Pacific 2020

BACKGROUND PAPER: POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

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Pacific 2020 Background Paper: Political Governance

Principal author: Cedric Saldanha, Development Consultant

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This paper is based on the discussion at a round table meeting of regional practitioners and experts, which occurred in July 2005. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are based on the discussion at this round table, and from a subsequent peer review process. They are not necessarily the views of any single individual or organisation, including AusAID, the Pacific 2020 Steering Group, contributing authors, round table participants or the organisations they represent.

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SUMMARY

The economic and social trends in the Pacific have been influenced by key political governance issues.

The political governance in some Pacific countries appears to have substantially influenced the economic and social trends in the Pacific. These trends include poor economic growth, deteriorating human development indicators, environmental degradation and worrying law and order situations in some countries. While it is important to strengthen political governance and its influences on social and economic progress, it is essential each country is encouraged to work out the approaches best suited to its own social and cultural environment.

Political governance is essentially about managing the state, establishing a practice of accountability to the people, and promoting a sense of nationhood. It includes the process of electing leaders to office, the interface between the political and bureaucratic arms of government, the strength of oversight bodies such as the judiciary and the ombudsman, and the role of civil society in influencing the quality of governance.

Key political governance issues of concern in the Pacific include:

> persistent political instability in some countries

> a trend of weak parliaments

> corruption

> weak executive governments, and

> the often encountered failure of institutions of good governance such as the auditor-general and the ombudsman.

The causes of poor political governance are deep and often institutionalised. They include:

> the complexity of governance institutional structures, often beyond the country's financial and management capacities

> the inability of such structures to take adequate account of local leadership tradition and effectively integrate customary political structures

> a weak sense of nationalism especially in some Melanesian countries

> inadequate sanctions for poor leadership or incentives for strong leadership

> the general inability of civil society to hold leaders accountable, and

> under-representation of women in political governance.

Some significant influences on governance in the region include:

> increasing pressures within countries for devolution and autonomy

> increasing activism on the part of civil society in its calls for better governance, and

> regional and international expectations, which have become important in the current globalised context.

As 2020 approaches, governments need to focus more aggressively on addressing the issue of political governance or run the risk of further lags in social and economic growth, and even the possibility of disintegration for some countries. Strategies for promoting better political governance generally fall within two categories: the 'supply' side of governance, and the 'demand' for better governance.

To strengthen the *supply side* of political governance, some important strategies that can be adopted include systematically strengthening three groups of key governance institutions: the electoral system, parliament and oversight bodies; the executive government and public service; and local government's integration with customary or traditional community leadership. In addition, much more can and should be done to support greater representation of women in political governance positions, and to build a sense of nationhood.

As important, if not more so, are the strategies that address the *demand* for better governance. These include enhancing the role of civil society organisations in holding government more accountable for performance, promoting the role of academia and the press in pressuring for better governance, and encouraging the private sector to engage with political leaders in more effective ways. While much has been done to strengthen the supply side of political governance, much more can be done to encourage greater demand for better political governance.

A 2020 vision of effective political governance in the Pacific region might include:

> vibrant and transparent electoral systems that offer opportunity for strong, nation-wide political parties to be elected on clearly enunciated mandates that are openly debated

> parliaments that function effectively and provide a strong oversight of the executive

> judicial and other oversight bodies that are well funded and work effectively

> truly accountable executive governments that encourage robust debate on policies, support a merit-based public service, and are open to being accountable to the public

> genuine partnerships between the leadership and the people, with civil society and the private sector given greater access to information and a larger role in working with government to enhance progress, and

> governments that are open to dialogue and trade with regional and international partners, working constructively for greater regional integration and cooperation for mutual benefit.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE PACIFIC

In the past three decades, average gross domestic product per person among the Pacific countries grew by only 0.5 per cent. Most of the larger economies experienced a fall in income per person between 1996 and 2003.[1] Fiscal and trade deficits have become endemic, often saddling these economies with debts that substantially eat at the already constrained public resources available for essential services. Levels of poverty continue to rise in some countries in which the term poverty was an anathema not so long ago. Ethnic strife, the breakdown of law and order, and the rundown of the natural resource base are also growing concerns in some Pacific countries.

Governance issues have constrained social and economic growth in the Pacific.

