

Program 6: The Governance Agenda

When overseas donors and investors promote the good governance agenda, do they affect the authority of governments? Pacific Islanders are picking and choosing from the governance agenda and adapting it to their own purposes. In the face of economic reform and structural adjustment, what do the critics say?

PEARSON VETUNA: Hello I'm Pearson Vetuna. Welcome to 'Time to Talk' - our series on governance issues in the Pacific.

Today - 'The Governance Agenda'.

NAPOLEON LIOSI: We say that no money is free and of course beggars cannot be choosers and I think I can confidently say that PNG came to a point of being a beggar and therefore we had little choice but to accept with the money other requirements of the donors.

VETUNA: Union leader Napoleon Liosi from Papua New Guinea.

The word 'governance' is very much a part of the development rhetoric these days. Indeed good governance is one of the key elements in reform programs sponsored by international institutions and aid donors in response to economic mismanagement and financial crises.

NAPOLEON LIOSI: Publicly and for purposes of diplomacy the government says that the restructuring of home grown programs, I believe I can confidently say that our government has had little choice given the financial chaos we experienced because of the Sandline, because of the 1994 volcanic eruption in Rabaul which has stretched our national purse beyond its limits, the ongoing Bougainville crisis, all had bearing on the cash flow of the country. And of course when you have internal financial problems obviously you have to seek help and the obvious institutions were the World Bank, IMF and to some extent Asian Development Bank.

VETUNA: Napoleon Liosi is General Secretary of the Public Employees Association of Papua New Guinea.

For institutions like the World Bank governance is about capacity building. It's about strengthening institutions and improving efficiency in the public service. Good governance is about creating a stable environment which encourages private investment and economic growth.

JOHN LIU: The idea of governance, it's a word that is being used quite a lot at the moment in Vanuatu and I think not many people really know about what governance is.

VETUNA: John Liu, Director of the Rural Development and Training Centres Association in

Vanuatu.

JOHN LIU: To me governance actually talks about the idea of controlling, directing, policy making, making decisions, right decisions and be able to implement those decisions in a transparent and maybe accountable way in order to meet the needs of the people in a proper way that everyone knows about it, where people are satisfied and where everyone feels that they're part of the place of the organisation of the institution that actually is trying to serve and meet the needs of the people.

VETUNA: Words like 'accountability', 'transparency' and 'democracy' underpin the governance concept. And while they are abundantly used by government officials and aid donors, how are they understood and implemented?

Former Government Minister in Solomon Islands, Alfred Sasako.

ALFRED SASAKO: We tend to use these jargons, born in incubators in New York or some other places and we tend to accept them on face value without actually analysing them and getting a grip on actually what they mean and how we are supposed to help that process to sink in to our local people, what it means, what the implications are. I think if we can make an effort to understand what transparency is, what accountability is, or at least to get a gist of what the intentions are, perhaps I mean we are on the way. Right now I think there is still a long way for us to go.

VETUNA: Increasing poverty and stagnant economic growth are some of the concerns which have led to reform programs throughout the region. But how relevant are these programs? Noel Levi from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

NOEL LEVI: One of the difficulties that we face at the Secretariat and I'm sure that member countries also face this in dealing with institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, is about post-development are we going into. Is it for the people or for the Asian Development Bank or for the World Bank? And the same with the donors, donors come into our region and we deal with them at the Forum Secretariat, they have a specific amount of aid to offer us, but then they want, you know they put a list of what they want and the nos and the yes' and all these things. So it's rather difficult and we try to work our way most of the time around these things to ensure that we're able to obtain that funding. And I think a similiar situation would exist in member countries. So I think the problem is really about dialogue and trying to come to an understanding and compromise on what is good at the end of the day for both sides. And I don't think there is enough of this going. There's too much bureaucratic processes on both sides, even from member countries and from say the World Bank for instance.

CLAIRE SLATTER: I think that policy makers and politicians have been basically driving the reform and handing it to us as a fait accompli and saying that this is the new thinking today and we've been changing course in line with what is everywhere a trend and a pattern.

VETUNA: Claire Slatter, Lecturer in History and Politics at the University of the South Pacific in

Fiji.

CLAIRE SLATTER: Actually we're not having any kind of public debate anywhere. In the case of Fiji there's not even any admission or acknowledgement of where the push for these economic policies are coming from. So firstly I think there needs to be a debate and I think that all sectors of the community need to be involved in it, and I mean more than national summit meetings, which are actually kind of rubber stamping meetings - called by government for purposes of getting some legitimation of what they're already pursuing. And I'm not talking about that, I'm actually talking about open debate on what kind of path of development etc. And this sort of dialogue and debate used to take place in the 1970s and it's not really being debated anymore.

