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PACIFIC STORIES

DEVPOLICY
BLOG POSTS
IN 2014-15

DEVELOPMENT
POLICY CENTRE

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Edited by Tess Newton Cain
and Matthew Dornan

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Introduction

Tess Newton Cain and Matthew Dornan

Welcome to the second edition of 'Pacific Stories', where we bring together some of the best Pacific-focused contributions to the Devpolicy Blog. This collection, which spans from mid-2014 to the end of 2015, explores political developments and other topics of importance to the region, including climate change, labour mobility, regionalism, gender equality, and resource management.

We have also included three items from the 'Pacific Conversations' series, which features discussions with important regional leaders and thinkers.

This booklet provides just a taste of the Pacific-related material available on the Devpolicy Blog. Articles on Papua New Guinea are included in another booklet. Please visit the blog and share your views by providing comments, or by sending us a contribution (guidance is provided on the website) – <http://devpolicy.org/>.

BLOG POSTS

1. What now for the debate on the future of Pacific regional architecture?

Greg Fry, April 8, 2015



The cancellation of the planned Sydney summit of Pacific leaders should not be taken as signaling the end of the debate about the future of Pacific regional architecture. Although there have been a number of [reviews](#) of the structure and functions of Pacific regional institutions, there is still a need for a debate about the overall governance and configuration of future regional architecture in the light of Fiji's recent return to democracy in September 2014 and its [refusal](#) to resume its membership of the Pacific Islands Forum unless it undergoes radical reforms.

Dame Meg Taylor, the dynamic new Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum, has recognised this need. She has been [reported on Radio New Zealand International](#) as saying that 'a discussion on regional architecture at this time, is I think, important. To ignore it is just to put a lid on sentiments that have been expressed and I think it is important to have a rigorous discussion around this'. She went on to say that:

"They have to get in a room. They have to discuss this. They have to consider before they come into the room all the consequences of all the different scenarios of what could happen. I would like to see Fiji be back as a very active member of the PIF because it is a very valuable member of the Pacific region."

What are the scenarios currently on the ‘table’? The first is the Fiji Government proposal that the Pacific Islands Forum become an all-island Forum run by Pacific islanders, for Pacific islanders. As [explained](#) by Prime Minister Bainimarama, ‘we are not interested in going back until it [the PIF] stops being the play thing of the Aussies and Kiwis. When it becomes a genuine expression of the will of the Pacific Islanders themselves, then we will go back, then we will think about re-joining the Forum’. This model draws on the example of regional organisations of developing countries elsewhere in the world – ASEAN, CARICOM, African Union, etc. In such a scenario, Australia and New Zealand would become special dialogue partners in an inner circle of Forum partnerships with donor countries. Underpinning this model is the idea that the Pacific island states need to control their own diplomatic agenda without the distortion provided by the very different agendas of their large, developed neighbours; and that to deal effectively on key global agendas such as climate change it is a strategic necessity that the region organise as an association of small developing island states so that they can be accepted in global southern coalitions such as AOSIS, and G77 and China. Leveraging Pacific positions through such coalitions, it is argued, is crucial for small island states in contemporary global diplomacy. The strategic case for exclusion has been most persuasively argued by Ambassador [Kaliopate Tavola](#) and by [Derek Brien](#) of the Pacific Institute of Public Policy. Foreign Minister Bishop has [indicated](#) that Australia would not take the adoption of such a model ‘lying down’. It has also been rejected explicitly by Papua New Guinea’s Prime Minister, [Peter O’Neill](#), and Palau’s President, [Tommy Remengesau](#). There has as yet been no explicit support for the exclusion proposal by any Pacific island leader.

A [second scenario](#), proposed by the Fiji Government as an alternative if the first scenario is not agreed to, is one in which all Pacific development partners – Japan, China, Korea, USA, etc – are invited to become full members of the Pacific Islands Forum sitting alongside the Pacific island states as equal members. Given the Fiji Government’s strong stance on achieving an independent Pacific voice in regional diplomacy this has the ring of a rhetorical point rather than a serious alternative. It is surely a debating point, meant to emphasise the inappropriateness of Australia and New Zealand sitting in the Islands Forum as equal members in a southern organisation when they are in fact development partners rather than developing island state recipients. This proposal clearly goes against the

principle of regional self-determination that Fiji has enunciated and acted upon elsewhere. It would in any case be a non-starter politically for all other Pacific island states, and for Australia and New Zealand, which would not welcome the membership of any other metropolitan powers.

A third scenario is that of doing nothing and maintaining the status quo. This will be the default outcome if no debate takes place. Under this scenario, Fiji will not resume its membership of the PIF; and it will continue to promote the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), Pacific Small Developing Island States grouping (PSIDS), and the Melanesia Spearhead Group (MSG), as an alternate and competing regional system financially supported by Russia, China, UAE, Indonesia and others. Furthermore, if there is no debate about how the Pacific Islands Forum system might work with other parts of this alternate diplomatic system – a system which has gained considerable support from Pacific Island countries – then we would see the entrenchment of two competing Pacific regional systems with overlapping membership. This would hamper Pacific unity on important issues and spread scarce human and financial resources thinly and inefficiently.

A fourth scenario follows from the more conciliatory language in recent pronouncements by the Fiji and Australian foreign ministers. The Fiji foreign minister, Inoke Kubuabola, has [denied](#) that Fiji's position was one of being 'bent on the eviction of Australia and New Zealand from the Pacific Islands Forum'. Rather he is reported as saying that 'regional governance of the Pacific Islands is primarily the responsibility of the island nations themselves' and it is therefore 'logical that metropolitan developed countries like Australia and New Zealand take a step back'. Foreign Minister Bishop provided an equally important basis for dialogue on a compromise scenario in her comments on the proposed regional summit during her visit to Papua New Guinea in December 2014. She [said](#) 'it was time for Pacific leaders to chart their own course ... adding that a Sydney summit early next year could set the regional architecture in place for that to happen.'

There are a number of reform strategies that could be discussed under the broad umbrella of this fourth scenario which ensure Australia and New Zealand 'step back' and the Pacific island states have a greater control over 'charting their own course'. I canvass some of them in my recent SSGM

Discussion Paper ‘[Recapturing the Spirit of 1971](#)’. They include: embracing, rather than competing with, the new Pacific island-controlled diplomatic system which has emerged outside the PIF network in the past five years to meet strategic needs in global and regional diplomacy; the re-introduction of the island caucus system within the PIF; and changing the financial arrangements of the PIF to allow for more Pacific island ownership (Australia and New Zealand currently provide about 95 per cent of the combined core and regular budget).

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2. Climate change and displacement: can labour migration be part of the solution?

Akka Rimon and Sophia Kagan, October 28, 2015



It was a big fortnight in migration policymaking this month, with three major inter-governmental events occurring around the globe, in Kiribati ([High](#)

[Level Dialogue on Climate Induced Migration for the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change](#)), Geneva (the Nansen Initiative’s [Global Consultation on the Protection Agenda](#)), and Istanbul (Eighth Meeting of the [Global Forum on Migration and Development](#)). Have they brought us any closer to effectively dealing with the critical issue of how climate change will impact on migration?

On the thin strip of land that is South Tarawa, home to over 50,000 people, the signs of climate change are everywhere. During a regular high tide,

waves lap at the very edge of the newly constructed road, and occasionally spill onto the narrow causeway that separates the islands. During king tides and storm surges, these same waves pummel seawalls, inundate houses and contaminate groundwater.

This was the setting for the [High Level Dialogue on Climate Induced Migration](#) in Kiribati, which brought together representatives from Tuvalu, Tokelau and Kiribati (who are members of the Coalition (CANCC)) to discuss the impacts of climate change on migration. Other guests included Prince Albert II of Monaco; representatives of UN agencies, including the Assistant Secretary General of the UN; the Roving Ambassador for Pacific Island Countries and Special Envoy from Fiji; the European Union; the Special Envoy from Tokelau; and members of international NGOs including Greenpeace and Oxfam.

The long-term threat of mass relocation from atoll countries is a hot topic in popular media, but can sometimes obscure the fact that climate change is *already* impacting on people's need for migration options. While it is hard to untangle the various reasons for migration, a recent household study in Kiribati by ESCAP, UNDP and the ILO showed that 23 per cent of people who had migrated within or outside of Kiribati said that climate change was a reason for the movement, second only to migration for job opportunities (41 per cent). Combine this with the evidence that 3000 applications are received annually under the Pacific Access Category for just 75 places available to i-Kiribati, and that the workready pool for seasonal workers contains over 1,000 names, though just 168 were given the chance to take part in 2014, and a significant problem of unmet migration demand seems to be looming.

Delegates at the High Level Event agreed that even if significantly up-scaled, labour migration will not and should not be the solution for *all* atoll people threatened by climate change, and stressed the importance of maintaining pressure on world leaders for a legally binding agreement in COP21. But can labour migration form *part* of the solution?

The connection between well-managed migration and reduction in poverty is now firmly entrenched, and enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 10 as well as through inter-governmental dialogues such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development. A burgeoning stream of literature

now also shows that labour migration can increase resilience to climate change by providing households in vulnerable communities with a diversified source of income (remittance from a member of the household working abroad) as well as decreasing the strain on limited resources through a decreased population.

At the High Level Dialogue delegates [acknowledged this](#), stressing ‘the importance of labour mobility, which provides immediate climate change adaptation benefits and [invited] the scaling up of existing initiatives and seek new and additional partnerships from the international community on urgent affirmative action for labour mobility of our people.’ While Tokelau and the Republic of Marshall Islands already have access to labour markets in New Zealand and the US respectively, increasing labour migration channels is critical for Kiribati and Tuvalu, where only one to five per cent of the population can take part in temporary or permanent labour migration annually. Combine this with an unemployment rate of 31 per cent in Kiribati (even higher amongst the youth) and limited potential for future private sector-led growth and it is clear why the Kiribati government recently established a national labour migration policy to expand existing decent opportunities for labour migration.

