Governance Challenges for Pacific Island states

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Abstract

Pacific Island states are being pressed to improve governance both by international institutions and aid donors, and by the need to provide for citizens. In a number of Pacific countries modern politics has clashed with traditional practices of leadership, consultation and resource management. Parliaments in some cases are not performing as they should to check executive power and scrutinise government accounts, and the transparency of decision-making by state agencies needs to be improved. An active and confident civil society, aware of its rights and assisted by an active and informed media, can add significantly to good governance. At the regional level the Pacific Islands Forum is embarking on a Pacific Plan that includes key good governance objectives. There are positive developments such as digitization of communications, the emergence of a well-educated class and civil society sector, and the expansion of the media, which will give greater access to global information.

Tension exists in the Pacific between ideals of governance and realities on the ground.[1] On the one hand there is much talk of putting

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[1] At the time of writing, for instance, the Somare government in Papua New Guinea was saved from collapse by a cabinet reshuffle. The Solomon Islands was slowly returning from the brink of complete breakdown of the state. The Vanuatu Parliament was dissolved after a newly elected President was found to be ineligible for office due to existing criminal convictions. A number of senior Fijian office holders, including the Vice-President, the deputy-speaker of Parliament, Fiji's Ambassador to the United Nations (a former Chief of Police), and the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces were either facing charges of treason or being investigated on charges of treason or mutiny. Fiji's main opposition party was refusing to participate in a parliamentary

in place the various institutional mechanisms and processes to deliver improved governance to Pacific peoples; while on the other, news media as well as more analytic sources report little substantial improvement in government performance and in some cases clear indications of decline. Also, tensions exist between introduced concepts of law and governance and Pacific traditions of authority, state, and society: not all the contradictions that emerge from the combination of these two sources of governance have been resolved.

Given these tensions, this paper suggests that while governance capacities are in fact strengthening, a set of more foundational questions still need to be contemplated in order for authentic approaches to Pacific governance to emerge and demonstrate their effectiveness. This is because the constellation of political, technological and social circumstances that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century has placed new demands on our constitutive imagination and requires the generation of a complex of new and more appropriate governance values and practices.

Some commentators regard governance as a 'faddish' concept, foreign to the Pacific region, and principally as a tool used by donors to discipline and punish stragglers in the conversion to the policies of neo-liberalism. It cannot be denied that 'good governance' elements such as transparency, accountability, democratization and the rule of law are indeed central to the reform programs offered to the small states of the Pacific by such international agencies as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank. So too, has 'good governance' often become part of 'aid conditionality'. But such programs do not exhaust the concept, nor do they represent its origins. To the contrary, it can be argued that the central concerns of governance – ascertaining the best and most effective way in which to govern – is an activity that has been undertaken through the ages, and in the context of every culture.

Governance may be too general a term to be useful (Minogue, 2002). Put broadly, it refers to the manner in which a society is governed. In a political sense, this governance is generally undertaken by a system of state. But governance has administrative, economic and

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committee investigation into reform of the sugar industry. The Nauruan Parliament could not form a government, at a time when the country was on the brink of bankruptcy.

social dimensions in addition to political, and the aspect of governance that is new is the strengthened relations between state agencies and other social actors. Political governance refers to the process of decision making to formulate policy and legislation; to judicial processes and dispute resolution; and to provisions for human rights and civil representation. In one dimension, political governance refers to the ways in which roles and responsibilities are distributed vertically within a system of government, while in another dimension (horizontal), it refers to the ways in which governmental authority responds to society's needs and concerns – to the ways in which it includes non-state actors in deliberation and decision-making. It is the quality of relations between these various dimensions of governance that determines how the concept is experienced and interpreted. Governance thus refers to a set of *processes* and *values* more than to a set of defined rules, leading some commentators to speak of the centrality of governance *interactions* between state and non-state actors rather than to governance institutions (Kooiman, 2003).