VETUNA: Associate Professor of Economics at the USP, Wadan Narsey, also questions the global trend while recognising there is a need for change.

WADAN NARSEY: There's certainly a general philosophy that they have been pushing in the Pacific as everywhere else in the world. I know that they have made major mistakes in some places, for instance the South East Asian crisis, you know their solutions for responding to the crisis is known to have worsened the problems. So they're not necessarily very good at prescribing the appropriate policies in the first place. Although there are quite a few things which I think they are advocating which are probably great. You know throughout the Pacific we do have many, many public enterprises which are totally inefficient, you know totally bureaucratic with lots of nepotism where they suck up taxpayers funds, and they have very vociferous lobby groups fighting for them. I'm quite convinced that the majority of our countries would very, very greatly benefit by reforming many of these public enterprises by putting them onto clear transparent footings, not necessarily losing sight of the social objectives, but these have to be made transparent so that whatever is the social objective is funded in a transparent manner and not mixed up with economic objectives. You know which is a big problem because then the enterprises get away by blaming the social objectives for their incompetence and economic inefficiencies.

VETUNA: Mel Togolo from the Papua New Guinea Business Council agrees that beyond the global trend for change there is a need for internal reforms.

MEL TOGOLO: In the community where power is exercised we have lost the sense of integrity and of course duty of care and all those other things. Institutions are not addressing their use of power very well, and by power I don't mean control, here I mean power to address issues of distributive justice, issues of fairness, issues of running organisations to serve the interests of the public basically. I think it's very important and as I say government is ensuring that the rule of law is respected and that private property is respected and that leadership maintains transparency and accountability.

VETUNA: This is 'Time to Talk' on Radio Australia and Radio National - today, 'The Governance Agenda'.

Ruth Liloqula, a senior public servant in the Solomon Islands, believes that for people to take ownership of the good governance concept promoted by aid donors, they have to be involved in discussions about what they need and want.

RUTH LILOQULA: I think what we need to look at with aid donors they mean well earlier, but I think it's more with then donor assistance is concerned it's more to do with us the recipients of donors to get our act together. Some of the things that I have seen is that governance or good governance has got to be as we relate to it, in our interpretation, and what is tangible to us, what we can see. And then on another level I think donors, they have adopted principles of good governance for their donor assistance and all this, but when it comes to the application of good governance that does not exist, I mean very little of it exists. Even with NGOs very little exists, I mean especially transparency is not there, a participatory approach is not there. It's been decided and then imposed upon you or "this is what we think is good for you". It's not like this bottom up approach, "look, where do you need the help?".

VETUNA: Papua New Guinea's Parliamentary Speaker, Bernard Narakobi, also agrees there needs to be more dialogue and understanding between donors and recipients. He points to the report prepared by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group which recommended the downsizing of the PNG Defence Force. The report, leaked to the media, triggered a mutiny within the military.

BERNARD NAROKOBI: It's one thing to have the Eminent Persons of the Commonwealth to come in and say: "Get rid of 2,000 soldiers, get rid of the civil engineering battalion and sell off the Murray Barracks and the naval establishment in Lombrum in Manus". It's easy for those people to say it and to say: "Well, get rid of them and pay them 70 million". But the practicalities of it are not what these people come up with. The problem and difficulty of finding 70 million kina to pay and relocate these soldiers if the defence force is to be downsized is a different issue. I think that we as Melanesians ought really to be more sensitive in accepting or rejecting international reports, experts' reports, if they are good reports we have no arguments with them. But the implementation processes in the traditions of our people, Melanesian societies, you need to consult, you need to communicate, you need to explain: "Look we have problems, we want to downsize, what's the best way of doing it? What's the timeframe behind at which we can do it?".

PASTOR PAIAPORU: The leaders have to listen more with the local people than to listen out there in the world.

VETUNA: Pastor Paiaporu from Santo in Vanuatu.

PASTOR PAIAPORU: The people down there do not understand what the government is saying. Some of the policies are foreign, there is an indigenisation of the policies, foreign policies, all the foreign policies they brought here they implement it straightaway. To me you have to bring that policies into the need of not understanding the local culture. I give this example, like just pot plant, you brought it down from Europe and you do not want to break the pot but you want to plant that same pot from Europe here in Vanuatu, and that's the problem for the politician. They are up there,

they are standing between the world nations and the people here, they have the right to indigenise any international policies, and that's a problem that we are facing today.