It’s not that Kiribati and Tuvalu are *excluded* from labour migration programs, but that it is extremely difficult to compete with workers from larger Asian countries, whose sophisticated labour administrations can support much greater marketing and promotion activities with employers and governments. Even where i-Kiribati and Tuvaluans have the right qualifications (which is one of the goals of the President of Kiribati’s [‘migration with dignity’ vision](#)), this is commonly not enough to get workers over the bar of immigration schemes.

The Nansen Initiative appears to recognise this challenge, and has suggested as part of its [Protection Agenda](#) – a global document on reducing cross-border displacement signed by 110 countries – that countries could consider developing or adapting national policies providing for residency permit quotas or seasonal worker programs that *prioritise* people from countries or areas facing natural hazard or climate change impacts, as well as increased training and education.

Currently, only one migration pilot gives prioritised access to people of Kiribati and Tuvalu – this is the recently announced [‘microstates visa’](#) for Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru, which will grant a maximum of 250 places for temporary migration to Northern Australia. This is a good start in recognising the unique risk of future displacement faced by these three countries (which has not, to our knowledge, been taken into account in other migration negotiations including those under PACER Plus or the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement). But much more is needed.

First, the new Australian scheme will be employer-demand driven. With limited capacity for marketing and promotion, labour administrations in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru may struggle to make the employer connections required.

Second, given the spiralling population growth and rapidly worsening environment in Kiribati and Tuvalu, many more migration opportunities will need to be available – both temporary *and* permanent – to realistically offset the risk of displacement. According to [one academic estimate](#) [pdf], the number of people who would need to permanently migrate from Kiribati on an annual basis to reduce the risk of mass displacement and maintain a stable population is in the thousands, not the hundreds.

“There is no time more critical than today to address the existential threat of climate change, especially as we prepare for Paris,” repeated the CANCC delegates at the High Level Dialogue. To avert a migration crisis from countries such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, more collaboration with nations which can, in the short and medium term, accept greater numbers of labour migrants is not only critical, it’s urgent.

Akka Rimon is the Kiribati Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Sophia Kagan is Labour Migration Technical Officer in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Office for Pacific Island Countries.

3. Labour and fish: making the most of the Pacific's tuna resource

Matthew Dornan, February 25, 2015



I met Ali on the flight from Suva to Funafuti. He was on his way home to Tuvalu from Korea, having completed four months as a fisheries observer on a Korean tuna fishing vessel. Sitting across from Ali was another observer on his

way home. He had been away for longer (five months), on a Spanish vessel staffed by Ecuadorian crew, and was flying back from Kirimati Island, Kiribati.

Ali is one of 50 Tuvaluan fisheries observers whose job it is to monitor the activities of vessels from distant water fishing nations. These vessels pay for the privilege of fishing in Tuvalu's waters. As one of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) – along with Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Palau – Tuvalu's license fees are set as part of the vessel day scheme. Vessels pay for the days in which they are allowed to fish, with (tradable) days allocated to PNA member countries according to an agreed formula. Fees were US\$6,000 per day in 2013 (triple the charge in 2009), and are expected to average US\$8,000 in 2015.

The vessel day scheme is controversial in some circles. PNA have effectively closed fishing in the 'high seas' pockets of the international waters that lie between member states, by mandating that any vessel that fishes in PNA waters must abstain from fishing in the high seas. Given that about 60 per cent of tuna from the western and central Pacific ocean is caught in the exclusive economic zone of PNA members, the majority of vessels abide by PNA rules.

By flexing its collective muscle, the PNA ‘tuna cartel’ – which is the source of over 50 per cent of the world’s tuna cannery supply – has been able to generate significant benefits for members. Access fees or their equivalent (in benefits from domestic processing or aid) were an estimated US\$218 million in 2013 and US\$91 million in 2009, after the vessel day scheme was introduced, compared with US\$60 million, US\$67 million, and US\$71 million in 1999, 2006, and 2007, before the scheme was introduced.

Such revenues are very significant in microstates like Tuvalu. Revenue from fisheries in Tuvalu reached an all-time high in 2013, measuring A\$18.2 million, or 55 per cent of domestic revenue. This revenue, which admittedly is unusually high, was greater than the A\$11.3 million received as grants from development partners – placing in question the appropriateness of labelling Tuvalu a [MIRAB economy](#) [pdf].

Observation of the efforts of tuna fisheries is also a source of employment for Tuvaluans. Fifty observers may not sound like many, but in a country with a formal sector of only 2,000 workers, observers make up 2.5 per cent of the formal workforce. That makes fisheries observation as significant as the [mining industry](#) [pdf] in Australia, in terms of its share of formal sector employment.

There is more that PNA members could do to maximise the benefits from tuna. Past efforts to develop domestic processing of tuna were without [success](#), and despite ongoing efforts, should not be trialled again (with PNG being an exception given its ability to achieve economies of scale). But there is scope to use Pacific island labour on foreign fishing fleets.

A requirement that 10 per cent of the crew on purse seine vessels be from PNA member countries has already been agreed to in principle by PNA fisheries ministers as part of the Bikenibeu Declaration in 2009 (this figure would rise to 20 per cent over five years). However, implementation has been stalled in the past by opposition from some countries, which do not have maritime training institutes where nationals could be trained to work on tuna fishing vessels. Last November, PNA ministers [reiterated](#) their support for such a measure, which would begin in 2016, and would include the option of paying a waiver fee for vessels unable to find local crew.

Details on how that scheme will function, including waiver fees, should emerge at the next PNA meeting, in two weeks' time.

Skills development will clearly be important for maximising the benefit of any local crewing requirements. In the case of Tuvalu, the maritime training institute could offer training appropriate for tuna fisheries, rather than their current focus on freight vessels (employment on which is becoming harder to find, given competition from countries like the Philippines). It is not difficult to picture a tuna fishing industry with large numbers of Tuvaluans, or I-Kiribati, working on vessels in PNA waters, generating employment opportunities and remittances in their respective countries. The Director of Fisheries in Tuvalu recently [estimated](#) that a 10 per cent local crewing requirement could lead to employment for 900 Tuvaluans; a massive 45 per cent of the current domestic workforce in the formal sector (and 9 per cent of the entire population).

Tuna, the only significant economic resource in countries like Tuvalu, would therefore not only provide resource rents (in the form of license fees) for government, but significant employment and income earning opportunities for Tuvaluan workers.

Government-paid observers, like Ali, would continue to be important. Without them, the government would be unable to independently verify the fishing activities of foreign vessels. But employment in fisheries for Tuvaluans would not be limited to observers.

The most difficult part of Ali's job? Communication. Four months on a boat where none of the crew, except the Captain, speak English (or Tuvaluan), is a long time. When we said our goodbyes, Ali was about to spend two weeks in Tuvalu with his family. After that, he was to board another foreign vessel, for another four months of watching people fish.

Matthew Dornan is a Research Fellow at the Development Policy Centre.

4. Maternal mortality and GBV in the Pacific: common drivers call for collaborative approaches

Nancy Waites, June 30, 2015



A few weeks ago I co-wrote a [blog on child mortality and morbidity in the Pacific](#) based on a recent World Vision policy report, *Getting to Zero*. The report also looks at maternal mortality in the region, however, due to word limits, the blog had focused only on children.

This blog revisits the maternal mortality component of *Getting to Zero* in light of a couple of other publications that have been issued more recently: [Harmful Connections](#)[pdf] by UNICEF and UNFPA on violence against women and violence against children in the South Pacific (previously summarised on the Devpolicy blog [here](#)), and a [study](#) published in this month's Lancet looking at macro-level drivers of violence against women. These two reports offer an important lens through which to consider the extremely high levels of maternal mortality in Melanesian countries, particularly PNG and the Solomon Islands, as well as in Timor-Leste.

According to [Lancet statistics](#), the maternal mortality ratio for Oceania (here defined as nine Pacific Island states including PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) is 494 per 100,000 live births. Put in context, a woman in the Pacific is [three times more likely](#) than a woman in South East Asia to die in childbirth. The lifetime risk of dying in childbirth is higher in PNG, at 1 in 120, than in India, one of the top three countries with the highest absolute burden of maternal mortality in the world, where the risk is 1 in 190.

The *Getting to Zero* report looked at some of the direct drivers of these high mortality rates: geographical challenges that prevent the health system from reaching all women, lack of access to a skilled birth attendant at time of delivery, poverty and low levels of education among women. However, the new reports from UNICEF/UNFPA and the Lancet point to other less direct but perhaps equally powerful causes of maternal mortality that we must also take into consideration.

In the *Harmful Connections* report, UNICEF/UNFPA show that ‘women and children growing up in South Pacific countries experience some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the world’ (p. 4). Their data identified an IPV prevalence rate of 57 per cent of women in South Pacific countries, compared to 34 per cent in other selected countries from both the developed and developing world. But beyond observing that it was symptomatic of wider gender inequality in society and laws (p. 22), the report did not go in-depth into the factors driving the disproportionately high level of gender-based violence in the South Pacific.

This is where the Lancet article continues the discussion by providing some intriguing insights. The authors undertook an extensive review of 66 partner violence surveys from 44 countries to understand the uneven global distribution of partner violence, where some countries have prevalence rates as low as 4 per cent and others exceeding 40 per cent (as high as 65 per cent, for Solomon Islands, as reported in the UNICEF/UNFPA publication). Their hypothesis was that macro-level factors, such as embedded socio-cultural gender norms and attitudes, might combine with individual-level risk factors to explain these striking geographical disparities in partner violence prevalence.

Their data analysis confirmed this hypothesis, finding that ‘especially predictive of the geographical distribution of partner violence are norms relating to male authority over female behaviour, norms justifying wife-beating, and the extent to which law and practice disadvantage women compared to men in access to land, property, and other productive resources’ (p. 338).