In many places the practice of governance has shifted from a focus on 'command, administration, management and control of societal institutions and spheres' to a 'steering' through the use of more inclusive processes of decision making and implementation (van Kersbergen and van Warden, 2004). This paradigmatic shift that has taken place in the relations between these two axes of power – the one that links state actors from the highest authority down to local level government – and the one that has witnessed the transformation of comparatively docile subjects into interactive citizens (and the frequent inability of these two foci of influence to understand each other) has resulted in tension and conflict in the Pacific Island countries as much as in other parts of the world. The inability of states to treat their citizens with the regard that they have desired, or to generate the levels of economic growth and development they have anticipated, has fuelled an increased resentment at the unsupervised or overbearing use of public power, and has generated greater levels of public will to call various state agencies to account for the degree of fairness, appropriateness and effectiveness of their actions. In a recent survey of reforms to parliamentary democracy in several states patterned on Westminster, for instance, Seidle and Docherty describe governance outcomes in relation to the effectiveness to electoral and constitutional arrangements:

Representation, responsiveness, and multi-level governance are in-

extricably linked. Changes to make institutions more representative may reduce the capacity of the state to respond effectively to unforeseen crises. Increasing the number of levels of government may provide more avenues for citizens to be heard, but it may also encourage squabbles over jurisdiction, which reduce responsiveness. Additionally, the state that can offer the quickest response to societal or economic challenges might be the simplest in structure, but it might also be unrepresentative of the people it governs. The challenge for parliamentary democracies is first to find the right balance among representation, responsiveness, and effective governance, and, second, to try to ensure that changes to serve one objective do not weaken the service of others (Seidle and Docherty, 2003).

This need to improve governance is being impressed on the Pacific states from both 'above' and 'below'. By 'above', I refer to the swiftly consolidating mechanisms of global and regional governance, the benefits of which can only be accessed if a state is able to present itself to international agencies as a reliable, dependable, and capable entity. By 'below', I refer to the need for states to ensure that their services reach all members of society, even the most remotely located. The need to foster the well-being of both rural and urban communities is ever-present. It must be admitted that in recent years a number of Pacific states have failed to provide their citizens with the services or the care they expected as part of their ideological 'social contract'.

At the global level, this new governance paradigm has been articulated and advocated by the UN and its agencies, amongst others. In his first Annual Report, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan described 'good governance' as comprising 'the rule of law, effective state institutions, transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, and the meaningful participation of all citizens in the political processes of their countries and in decisions affecting their lives' (*Report of the UN Secretary-General*, 1997, para. 27).

While this set of conditions that has come to constitute the 'good governance' paradigm has emerged to some extent as a response to disappointment with the performances of the late twentieth-century nation-state, other more positive origins should also be noted. Recognition of the interconnectedness of people and institutions, for instance, has provoked a search for more inclusive, less oppositional,

less conflict-laden, more deliberative approaches to complex planning and complex problem-solving (Habermas, 1996). A recent UNDP document has referred to governance as:

> The combination of institutions, systems, structures, processes, practices, relationships, and leadership behaviour that empower the governed to influence the decisions and policies that concern them and to determine who governs them as well as through what ways (*National Program*, p.10).

Another positive step has been the articulation of the concept of 'human development' as the end-goal of governance.[2] A government that focuses on human development will emphasize policies aimed at reducing instances of poverty, promoting literacy, and improving access to health services. Such are the goals, for instance, of the UNDP's 'Governance for Livelihoods and Development in the Pacific' (GOLD) project.[3]

Finally, the desire to improve on performance within both the public and private sectors, as expressed for instance in the 'learning organization' culture, has evolved into exercises to establish 'indicators of good governance'.[4]

Key Historical Trends

A brief and broad overview of key historical trends will provide some context for current discussions of governance in the Pacific states. The sovereign states of the Pacific emerged from colonial experience. At independence, most adopted the political cultures and institutions most familiar to them, those of their former masters. Their boundaries generally followed those of the colonial states, resulting in a patchwork of states of small size and limited institutional and eco-