In part, some of these social and economic issues are rooted in the inherent constraints of the Pacific countries – small populations, great distances from markets, susceptibility to the vagaries of nature and, for some countries, scarce natural resources. However, there is no denying that the quality of political governance has also had a major bearing on the social and economic performance of these countries over the past two decades. Small economies such as those typical of the Pacific could do without the so often seen political instability, the inefficiencies of the public sector, and the often encountered reluctance of governments to engage openly and constructively with civil society.

There is clear evidence that countries that have successfully engendered stable, predictable and mature governance institutions and processes have reaped the benefits of efficient and equitable development. There are some good examples in the Pacific, from which we should draw lessons and inspiration.

Each country must be encouraged to work out its own approaches to better and more effective political governance.

This paper attempts a broad overview of the state of political governance in the region. It identifies some of the symptoms (manifestations) and causes of poor political governance, and suggests strategies for the consideration of governments and development partners. The strategies are largely based on successful experiences within the region. However, the underlying theme of the paper is that each country must be encouraged to work out its own approaches to better and more effective political governance.

ROLE OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

The debate on political governance typically revolves around how leaders are elected, and their role in steering the country to economic and social progress, ensuring public resources are used efficiently and equitably for this purpose. It also revolves around the approaches used by political leaders to achieve the above, and the extent to which they accomplish all aspects of their role through the free and active participation of all.

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[1] AusAID, *Papua New Guinea and the Pacific – a development perspective,* Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, 2003.

In essence, political governance is about managing the state, establishing transparency and accountability to the people, and promoting a sense of nationhood.

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> In managing the state, good political governance ensures predictable policy regimes, responsible fiscal management, efficient delivery of essential services, the maintenance of law and justice, and the sustainable custodianship of the country's natural resources.

> In ensuring responsiveness and accountability to the people, good political governance institutionalises fair, equitable and transparent electoral, political and public oversight systems and practices. Political representatives are elected to office and held accountable for the affairs of the state, leaders are encouraged to adhere to a code of ethics, and oversight bodies ensure that the rights and interests of the people are always safeguarded.

> Engendering a sense of nationhood among the people is particularly important in Pacific countries that are young nations and essentially an amalgam of disparate tribal and ethnic groups.

MANIFESTATIONS OF POOR POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN THE PACIFIC

In a number of Pacific countries, all does not seem to be well with this critical issue of political governance. The following are some manifestations (or symptoms) of poor governance among Pacific countries. These governance failures are the increasingly obvious contributors to lagging social and economic progress.

Political instability

Political instability is often widespread, especially within Melanesia and Micronesia (Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), though Polynesia is not immune (Niue, Cook Islands and recently Tonga). The resulting discontinuity of governments is disruptive and does not allow for predictable policy regimes and efficient fiscal administration. This serves as a disincentive for investors, internal and external. Such political instability also influences the public service and affects the efficiencies of day-to-day administration.

Weak parliaments

Parliaments in the Pacific are often weak and dysfunctional. Reasons range from the multiplicity of political parties present in some countries, to the reluctance of parliamentarians to rise above local interests. Often, parliamentarians lack an adequate understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In some countries, candidates to parliament clearly seek legislative office with a view to obtaining executive positions so that they can access the resources of the state. Being a legislator is often of little interest to them. Thus, parliaments in some Pacific countries do not meet regularly, committees often do not function, and in general parliaments are unable to fulfil their critical functions of legislation and oversight of the executive.

Corruption

The corollary of political instability and weak parliamentary oversight is typically corruption within the executive and public administration. Not infrequently, office

holders seek to make the most of their period in office, seeking the 'spoils of the state' for their own benefit. Their parliamentary colleagues find it difficult to rein them in due to the tenuous nature of coalition governments. Thus, a country's finances as well as its natural resource base are often seriously run down by the occupiers of office.[2]

Weak executive governments

In the context of the above, it is not surprising that executive governments are generally weak and inefficient. The breakdown of essential services and of law and order has become a worrying phenomenon and one that Pacific countries can ill afford. Recent examples are Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Bucking the trend, however, is Samoa, which has established a stable government and an efficient administration, though to some extent at the expense of a vibrant democracy.

Failure of institutions of good governance

Regrettably, most of the Pacific countries have had a dismal record with respect to the effectiveness of their institutions of governance, such as the offices of the auditor-general and ombudsman. As Vanuatu's former Ombudsman Marie-Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson told a major Pacific media conference in Fiji in May 2001[3] when referring to her many recommendations for action on uncovered corrupt deals among politicians:

> Nothing happens, no one resigns, no one was listening, no one was arrested except the rioters. No one was charged, no one was prosecuted … The lack of consequences for wrongdoing is corroding our society.