Some of these identified characteristics can be found in traditional Melanesian gender norms. For example, an ANU baseline evaluation of a World Vision Gender Based Violence project (copies available on request)

conducted late last year found that in surveyed communities in the Solomon Islands 69 per cent of men responded affirmatively to the question ‘Is it ok for men to hit women in certain circumstances?’ and 39 per cent to the statement ‘women should not make decisions.’ In a more general assessment of the Pacific, the [Secretariat of the Pacific Community](#) (SPC) has observed that ‘tolerance for acts of violence against women and girls remains quite high’ across the region.

And it’s at this point that we return full circle to maternal mortality. Gender-based violence is to some degree an expression of women’s and girls’ status relative to men and boys in a society. A compelling argument can be made that the low status of women in many Melanesian communities is a significant contributing factor to the high levels of maternal mortality in these countries. Thanks to a [WHO study](#), we know that there is a direct correlation between violence against women and poor maternal and newborn health outcomes. Women experiencing violence are more likely to give birth to low birth weight and/or premature babies, and to suffer pregnancy loss. Living with a violent partner also inhibits women from seeking health care and family planning services due to a (perceived) lack of autonomy and fear of partner reaction. This is particularly tragic given [estimates](#) that maternal mortality could be reduced by up to 30 per cent if all women who wished to use contraception had access to it.

This effect was confirmed in the Pacific context by the SPC, which observed that despite the increasing availability of sexual and reproductive health services, women’s access and uptake remains hindered by limited decision-making power regarding their own bodies as well as relative social isolation (p. 34). Yet despite the overlapping social drivers of gender-based violence and maternal mortality and morbidity, historically there has been limited collaboration between those working on reducing gender-based violence and those in health more broadly. This isn’t restricted to the Pacific – the WHO study observed more broadly that the health sector has been slow to engage with the issue of violence against women, despite ample evidence that exposure to violence is a key determinant of poor health for women (p. 31).

Given the high levels of both gender-based violence and maternal mortality in the Pacific region, particularly the Melanesian countries, there is an opportunity here for those working in gender-based violence

prevention and health to collaboratively lead the way in tackling the social norms that are key drivers of both of these negative outcomes for women. Programs aimed at changing attitudes to gender roles in ways that improve the status of women can be used both to reduce gender-based violence and also to increase support for women to seek health care. For example, World Vision's [Channels of Hope methodology](#) has been used successfully in the Pacific to change attitudes to gender-based violence. This approach works with faith leaders to teach biblical reinterpretations that explain God's view of men and women as equals and of the need to treat each other accordingly. This attitudinal change methodology can also be used to address social and religious barriers to health-seeking. In one example, an evaluation of a World Vision [Channels of Hope](#) for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health program in Kenya demonstrated an increase in antenatal and perinatal clinic participation for two years following commencement of the program. Given the successes of Channels of Hope for Gender in the Pacific, extending this methodology to maternal health could be a starting point for greater collaboration between the two sectors.

I'd like to suggest that from early engagements such as this we work to a future vision where, from this challenging environment, the Pacific becomes the model of gendered-health initiatives from which the rest of the world can learn. If nothing else, it's what Pacific women deserve.

Nancy Waites is Head of Policy Research and Government Relations at World Vision Australia.

5. What next for Nauru?

Tess Newton Cain, October 9, 2015



The ongoing governance crises in Nauru were noticeable by their absence from the [communiqué](#) released at the end of the meeting of Pacific Island Forum leaders in Port Moresby last month. This is certainly disappointing if not very surprising. The

media covered the decision by the government of New Zealand to [suspend its aid](#) to the justice sector of Nauru. This decision was important in terms of its timing and also a significant indicator that this is one area where there is appetite to demarcate a policy difference between Wellington and Canberra. On the part of the Nauruan government, this was met with little concern and the impact in terms of operations within the justice sector appears to have been minimal. The Minister for Justice, David Adeang (who is also the Minister for Finance), has more than sufficient funds available by virtue of Australia's regional processing centre to make up any shortfall that may arise.

From numerous conversations and exchanges I have had with sources close to what is happening on Nauru, it is clear that the rule of law and democratic governance is deteriorating. This is a matter of concern to many within the region and needs to be given appropriate attention, not only to protect the rights and freedoms of the citizens of that country but also to ensure that the region as a whole remains one where democratic government continues to be the prevailing norm.

The government of Nauru has, via its [official Twitter feed](#) (managed by the Brisbane based public relations firm [Mercer PR](#)), made much of the fact that the country has a full complement of judiciary, including a Chief Justice (Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi of Fiji) and a Resident Magistrate (Emma Garo of Solomon Islands). There is nothing to lead anyone to believe that these jurists are making decisions at the behest of the executive. However,

there are certainly concerns that within the executive (and particularly on the part of Minister Adeang and the Secretary for Justice, Lionel Angimea) actions are being taken that serve to distort the processes and procedures normally associated with an observance of the rule of law. These have included [manipulation of visa regulations](#) that make it difficult for defendants and litigants to secure appropriate legal representation. More recently, Minister Adeang has [advised several senior citizens](#) of Nauru that pension payments and access to concessional travel have been withdrawn. This is as a result of a Cabinet decision, which was based on their having participated in what the government calls ‘riots’ during June of this year. None of these people have been charged with riot or any other criminal offence and they have not appeared before any court. This ‘pension’ scheme has no statutory basis and the payments are discretionary, which is what allows them to be discontinued by the Cabinet without having to worry about a legal challenge on the part of those affected.

These are some of the most recent worrying occurrences on Nauru that can be added to previous ones that have been documented [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Which leads us to the following questions:

What, if anything, can or should be done?

Who should do it?

A number of references have already been made to the application of the [Biketawa Declaration](#) in a situation such as has been unfolding for some time in Nauru. The Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Dame Meg Taylor, [has cited it in her comments](#) and has indicated that she does not expect there to be a Forum-led intervention in Nauru but that the Secretariat stands ready to provide Nauru with any assistance in relation to governance that may be required. It is too simplistic to say that the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is failing in its mandate to ensure regional peace, security and governance. Whilst it is certainly true that it is the regional body with primary responsibility in this space, it remains the case that the secretariat cannot be expected to act either in isolation or without the political backing of the Forum leaders.

The current administration of Nauru continues to demonstrate an insularity and resistance to anything it perceives as an attack on its

national sovereignty. This is reflected in the blocking of Twitter accounts (particularly those of international journalists) that express criticisms of the government of Nauru. Opportunities to influence decision-making are not plentiful whether on Nauru itself or outside the country. However, there are options available which merit consideration here.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat needs to maintain a watching brief in relation to governance on Nauru, further to [the visit to that country](#) by the Secretary General. The issues that have been discussed here did not garner any consideration at the recent leaders meeting in Port Moresby because they did not feature in the '[Framework for Pacific Regionalism](#)' [processes](#) that determined the agenda and were not raised by any of the leaders as a matter for discussion. They were, however, raised at the recent [Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting](#) in Sydney and it may be that this is where the continuing engagement should take place as facilitated by the Forum Secretariat.

It is generally the case that Pacific Island Forum members are reluctant to be seen to be critical of each other and this may well constrain individual leaders from seeking to influence the Nauru leadership to change course. However, as we have [seen](#), Pacific island leaders will criticise other member countries in relation to issues about which they feel sufficiently strongly or in circumstances that they perceive will further their interests. There are some Pacific Island Forum members that could see meaningful engagement with Nauru to restore democratic governance and the rule of law as an issue that could merit deviation from the norm.

Papua New Guinea as the new chair of the Forum is well placed to make this issue one that provides more clear evidence of that country's desire to be viewed as a [regional leader](#). It is not necessary for PM O'Neill to go it alone in this regard; he can call on the support of the Troika (comprising the current chair, immediate past chair (Palau) and incoming chair (Federated States of Micronesia)).

Very recently, Australia has [declared](#) that it is seeking a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018–2020) with this manifesto:

“Should we be elected, our focus would be on empowering women and girls, strengthening governance and democratic institutions, promoting freedom, freedom of expression, and advancing human rights for all.

Australia would be at the forefront of efforts to hold to account those responsible for human rights abuses, and to build more effective preventative and accountability measures.”

The situation on Nauru provides the government of Australia with a very real opportunity to demonstrate to the global community how it is able to engage meaningfully and beneficially in a country within its sphere of influence. One where governance and democratic institutions are being undermined, where freedom of expression is denied and where there is a strong and pressing need to hold those responsible for human rights abuses to account. However, the nature of the relationship between Australia and Nauru centred on the use of the latter as a regional processing centre for asylum seekers by the former, means that Canberra is unlikely to be very active in this regard.

A similar opportunity presents itself to the government of Fiji, which is also seeking an appointment to the UN Human Rights Council (2018–2020) on a [similar platform](#) [pdf]:

"Dedication to basic human rights is the foundation of democracy. No democracy can survive if the rights of each person are not sacred, if the state fails to protect – or even works to undermine – the individual’s ability to think and believe and worship as he or she chooses.”

Both Australia and Fiji have very close linkages with the executive leadership of Nauru. Australia is a primary provider of finance flows to the Nauruan government (including more than \$600,000 in visa fees per month) and Fijian nationals occupy many important posts within the Nauruan bureaucracy. It is no doubt a matter of concern to the Fijian leadership that these public servants are susceptible to being placed under considerable pressure to act contrary to the rule of law and democratic

principles faced with the knowledge that their continued employment is at the whim of the Nauruan cabinet.

Many Forum member countries, Fiji and Papua New Guinea included, have struggled and are currently struggling with governance challenges of their own. This may mean that they have limited room to move, but they are also able to approach this complex and sensitive issue from a starting point of achieving and maintaining democracy as a shared challenge.

I am the first to acknowledge that rectifying a situation such as the one that has arisen in Nauru is neither straightforward nor easily achievable. However, simply looking the other way is indefensible.

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6. Moving beyond the ‘musical chairs’ of Solomon Islands politics

Gordon Leua Nanau, November 10, 2015



The recent defections within Manasseh Sogavare’s Democratic Coalition for Change Government, the tabled no confidence motion, and the threatened change of government in between elections are all too familiar.

