

Program 1: Governance – What's in a word?

When the World Bank and other aid donors talk about governance, they use words like 'transparency', 'equity' and 'accountability'. What does this language mean for people in the Pacific? For centuries, indigenous societies in the region have had their own ways of governing family and community. Can these traditional modes of governance now be combined with new institutions?

WILLIAM PARKINSON: As we've entered into the new millennium there are some very critical issues right across the South Pacific - how are we going to achieve political stability, good government, economic growth. I think the answers will come through a process of evolution. There is no magic wand here, we've just got to work through each issue as it comes along and deal with it.

VETUNA: Hello, I'm Pearson Vetuna. This is 'Time to Talk' - a series of programs on governance in the Pacific. Over 13 weeks, people from various parts of the region will discuss aspects of their culture and how they relate to today's political and social structures.

Today - 'Governance - What's in a word?'

RUTH LILOQULA: The simplest way for me to explain it as the beginnings of my learning of good governance is being out in the reefs collecting clam shells with my mother, and when we come across two clam shells sitting down together, I'm only allowed to take one. I am told to leave one for my children's children in the future. So it's using the resources wisely and showing that you...

FATHER JOSEPH TAKARO: As a parish rector here in Tagabe, good governance is to be a good leader in this nation and not to take that leadership for your own interest but to serve the people. As Jesus said: "I come not to be served but to serve".

SISTER LORRAINE GARASU: It's too big a word for us to understand. When people in the village ask me that, I don't even know how to answer them you know. But it's something that I feel is important for us to try to understand wherever we are, because you know there are outside things that are governing our lives at this stage. So it's important for us to know what it is really.

VETUNA: Sister Lorraine Garasu from Bougainville shares concerns expressed by many people in the Pacific. 'Good governance' is commonly heard in relation to development assistance these days, but what does it mean? And why is it so important?

The term 'good governance' emerged in the late 1980s from aid donors and international organisations like the World Bank. Although millions of dollars of aid money was being poured into developing countries, the reality was that living conditions were not improving, economies were not growing and corruption was rife.

'Good governance' is now a prominent term in international development assistance. For AusAID,

the Australian Agency for International Development, good governance means competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people's needs.

While that sounds good in principle, what does the term 'good governance' mean to the people of the Pacific?

NOEL LEVI: It becomes complex insofar as many of the Pacific Island people are concerned when outside interpretation of good governance is imposed and expected of us. So we're really trying to justify what is good governance according to outsiders' interests, but not really our own interests.

VETUNA: Noel Levi is the Secretary General of the Fiji-based Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

NOEL LEVI: We can't say that we don't want outside influence because when these countries decided to be independent, they genuinely made a decision to move away from traditional ways of governance, moving into the international, what is commonly bandied around these days is the Western style of government. But the problem that we face is that not enough credence was given to our own traditional ways of running our society, and many of our constitutions, I believe, developed on the basis of a Western style type of democracy and not taking enough input from our traditional ways. So I think that is probably where we are having some difficulty.

GRACE MOLISA: From time immemorial our diverse societies have their own notions of governance. Whether current democratic politics views traditional governance to be good or bad is another matter.

VETUNA: Grace Molisa is president of the Vanuatu National Council of Women.

GRACE MOLISA: The notion of governance and good governance being raised at this point in time in the development debate has to do with international development and the need to coordinate, if not control its process by the keepers of the purse on this globe. Certainly there's a difference between the way globalisers look at the globe and the way people on the ground live their lives on a daily basis and choose how to group, organise and govern themselves.

BERNARD NAROKOBI: Back in our traditional societies good governance in a village means they make sure there are gardens for everyone, they make sure that in times of hunger, taim bilong hangre, that they through long experience manage to keep some food in store and in stock for bad times. They make sure people have houses, they make sure that young people are brought up in the traditions and customs. So transferred into a modern state, good governance for us really is about that, it's about taking good care of our land, our resources and our relationships with one another and of course with people who we regard as allies, or friends in the working out of our common lives. Good governance, good administration, good management, a key to it is wisdom in our societies. You have to be wise, you have to be sensitive, you have to be cautious, careful in what you say, what you do, and most significantly in your distribution of food and pigs you must be fair to

everyone.