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[2] Sen (1999, 20002). The UNDP Human Development Report, 1990, is on the web at http://www.undp.org/hdr For the Pacific Islands, see UNDP (1999), online at http://hdr.undp.org/reports/view_reports.cfm?region=PCF&regionname=PACIFIC%20

[3] http://www.undp.org.fj/gold/index.html. At the global level, Richard Falk explores the parameters of 'humane governance'. See Falk (2000)

[4] The Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance at the University of the South Pacific is developing one such index: see Duncan, R., T. Toatu, and A. Gani. (2003). 'A Conceptual Framework for the Development of a Composite Governance Index for the Pacific Island Countries', (mimeo).

nomic capacity. This wholesale adoption of introduced constitutional and legal systems had the advantage of making the Pacific states instantly recognizable under the prevailing system of nation states in the international community. Less constructively, a lack of consultation and dialogue on the part of 'the peoples' of these states regarding the types of constitutional orders being established often led to a mismatch of political systems and fundamental aspects of their underlying cultures. Speaking of the Solomon Islands, for instance, Turnbull has recently suggested: '…the Solomons state is a blend of traditional behaviour and Western liberal structures. The way that power relations are institutionalized in it suggests that the state, in its existing form and mode of operation, has little chance of being able to significantly improve the quality of life of its citizens.' (Turnbull, 2002).

Political governance in a number of Pacific states has thus created a rift between 'modern politics' and long-standing traditions of consultation, leadership, problem solving, and resource management embedded within the diverse cultures of the region (Huffer and Molisa, 1999). Several Pacific states, notably Fiji, continue to define the rights of individuals on the basis of ethnicity rather than citizenship (Lawson, 1996). Contemporary roles for 'chiefly authority' remain ambiguous, regardless of whether or not chiefs enjoy constitutional recognition (White and Lindstrom, 1997; Shuster and Larmour, 1998).

Undesirable outcomes have included (a) fragile formation of executive power (governments under parliamentary systems tend to expend much energy retaining their mandate – that is, their majority numbers in the legislature – and so have less energy available to focus on governance needs); (b) the low 'output' of parliaments - though there may be some exceptions - has led to a lack of law reform, and lack of passage of law, and as a result a weak and unresponsive legal environment; (c) a lack of substantive oversight of executive government, a lack of scrutiny of tabled reports, and a low level of parliamentary committee effectiveness; (d) emergence of party-political conflict at both national and local levels (not necessarily premised on the articulation of alternative political philosophies); (e) lack of growth of 'contemporary customary law' and the prevalence of introduced legal values (Care and Newton, 2000); (f) uncertainty over the content of such rights as freedom of speech, movement, and association, and (g) exploitation of current governance systems by national

elites to the detriment of remote and less powerful localities.

The inability of current governance systems to ensure steady economic and social advance, or to solve pressing problems related to land tenure and use, or ensure development of the private sector, has fuelled resentments based on ethnicity or on separatist sympathies (Larmour, 2002). NGOs and civil society actors have spread rapidly in the region in response to felt needs at community level. While this civil society activity has been mostly beneficial, it can in its current form also fuel conflict in the public policy arena.

International agencies have multiplied their activities in the region in the past three decades, although the small size of some PICs has limited their capacity to fully interact with international agencies, or to fully participate in the development of norms and public policy at the international level. The Pacific Islands Forum and other agencies in the region have provided a sound platform for the development of region-wide technical cooperation but cannot ensure implementation at national level. The participation of Pacific states in regional and global agreements already constitutes an exchange of some sovereign power for mutually beneficial shared standards, but the extent of inroads into 'full sovereignty' has not been fully assessed.