Solomon Islands

politics resembles a game of musical chairs with serious costs for political stability and good governance. Political unpredictability, floor crossing and no confidence votes have been recurring in Solomon Islands politics since independence in 1978. In recent years, reasons used by individual MPs to justify defections to either side of the house involved disagreements on how aid money is redistributed, and allegations of leadership incapability

and even dictatorship. Conflicting policy positions or ideological principles were rarely the basis of such defections.

Even though the most recent no confidence motion was seen off, the government will still not be immune to political flux. As such, decisive measures must be adopted, or future governance and development efforts will continue to be held hostage to political instability. Without being too prescriptive, there are feasible actions which can be taken to break this cycle of political uncertainty and instability.

First, it is important to note that the current political impasse has occurred despite the enactment of the [Political Parties Integrity Act 2014](#) (PPI Act) before the national general elections. The PPI Act aimed to ensure political stability by facilitating the registration of parties and the formal affiliation of successful independent MPs to officially registered political parties should they wish to be included in coalition governments. Unfortunately, the intentions of the PPI Act were compromised and neglected.

To address challenges related to the instability of political parties, Solomon Islands might seriously consider reforming the country's political system, possibly by adopting positive aspects of other systems elsewhere in the Pacific. For instance, in Samoa there is provision requiring candidates to be registered as members of a political party if they wish to form government. Under its standing orders, a political party is recognised only if it secures at least eight MPs in the general election. Independent MPs and those who resign from their parties are not allowed to join other political parties or become ministers in the entire life of that house. Likewise, in Kiribati a successful vote of no confidence against the President would result in the dissolution of Parliament. These could be factored in to political reforms or a new political system in Solomon Islands.

The government could also expedite the adoption of the draft Federal Constitution of Solomon Islands. Since 2001, following the signing of the [Townville Peace Agreement, 2000](#) (TPA), work on the federal government structure and constitution has been ongoing. This year, consultations on the 2014 draft (*Second 2014 Draft for Proposed Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Solomon Islands, 2014*) were undertaken. The 2014 draft of the [proposed Federal](#)

[Constitution](#) includes provisions governing areas such as the disbursement of aid that is given in cash form and prescriptions on political party membership and stability. Its adoption would go a long way to address the problem of chronic political uncertainty and fluidity in Solomon Islands.

Another contributing factor to the most recent round of instability is Taiwanese-funded support for development initiatives by MPs in national electoral constituencies, the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF). This aid also provided SI\$30 million discretionary funding to the Prime Minister's office. It is this discretionary fund, and how SI\$10 million was allocated by the Prime Minister, that allegedly led Deputy Prime Minister Douglas Ete to abandon the DCC ([IslandSun.com; 19 October 2015](#)). Taiwan's role in the current political impasse is directly related to the laxity on the part of the donor not to require a certain degree of accountability. To prevent further instability associated with this funding Taiwan should require greater transparency in how it is spent, and place rules on what it can be spent on.

While many of Solomon Islands' political problems are national, others are local, occurring within constituencies. Taiwanese aid has contributed to these problems, through provision of aid to MPs to spend at their discretion within their constituencies. This money adds to the money MPs receive from the Solomon Islands Government for the same purpose. Although Taiwan's declared intention to support rural development efforts is laudable, there is little evidence to show that it is achieving this stated aim, and at times constituency funding has exacerbated local level disharmony and political instability. The discretionary nature of the fund makes it open for abuse despite the fact that there is a [Constituency Development Fund Act 2013](#) (CDF Act). The CDF Act has an accompanying regulation (*The Constituency Development Funds Regulations 2013*) that is yet to be adopted. Even with this regulation, the CDF Act leaves multiple openings for misapplication. There was a [public outcry](#) when the CDF Act was brought to Parliament for debate. Unfortunately, public calls were not heeded primarily because those who are making the laws are also direct or indirect beneficiaries. Although Taiwanese aid only makes up a minority share of constituency development funding, it is still significant, and Taiwan could use the leverage this provides to help Solomon Islands' citizens demand good governance, transparency and accountability through the state's established institutions and apparatus when aiding

MPs and the constituencies. There has to be a shift away from ‘discretionary’ funding.

If good governance and accountability are not insisted on, sooner or later MPs with the political will and concern for the future of Solomon Islands will ultimately call for a diplomatic switch from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People’s Republic of China. Although a switch in allegiance may not guarantee good governance and leadership, it could at least provide a fresh start to rethink the future of what is important for Solomon Islands and its citizens.

To move beyond the ‘musical chairs’ of Solomon Islands politics will above all require political will. This is a serious challenge that must be addressed head on if the country is to have a stable political future with steady development.

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7. Aiding women candidates in Solomon Islands elections

Terence Wood, September 29, 2015



One of history’s enduring lessons is that men often do not run nation states well. Certainly no better than women. Given this, it’s reassuring that globally, slowly but surely, the number of elected women politicians [is rising](#). Unfortunately,

however, this trend is absent, or largely absent, in much of the Pacific. From 1997 to 2014 the percentage of women parliamentarians increased from just under 3 per cent to 4.3 per cent (for regional trend comparisons see Figure 1 [here](#) [pdf]). Anyone who has worked in development in the

region will appreciate the cost of this. Many of the region's most capable and motivated reformers are women. And yet political power is denied to them.

Solomon Islands is one of the Pacific's worst performers. Since independence there has never been more than one woman MP in its parliament at any one time, and for long periods of time there have been none. There has been a steady increase over time in the number of women candidates. However, despite this, women are not winning elections more often. Indeed, as I show in my [new paper](#) [pdf] in *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, on average, women candidates are not even becoming more competitive.

This is not the women candidates' fault. The playing field of Solomon Islands politics is heavily tilted against them. Although the best available survey research (see page 535 of the paper) suggests most Solomon Islands voters are not averse to voting for a woman in the abstract, Solomon Islands is a strongly clientelist polity, vote buying is common and, to be successful, candidates typically need to use material resources to earn for themselves a reputation as someone who will help if elected. Candidates also need influential local brokers (heads of families, community leaders or church leaders) on their side. In all of these aspects of competition it helps to be a man. As I show in the paper, men are much more likely to work in the cash economy and through this have resources for campaigning, and norms of leadership mean that most local brokers are men who won't work for women candidates.

Aid donors are, of course, not oblivious to the fact that Solomon Islands' parliament is nearly bereft of women MPs, and donors have been trying to help change this. The problem is that their help to-date appears to have achieved little.

Donors have, for example, promoted quotas that would see seats set aside for women MPs in parliament. This is a good idea: if quotas were legislated, they would guarantee the presence of women MPs. However, there's no reason to believe quotas will be legislated — no reason because there is no strong domestic political impetus for quota legislation. And Solomon Islands politics has its own internal logic; a logic that leaves donors, as external actors, with surprisingly little influence. Donor pressure has kept

quotas on the table, and there's always the chance they may one day be enacted, so the idea shouldn't be abandoned, but nor should it be counted upon.

Donors have also funded training for potential women candidates. Such training is well intended and appears to be appreciated by participants, but (as I show in the paper's second figure) there is no compelling evidence it has helped. In part this is because the content of the training has often (although not always) neglected the realities of electioneering in Solomon Islands. However, the most important issue is simply that many of the challenges women candidates face are structural, and are not easily solved in the classroom.

Donors have also sought to aid women candidates through voter education campaigns. In general, voter education, when it covers the rights of voters and the rules of elections, is useful, but there is no reason to believe voters can be educated into voting for women. As I have written [elsewhere](#) [pdf], when they are free to choose, most voters in Solomon Islands actually make choices that are perfectly reasonable given their circumstances. And it is not easy to educate people away from reasonable choices.

Aid donors have tried to help women candidates, but this hasn't helped a lot. This isn't the aid world's fault. Intervening in other countries' electoral politics isn't easy. And the only way we can ultimately give better aid is by doing and then learning. However, given aid's track record so far, it's time some lessons were learnt. This doesn't mean abandoning all existing work (although it urgently needs to be re-calibrated: candidate training, for example, needs to be much more carefully geared to context). But new approaches should also be tried.

One example I suggest in the paper would be to help potential women candidates gain reputations as people who can be trusted to provide material assistance. Often male candidates win this way; and the art involved requires aspiring candidates (who often live in Honiara) cultivating links to rural communities by helping meet people's material needs and assisting with small-scale development projects over time. This shouldn't be confused with vote buying, which is common in the immediate lead up to elections, is overtly transactional, and which donors obviously couldn't aid. Rather, my proposal involves building longer-term

relationships of respect. It wouldn't be hard for donors to assist with this; some already engage in similar community development work, the main change would simply be linking the work to promising potential women leaders.

I'm still humble enough to concede that what I am suggesting may not work. But given that aid efforts are currently delivering little, it is time to try something new.

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This piece was published collaboratively with [Policy Forum](#) – Asia and the Pacific's platform for public policy analysis, debate and discussion.

8. Vanuatu after Cyclone Pam: how will reconstruction be financed?

Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain, May 7, 2015



Vanuatu is currently faced with the daunting task of reconstruction in the wake of one of the strongest cyclones to ever hit the country. An [earlier post](#) noted that reconstruction will be expensive, and argued that the most

important question for the Vanuatu Government in the coming years will be how to finance that reconstruction. That challenge will be the focus of this blog post.

Estimates of the damage caused by Cyclone Pam are still being undertaken. In the meantime, we can look at other disasters in the region for guidance.

In the case of Cyclone Evan in 2012, the damage in Samoa was estimated at 30 percent of GDP. This is likely to be an underestimate in the case of Cyclone Pam, which impacted most provinces in Vanuatu. Nevertheless, if we use 30 percent of GDP as a guide, a similar impact in Vanuatu would equate to damage of \$248 million USD, or 26,601.7 million vatu (an amount equivalent to 140 percent of annual government revenue).

