island countries to shift and take position. And kudos to them.”

And then he provided a very important statement to define the role and place of the PIDF; one that I feel has not been so clearly and explicitly articulated before now:

“...we need to have clarity on what PIDF is. It's a space. Maintaining that space is a very difficult challenge. Everybody wants to cloud that space, Fiji included. Everybody wants to get that space, monopolise that space. As long as we can keep that space as an opportunity for people to come and talk about issues or challenges, talk about opportunities, discuss deals, that will form the character of PIDF. It's not a CROP agency. It will not deliver on water tanks and water and sanitation programs. It's not geared towards that.”

We then moved on to discuss the concept of 'green growth' in the Pacific context, which is an aspect of development with which Fei has been very involved in recent years. I began by asking him how he conceptualises the Pacific concept of green growth, given that it appears to be something that has yet to achieve one accepted definition globally:

“In the work that we’ve been doing over the last 3-4 years, in the Pacific, green growth has to do with lifestyles; green growth has to do with a sustainable approach to development. Green growth has to do with—the maturity of the countries to determine where and how they want to address development.”

He sees the Pacific conceptualisation of green growth as being one that goes beyond technological interventions. So, next, I asked Fei to give me some sense of what green growth means in a practical sense. How can it or should it influence the way Pacific Island countries do business? He took as his starting point the resilience of the communities in Vanuatu further to the impacts of Cyclone Pam last year.

“...that for me expresses a set of values that for me green growth encompasses ... And that’s part of, I guess, a sense of maturity that we are going through. The recognition that there is something that we can learn and that the future of the region, in terms of green growth, it’s within us. We need to find the tools to identify this and to identify those components of what we can achieve. So that’s one example we can quote. Examples of which time and time again, the resilient nature of these communities has expressed itself with or without help or foreign assistance. So we need to think about that. We need to think how that defines, how that defines growth for us.”

Drawing on Fei’s longstanding and extensive involvement with civil society activism in our region, I asked him how he assessed the current capacity within that sector to influence national and regional decision-making about the important issues that we face. He reflected on the changing nature of activism in the region, which he felt had been blunted as a result of becoming ‘institutionalised’ in the 1990s. However, more recently, he had seen resurgence particularly around the issues of self-determination for West Papua and climate change activism:

“You have the new environmental activists that are coming through, the young Solwarans, the Young Solwara movement, the Wan Solwara movement, the other groups that have— ... PICAN, Pacific Islands Climate Action Network. These are all young, new activists that are coming through.”

I expressed a concern that a weakness for civil society at present in our region is a lack of access to and influence with governments. Fei was quite clear that governments in the region should do much more to include civil society in relevant discussions and policy formulation:

“... I think we cannot point five of our fingers at civil society. I think there’s a lot of responsibility also that governments have to take on in terms of how they deal with civil society... there has to be a revisiting of what civil service means, and being a civil servant. You are a servant of the government, and by government means the people. So you serve the people. It’s not the other way around. The people don’t come in on their knees to come and ask for service. They shouldn’t. Citizens, rightfully, ask and request their assistance, and their service. Then I think there needs to be a give and take in this discussion.”



Finally, we discussed the impact of the election of 'Akilisi Pohiva as Prime Minister of Tonga and what it means for democracy in that country. He was quick to acknowledge that the early months have proved disappointing in some ways:

“I think in the longer run, in the medium to long term, I think there's a lot of benefit that can accrue from 'Akilisi and his time, and his government being in place. I think there's a lot of lessons that can be taken from the first year or so of 'Akilisi's government. A lot of questionable decisions.”

He then went on to make a very interesting observation in relation to what we can expect from Tonga in terms of regional participation:

“There is more good than bad—there's more strengths than weaknesses that's coming out of this government. The fact that, you know, Tonga has taken a strong stance on the issue of West Papua is a token of that and you will see, you will see this government taking on regional issues in a much more stronger way than in the past. The first year has been about consolidating and shifting the country at the national level. I think you will see Tonga playing a more influential role in the region in the future.”

...something to look forward to, for sure.

*Dr Tess Newton Cain is the principal of **TNC Pacific Consulting** and a Visiting Fellow at the Development Policy Centre. Fe'iloakita Kaho Tevi is a consultant to the governments of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.*

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The Development Policy Centre (Devpolicy) is a think tank for aid and development serving Australia, the region, and the global development community. We undertake independent research and promote practical initiatives to improve the effectiveness of Australian aid, to support the development of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island region, and to contribute to better global development policy.

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