Institutional Strengthening and Reform

One of the key themes in improving governance is the strengthening of state institutions, and in some cases, institutional reform, in pursuit of greater accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness. These normative goals need to be interpreted in a realistic way in each specific setting. Although the 'key institutions' in the modern state are the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, there is often a range of additional agencies created by the constitution itself, or by one or other branch of government. Many Pacific governments have also supported large public enterprise sectors, and reform of these institutions (mostly in the sense of scaling down or privatizing) has been a significant factor in the economic and political life of states from Fiji, to Solomon Islands (Eldridge, 1989), to Cook Islands, to Kiribati (Dubsky and Pathak, 2001; Ray, 1999).

Constitutional Legitimacy and Constitutional Dialogue

Pacific countries differ in the degree to which their constitutions provide legitimacy for their state systems, and this weakness, it can be argued, is a contributing factor to a sense of alienation of the people from their laws and their formal systems of authority that exists in some places. In brief, legitimacy is strengthened where discussion of a state's constitutional foundations is widespread, and where the resulting constitution actually reflects the social and political values, and the historical circumstances, of its peoples. Elsewhere I have described the extent to which independence constitutions of Pacific states owe more to colonial influences and circumstances than to post-colonial needs and aspirations (Hassall and Saunders, 2002) .

Fiji, of course, is quite familiar with constitutional dialogue and constitutional reform, and the current constitution is the outcome of an exhaustive process of inquiry (Reeves, Vakatora and Lal, 1996; Lal, 1998). In Kiribati, Marshall Islands and FSM, similarly, constitutional review is an accepted periodic exercise. But in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu there has been only limited public dialogue on the constitution since independence, despite in some cases a constitutional mandate to do this. On a regional basis, therefore, and not looking only at the case of Fiji, we can say that the need exists for the initiation of effective processes of constitutional review.

Values generally associated with constitutionalism and the rule of law include sovereignty of the people, representative government, majority rule, limited government, individual rights and freedoms (in some cases articulated in bills of rights), judicial independence, supremacy of the civilian power over military authority, specified protections for the rights of minorities, and in some cases promotion of individual and social welfare. In such a form of government, high expectations are placed on all branches of government, but particularly the executive, to act in the public interest. There must also be sufficient provision for accountability of government. In addition to the holding of 'free and fair' elections at regular intervals, ensuring freedom of the press and of individual expression, and a 'separation of power' between the three principal organs of state (the legislature, executive, and judiciary), is the presumption that the well-being of the constitutional order as a whole is monitored by 'civil society'.

Effective constitutional dialogue may not seem essential for day

to day living, but is indispensable to good governance in the longer term, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, since the intent of such dialogue is to produce a governance system acceptable to all, it must consider the full range of political views present within a society without being captured by any single one of them. Secondly, such dialogue is yet to fully consider the issue of the extent to which the systems of governance introduced in independence constitutions are reflective of contemporary Pacific values. I leave aside the issue of the extent to which 'modern' constitutions mirror 'Pacific tradition': the task should more properly be viewed as one of bringing together a set of institutions and shared values that – however much they build on past practices – take Pacific societies into a prosperous future. To make this come about, there is need for the establishment of procedures for constitutional dialogue that are insulated from strategic interests within their societies, and which can include all citizens in a process of public dialogue that has as its goal the refinement of a founding document that truly reflects the will of the people. In the absence of this exercise, difficult though it be, the framework of the 'modern state' runs the risk of eluding the affection and allegiance of the people.

Given the corporate or communal structure of most Pacific Island societies, it will be important to consider the extent to which Pacific states should continue to be modeled on the concept of individualism that underpins the laws and institutions of states in the West. Secondly, there is an on-going question concerning the extent to which the prosperity of agricultural societies that have a basically subsistence and barter economy is judged against that of fully monetized economies and societies (Gegeo, 1998). 'A little admitted fact', writes McIntyre of development in New Caledonia, '…is that neither tribal life nor traditional practices are compatible with the economic development activities that sustain independence.' (McIntyre, 2003).