CAUSES OF POOR GOVERNANCE

It is important to note the fundamental causes of these various manifestations of poor governance before considering strategies to promote more effective governance. These causes need to be understood if leaders and development partners wish to influence change.

COMPLEX GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Most Pacific countries adopted the Westminster system of government without adequately considering local contextual factors such as demography, social custom, geography, education or technical capacity. Two issues particularly stand out with respect to the governance structures adopted – their level of complexity for the relatively small populations they serve and their inability to cope with deeply ingrained local social tradition.

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2   P Lamour, *Corruption and governance in the South Pacific*, Discussion Paper 97/4, Australian National University, Canberra, 1997.

3   ABC Radio Australia.

With respect to *complexity*, the governance structures in Pacific countries usually reflect their colonial past. Not infrequently, complex structures of government and broad governance responsibilities, well beyond the capacities of current governments, were assumed and institutionalised. For instance, the Federated States of Micronesia burdened itself with a parliamentary setup that makes its legislative and executive governance very complex and difficult. It has four state governments, each with its own legislature, executive and judiciary, and 60 local administrations for 110 000 people. Papua New Guinea has a substantially decentralised government that makes financial and technical demands well beyond the capacities of the nation.

The *sociocultural traditions* of the Pacific countries were not adequately taken into account when these nations first developed their formal governance structures. It should be acknowledged that democracy is a relatively new concept in the Pacific, and one that struggles to sit comfortably alongside local governance traditions. It is apparent that Westminster-style parliaments are often at odds with local political cultural forces. Except in Samoa and Fiji, the governance structures generally do not take account of tradition. Huffer and Molisa state that 'there is a perception in Vanuatu that chiefs have been neglected in the overall framework of governance'. Further, they say that 'politicians frequently attribute to themselves a chiefly or "big-man" aura that they use to profit from their functions as parliamentarians.'[4]

In Polynesia though, some degree of effective integration of political and customary structures has been achieved and perhaps this explains the relative stability of local leadership.

> In Samoa, about 90% of people live either partially or wholly under the authority of a gerontocracy of titled family heads, matai. Through the fono (village council), often in partnership with the Land and Titles Court, the church and other government agencies, the authority of the matai continues to remain legitimate.[5]

WEAK NATIONALISM

A number of the relatively new nations of the Pacific, particularly Melanesia, are an amalgam of a multitude of tribal groups, each with distinct language, culture and traditions. In the absence of strong, visionary and responsible central leadership, often isolationist and parochial approaches to politics have continued. It has sometimes been difficult to engender a national identity. In some countries this has constrained the development of truly national political parties that appeal to a broad cross-section of the population and are able to mobilise and engender mainstream

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[4] E Huffer and G Molissa, *Governance in Vanuatu: in search of the Nakamal Way*, Discussion Paper, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 1997.

[5] M Tuimaleali'ifano, ' '*Aia Tatau and Afioga Tutasi:*' *Aiga versus Tama a* '*Aiga*. Manipulation of old and new practices: an MP for Faletatai and Samatau in Samoa's 2001 elections', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2001, pp. 317–25.

opinions and support on strategic directions for the country.[6] A recent paper suggests:

> A brief survey of recent anthropological and ethno-historical literature indicates that nationalism in Melanesia particularly is weak, contested or absent. Where Melanesians – rural and urban – engage with the state, they often treat it with a high degree of suspicion or antagonism.[7]

INADEQUATE INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS FOR LEADERS

The incentives for leaders to govern responsibly are typically rooted in strong social traditions on the one hand or in the potential sanctions of the ballot box on the other. Both of these factors exert relatively weak influences on leadership in many Pacific countries.

The incentives and sanctions for effective leadership are often missing.

In the Pacific, custom required that leadership roles were undertaken with wisdom and solicitousness for the community as a whole. Traditional induction processes for new leaders were developed for this purpose. Some of these processes have become irrelevant in the context of modern governance structures, and there is little done by way of 'education' and training of newly elected leaders on their responsibilities to the people and the nation.

The ballot box has mixed influence on the behaviour of political leaders. In some countries, some elected leaders feel little accountability since, despite their incompetence and transgressions in office, they are still able to be re-elected to office with the promise of sharing with their constituents the spoils of the state. In other countries, particularly Papua New Guinea, where 50 per cent of parliamentarians can be expected to lose their seats at the next election, they use their short time in office to exploit their position for personal gain and for the benefit of their direct constituents.

