2020 has been a year of lockdown and closed borders. We couldn’t travel so we wrote, publishing 364 blogs. Thank you to our authors and readers for supporting us throughout our tenth year of blogging.

In case you missed a few, or want to revisit your favourites, here are some of our most popular blogs for the year. Of course, COVID-19 dominated, but it wasn’t the only topic. Scroll down towards the end for summer reading suggestions.

This is our last blog for 2020. Have a relaxing holiday and see you in the new year. We start again on Monday 11 January 2021.

**International development**

[COVID-19, localisation and locally led development: a critical juncture](#) by Chris Roche and Fiona Tarpey

[International (development) cooperation in a post-COVID-19 world: a new way of interaction or super-accelerator?](#) by Artemy Izmestiev and Stephan Klingebiel

[Time to end the hustle culture in international development](#) by Kate Wilson

[The problem with Doing Development Differently](#) by Terence Wood

[COVID-19: three ways to support women, girls and vulnerable groups in humanitarian settings](#) by Leisa Gibson and Leda Tyrell
Australian aid

Australian aid in five years’ time by Graham Teskey

Defence and aid: unprecedented divergence by Stephen Howes

COVID-19, and Australian and New Zealand aid to the Pacific by Terence Wood

The aid budget and COVID-19 strategy by Stephen Howes

Oxfam Australia’s woes: a sign of the times? by Stephen Howes and Sherman Surandiran

Asia

Pivoting to respond to COVID-19: early thoughts from the Philippines by Nicola Nixon, Sam Chittick and Jaime Faustino

Vietnam: a COVID-19 success story by Tran Chung Chau, Michael D. Gregorio and Nicola Nixon

Peace and the pandemic: the impact of COVID-19 on conflict in Asia by Adam Burke

Stop widening gender inequalities: Asia’s COVID-19 responses must leave no one behind by Chamaiporn Siangyen

Vietnam’s low-cost COVID-19 battle shows the world what can be done by Misha Coleman and Margaret Sheehan

South Korea’s COVID-19 response: hard lessons on saving lives by Kwang Kim, Kyung-sook Lee and Jaemyung Lee

Taiwan’s experience with COVID-19, and aid to the Pacific by Yun-Ching Tseng, Yan-Tzung Cheng and Chun-Hsuan Sung
Gender equality in China’s labour market: some worrying signs by Jeni Klugman, Limin Wang and Meiyan Wang

PNG

How PNG lost US$120 million and the future of deep-sea mining by Colin Filer, Jennifer Gabriel and Matthew G. Allen

Against amending the Constitution to make PNG a Christian country by Robin Oge

What it takes to change a prime minister in PNG by Michael Kabuni

Not all men are violent – but PNG is not safe for women by Geejay P. Milli

Climate change: a sign of the ‘End Times’ by Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam and Kylie McKenna

PNG’s job crisis and COVID-19 by Stephen Howes and Jotam Sinopane

PNG budget: pluses and minuses by Maholopa Laveil and Dek Joe Sum

Debt financing without development in PNG by Joe Taia Kapa

Pacific and Timor-Leste

Fiji’s economic freefall, and the government’s response by Neelesh Gounder

COVID-19 and Solomon Islands: the first casualties and possible ramifications by Transform Aqorau

Bigger than aid: Vanuatu’s citizenship schemes by Sherman Surandiran and Stephen Howes

Adventures in the East Timorese bureaucracy by Joao Almeida and Gordon Peake

Young in rural Timor-Leste: poor, hungry and bored by Akito Ximenes and
Michael Rose

**COVID-19: economic damage and Pacific strengths** by Stephen Howes and Sherman Surandiran

**Tonga’s double whammy: COVID-19 and tropical cyclones** by Ofakilevuka (‘Ofa) Guttenbeil-Likiliki

**How is Tuvalu securing against COVID-19?** by Carol Farbotko and Taukiei Kitara

**Do Papuan lives matter?** by Arichika Okazaki and Grant Walton

**Time for a Pacific Community** by Biman Chand Prasad

**Pacific labour mobility**

**For Tonga, Australian labour mobility more important than aid and trade combined** by Stephen Howes and Beth Orton

**The Pacific remittances boom: it’s for real** by Stephen Howes and Sherman Surandiran

**Licensed agents: the key to Vanuatu’s SWP success** by Joanne Wade

**Throwing it all away? Vanuatu’s abolition of licensed SWP and RSE agents** by Richard Curtain and Stephen Howes

**Pacific Islander communities and employment in Australia** by Beth Orton and Ryan Edwards

**The PLS: beefing up Australia’s meet industry** by Holly Lawton

COVID-19: **RSE** and **SWP** by Rochelle Bailey and Charlotte Bedford

**Aid to the Pacific**

Australian aid to PNG - **Part 1** and **Part 2** by John Ma’o Kali CMG OBE
Aid to the Pacific is the least value for money by Carolyn Hunt

Australia leaves Fiji to flounder by Stephen Howes

What ails Australian aid to the Pacific? Two Pacific expert views by Sadhana Sen

Comparing China’s and Taiwan’s aid to the Pacific by Denghua Zhang

Summer reading suggestions: 2020 book reviews and more

Aid’s implementariat: national and invisible by Gordon Peake

Behrouz Boochani’s No Friend but the Mountains: an Oceanian lens by Michelle Nayahamui Rooney

Fishing for success: lessons in Pacific regionalism by Bob Warner

PNG on the border: too close to ignore, but what to do? by Stephen Howes

The Watermill: compelling stories of injustice by Gordon Peake

Providing by leaving: a gripping tale by Michael Rose

Personal stories

Growing up in Papua New Guinea: a six-part series by UPNG undergraduates.