Pacific Parliaments and the Future of Westminster

The parliament plays a vital role in the governance of every state, but in some instances parliaments in the Pacific are not performing as expected. In most cases (Tonga aside, where the Monarch still retains executive power (Lawson, 1996; Campbell, 2001)) the constitution delegates to the parliament full legislative and executive power, and even in some cases a range of judicial powers. In practice, the roles of

parliament are often diminished by those of the executive government. Much of the important work of the legislature is disrupted by the strategic needs of political parties, which focus on winning and retaining the allegiance of a majority of the members of parliament, and on distributing patronage as the principal means of doing these things. In the meantime, the accountability that parliament is meant to provide in such matters as scrutiny of public accounts, and in controlling the use of power by the executive, is often lacking.

While the fragility of Pacific parliaments is often attributed to personalities, and the volatility of political parties, it may also be necessary to examine the extent to which the Westminster model of parliament is in fact appropriate to the Pacific social and historical context (Care, 2004). In the face of much activity focused on promoting human development, much of the energy of those in high elected political offices is focused on maintaining their hold over executive power and distribution of patronage—whether in the form of electoral development funds or appointments to government and semi-government boards and other agencies. While 'politicians' give their attention to 'power' and resources of the state, the needs of the people in their care grow ever greater. There is, thus, at the present across the Pacific a sense of disillusion with party-politics, and a wariness of political actors.

The Westminster model, which systemically requires the formation of a 'government' and an 'opposition', presumes the existence of political parties where none existed, and depends on a model of political debate that doesn't reflect Pacific traditions of dialogue or consultation. One persistent outcome has been parliamentary instability due to competition amongst political actors to obtain executive power. Whereas the 'tradition' in Westminster is for governments to be formed following elections, or following a confidence vote in which a majority voted against the Prime Minister, the practice in most Asia Pacific states has been for parties to pursue executive power at any opportunity. A lack of party traditions has fuelled the movement of MPs between parties, from government to opposition and vice versa. 'Anti-hopping' electoral laws are being adopted in an effort to fortify the current system but do not address the fundamental structural issues and lead to a reduction rather than an enlargement of democratic practice. Is the answer greater institutionalization of party systems or a re-examination of more fundamental processes? Mainwaring explains:

> Although weak institutionalization is typically associated with a variety of problems, this does not imply that greater institutionalization is always better. To the contrary, very high levels of institutionalization may result from a stultified party system. The relationship between party-system institutionalization and the quality of democracy, then, is far from linear, and an institutionalized party system is far from a panacea (Mainwaring, 1998).

Given the inability of most Pacific legislatures to adequately monitor and control the executive branch of government's use of power, there is no harm in searching for alternative methods of constitutional design, which retain the positive aspects of democratic culture while limiting the capacity of partisan activities to destabilize governance processes. At the same time, it must be said that notwithstanding the dilemma of how best to improve the performance of parliament, and to secure the stability of the executive branch of government, there are throughout the region a cadre of several thousand public servants in all sectors carrying out their duties competently, with care, and with a conscientious belief that they are doing what is in their power to do to build their country. They are for the most part doing so for little pay, and in some cases with little prospect of spectacular promotion. Adequate means of recognition and reward of such public service is no doubt vital to the enhancement of public service performance and morale.

Transparency and Accountability in Executive Government

A significant challenge at the current time is improving the transparency in decision-making by state agencies. Whereas the workings of the judiciary are almost entirely in the public domain, and whereas sessions of parliament are similarly open to scrutiny, key areas of concern include transparency in the awarding of business contracts by state agencies, in the making of appointments to senior public service and constitutional positions, and in the workings of the executive itself.