CIVIL SOCIETY UNABLE TO HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE

Traditional social systems do not encourage the questioning of authority.

The diversity of culture, geographic fragmentation and poor literacy levels militate against holding politicians and public servants accountable. Culturally, the 'big man', *matai* and *wantok* social systems, to name a few, remain pervasive, influencing every facet of life including politics. These traditional social systems do not encourage the questioning of authority. Even modern education systems in many Pacific counties do not encourage inquiry and the questioning of authority. And the often low level of education found in some Melanesian countries compounds this situation.

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[6] Steven Ratuva, Paper presented at the conference 'Foreign Policy, Governance and Development: Challenges for Papua New Guinea and Pacific Islands', Madang, Papua New Guinea, 22–23 March 2004.

[7] Michael Morgan, 'Cultures of dominance: institutional and cultural influences on parliamentary politics in Melanesia', *State, society and governance in Melanesia*, Discussion Paper no. 02, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 2005.

UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

The potentially beneficial influences and perspectives of women are often missing in key formal and informal processes.

Women are often substantially under-represented in key governance institutions such as parliaments, the executive, and oversight bodies in the Pacific. Even at the local traditional governance level, they often have no formal role and exert their influence through informal processes. Pacific countries are thus deprived in the formal political governance sphere of the potentially beneficial influences and perspectives of women. However, changes are taking place. In Polynesia women often hold senior civil service positions. And consideration is being given to experimenting with quotas in Bougainville and Papua New Guinea.

TRENDS INFLUENCING POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN THE REGION

Before this paper considers potential strategies for supporting good political governance in the region, it would be useful to quickly review some significant sociopolitical trends that undoubtedly have implications for and impacts on the evolution of governance in the region in the medium term.

PRESSURES FOR DEVOLUTION AND AUTONOMY

Pressures for local autonomy run counter to the need for a sense of nationhood and for economic and social integration.

In some countries, particularly those with ethnic diversity, the clamour for local governance autonomy and greater control over local resources is growing as people feel increasingly alienated from the national government. This sense of alienation is fed by deteriorating basic services, and the increasingly evident capture of substantial public resources by the capital region, by politicians, and/or by certain ethnic groups. This is certainly evident in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

This trend to greater local autonomy runs counter to the need for a sense of nationhood (so critical for effective governance) and to the need for greater economic and social integration, which potentially brings with it greater economic progress. This trend presents the leaders of some Pacific countries with a stark challenge – move quickly and decisively to improve national governance and its impacts on the daily lives of people, particularly those in the provinces, or run the risk of gradual disintegration and its resulting ill-effects on social and economic progress.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM

Civil activism can benefit governance and development if used constructively.

As education and access to information become more pervasive within the Pacific, people become increasingly aware of their rights. Ways are found to express their needs and demands to those in power. The growth and maturing of civil society organisations is a manifestation of this trend. Trade unionism is also strengthening, as is evident in the recent events in Tonga. The role of churches in development has also grown, often taking over community-led basic services in the absence or inefficiency of government services.

This trend in civil activism will continue to strengthen as access to information increases. It has major implications for how political governance will evolve within the region. While in the immediate term governments may view such developments as destabilising, in the medium to longer term such activism can only benefit governance and development if it is used for constructive purposes.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

International and regional organisations are playing an increasing role in promoting good governance.

In our increasingly globalised world, international and regional organisations are playing an increasing role in promoting good governance, not just in the Pacific or in developing countries, but the world over. As members of the regional and global community, Pacific countries have to be increasingly sensitive to governance expectations of regional associations such as the Forum Secretariat, of international initiatives such as the Financial Action Task Force of the OECD, and of world bodies such as the United Nations (Millennium Development Goals) and the International Monetary Fund. Even non-government international bodies such as Transparency International have begun to wield a powerful influence that should not be discounted. The influence of these bodies should be viewed constructively, as long as they do not cross the boundaries of national sovereignty.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT GOOD POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

What then are the avenues available to promote more responsible and effective governance in the Pacific? Academics, development partners, international institutions often seek innovative breakthrough strategies and solutions, given the enormous significance of political governance for social and economic progress. However, there are no such solutions readily available to apply. The very nature of political governance, and the fact that it is so deeply interwoven with the local cultural and social context, demands that strategies to address it must be home grown. Also, building good political governance is a slow, iterative and complex process. It must cope with myriad social forces specific to each country and society. It cannot be imposed from outside.