Much of this damage bill will of course be absorbed by households and businesses – only some of which are likely to have had insurance cover. But the Vanuatu government will also fund considerable reconstruction, given the damage to public infrastructure such as schools, health clinics, and government administration buildings. It is also assisting households affected by the disaster. The government has already funded much of the emergency response and initial recovery effort; in its appeal for emergency relief, the government sought \$29.4 million USD, and received about half that amount. In its subsequent Humanitarian Action Plan, which will cover three months to the end of July, the government has requested \$13.5 million USD.

Revenue raising options are limited. The government is unlikely to increase taxes just when ni-Vanuatu are reconstructing their homes and livelihoods (in fact, it has lowered import duties on certain goods, such as farming tools, seeds and building materials). The same consideration will also restrict its ability to widen the tax base. The establishment of income taxation is a worthy long-term endeavour, but not something that should be pursued in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam. The imposition of a disaster levy, as occurred in response to the Queensland floods in Australia in 2010–11, would adversely affect households hit by the cyclone. (In the case of the Queensland flood levy, the Commonwealth Government was able to transfer resources collected by the tax from non-affected parts of the country to flooded areas – an exercise that is less feasible in Vanuatu given that most of the country was struck by the disaster.)

External funding will therefore be required.

A surge in aid provided in response to Cyclone Pam will cover some reconstruction costs. Australia has announced \$15 million AUD in assistance (less than \$5 million of which, it appears, will take the form of budgetary assistance), the ADB is giving \$5 million USD, and the World

Bank a similar figure. The Pacific Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance scheme has also [provided](#) \$1.9 million USD. This funding has been welcomed by the Vanuatu Government. However, it is grossly inadequate for the task of reconstruction. This is hardly a surprise. As noted previously, [experience](#) around the world tells us that increases in development assistance never fully fund reconstruction. Past disasters in Vanuatu (three cyclones in 1985) and Samoa (Cyclone Evan in 2012) have resulted in aid surges of approximately 5 percent of GDP – far below the cost of damage caused by these events.

The Vanuatu Government will need to borrow funds for reconstruction, as did the Samoan Government after Cyclone Evan. It makes sense to do so. Access to finance for reconstruction is an essential element of recovery, and one that influences the [severity](#) [pdf] of the economic impacts of a disaster. Cyclone Pam was not like other cyclones that regularly hit Vanuatu. It was a unique event, which one hopes, will not be repeated for some time.

Vanuatu is currently in a sound fiscal position, with public debt of only 21 percent of GDP, well below the 40 percent threshold recommended by the IMF. On the face of it, the Vanuatu Government is therefore in a position to borrow money for reconstruction. However, look more closely and the government's position is less rosy. It currently has a significant [pipeline](#) of infrastructure investments forecast. These projects are to be funded through a combination of grants and concessional loans from donors, and would result in a considerable increase in public debt – forecast to rise to just below the 40 percent threshold identified by the IMF (and this is optimistic, given that it does not account for the economic impacts of Cyclone Pam).

Figure 1: Vanuatu government debt

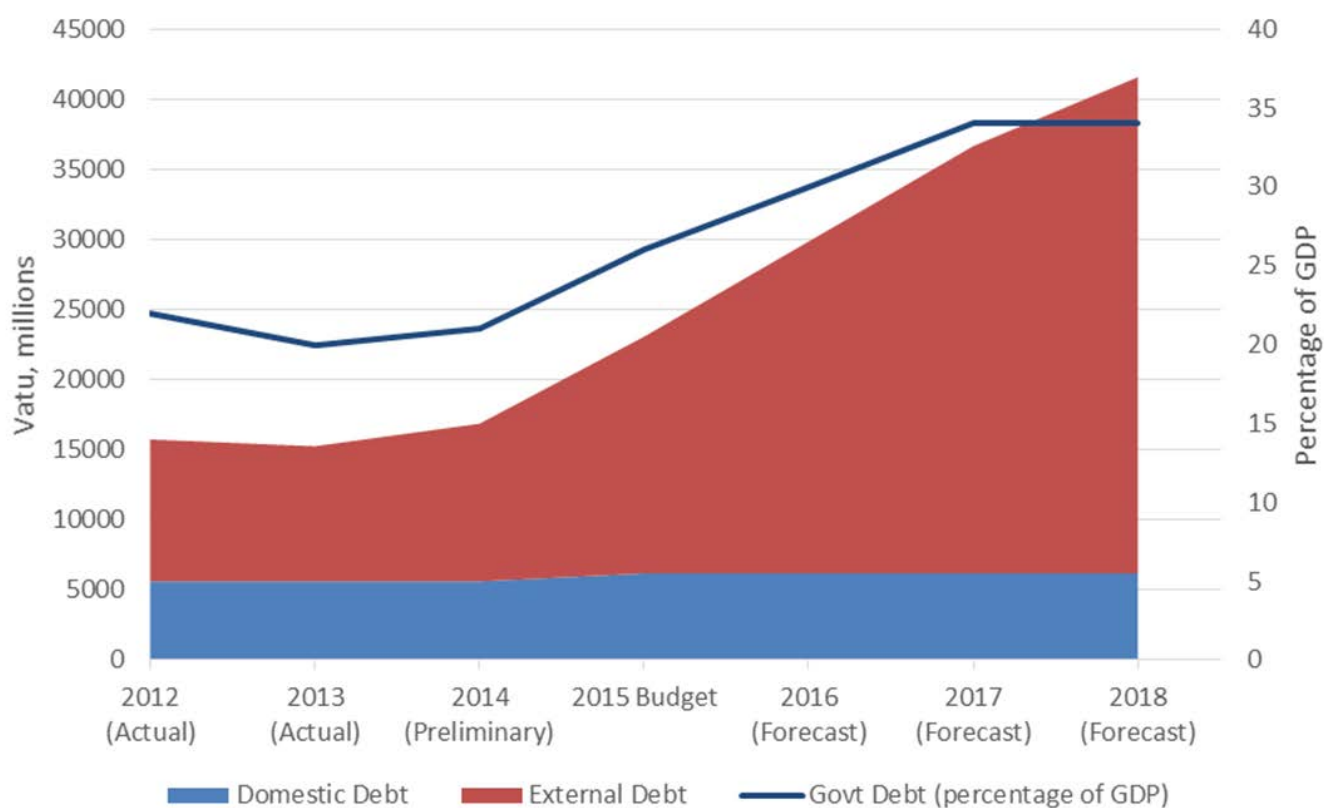
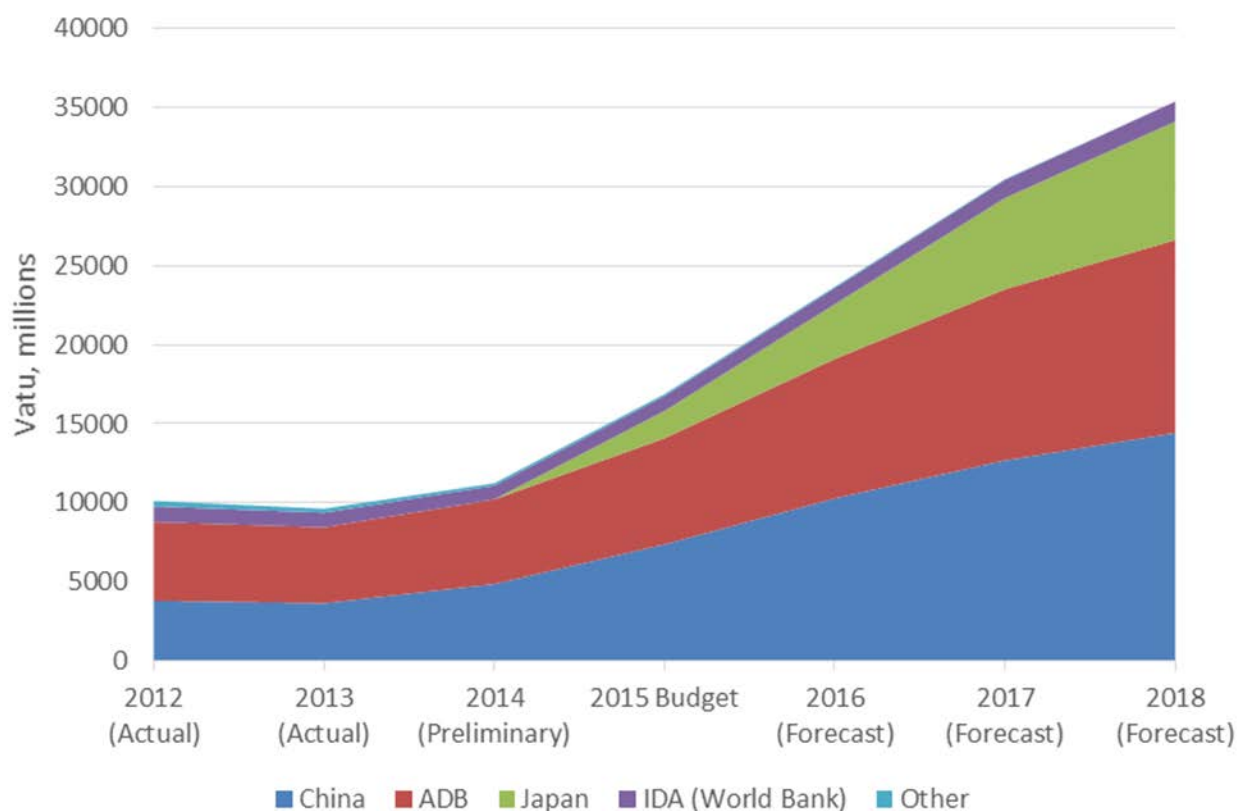


Figure 2: Vanuatu government debt – external creditors



The government will need to reconsider whether infrastructure projects that had been planned prior to Cyclone Pam should proceed. There are strong fiscal grounds for cancelling or postponing, where feasible, given the financial and logistical demands that reconstruction will place on both government and the private sector in Vanuatu. If all of the projects that were planned prior to Cyclone Pam were to proceed, it is difficult to see how the government could fund them in addition to reconstruction without placing itself in a precarious financial situation. The government will be conscious that the more it borrows, the more vulnerable it is to future disasters, whether of an economic or natural variety. The inflow of funds also risks placing upward pressure on the vatu, and the construction activity associated with such projects would exacerbate inflationary pressure caused by reconstruction activity (Samoa experienced this in the wake of Cyclone Evan).