In the case of appointments to senior public service positions, good governance standards encourage the use of an impartial body, other than the executive, to make appointments on the basis of merit and applicability, and free of political pressure. So too with judicial

appointments, for which the existence of some form of judicial appointments body can reduce the potential for political interference. The goals of improving both accountability and transparency can be furthered by the appointment of an Ombudsman Commission – an investigatory body established by the state – sometimes by the constitution itself – and invested with sufficient judicial powers to look into complaints derived from actions of government.

Some initiatives have come at the regional level. The Pacific Islands Forum issued a statement of 'Eight Principles of Accountability' in economic and financial management, and also worked on a model leadership code for small states and a Regional Leadership code.[5] Technical support can improve the degree of accountability of the activities of executive government within the parliament. The failure of many legislatures to scrutinize the work of the executive government, as the Westminster model requires, marks the start of this failure to ensure accountability. At the technical level, improvements can be made through strengthening the capacities of parliamentary committees, and strengthening administrative branches such as its legislative office, the office of the speaker, and the parliament's library and research services. The improvement of such support services to individual members of parliament, and to parliamentary committees, will enhance their effectiveness in the legislative process.

This quest for the strengthening of transparency and accountability also deepens the legitimacy of 'the rule of law' – a concept developed as part of the 'common law' tradition of the English but having parallels in other legal traditions. It includes the notions that no person is punishable or can lawfully be made to suffer except for a distinct breach of law, as determined by a court; and that all people regardless of their rank or condition, are subject to the law and to the jurisdiction of the courts. The 'rule of law' is associated with ideas of 'due process' and 'natural justice', which suggest that all decisions must align with a generalized notion of law being applied in a just manner. Laws are 'legitimate' when they are made by a representative parliament, are protected by a court, and are implemented by an accountable executive. Laws must be generated and issued through agreed and transparent processes.

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[5] One report on progress is on the Forum Secretariat's website at http://www.forumsec.org.fj/news/2002/Mar03.htm

The Emergence of Pacific Islands Civil Society

Social governance envisages the promotion of voluntary forms of public association; of cooperation in politics; the search for a self-sustaining democracy which takes forms of relationship that are not destructive or inherently conflict laden. Civil society actors and organizations have emerged quite rapidly across the Pacific in recent years, and provide considerable resources for the elaboration of governance partnerships with the state. A central purpose of democratic constitutions has always been protection of the concept of a 'public sphere' in which all citizens, or non-state actors ?including individuals, peoples, corporations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – are free to discuss issues of public concern.

The promotion of human rights – frequently a concern of civil society organizations?remains an underdeveloped aspect of governance regimes in the Pacific. Whereas Pacific Islands constitutions invariably include lengthy human rights protections, many international treaties remain unsigned, and few states have established independent human rights agencies. The Asia Pacific Human Rights Forum, an association of national Human Rights bodies in the region, includes just one Pacific Island state (Fiji) amongst its twelve members (Asia Pacific Forum).

An active and confident civil society, aware of its rights, and upholding values of free speech and free association, can provide feedback on the performance of government, and constitutes a 'space' for discussion of alternative policy options. It plays a crucial role in monitoring the activities of the state, reporting abuses, and offering critiques. While these roles are often adversarial they need not be so; there are many instances of civil society agencies working cooperatively with the state, for instance, in the provision of services such as health and education. There is significant activity in the civil society, with the emergence of burgeoning numbers of NGOs, and activities of a scientific and technical nature. But the work of NGOs can be undermined by an undercurrent of rivalry between prominent personalities, entanglement with political processes, and competition for scarce donor resources. In other words, good governance is important also for NGOs.

The media comprise one specific group that plays a significant role in relation to both civil society and the state. It bears responsibil-

ity for reporting on public affairs impartially and objectively, and provides a powerful means of communication and analysis that can benefit both the people and the state. Media coverage of the activities of state agencies and office holders provides a valuable mechanism for checking abuses of power. ICTs have expanded the reach and the scope of media. Whereas news could once only be spread by radio, or newsprint, it is now dispersed quickly across the Pacific by cable television and the internet (Asia Pacific Media Network). There are newsportals for individual PICs as well as for the region as a whole, and there are websites by the various branches of government. Indeed, the emergence of digital technologies in the Pacific has transformed governance relationships. In recognition of the trend, the Pacific Islands Forum published a *Communications Action Plan* in 1999, which was reviewed in 2002 and cited in 2004 as the basis for the development of a 'digital strategy' for the Pacific region.