Each country must work out its own strategies.

Thus, each country must be encouraged to work out its own approaches to better governance, whether this is through adjustments to institutional structures, the active promotion of a national identity, or the greater incorporation of social tradition into a country's governance processes. Whatever the strategies adopted, they need to take account of the fundamental causes of poor governance in the region and the sociopolitical trends in the Pacific, which will inevitably continue their influence on governance in the region.

As has been mentioned before, there are a number of examples of good political governance among Pacific countries that should be recognised and used for the

lessons they offer other Pacific countries. Some of these examples are provided as part of suggested strategies.

The strategies presented in this paper for the consideration of Pacific governments, broadly fall within two categories:

> strengthening the *supply side* of good governance, and

> catalysing and promoting the *demand* for good political governance.

Working on the supply side of good governance has been the traditional approach of both governments and their development partners. And this paper supports and reinforces some of the traditional strategies such as strengthening the institutions of governance. However, it also suggests much more can be done to ensure greater participation of women in political governance at all levels, and to strengthen the sense of nationhood.

As we look to 2020 and seek greater emphasis on good political governance in an effort to hasten the social and economic development of the Pacific countries, there is a need to focus on the unconventional as well. This is the demand side of good political governance. It has received relatively little attention either by governments or by development partners. The former often find it uncomfortable territory; the latter tread carefully in this area out of deference to their Pacific government partners in development.

The demand side of good governance, however, does hold the greatest potential for substantive returns to development. It essentially represents strategies focused on:

> promoting links between communities and government to make government more accountable, and

> supporting civil society institutions such as non-government organisations, the media and the private sector to engage proactively with government in shaping the development process.

STRENGTHENING THE SUPPLY SIDE OF GOVERNANCE

The strategy to strengthen the supply side of governance focuses on systematically strengthening three groups of key governance institutions:

> the electoral system, parliament and oversight bodies

> the executive government and public service, and

> local government's integration with customary or traditional community leaders.

In addition, it involves doing more to support greater representation of women in political governance positions, and to build a sense of nationhood.

Strengthening electoral systems, parliaments and oversight bodies

Good political governance requires …

A key issue in most Melanesian countries is the multiplicity of political parties, constant party-crossing by politicians, and the related political volatility that so often contributes to failures in governance.

sound electoral processes and well-functioning parliaments …

The integrity of the electoral process and well-functioning parliaments are critical to good political governance. This includes the independence of electoral commissions, responsible and multiple political parties, and properly resourced political oppositions. The electoral system should be encouraging parliamentary members to look beyond their own electorate and to use their office for the broader good of the nation.

In this connection Papua New Guinea recently introduced the Limited Preferential Voting System and the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates. Both were necessary to counter party fragmentation, frequent party-crossing by elected members of parliament, and the tendency of elected members to focus on the small percentage of voters in their electorate who voted them into office. While these two interventions have had some initial beneficial effects, it is too early to judge their deeper effects on the functioning of the parliament. Generally though, it is the long-term civic education of the electorate that remains critical so that the ballot is used to greatest effect.

peer pressure among politicians …

Peer pressure among politicians is often useful. There is no better influence than good example, particularly when good behaviour is rewarded. Good politicians should be supported and encouraged to promote good governance among their colleagues. This can be done through the media, by development partners in the negotiation of development assistance, and by regional institutions such as the Forum Secretariat in their publicity of good practice.

educated parliamentarians and seats for women …

Educating parliamentarians, strengthening parliamentary committees and reserving seats for women are also strategies to assist in making parliaments in the Pacific more effective. The United Nations Development Programme and the Forum Secretariat have done some good work in this area. However, turnover among parliamentarians is often high; hence the effects of such interventions are short lived. The capacity to undertake such education should be institutionalised by strengthening the secretariats or offices of the clerks of parliament. Thus, regular inductions of newcomers to parliament and updates on key issues of relevance to parliament should be offered on an ongoing basis. Leadership education should be part of this process.

effective oversight bodies …

Oversight bodies such as the attorney-general, the solicitor-general, the public prosecutor, the ombudsman and the judiciary, police and correctional services are essential elements of the framework of good political governance. The judicial systems of the region have generally functioned freely and fairly despite difficult circumstances in some cases. Mention should also be made of the Office of the

Ombudsman in Papua New Guinea, which for some time has been able to maintain an encouraging degree of independence while making its presence felt within government and society as the public's watchdog on the behaviour of political leaders. It has demonstrated that oversight bodies do indeed contribute positively to good governance.

