

# 2021 PACIFIC UPDATE: ABSTRACTS

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## POLITICS AND REGIONALISM

**2022 PNG elections: Expectations, predictions, and concerns from participants** • Michael Kabuni, Russel Kitau Jr, and Minetta Daniella Kakarere, The University of Papua New Guinea

This paper is based on an online survey conducted two weeks before voting in the Port Moresby Northwest (PMNW) by-election, to gauge views on the following: which political parties will win most seats in 2022; important issues parties and candidates should prioritise in 2022 elections; perceptions about female candidates; and how would voters distribute preferences for the 2022 elections. 120 participants took the survey. PANGU and PNC were predicted to win most seats in 2022. Whilst crime and law and order arose as the most pressing issues in PMNW, economic development and corruption were issues participants said candidates should focus on for 2022. Good policies were the main thing voters would look at when voting. Some participants who did not vote for a female candidate in 2017 said they would vote for a female in 2022, but majority said it will depend on the female candidates' policies and standing in the community.

**Fault lines for unrest in the Pacific: Youth, livelihoods and land rights in driving and mitigating conflict** • Aidan Craney, La Trobe University

Instances of civil unrest and disorder have pockmarked the mainly peaceful functioning of multiple Pacific states in recent decades. This paper examines factors which can be seen as fault lines for predicting and mitigating such unrest, with a particular focus on Fiji and Solomon Islands. Drawing on data collected through interviews with youth advocates and activists, it becomes clear that the common justification of 'ethnic tensions' for past unrest, and fears of future unrest being necessitated by a 'youth bulge', oversimplifies the complexity of factors that lead to disorder. Issues of land rights, uncertain livelihood futures and public perceptions of inequality provide more salient framings for understanding why citizens engage in unrest. Indeed, it is perceptions of injustice and inequality which may well prove to be the greater indicator of the likelihood of any future destabilisation.

**Declaration on preserving maritime zones in the face of climate change-related sea-level rise** • Henry Puna, Secretary General and Filimon Manoni, Deputy Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

At the 51st Pacific Islands Forum, held on 6 August 2021, Forum Leaders endorsed the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-level rise. In brief, the declaration sets forth the views of the Pacific Islands Forum Members on the application of the relevant rules of international law in the event of climate change induced sea level rise. In doing so, Leaders noted the centrality of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of Sea as providing the basis for the Declaration. The Declaration contains important affirmations, records, and declarations, culminating in a strong proclamation that Forum Members' maritime zones, as established and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with the Convention, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply, without reduction, notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise.

The Declaration is an original and ground-breaking landmark that frames and defines the Blue Pacific Continent. Leaders affirmed the critical value and flagship potential of the Declaration in shaping and transforming international thinking on the issue, placing the region at the heart of international discussions, and providing a strong basis for Forum engagement and advocacy. Its endorsement on the 50th Anniversary of the Forum demonstrated the important value of the Forum family and signalled deep mutual commitment to safeguard the homes and interests of the Pacific peoples into perpetuity. In addition, it is envisaged that the Declaration will contribute to building a solid foundation to support the development and implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent that is currently under development.

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## FOOD SECURITY AND SUPPLY CHAINS

**Understanding changing land use patterns in response to disaster on the peri-urban fringe of Port Vila** • Andrew MacKenzie, The University of the South Pacific – Vanuatu Campus

This paper reports on research that seeks to understand the extent of changes to the peri-urban landscapes of Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital city. The research is interested in two categories of landscape change; urbanisation and gardening. The aim of the project is to understand what these changes reveal about the vulnerability of urban edge communities to disaster in

Vanuatu. It analyses these changes at different time periods defined by two significant disaster events; the March 2015 Cyclone Pam and the March 2020 closure of international borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of interest to the research will be to understand whether disasters have a compounding impact on communities living in the case study areas. The research will investigate whether the changes to landscape patterns are temporary and reflect immediate recovery actions, or does the changing landscape pattern reflect more permanent changes in the study areas?

