

Development economics in the Vanuatu context: one size doesn't fit all

By Daniel Gay and Tess Newton Cain

In Port Vila recently a group of more than 40 people from government, academia, the private sector, civil society and donor partners came together for the second 'Devpacific Dialogues' event. Daniel Gay's presentation drew on his book ["Reflexivity and Development Economics: Methodology, Policy and Practice"](#) and his professional experience, including his work as an ODI fellow in Vanuatu.

Daniel [presented](#) the key arguments from his book and devoted a lot of attention to his critical analysis of economic development in Vanuatu and the role of donors. He particularly focused on the Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) of the late 1990s and early-2000s, a fiscal retrenchment program supported by the ADB. The presentation was very well received and generated many questions and discussion. In relation to the use of external policy advice, Daniel noted that it has its place because if all you look to is context there is no opportunity to learn from others. But internal actors need the capacity to modify the 'development narrative' drawing on what they know about context. There are some indications that Vanuatu has learned lessons from the CRP experience. At the time of CRP, only two qualified economists worked in government. Seventeen years on, policymakers are better equipped to engage more robustly with international agencies. It was agreed that development economists (and other development practitioners) need to design methods to reflect the interests and needs of the poorest and most disadvantaged because these are the people who matter and are most affected by policies and programmes. It takes bravery on the part of political leaders to undertake adjustment of development narratives and while there are

instances of this happening, it is not evident across the board. However, there needs to be a focus on strengthening institutions and not being reliant on individuals. Learning about and engaging with the context in Vanuatu (and elsewhere) requires appropriate resources because it is not optional - it is crucial to achieving any measure of meaningful success.

Photos from this event can be viewed [here](#).

“Devpacific Dialogues” are events designed to create intellectually stimulating spaces where colleagues from all sectors can meet to share knowledge and form connections to support development in Vanuatu and elsewhere in the Pacific island region. For more information, please contact tess@devpacific.org.

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