VETUNA: One example of good governance is the Bougainville Microfinance project set up in the late 1990s under the Bougainville Transitional Government. This unique scheme is designed to address the financial needs of the people at community level. It is run for the people by the people with the support of AusAID.

Agnes Titus from the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, says it's been very successful and has helped empower the people of Bougainville.

AGNES TITUS: With the Microfinance, because it is set up out there in the community already there is transparency, there is accountability also, just the way the community has set up. And that is why I say it is very good that it just falls back on the traditional way of society is based, and that you know it does not bring in new, completely new ideas. It is a project that is just falling nicely on our own way of life except for the fact that the women are heavily involved. The women are always minding their families, they're always worrying about issues that affect the family. The Microfinance institution is the way they can address their personal issues too, their family issues or their community issues. And I'm very confident that that is the way Bougainville will go at a time when we're talking about being an autonomous state. Because I mean to me that is one of the best ways people can really feel and articulate that independence where we are always talking about.

VETUNA: Governance, as Mel Togolo points out, should not just be seen as a 'quick fix' introduced in times of crisis. It is a long term process for the whole community.

MEL TOGOLO: Often it is looked on as a, more as a mechanism to fix things rather than being looked at as evolutionary process which would looked after institutional integrity, the macro-economic issues, infrastructural issues and issues of health and education as a long term process to develop a community that can be PNG, but can also fit in well in a global situation. And therefore in that way you will start to encourage cultural adaptation in the process. If you look at it in that way as a long term process you're looking at building institutions, building framework that encourages transparency, accountability. You are looking at ways in which due processes can be respected and then your community itself adapts governance.

VETUNA: But for this to happen, and good governance to become a reality all sectors of the community need to be involved in the formulation and implementation of policies.

Nikenike Vurobaravu, the Head of ESCAP Pacific Operations - ESCAP is the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

NIKENIKE VUROBARAVU: A lot of people in Vanuatu think that governance is synonymous with government. It's not, because you know you have to put in the participation of people that not traditional in the area of activities of what we call government - the NGOs, the private sector. I mean

it's a new process in Vanuatu. The government has to learn to be able to discuss so-called policy with NGOs. Before that was not done because it's confidential. And bureaucrats have to learn to talk about policies with the journalist and it's no longer confidential, and all these things, you know bringing the NGO sector into the how you formulate and implement policy for the benefit of people.

RUTH LILOQULA: A lot of aid money would go a long way. We'd take time to talk together, see each other's views. Most times people find me very difficult but I'm not going to say "yes" to something that I don't understand and I expect you won't say "yes" to something you don't understand either.

VETUNA: And Ruth Liloqula from Solomon Islands ends this program. Next week in 'Time to Talk' we look at economic reform.

CLAIRE SLATTER: Essentially what it's all been about is paving the way to opening up the economies of countries everywhere, including the Pacific, and it is very clear that all of this has been driven by the international trade institutions, the international financial institutions, and that basically the Pacific are conforming just like other countries in the third world.

VETUNA: And don't forget to visit our website too at abc.net.au/timetotalk

I'm Pearson Vetuna. Bye for now.

You've been listening to 'Time to Talk' - a series of programs looking at governance in the Pacific. The program was produced by Isabelle Genoux and Barry Clarke. Technical production by Ryan Egan.

I'm Pearson Vetuna, bye for now.

Program Participants:

- Pearson Vetuna, Executive Producer of the Tok Pisin service at Radio Australia
- Napoleon Liosi, General Secretary of the Public Employees Association of Papua New Guinea
- John Liu, Director of the Rural Development and Training Centres Association in Vanuatu
- Alfred Sasako, journalist and former Government Minister in the Solomon Islands
- Claire Slatter, Lecturer in the History and Politics Department of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji
- Waden Narsey, former Member of Parliament in Fiji and lectures at the University of the South Pacific
- Bernard Narokobi, Speaker of Papua New Guinea's Parliament, and author of "The Melanesian Way"
- Ruth Liloqula, senior public servant from Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands
- Mel Togolo from Bougainville, Vice President of the Papua New Guinea Business Council
- Noel Levi CBE, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Suva



Time to Talk



- Pastor Paiaporu Antfalo, Presbyterian Church in Santo (Vanuatu)
- Agnes Titus, Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency in Bougainville
- Nikenike Vurobaravu, Head of Pacific Operations for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