### **Factors affecting food choice and food environment during COVID-19 – A cross sectional study in Samoa**

• Ramona Boodoosingh, National University of Samoa, Sarah Burkhart and Dana Craven, Australian Centre for Pacific Islands Research at University of the Sunshine Coast, Leslie Panapa, National University of Samoa

During the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts on the food system have included supply chain interruptions, panic buying leading to shortages, and food insecurity due to increased unemployment. Additionally, in the Pacific Islands region during this time significant weather events have devastated some agricultural sectors. The impact of this is visible through shifts in the food environment and food choice. Unfortunately there is little empirical data on the impact of COVID-19 in Pacific Island countries particularly focused on food behaviors. This presentation will share the findings of a small survey on the impact of COVID-19 on food choice in Samoa. We will include the perceptions of food pricing, food supply, barriers to cooking methods and changes in procurement, including the types of foods bought in bulk, stored or bartered.

### **COVID-19, domestic agricultural supply chain and food security: The case of Fiji** • Saleshe Kumar, Fiji National University, and Neelesh Gounder, The University of the South Pacific

This paper studies the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the domestic agricultural supply chain in Fiji using Sigatoka Valley (the main vegetable production center of Fiji) and the municipal market in Sigatoka town as a case study. A survey of farmers and markets vendors was carried out to collect data to map out key challenges faced by farmers and vendors in either producing or sourcing produce for forward flow or selling. Policy implications are also discussed.

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## **GENDER**

**Voters' perceptions of women as leaders in leadership in Tonga** • 'Ungateka Kata, Tupou Tertiary Institute, Vanessa Lolohea, Tonga National Youth Congress, and Mereani Rokotuibau, Balance of Power

There are few women represented in formal political institutions across Tonga. The social norm that men are 'natural' decision makers and political leaders is a major hindrance to women's leadership in this domain. There is, then, a critical need to address the way in which women's leadership is perceived in society. To date, research and development programs aiming to support women's pathways to politics in Tonga have concentrated – unsuccessfully – on the provision of pre-election technical training for candidates (the 'supply side') rather than approaches which amplify the perceived value of potential women candidates among the constituents (the 'demand side'). This paper will present findings from a recent nation-wide survey of Tongan voters' perceptions of women's leadership by Tupou Tertiary Institute and Tonga National Youth Congress, supported by DFAT-funded initiative, Balance of Power, with the aim of identifying the attitudinal blockages resulting in a miniscule proportion of elected female leaders.

### **Leadership Matters: Benchmarking women's business leadership in the Pacific** • Sarah Boxall, Asian Development Bank, Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative

With the world's lowest representation of women in parliament, women's opportunities to participate in leadership and decision-making in the Pacific are often considered limited. A new study by the Asian Development Bank's Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative finds that, increasingly, Pacific women are being afforded leadership opportunities in the private sector. Women's representation as company directors is considerably higher than for members of parliament in most countries in the study, and the Pacific average for women's representation as CEOs and directors compares favourably with global averages. The study assesses the representation of women in senior management and board positions in over 240 private sector organisations across 14 Pacific Island countries. It presents analysis by country, sector, and organisation type, and provides best practice examples and recommendations to support the private sector to further increase women's representation in leadership.

### **Factors that instigate intimate partner violence in the National Capital District, PNG** • Minetta Daniella Kakarere, The University of Papua New Guinea

The implications related to Gender Based Violence (GBV) especially Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a serious concern in Papua New Guinea as it is affecting a lot of women, children and also men. The purpose of the study was to find out the causes of IPV in Port Moresby, and why most victims do not get justice, so that

strategies formulated can effectively address this issue. Using document analysis, this study analysed 2020 police records of IPV from Family and Sexual Violence Units located in police stations in Port Moresby. Most of the police records showed that the common cause of IPV between couples was extra-marital affairs with most victims (female) experiencing physical abuse. This study definitely showed that around 80% of the complaints received at police stations were domestic violence cases, however, there are a lot of complex challenges involved in trying to assist GBV victims.