VETUNA: Bernard Narokobi from Papua New Guinea, author of 'The Melanesian Way'.

While 'good governance' is being heavily promoted in economic reform programs throughout the region, it remains an obscure concept for many people at community level.

LAIO POKA: Maybe we know what is governance but the word is new to us, that's why it's hard for us to explain or describe.

PASTOR PAIAPORU: I think some of the highly educated people will listen to this and say ah no, no, it's not that. But I will say that good governance is that which comes from God. God himself is a good governance person.

DONATUS MOLA: Sorry, you're talking about the government?

BISHOP HENK KRONENBERG: I think it has something to do with governing, with ... but I find it very strange word. (laughs).

LAWRENCE STEVENS: It's actually one of those words that annoys me. It's one of those words that has all of a sudden arrived and is being emphasised everywhere. People keep talking about governance, good governance, concepts of governance and so on. When I was studying politics we used to talk about government, we hadn't got to governance.

VETUNA: Lawrence Stevens is Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Throughout the Pacific, the Church has played an important role in peoples' lives. Beyond spiritual guidance, it's often the Church that provides services like health and education for many people, particularly in rural areas. Indeed, the Church is sometimes seen as a surrogate government.

LAWRENCE STEVENS: In some places you get the impression that it is actually the Church that is the government. People so rarely see anybody else that the Church provides health, the Church provides education, the Church provides the pastors, and the government comes around at election time and disappears again.

People tend not to like the government structure. People avoid dealing with the government as much as possible - they find the system complicated, they find that it's not a system which reaches out to them but it's something they have to fight their way through. If you talk at the village level about government, it's fascinating to hear the comments that are made by people. I've told the story before: I remember once in Rabaul when after the tsunami struck Aitape and there were people all over the country, that's one of the joys of Papua New Guinea, all over the country people were putting together money to assist the suffering. And a group came to me at Vunapope, they had come right

around the coast by boat, they represented their community and they brought the money to the Bishop's office and said that this was to go to the people in Aitape. And I said but why are you bringing it here, there are committees set up in East New Britain for this. They said there's no way we are going to put our money anywhere near anything to do with government. We believe if we leave it here it will get to the people. It struck me then - if people in the bush think this, we have a serious problem with our perceptions of government here.

VETUNA: Meanwhile Bishop Michel Visi from Vanuatu believes it's this element of trust which is lacking in the relationship between today's political leaders and the people.

MICHEL VISI: There has been a transition but it is not well done because we come from traditional society to a new system of society which is democratic and I think we don't feel at ease in this new situation. We have to learn a lot. In the traditional society, we have the chief who is known in the village and everybody knows him and he knows the people. He cannot mislead the people because he is seen every day and he is among his people every day. When he speaks, he speaks knowing that what he says is for the good of the people and people would react consequently. Sometimes there are tensions but what we can say about the traditional society is that the role of the chief is respected because he is trusted, he is the man who lives among his people. But in the new situation it is different. Election whereby leaders are appointed into parliament is political and we elect people who are not competent to do the work. A leader has to know his people and to trust his people and vice versa. And I don't know, there are many reasons, but personally I would see that this is one of the aspects of life which is not continued with this new environment of democratic society.

VETUNA: Bishop Michel Visi.

On Radio Australia, this is 'Time to Talk' - a series of programs on governance in the Pacific. Today, 'Governance - What's In a Word?'

MASIOFO LAULU FETAUI MATA'AFA: I would say you have the interest, the security of the people above everything. It's the people that are secured in every area, their physical needs, their mental needs and above all their spiritual needs. If the government hold those requirements of the people, that would be the hope of Samoa.

SUSAN SETAE: To me as the leader of the women of Papua New Guinea, good governance is the equal sharing of the resources of the country and how it is managed. It means having our people properly looked after and cared for and all services provided...

MARIE-NOELLE FERRIEUX-PATTERSON: Good governance I think is a concept also that traditional society has. Unfortunately by the fact of corruption, which is the opposite of good governance, in a way that affects directly that management of assets because management of assets is not made for the community, but it is made for the politicians for their own interest.

MEL TOGOLO: Melanesian communities do have governance, they know what is good and what is

right.

VETUNA: Mel Togolo is Vice President of the Papua New Guinea Business Council.