Poverty in China: a personal encounter – part one and two by Huiyuan Liu

COVID-19 stories from PNG, Fiji and China

Farewell. We sadly said goodbye in 2020 to some very fine people

Obituary for Simon Tosali by Paul Flanagan

Vale Dr James Scambary by Gordon Peake

Vale Nahau Rooney by Sadhana Sen and Gynnie Kero
Disclosure

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Link: https://devpolicy.org/best-of-the-blog-2020-20201218/
Date downloaded: 27 June 2024

Best of the Blog 2020
By Arichika Okazaki and Stephen Howes
18 December 2020

The tragic death of George Floyd has revitalised the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement not only in the USA, but also in other parts of the world. In one of Australia’s closest neighbours, Indonesia, the BLM movement has helped place a spotlight on the long-running grievances held by those who identify as West Papuans and call for self-determination in Indonesia’s eastern provinces.
In West Papua, many indigenous Melanesians have been fighting against human rights violations – including unlawful arrests, violence against civilians, and violations against the right to peaceful assembly and association – committed by the Indonesian government since it took control of the territory in 1963. While international attention waxes and wanes, recent local conflagrations between militia and the Indonesian armed forces, as well as urban protests, have drawn international attention to West Papua’s struggle.

The renewed momentum of BLM has sparked the Papuan Lives Matter (PLM) movement, which has again helped highlight the ongoing concerns of those living in this troubled region. Photos and videos of protests and human rights abuses are shared over social media with the hashtag #PapuanLivesMatter. Media companies around the world have in turn highlighted racism and human rights violations in West Papua (as seen here, here, here, here, here and here). Indonesian Human rights lawyer Veronica Koman suggests that there is now even greater “sympathy from Indonesian people towards West Papuans” than during the uprising last year.

Global and national concern evoked through the PLM movement has put pressure on the Indonesian government; this has resulted in the recent “victory for political prisoners”. Seven Papuan men, known as ‘Balikpapan Seven’ who participated in anti-racism rallies and were arrested last year, were found guilty of treason but were only sentenced to up to 11 months in prison, much less than the sentences sought by Indonesian prosecutors of 5 to 17 years. While a small victory in relation to the protestors demands – the end of racism, a referendum on independence, and intervention from the United Nations and the international community – “[t]he world-wide pressure, from civil societies to legislatures, made all the difference.”

Yet in the Pacific region, only a brave few have dared highlight the plight of West Papuans.

There is a natural empathy for the plight of West Papuans amongst many
grassroots Melanesians, and high-profile Pacific leaders have spoken against violence and expressed their support for the West Papuan cause (for example, the governor of Papua New Guinea’s National Capital District Powes Parkop and Vanuatu Prime Minister Bob Loughman). However, most Pacific governments remain more circumspect in regards to their support.

This is in part due to Indonesian efforts to undermine support for West Papua. For example, Indonesian diplomacy contributed to Nauru and Tuvalu softening their support for West Papua, despite the significant role they had played in gaining regional support for the cause (for example, through participating in the Pacific Coalition on West Papua since 2016).

Australia, a key donor to Indonesia and the Pacific, has taken a cautious approach to the West Papuan issue, despite some commentators accusing it of turning a “blind eye” to these grievances.

The biggest reason for Australia’s indifference is its close relationship with Indonesia and the benefits that flow from this relationship. Indonesia is predicted to become the fifth largest economy in the world by 2030, and has become a key trading partner for Australia. The two countries’ trade in goods and services was worth A$17.8 billion in 2018-19, which makes Indonesia Australia’s second largest trading partner in the Pacific following New Zealand, and the thirteenth largest overall. Australia’s efforts to maintain close economic ties are outlined in the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which came into effect in July 2020.

Indonesia’s growing influence in the Pacific also helps explain Australia’s silence. With China’s rising influence, some suggest it is crucial for Australia to keep Indonesia as a close ally to maintain its power within the Pacific. Hugh White suggests Indonesia is “the only one of our neighbours that’s strong enough to really work with us to help to secure the region.”

Moreover, Australia’s support for independence in Timor-Leste significantly
strained its relations with its northern neighbour. Four years after Timor-Leste’s formal independence, Australia also created a furore when it granted temporary protection visas to 42 Papuan asylum seekers; Indonesia responded by withdrawing its ambassador to Australia and announcing that it would be “reviewing” its bilateral cooperation. This incident led to both countries signing the Lombok Treaty, which obliges them to have “mutual respect for the sovereignty”, making it even harder for the Australian government to act on the issues in West Papua.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further undermine global and regional attention. As the pandemic consumes news cycles, and nations turn inwards, international awareness and concern will likely wane.

COVID-19 also directly threatens Papuan lives. West Papuans are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to limited access to health facilities. As of 30 September, there were 8,087 cases reported in West Papua and Papua provinces, though the rate of testing is well below World Health Organisation’s recommended rate. Despite this growing threat, West Papuans continue to protest; recently, en masse, they demanded the release of political prisoners, commemorated the 1962 New York Agreement against injustice and demonstrated against the extension of the Special Autonomy Law. In the provincial capital, Jayapura, many demanded a referendum on secession from Indonesia. Of course, such public gatherings risk spreading the virus more widely throughout the population (particularly as video footage suggests that mask wearing and social distancing are not strictly in place among protesters).

While responses to police brutality in the USA and subsequent PLM movement have helped focus attention on the plight of West Papuans, the COVID-19 pandemic might just prove to be yet another threat to West Papuan lives and another roadblock to self-determination. As the pandemic threatens to turn attention elsewhere, given ongoing human rights violations and a looming health crisis, it is now even more important that the international community and sympathetic Indonesians pressure the Indonesian government to help ensure
Papuan lives really do matter.

Disclosure

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