Regional Governance

Governance occurs at regional level as well as national and local. The Pacific Islands Forum and other regional agencies have coordinated considerable technical cooperation between the Pacific states over several decades ?often in the fields of trade and finance agreements, but more recently in security matters and increasingly in the establishment of regional norms for economic and financial good governance. Civil conflict in both Bougainville and Solomon Islands escalated significantly in the 1990s, and after the shock of the Fiji and Solomons coups in 2000, the Pacific states devised the 'Biketawa Principles' to facilitate their collaborative involvement in future conflict resolution missions. This growing appreciation of the ways in which the Forum is able to intervene at the early stages of a problem has generated new thinking on the possibilities for pro-active regional governance initiatives.

The Eminent Persons Report

In April 2004 the leaders of the Pacific Island states met in Auckland to consider a report on the Forum Eminent Person's Group review of the performance of the Pacific Islands Forum. This regional organization had agreed at its 34th meeting in Auckland in 2003 to such a

review for the purpose of seeking a 'refreshed mandate and vision'. In particular, the leaders were seeking views on how to improve the Forum's capacity to provide leadership on regional cooperation and integration. They had reached consensus that the serious challenges facing the region required full consideration of how its limited human and material resources could be pooled, and issued a vision of the Pacific region as one of 'peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity' [6]. A 'Pacific Plan' is to be drawn up, indicating how the Forum can deliver on the four principal objectives of promoting economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security, through the establishment of 'stronger and deeper' links between the sovereign states.

Future Trends

Reflection on the theory and practice of governance in the second half of the twentieth century has generated ever-more sophisticated understandings of how governance systems operate. The new governance paradigm emerged partly as a general response to negative experiences with the state; and partly as a result of the changed circumstances that empowered non-state actors to articulate their own views and interests quite independently of the traditional authorities. Falk (2000) has recently suggested that while the future is inherently obscure, too complex to fathom and too dependent on the vagaries of human action for good or ill, and that there can be no assurances of success, given the existence of countervailing projects and pressures, almost everything necessary for human well-being is sufficiently achievable to be worth pursuing.

In this spirit of seeking out principles of 'humane governance',

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[6] 'Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives. We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed. We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values, and for its defence and promotion of human rights. We seek partnerships with our neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all.' Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders' Retreat, Auckland, 6 April 2004. The Auckland Declaration.

we can ponder future challenges for social, economic and political governance in the Pacific region. As educational levels rise and expectations for material development rise also, resentment at lack of delivery of good governance may create an environment in which further political instability can be expected; as the gap between standards of living in the PICs and other regional states increases, increasing numbers of educated Pacific Islanders will seek to emigrate, perpetuating a cycle of human resource depletion; and in the absence of any substantial reforms of political governance, little additional economic growth performance can be expected.

There are, however, positive trends and opportunities. Digitization will transform communications in the region (with a large potential impact on governance and business opportunities). An emerging class of well-educated public servants and teachers throughout the region will seek opportunities to contribute to the development of their nation and the Pacific generally. A rapid flourishing of the civil society sector will similarly seek to contribute in numerous sectors ?from advocacy, to training, to service delivery. Media will spread – both conventional media such as newsprint, radio, and TV, and the 'new media' of cable, internet, and satellite – all combining to provide ever greater access to global information. The objective of those committed to improving governance is to procure the technical expertise, encourage the public will, and refine the intentionality of those in public life, to ensure that improvements in governance occur. These processes can learn from global practices but must be applied in ways that are contextually relevant to the Pacific.

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