In Kiribati the government has created an 'Ethics Adviser' position, whose primary role is to assist, guide and advise political leaders in the conduct and discharge of their leadership responsibilities.

In general, however, governance institutions are in need of substantial strengthening. There are three issues that greatly influence their effectiveness and that need to be systematically addressed if their performance is to improve. These are their independence from political influence, the adequacy of their resources (staff numbers, skills and operating budgets) to perform their functions effectively, and the support they obtain from the public, and in particular from the media.

and a population that understands the roles of governance institutions.

Thus useful strategies that should be considered include educating the public on the role of these bodies, passing laws that ensure their independence and the adequacy of their resources, and encouraging interagency collaboration among such bodies to strengthen their confidence in performing their oversight functions.

Strengthening the executive government and public service

A fundamental issue in good governance in the Pacific is the professionalism of the executive governments and the public services, their transparency in exercising their office, and their accountability to the public. The executive governments and the public services require some significant changes in the ways they do business, which include:

> establishing formal, systematic and transparent processes for cabinet policy and decision-making
> clearly and formally separating politicians and the public service, emphasising meritocracy for the public service, particularly in recruitment, appointments and promotions
> professionally managing fiscal and public financial management systems, giving pre-eminence to developing and managing a transparent budget process, and
> formally adopting results-based management.

Professionalising the executive government and making it accountable for results is a challenge in an environment where politicians sometimes consider themselves the new 'big men'. Accountability to the public is not often their highest priority. Thus, a substantial mind-shift is often called for with regard to the role and responsibilities of politicians. This requires more than the introduction of systems such as output-based

budgeting. It needs the government polity and bureaucracy to acquire the values and attitudes that lead to tangible improvements in service to the people. It involves institutionalising the concepts and practices of results-based management for the public service, establishing standards of service, and reporting on performance to the parliament and the public.

The public services often experience a high turnover of staff, political interference in senior appointments, very poor conditions of service, and poor discipline and professionalism. Also and often, erratic political decision-making processes leave the public services confused, directionless, and with little motivation when such decisions patently undermine policy and reform initiatives. Numerous public sector reform programs and capacity development projects, supported by various development partners, have been undertaken in this connection at much cost. The results have not been encouraging.

Fundamentally, an effective public service comes down to two key factors that remain absent in many Pacific countries – independence from the political system, and a strong professional ethos that is supported by the political system.

It is essential for governments to establish public service commissions to ensure that appointments are made on merit. In parallel, improvements in the conditions of service, discipline regulations, and public administration training are essential. However, in many ways, professionalising the public service lies in the hands of the political overseers in the country. It is they who must finally demand professionalism of the public service, and nurture and support the conditions necessary to make this happen.

A number of Pacific countries – Cook Islands, Samoa, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste – have made efforts to introduce a professional and merit-based public service. Measures undertaken include minimising the number of political advisers to ministers and their control over the public service, making senior appointments through a merit-based system managed by a public service commission, placing heads of departments on performance contracts, and establishing professional human resource management systems for all civil servants. These initiatives have had varying degrees of success. However, the trend continues and this is encouraging.

Integrating local governance with customary or traditional community leadership

Virtually every Pacific country has a long tradition of institutionalised community leadership, which over the years has effectively managed key local governance issues such as equitably distributing community resources, mobilising community effort, managing land, and maintaining local law and order. In some countries such as Papua New Guinea, these local institutions were virtually ignored when constituting the new system of government after independence. In other countries such as Fiji and Samoa,

a degree of integration has taken place, which has allowed modern governance systems to build on and integrate existing traditional systems.

There is much merit in promoting the integration of formal local governance structures with local traditional leadership systems.

> Local communities continue to respect and follow local leaders and tradition on issues such as land management and local law and order, even where such traditional systems are not formally recognised by the state.

> Substantial resource constraints often do not allow for national and provincial governments to effectively outreach to the vast majority of people living in rural areas and small islands, and service them in key aspects of social and economic life. It therefore makes sense for the state to use these traditional systems where appropriate.