The government must therefore balance the need to finance reconstruction with the long term risks associated with that debt.

However, cancelling projects will also involve costs, and will not always be feasible. Some projects are well-advanced. Construction work has already been tendered, and construction companies have invested in plants and machinery. There is concern in Vanuatu's private sector that these projects will not proceed, leaving businesses out of pocket. The decision about whether or not to proceed will therefore need to be made cautiously, with a view to the impact on the government budget, private sector, and the economy over the long run.

Where possible, projects should be modified to incorporate reconstruction work. There are some projects where this is clearly possible. The Vanuatu Tourism Infrastructure Project, for example, which includes beautification of the Kalsakau Drive (Port Vila seafront), has been fast-tracked by donors in response to government requests. Rehabilitation will include reconstruction work. This ensures that the project meets the needs of Vanuatu, while also honouring contracts.

The debt implications of projects should also be considered. Many of the infrastructure projects in the [planning pipeline](#) involve both concessional loan and grant elements, which makes them attractive even if there is no potential to incorporate reconstruction activities. The Port Vila Urban

Development Project is a case in point. The [project](#) is estimated to cost \$39 million USD, but most of this is being provided as a grant by DFAT – borrowing for the project will involve only \$5 million. Debt associated with this particular project is therefore minimal.

Projects that are good candidates for cancellation or postponement are a) those that require the government to borrow considerable funds on less concessional terms, and b) those that are less advanced, or where financiers are willing to amend contracts. One project that fits the first characteristic is the road upgrade in South Tanna and Malekula, which is being funded by China Eximbank. The conditions associated with this loan are not very concessional – interest of 2 percent will be charged over 20 years, with a five year grace period. The loan is also reported to be very large, at \$50 million USD (for purposes of comparison, the Lapetasi wharf development is being funded by a Japanese loan of approximately \$40 million USD, which will incur an annual interest payment of 0.56 percent and be repaid over 40 years, with a ten year grace period). Outright cancellation is unlikely, given that [ground was broken](#) for the project last week, but modification or downsizing could be possible – the second phase of the project, focused on Malekula (which was not so badly affected as other parts of the country), has not yet begun.

The economic impact of a project is also important, of course. Projects that generate [economic activity](#), and thereby increase revenue that the government can use to repay debt, are attractive. However, it is worth stressing that when considering economic impact, a conservative and risk-averse approach is appropriate, given Vanuatu's exposure to natural disasters and economic (and policy) developments in neighbouring countries.

The Vanuatu Government clearly has some difficult decisions to make as it seeks to ensure that sufficient funding is available for reconstruction. Although public debt is currently low, the government has entered into agreements with development partners and contractors for a range of infrastructure projects. These should be amended to include reconstruction where possible. In some cases, where projects are less advanced and grant finance is minimal, it will make sense to postpone projects (possibly indefinitely). Cancelling or postponing any project will be a painful and contentious exercise. Not doing so will also be painful – in

the long-term – as it will limit the government’s ability to borrow funds for reconstruction.

Matthew Dornan is a Research Fellow at the Development Policy Centre. Tess Newton Cain is a Visiting Fellow at the Development Policy Centre.

9. Investing in people and building a business in Vanuatu

Bernie Cain, August 7, 2014



I run a business in Vanuatu called Vila Refrigeration. We are an air conditioning and refrigeration company that supplies and installs new equipment and also undertakes maintenance and repair work. Our staff requirement is for personnel who are technically savvy, preferably well trained and in possession of suitable qualifications. The simple fact is that finding personnel in Vanuatu who fill that bill has been virtually impossible. This is not just a problem for me but it is a problem across many types of enterprise.

The majority of the country’s population live in villages outside of urban areas. There are schools for children to attend but these are fairly basic and often lack resources. These shortcomings in the education system in rural areas are also present in urban schools. Secondary schooling is not free and, although school fees are not high by Australian standards, they are a burden on people who are not earning a lot of money. This is more exaggerated outside of the towns, where there is much more of a subsistence livelihood. So for the average *ni-Vanuatu* child it is unlikely that their education will be of a high standard or that they will be exposed to anything very technical.

When I first arrived in Port Vila in the early ’90s none of the company’s in-Vanuatu staff had qualifications beyond primary school or lower

secondary. The staff received on-the-job training, as there was no other option in our industry. At the time I think there was only one qualified in-Vanuatu refrigeration technician in the country; he worked for a French company and had received his training in New Caledonia. We had one member of staff who had done a few years at a technical college in Solomon Islands but had not finished the course. In order to meet the technically difficult problems that often arose, we had to employ qualified staff from overseas, which is a much more expensive business than if properly qualified and trained local staff are available.

There was a technical college in Port Vila that taught some trade-type courses (electrical, carpentry, automotive, for example) but the standards were not high. At one time I was co-opted onto a committee to re-write their electrical course syllabus, with a view to making it a basic technical course. In recent years numerous donors have invested in the [Vanuatu Institute of Technology](#) (VIT) to improve training standards. In fact, many of our current staff have completed the electrical course at VIT. However, a refrigeration course has never been offered at that institution.

Scholarships to study overseas (whether offered by the government of Vanuatu or donor partners) have largely focused on university education, with very little attention paid to trade training. Teaching people trade skills has historically been left in the hands of local companies.

We undertook on-the-job training and found staff performances improved but it didn't compare to a proper technical education. If this was to be achieved, the employer would have to pay for staff to do technical studies overseas – not a cheap exercise. Over the last seven years it has been a different story with the establishment of the [Australia Pacific Technical College](#) (APTC), which provides access to good technical education. Four of my staff have qualified through the APTC [refrigeration and air conditioning course \(Certificate III\)](#) [pdf] and two others are currently attending. This has been a cost to the company but I believe it has been money well spent.

The APTC refrigeration and air conditioning course is taught in Samoa and is based on a block release type scheme. Each of my staff has received an APTC scholarship, which covers tuition fees and a stipend to live on whilst in Samoa. We paid the staff their standard salary whilst they were away as

they all have families who could not have met their living costs if there was no income. Not all companies take this approach but I feel it has helped my staff members to do better by being able to focus on their studies whilst away from home.

Of the first three staff to receive their qualifications (two males and one female) one man has moved on but the other two remain with the company. The fourth to be qualified and the remaining original two have improved their productivity and work attitude immensely. The education they received has not only increased their knowledge and competence but also their confidence in their abilities. All three now have supervisory roles in the company. We have been able to drop two expatriate staff, which has been a significant saving to the payroll. As well as being competent at their jobs, they have also taken on organisational activities including prioritising in-coming work and allocation of staff to jobs. This has allowed me to concentrate on other matters in the company's operation.

I have been very impressed to see that, once qualified, they have raised their level of performance and attitudes towards work and are keen to improve themselves even further. Two are looking at doing additional study to improve themselves and their career prospects further.

One has been appointed as the Vanuatu National Technician by the National Ozone Unit (a section within the Department of Environment). This is an occasional position and so, in effect, he works full time for us but occasionally requires some time off to undertake those duties. The position oversees and helps with the training of other refrigeration workers in the country regarding the introduction of new technology, particularly relating to new refrigerants. He has recently signed up to do a further course without scholarship assistance. Again we will pay his salary whilst he is absent, and between us we have agreed that the company will contribute to his tuition costs on the basis he remains with the company over the next few years.

We had a few problems with the male staff when our workshop supervisor (as she now is) received her qualifications and was given a supervisory role. The men were not keen to be told by a female what to do; this was particularly so with the older men. I had to put my foot down a few times to get the message across that if she told them something, it was as if the

directive came from me. Interestingly enough this gender issue has, for all intents and purposes, now disappeared and the other female technician (who is not qualified) is also accepted as an equal in the workshop. Both of our female technicians were featured in the recently released [United Nations Environment Program](#) (UNEP) publication: [International Standards in Refrigeration and Air Conditioning](#) [pdf] – *an introduction to their role in the context of the HCFC phase-out in developing countries*. The booklet was published to assist refrigeration companies in the developing world to meet international standards. It was good to see how those pictures were perceived by all the staff as positive for women, and it lifted morale across all the business for them to see their colleagues appear in such a publication.

Spending a little time and money to improve your staff's access to good educational opportunities will return that investment several times over. I am not saying it will work every time but for me, three out of four (and potentially five out of six) is a great return. The big turning point for us was that the APTC made technical training available, which was not previously accessible at an affordable cost.

I was listening to [Radio Australia](#) a few weeks ago and there was a segment on a recent report on the performance of the APTC in meeting its objectives; in my opinion, in Vanuatu at least, they have succeeded handsomely. It has provided Vila Refrigeration and several other companies involved in the technical trades with qualified staff who can perform. This has begun to fill a gap in the Vanuatu labour pool, enabling the country to rely on its own people. There was some early discussion that once qualified, people would want to move to more developed countries but this has not occurred to my knowledge. I think that most in-Vanuatu do not want to move to Australia or somewhere else, they want to remain in their own country.

Something I had not really thought of before the staff started working towards their qualifications was that good education opens up paths for personal advancement beyond the immediate goals of the qualification. All of the staff who have been through the course have a wider view of the job and their own lives and expectations. I have been impressed to see them now looking to further improve themselves and their families' prospects. The two staff who are still studying for their APTC qualifications are also

improving their productivity and attitudes as they progress through their courses. Improving the staff's educational opportunities has been a win-win situation: a win for me as an employer to have trained and better performing staff, and a win for the staff as their income and career prospects have improved.

Bernie Cain is Manager of Vila Refrigeration. This is an edited version of a presentation to the Vanuatu–Australia Business Forum held in Brisbane in June 2014.