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## ECONOMICS

### **The private sector in a pandemic – a Vanuatu case study** • Liz Pechan, International Finance Corporation

During COVID-19, Vanuatu's economy experienced an annual loss of 9.235 % in GDP for 2020, with a projected GDP recovery of 3.2% during 2021. Prior to the global health pandemic, Vanuatu had made significant policy reforms to enable private sector-led growth. The COVID-19 pandemic is altering this course. This paper provides an overview of the Vanuatu private sector's experience during COVID-19 to date. It explores the varied impact of prolonged border closures on private sector employment, business continuity and entrepreneurship, where some sectors have been hardest hit, whilst other sectors are thriving or at the very least surviving. This paper will analyse the private sector trends during COVID and review what a pandemic-era enabling environment could hold for the Vanuatu private sector. It offers some thoughts about potential private sector responses in support of the way forward for Vanuatu's economic recovery in a new economic climate.

### **Reducing poverty through cash transfers in the Pacific** • Christopher Hoy, World Bank

This paper examines the most effective way to maximize poverty reduction through the scale up of cash transfers programs in the Pacific. The analysis involves conducting microsimulations using HIES data collected immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Fiji, Vanuatu, Kiribati and RMI. The main findings are threefold. Firstly, expanding some kinds of cash transfers programs that use categorical targeting, such as elderly pensions, will have little impact on poverty, whereas cash transfers to households with young children and/or those in rural areas will have a much larger impact. Secondly, consumption targeting will always result in more poverty reduction for a given budget than categorical targeting even when large targeting errors exist. Thirdly, there are significant diminishing returns from additional spending on narrowly targeted cash transfers. Collectively, the results illustrate

the types of cash transfer programs that are likely to lead to the largest impact on poverty in the region.

### **Fiji economy: Challenges and path to recovery** • Janesh Sami, The University of the South Pacific

With the recent escalation in the number of COVID-19 cases in the Suva-Nausori Corridor, there is now an even greater deal of uncertainty about the scope and pace of macroeconomic recovery of the Fijian economy. Despite public debt standing at around 84% of GDP and significant uncertainty regarding resumption of international travel, the Fijian government announced a bold 2021-2022 budget on 16 July 2021. This presentation examines how the COVID-19 pandemic led to a worsening of Fiji's macroeconomic performance, and exposed the underlining structural weaknesses of the economy. We scrutinise some of the major fiscal policy responses, identify some missed opportunities, and discuss policy options to support macroeconomic recovery.

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## AGRICULTURE

### **Agri-food systems knowledge and skills exchange between Australia and the Pacific through circular migration: Experiences from Seasonal Worker Programme participants** • Federico Davila, Institute for Sustainable Futures at University of Technology Sydney, Olivia Dun, The University of Melbourne, Carol Farbotko, CSIRO, Brent Jacobs, Institute for Sustainable Futures at University of Technology Sydney, and Natascha Klocker, University of Wollongong

Pacific Island workers contribute significantly to Australia's agricultural industries and food security through the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP). Many studies have shown the economic benefits of the SWP to both Australian employers and Pacific Island seasonal workers. However, there are limited studies about agricultural knowledge exchange that occurs via the SWP and the experiences of SWP workers and employers as agricultural knowledge holders. In this paper, we present findings from interviews with 4 Australian employers and 63 workers (from Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu) about agricultural knowledge and skills acquired and exchanged between Australia and the Pacific, enabled via SWP participation. Based on this data, collected in 2021, we present future opportunities for research and development interventions that can be embedded in Pacific labour mobility programs to augment agricultural knowledge exchange opportunities to support food security and COVID-19 economic impact recovery in the Pacific.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on production and trade direction of high value 'niche' crop products in small Island countries: A case study of Fiji** • Nandakumar