TOGOLO: And in fact governance worked very well in small communities in the context of Melanesian societies because those societies tend to be open in the sense that people know what the power of the chief is, or what the power of the clan leader is. People know how many pigs he's got, how many gardens he can muster up if he's asked. So in that sense the chiefly resources are quite transparent. They're not hidden in Swiss banks and central banks, they're quite open and people can judge very quickly what sort of power their leader has and how they would mould in, how they'd become part of the system. And the chief also doesn't just make decisions on his own, contrary to many beliefs, he gets his council to talk with him, he gets the people to advise him before he comes out with a decision. So the governance operated quite well in those societies, and nowadays people think that governance is a World Bank word, it never happened in other communities. No, governance did take place in our societies.

VETUNA: If transparency was a feature of traditional societies why is corruption so widespread today? Peter Aitsi is a Director of the Papua New Guinea chapter of Transparency International.

PETER AITSI: What we see now is that possibly if you call it a bastardisation of that tradition, and what we see now is people who are in power without any real claim to experience or knowledge but have a monetary value to people so they can be seen. So the people take them as leaders. But in actual fact I mean they may not be the most experienced, they may not be the most honest, they may not be the most appropriate person in providing solutions, but they have a monetary value to the people which equates to leadership at the moment. And I think if there's a comparison between traditional values that we had in the past and now, it would be that we, I think we see money as being the yardstick to measure the greatness when it should be more on what the person can give back to their communities.

VETUNA: Good governance is not just a Western concept. As we've heard, good governance prevailed in Pacific communities long before Europeans settled in the region. By and large, communities managed their resources and their lives in a fair and open way taking everybody's needs into account. The challenge is how to continue to incorporate traditional notions of good governance into inherited models of government.

Noel Levi again.

NOEL LEVI: I think more and more of the traditional ways of governing our society are finding their way into the Constitution. As more and more of our people becoming educated and also travel the world and experience the way other people live, I think they're bringing this back and going back to the roots so to speak, and bringing up traditional ways. I guess for some reason in the past when the colonials were administering us, I think there was a certain perception that anything traditional is not good and should be ashamed. And so I think many of our early leaders as much as they would

like to retain traditional ways were more or less forced into accepting modern and Western ways of organising society.

VETUNA: Noel Levi from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Next week in 'Colonial Legacies' we look at the effect of colonialism on Pacific communities.

GRACE MOLISA: Since political independence our challenge has been to unify the British national service, the French national service and the Condominium service and to bring that kind of a situation together under one umbrella of Vanuatu as an independent nation. It's not something that you do overnight and we are living with that legacy.

VETUNA: 'Time to Talk' is a series about governance in the Pacific. It's produced by Radio Australia with assistance from AusAID. Producers are Isabelle Genoux and Barry Clarke. Technical production by Ryan Egan. Don't forget to check out our website too at abc.net.au/timetotalk

I'm Pearson Vetuna - bye for now.

Program Participants:

- William Parkinson, President of the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) in Suva, Fiji
- Ruth Liliqula, a senior public servant in the Solomon Islands
- Father Joseph Takaro, Anglican Church in Tagabe, Vanuatu
- Sister Lorraine Garasu, the Interchurch Forum in Bougainville
- The late Grace Molisa, President of the Vanuatu National Council of Women
- Bernard Narokobi, Speaker of Papua New Guinea's Parliament, and author of 'The Melanesian Way'
- Bishop Michel Visi, Catholic Bishop in Vanuatu
- Noel Levi CBE, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- Lawrence Stevens, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands
- Peter Aitsi, PNG Chapter of Transparency International and General Manager of PNG FM
- Laio Poka, Crossroads shelter project in Papua New Guinea
- Pastor Paiaporu Antfalo, Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu
- Donatus Mola, member of the first House of Assembly in Papua New Guinea, and a member of the Constitutional Development Committee
- Bishop Henk Kronenberg, Catholic Church in Bougainville
- Masiofo Lauulu Fetau Mata'afa, a leading women's activist and wife of Samoa's first Prime Minister
- Susan Setae, National Council of Women of Papua New Guinea
- Marie Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, former Ombudsman in Vanuatu
- Mel Togolo, Vice President of the Papua New Guinea Business Council and General Manager (Corporate affairs) Place Niugini