10. Bainimarama and the Pacific Islands Forum: a storm in a calm ocean

Wadan Narsey, November 11, 2014



Thinking members of the public would have been pleased to see the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) [announce](#) that Fiji was being admitted back into this regional organization.

But immediately, they would have been horrified that Bainimarama is [demanding](#), as a pre-condition, that either Australia and NZ relinquish being full members and become only development partners

like Japan, China, Korea and USA OR that these other countries are allowed to become full members.

This unnecessary aggression from Bainimarama does not help his other government ministers in their work, it does not help the Fiji people in their relations with Australia and NZ, it does not help the other Forum member countries, it does not help the Forum staff in their work, and it undermines Bainimarama's own personal standing in the diplomatic world.

It is a pity that the Fiji First Party does not have senior advisers who could encourage Bainimarama to make the transition from his stormy eight years of military dictatorship to being an elected prime minister accountable to his people, and working diplomatically in their interests.

Both Bainimarama and Fiji stand to gain, if he could.

The expulsion fall-out

Fiji was expelled from the Forum when Bainimarama failed to hold elections in May 2009.

The argument was that the Forum wanted to give a clear signal to the region that it seriously disapproved of the illegal removal of a lawfully elected government.

Whether the instigator of the expulsion was Australia or not and whether that decision, in hindsight, was a wise one for the Forum Secretariat to make, will be debated till the cows come home.

But the expulsion, along with travel sanctions and the mutual expulsion of high commissioners, ruined political relations between Fiji and its two traditional donors and split the Forum. The investment climate was damaged as potential investors worried about how badly relations could deteriorate.

To the relief of many, the tourism industry and many aid projects, as well as people-to-people relationships and emigration to Australia and NZ, continued as usual, although investment did not recover.

Fiji also strengthened extremely beneficial foreign relations with and sources of funding from countries such as China, India and Malaysia. By and large, it escaped the diplomatic freeze with Australia and NZ relatively unscathed

The continued aggression

It is natural that the Bainimarama Government is still unhappy with Australia and NZ given their opposition to his coup over the last eight years.

But that opposition was a principled one on the basis that it was unacceptable for a military coup to depose a lawfully elected government, and this was not a precedent to be encouraged elsewhere in the Pacific.

The Bainimarama Government should acknowledge that it has been a military dictatorship for eight years, with no accountability to the ordinary people of Fiji (not having been elected by them). Their hostility towards Australia and NZ did not need to take into account the people's views.

But since the September 17 elections, with Bainimarama elected as the Prime Minister of Fiji, he also loses that total freedom he had previously.

An elected accountable government

The Bainimarama Government is now a democratically elected government, representing the interests of the majority of the voters of this country, and accountable to them.

Without fear of contradiction, one can say that the majority of the people of Fiji would like the complete normalization of relations with Australia and NZ, without any unnecessary and unwarranted aggression on the part of their elected leaders.

With tens of thousands of Fijian families having emigrated to Australia and NZ, there are many family ties between Fiji and both countries, and any chilling of relations would be to their disadvantage, on both sides.

The majority of Fiji military personnel and their families have welcomed the normalization of relations: they have no wish to go back to the dark days between 2009 and 2014 when they were banned from traveling to Australia and NZ.

The majority of Fiji citizens who have taken up board memberships despite the sanctions, and those who are now willing to take on these social responsibilities in the future, have also welcomed the normalization of relations and the ending of travel bans on them.

The large numbers of our students who go to study in Australia, and the large numbers of labourers for whom temporary guest worker schemes may soon open up in Australia and NZ, would also not like to see any further deterioration in relations between Fiji and Australia, in case their opportunities in Australia and NZ are affected.

The ordinary people of Fiji wish to see the close, warm relations with the Australian and NZ governments that existed pre-2006, and which they know very well cannot be replaced by Fiji's new relations with China, India, Malaysia or Russia.

In the thawing of Fiji's foreign relations with Australia and NZ, the elected Bainimarama Government is duty bound to place the people's interest first, and not their leaders' own egos.

The Bainimarama Government should note that there are many fronts on which the ordinary people of Fiji can benefit from more favorable foreign policy treatment by Australia and NZ: temporary work visas, easier immigration entry for permanent residency or holidays, strengthening of military ties, greater integration in sports such as rugby, soccer and netball, and in culture, disaster relief, policing and protection of national economic zones against illegal fisheries, etc.

Most important, it is on the cards that renewed confidence by both foreign and local investors may drive economic growth well above the 4% or so currently predicted for the next few years, and nothing should be done to undermine this burst of confidence and investment.

These positive developments can only be encouraged if Australia and NZ view our government as friendly and co-operative, instead of being unnecessarily aggressive and hostile, the stance currently being projected by the Bainimarama Government.

Adapting diplomatically

Bainimarama must surely know that the Forum cannot and will not give in to his “ultimatum” to expel Australia and NZ as full members, given that they are the ones who provide the funds to keep the Forum going, not the other countries on whose behalf Fiji claims to be speaking.

China, Korea, Japan and US must be diplomatically affronted, astonished or just merely amused, that Fiji is demanding that they be included as full members of the Forum without them being asked, or without asking for it themselves.

Other Forum countries, especially those of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, who have been torn apart these last eight years because of the conflicting pulls of being on good terms with Australia and NZ (who are vital to their economies) and giving fraternal support to Fiji, would like to see an end to the turbulence in the Forum and a return to their annual meetings with peaceful wining and dining.

Let us also not forget that unnecessary diplomatic spats between Forum member countries must also be extremely demoralizing for the staff of the Forum Secretariat, who would like to focus on their tasks at hand and not be thinking perpetually about Fiji’s ‘Damocles Sword’ hanging over them. Their predicament is made worse with the establishment by Fiji of a competing Pacific Island Development Forum, funded by China.

Foreign Minister Inoke Kubuabola, whatever gloss he puts on the Fiji statement, must be tearing his hair out to see his hard work at rebuilding good relations with our traditional partners being undone by continuing diplomatic aggression from his prime minister.

Many other ministers (and their ministries) who also work closely with important Australian and NZ aid projects in Fiji will find relationships made more difficult.

It is a pity that the Bainimarama/Khaiyum elections strategy and results give the appearance that Bainimarama is the only popular Fiji First Party candidate, and that the others in his Cabinet have little democratic mandate and popular support in their own right.

It is a pity that the Fiji First Party does not have a depth of secure leadership that could confidently advise Bainimarama to put his stormy diplomatic past behind, and trim his sails to the calmer ocean that Fiji has steered to after the September elections.

Not only would Bainimarama benefit personally, but so also would Fiji if such diplomatic storms are not unnecessarily created in our calm Pacific ocean.

Postscript

A diplomatic solution may be in the offing. The Bainimarama Government has agreed to Australia's proposal to have a meeting in Sydney in 2015 to discuss the architecture of all the regional organizations, presumably including the Forum Secretariat and Pacific Islands Development Forum, largely funded by China. What will come of it is anyone's guess. Probably there will be a greater role for China and India in the regional organizations, and no doubt a greater collective co-ordination and rationalization of aid that countries like Australia and NZ already attempt.

Wadan Narsey is Adjunct Professor, The Cairns Institute, James Cook University and former Professor of Economics, The University of the South Pacific.

PACIFIC CONVERSATIONS

Regionalism, sub-regionalism and women's empowerment: an interview with Dame Meg Taylor

Meg Taylor and Tess Newton Cain, March 8, 2015



During her first visit to Vanuatu as Secretary General of the [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat](#) (PIFS), Dame Meg Taylor took some time to chat with Tess Newton Cain for [Pacific Conversations](#). You can listen to a podcast of their conversation [here](#) and read the transcript [here](#). For the highlights of what they discussed, read on...

I started by asking Dame Meg what she thought were the key objectives for Pacific regionalism in the next few years. She stated that, from the perspective of the PIFS, she saw the future of regionalism as based on the [Framework for Pacific Regionalism](#) [pdf], which was adopted by leaders at the 2014 Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Majuro:

“...the key emphasis is about changing the paradigm of the way development is done in the region, where the leaders of the Pacific are the ones that make the decision as to what are the regional priorities.”

The Secretary General made it clear that she wants to ensure that the Framework for Pacific Regionalism is an impetus for action:

“The task that the Pacific Islands Forum has and the CROP agencies will have is to make sure we are implementing that. But right now, it's rolling out that process, and actually implementing a report that was done in the Pacific rather than shelving it and hoping that somebody will write another one.”

In a definitive display of positive thinking, Dame Meg advised me that she did not want to predict obstacles to achieving these objectives. That is not to say that she is unaware of the challenging nature of the endeavour:

“I think that grappling with these issues, that’s going to be tougher than we all think. You don’t just pluck a topic out of thin air. We’ve got to make sure that it’s a regional issue, and not a regional issue for some and not for others.”

I moved on by asking Dame Meg what she would like the PIFS to look like at the completion of her three-year term. Whilst there is a need for organisational reform, her focus is on the present and the future rather than the past:

“I’m looking at an institution that I’ve inherited, end of 2014, now 2015. It’s amazing how dynamics change in this region very quickly, and what we’ve been asked to do in terms of implementation is going to require skill sets that can deliver, be responsive to what the leaders want.”

Again, Dame Meg made it clear that she intended to devote the bulk of her time and energy into putting the decisions of Pacific leaders into action:

“...my main focus in terms of institutional outcome is to ensure that the Pacific Framework is truly implemented and accepted, not just by the leadership and the CROP agencies, but by the donor agencies. That when the leaders of the Pacific say “these are the four priorities for the issues in the region”, that donor agencies get behind it.”

Dame Meg was very candid in her acknowledgement of concerns within the region about the relevance of the PIF and its secretariat, but she is very clear that the PIF has an important role to play within the wider context of regionalism:

“There’s a debate that the Pacific Islands Forum is becoming irrelevant, that it’s not needed. I want to be able to assure the people of the Pacific, because when they were asked by Sir Mekere about regionalism they responded that they needed a regional organisation that represented their countries. And the Pacific Islands Forum is one that represents the independent states of the Pacific. And that’s a very precious mandate for me. And we’ve got to make sure that it is protected but also effective.”