M. Desai, Abdul Kader, Sonny Lameta, The University of the South Pacific – Samoa Campus, Vinod Naik, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, India, Leslie T. Ubaub and Irene R. Chand, The University of the South Pacific – Samoa Campus

Increasing integration of global markets after the WTO brought several changes in fresh agricultural crops export. Ginger, papaya and kava are niche crops of Fiji. Thus, there is a need to analyse the growth trends for acreage, productivity and direction of these crop exports (2013-2020). Over the years, ginger supply has been mainly driven by expansion of area rather than productivity while kava has been driven by both. Contrastingly, papaya supply declined with reductions in both area and productivity. An analysis of Nominal Protection Coefficient (NPC) indicated export competitiveness for ginger and papaya, but not for kava, in the global market. The Markov chain model was used to assess transition probabilities in both quantity and value for export destination of these crops. Results showed that USA and New Zealand are the most stable markets for ginger and papaya, while other countries are for kava. Forecasted quantities and values show an increasing trend for ginger, papaya and kava in USA, Australia and other countries, respectively.

**Local coalitions for economic recovery and food security – experiences from Vanuatu** • Ellis Silas and Jilda Shem, Vanuatu Skills Partnership

Faced with the dual crisis of COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold, Vanuatu faces significant challenges in its recovery, particularly with regard to revitalising economic growth and ensuring food security. However, the crisis has also catalysed an increased focus on, and appetite for, local resilience, freed from an over-reliance on external inputs and supply chains. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership, a locally-led reform initiative and its network of provincial Skills Centres under the Ministry of Education and Training, is supporting this new momentum – facilitating local coalitions and networks, particularly in the agriculture, creative industries and tourism sectors. These approaches are bringing together local producers to work collectively to build demand for their products and services, and stimulating and providing access to new domestic markets. Ellis Silas, a senior manager of the Partnership, along with Jilda Shem, manager of the Malampa province Skills Centre, will provide insights into this national recovery movement.

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## HEALTH SYSTEMS

**Strengthening fragile health systems: The case of Fiji** • Neil Sharma, Medical Practitioner, Suva

**COVID-19 in PNG** • Shane Stockil and Natalie Gray, International SOS

PNG has not been spared the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date there have been over 17,000 reported cases, placing pressure on an already fragile health system and economy. COVID-19 vaccination of essential workers is a key pillar of the PNG Government's COVID-19 response. In March 2021, Australia donated vaccines for front line health workers in Port Moresby. International SOS was engaged by DFAT to not only administer the vaccines, but also to deliver a significant Vaccine Safety Communications Campaign to promote vaccination and challenge the negative impacts of social media. From rapid mobilisation and complex logistics, to overcoming misinformation and vaccine hesitancy, this presentation explores the challenges and successes of the initial vaccine rollout.

**Reversing the NCD trend in the Pacific: Promising results from a three-year pilot, testing behaviour science applications and 'edutainment' to address Pacific's most intractable problem** • Simona Achitei, DT Global, and Aya Vang, Busara Centre for Behaviour Economics

The Pacific Island Food Revolution (PIFR) is a social and behaviour change communications program that takes an innovative, evidence-based and culturally grounded approach to addressing the non-communicable disease (NCD) crisis in the Pacific. It combines entertainment with insights from behavioural science to tailor messaging and 'nudges' for impact. In just under three years, PIFR has become a powerful Pacific brand, with an estimated 5 million weekly viewers across 12 Pacific countries, and a further 5.3 million users reached through social media. This paper will present evidence that PIFR is changing attitudes and eating habits. COVID-19 has provided an unexpected favourable environment that works to condition behaviour change aligned to PIFR's goals. This paper argues that PIFR is not only a highly cost-effective blueprint for NCD prevention, but also a credible part of the NCD solution in the Pacific.



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