When Dame Meg was appointed to the position of Secretary General, much was made of the fact that she is the [first woman](#) to have held that position. I asked her what she thought was needed in order to support professional women to take on positions of regional leadership in the Pacific. Her response was incisive:

“I think we’ve got to be supported by our own gender and supported by men in our communities for the intelligence and the contribution that we can make as individuals... I’ve heard this from young women in PNG, that some of the areas that they feel they can’t make progress is because many of us who are the older women are making sure that they don’t have those opportunities.”

Dame Meg advised me that she hopes to draw on her experience of mentoring young professional women within the World Bank Group to do the same whilst she is Secretary General of the PIFS.

Returning to regionalism, I asked Dame Meg for her assessment of the regional and sub-regional landscape as it currently stands, and how she thought it might evolve in the future. She was particularly keen to discuss the opportunities offered by sub-regionalism further to her meeting with the [Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat](#):

“I think that what we’ve got to be open to as a regional organisation is that there are some things that a sub-regional can do and do them well. There are other things and issues that a regional organisation has to have responsibility for and take leadership on. And to be able to exchange ideas and not to be afraid of it.”

Dame Meg Taylor has taken on an [important and challenging role](#). The next three years will be very busy for her and the organisation she leads.

Dame Meg Taylor is Secretary General of the [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat](#). Tess Newton Cain (@CainTess) is a Research Associate at the Development Policy Centre.

Political instability, the MSG and regional politics – an interview with Prime Minister Joe Natuman of Vanuatu

[Joe Natuman](#) and [Tess Newton Cain](#), November 13, 2014



At the end of what had been a very busy week, Prime Minister Natuman took some time to sit down with Tess for Pacific Conversations. You can listen to a podcast of their conversation [here](#) or read the full transcript [here](#). But for the highlights of what they discussed, read on...

I started by asking Prime Minister Natuman what his government hoped to achieve before the next general elections in 2016. He told me that a particular area of focus was addressing issues of political instability. As he pointed out, at Independence in 1980 there were only two political parties in Vanuatu but since then there has been a rise in the number of smaller political groupings. The prime minister is planning to take forward constitutional and legislative reform to address this issue:

“... at the moment we are engaging with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and they have discussed this issue recently. When I was in New York with the UN General Assembly, I talked with the Secretary General. They visited us a couple of weeks ago. And I will be talking with the Speaker of Parliament, so that during this November session we will organise a forum whereby members of Parliament and other stakeholders will be consulted on the way forward in this political reform.”

In the same vein, we discussed reforms in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, also aimed at reducing political instability and improving the integrity of political parties. The prime minister said that there was a need to look at what had happened in these neighbouring countries and establish what was the best course of action for Vanuatu in this regard. He

advised that the registration of political parties, as very recently enacted in Solomon Islands, was something that was considered important:

“... we’ll have to register political parties so that those political parties will be able to declare any gifts they receive during election so that things are transparent and accountable.”

Looking a bit further afield to Papua New Guinea, the prime minister noted some concerns about the limitations that have been placed on the use of motions of no confidence:

“I think it’s a question of balance. We should be able to remove any government that’s become unpopular. We should not entrench a government in office just because they want to be in office.”

We then moved on to discuss the importance of Vanuatu’s membership of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). As the prime minister reminded me, Vanuatu was a founding member of the sub-regional bloc and it is a grouping that is very important to the country. The prime minister reflected on the evolving nature of the MSG’s remit:

“The MSG was established to drive the cause of the Kanak people of New Caledonia — to enlist New Caledonia on the C24 with the United Nations as a non-governing territory. And of course now it’s expanded to cover trade issues, climate change, a whole lot of things. So it’s an important sub-regional bloc. We see ourselves as sub-regional, contributing to regional arrangements, issues that have been raised by the Pacific Islands Forum”

There continue to be issues to be addressed within the group, including the current negotiations in relation to trade arrangements (MSGTA 3).

The issue of self-determination for the Melanesian people of West Papua is one that is important for the MSG and a particular concern of the government of Vanuatu. The prime minister made reference to the Noumea summit of 2013, at which Vanuatu lobbied for the issue of West Papuan self-determination to be included in the MSG’s final communiqué:

“For the first time MSG accepted the fact that West Papuan people have a right to self-determination and independence. And we will continue to do that. There is a pending case of the application of

West Papua to MSG that is still under discussion. So hopefully next year we will discuss further on those issues.”

We also discussed how Vanuatu was using its international position within the United Nations to highlight this issue:

“So the Indonesians know our position. And I raised it during this year’s UNGA general debate. And we will continue to raise those issues. And what we want to do is to try to get a regional consensus, regional support in so far as MSG is concerned, so far as the Forum is concerned to gain support from there and then we can proceed further through the UN level.”

Prime Minister Natuman stressed that his government was very concerned about abuses of human rights in West Papua and saw that a role for Vanuatu was to provide regional leadership in addressing this issue:

“This is an issue which every country in the Pacific Forum, including Australia and New Zealand, should be voicing concern about the human rights abuses. I mean, I hear countries accusing other countries outside our region of human rights violation, but within our own region people are shutting their mouth. I don’t know why.”

Finally, we addressed the question of Vanuatu’s relationship with the People’s Republic of China. The prime minister described this relationship in warm terms, reflecting on the contribution China is currently making to infrastructure developments in Vanuatu. He also made reference to the possibility of increased Chinese investment in the country:

“China is an important player in the world today, in terms of economic development and I know in Australia a lot of the mining that’s going on is Chinese investment and Chinese money in Australia. And we have a lot of Australian tourists coming here because of the booming industry that is helped partly by Chinese money. So we should not be closing our mind. We would welcome Chinese investments here as well.”

The Hon. Joe Natuman is the Prime Minister of Vanuatu. Tess Newton Cain (@CainTess) is a Research Associate at the Development Policy Centre.

Tourism, regionalism and Niue's quest for self-sustainability: an interview with Premier Toke Talagi

Toke Talagi and Tess Newton Cain, January 29, 2015



Tess reached out across the International Date Line to talk with the Premier of Niue, Toke Talagi. You can listen to a podcast of their conversation [here](#) or read a transcript of the interview [here](#). But for the highlights of what they discussed, read on...

I started by asking Premier Talagi to introduce Niue and its people to those who (like me) may not know very much about his country, which is sometimes referred to as 'The Rock of Polynesia'. He told me that the landmass of Niue is actually quite substantial at around 100 square miles, making it bigger than Cook Islands. Niue is a self-governing state in

free association with New Zealand. In terms of the island's economy, the Premier advised:

"...our main industry at the moment is tourism. We've built up tourism over the last six years. We have arrangements with Air New Zealand for two flights a week. So the tourism industry is growing pretty rapidly, and I'm pleased about that because in the end it means we should be able to become self-sustaining in the long term. That's what we're banking on – our target if you wish – at the present time."

We then explored the opportunities and challenges associated with economic and social development in Niue a little further. One of the most significant challenges that the country has faced until recently is that of Niueans leaving to go to New Zealand (they are New Zealand citizens), with many of them then relocating to Australia. The Premier expressed the hope that as tourism was developed, there would be economic opportunities available that would attract some of these people back to Niue. And he pointed to some signs that this is already happening:

“...our objective is to use tourism as a means for buoying the private sector, buoying the businesses, increasing shipping and air services so that people have confidence that when they come back here they’ve got a good opportunity to earn money. There are a lot more people now starting businesses here. I think about two to three years ago there were about 100. The number of registered businesses has gone up to about 250, and probably over, at the moment. So clearly economic activity, particularly in relation to the tourism sector, is growing.”

Moving on to regional issues, I asked Premier Tolagi to tell me more about his [apparent frustration](#) with the role of the [Smaller Island States](#) (SIS) portfolio within the [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat](#) (PIFS). And, more generally, what he sees as the role for regionalism in addressing the development needs of Niue.

The Premier said that he was yet to see that the SIS had delivered on its intended mandate in any pragmatic way in terms of ensuring that specific funding was targeted at addressing the needs of countries such as his. He confirmed that it was his intention that Niue would withdraw from the SIS. As for regionalism, he characterised this as an aspiration that was yet to be realised:

“As far as regionalism is concerned, that’s a slightly different perspective. The Pacific Islands Forum, for example, and regionalism, are excellent concepts. But I think one of the things that we’ve got to be careful about is the fact that we’ve focused our attention so much on the concept rather than the practical application of what that actually means to the Pacific island countries, and to the people that we serve. At the present moment it appears to me that regionalism is a concept that many people talk about, but I’m not certain whether there is any practical implementation thinking in relation to what this regionalism can do, not just with small island states like Niue, but also some of the bigger island states that are part of the Forum.”

I also asked the Premier to expand on recent comments of his regarding the need for existing partnerships to deliver more to Pacific island countries in terms of assistance to deal with the effects of climate change. The Premier confirmed that he was happy with the partnerships that Niue has with other countries and groupings, such as the European Union, but he feels that there has been [little real movement, despite much talking](#):

“There are too many meetings, to be honest. There are just too many meetings. And although we’re small, we can send people to these meetings. But if I were to attend every meeting that I was invited to, I’d spend no time at home at all. It’s not worth the time. So we’re being very selective for the moment about the meetings that we attend.”

Finally, I asked the Premier what he thought his country of Niue had to offer the region and the wider world. He told me that he considered Niue to be something of a microcosm and that the people of Niue have much to contribute to wider conversations, provided regional and international stakeholders are able and willing to listen. In addition:

“What we can offer the world ... is an example of a country that is trying its best at this moment to become self-sustaining, and is determined to become self-sustaining, so that other people can see what we’re doing and hopefully learn from that.”

Toke Talagi is the Premier of Niue. Tess Newton Cain (@CainTess) is a Research Associate at the Development Policy Centre.

DEVELOPMENT POLICY CENTRE

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.

We were established in September 2010 and are based at Crawford School of Public Policy in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University.

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