There are, however, some trade-offs in this approach that need to be recognised and coped with. The traditional social systems do not encourage democratic questioning of authority. The western world's social principles of human rights, democracy and equity do not apply in the same form and substance within these local, traditional systems. The balance of power and influence between men and women in such systems also comes into question as Pacific governments become increasingly aware of the need to promote gender equality.

Some specific and potential areas for constructive integration of local governance with customary leadership include:

> integrating the local courts with the traditional village justice systems

> allowing local-level governments to reserve seats for local traditional leaders

> requiring periodic consultations between provincial/local-level governments and local leaders on local socioeconomic issues such as infrastructure development, the locations of schools and village clinics, and the introduction of local taxes, and

> encouraging communities to contribute to public services by negotiating with traditional community leaders on such contributions as allocations of community lands, community policing and other volunteer community services.

Promoting the roles of women in political governance

Traditionally women have played a powerful role in Pacific societies, and this role can be strengthened and supported so that women can become more influential in supporting good political governance.

The significant roles of women are related to raising and educating children, participating in economic activity, maintaining important cultural norms and practices, and promoting critical community values. They thus indirectly exert extensive positive influences on governance at the community and national levels,

often in the face of severe and aggressive contrary forces. It is timely for Pacific countries to consider ways to formalise and strengthen their constructive roles. This is not easy, given traditional norms that require women to undertake their roles in the background without formal recognition.

Promoting the roles of women in various governance institutions at the national and local levels could have many benefits. Three steps in particular need to be taken.

> At a policy level, governments need to be encouraged to adopt policies, strategies and budgets that take due account of women and their place and roles in society. Major government polices should clearly spell out their implications for both women and men. Budgets at both the national and local levels should focus on disaggregated projections of their potential impact on women's issues.

> At a political and public service level, governments should consider taking such affirmative actions for women as:

  – reserving seats in parliament for only women

  – requiring all local government councils to have a given proportion of women representatives, and

  – requiring that a percentage of all head-of-department positions and senior staff positions in the pubic service be set aside for women.

> In the legal, justice and oversight bodies, both women and men should have access to positions and be duly charged with monitoring the implementation and impacts of gender policies.

Such affirmative actions need to be accompanied by education that targets traditional chiefs and politicians, women themselves and society in general and that explains the roles of women in political governance. The support of academia and the media in this is also very important.

Promoting 'nationhood'

In Melanesian and some Micronesian countries particularly, the sense of nationhood is not always as prevalent as it is in some Polynesian countries. This is largely due to Melanesian countries having numerous ethnic groups, which have lived apart and sometimes at odds with each other for centuries. The lack of a sense of nationhood among these groups undermines the influence to effective governance. This is particularly so in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, and is a factor in countries such as Fiji and the Federated States of Micronesia.

As Pacific nations progress economically, their sense of nationhood is growing. With economic progress comes more effective communication and transport links between various parts of the country, providing for social binding between discrete communities. However, this is a slow process and governments must be proactive in promoting parallel initiatives. These could include:

> encouraging national political parties that eschew regionalism

> strengthening the civic education curriculum in schools, and using it to propagate the merits and benefits of working to build national unity

> promoting an intergovernmental financing system (in cases where the country is made up of states or provinces) that is fair and promotes the equitable distribution of public finances across the country as a whole

> using the formal channels of communication and the media to increase the flows of communication between national and local governments, and between different regions of the country, and

> providing a political vision and leadership, which is the most powerful tool for engendering national unity and cohesiveness.

STRENGTHENING THE DEMAND FOR GOOD POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

The strategy to strengthen the demand for good political governance focuses on the role that civil society, broadly speaking, can play in making government more accountable. Civil society includes non-government organisations and the churches, the press and academia, and the business sector.

In a democracy, civil society has a key role in holding government accountable. The ballot box is the ultimate lever in this regard. But there are other ways in which civil society can make its voice heard. At the local government level where the interface between the community and government is most intense, voicing demands for better service delivery, for more effective law and order, and for transparency in decision processes and budget allocations is a useful way to make government more accountable.

Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations such as trade unions, non-government organisations and churches must be encouraged to hold government accountable, starting at a local government level. 'Citizen charters' have been developed and institutionalised in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. 'Report cards' have become prevalent in South Asia and South-East Asia. These instruments have proven effective in making holders of political office more responsible and accountable. Can the same be done in the Pacific? The churches in the Pacific have a particularly important role to play in helping to organise civil society opinion and feedback to politicians. This has

happened in some countries, and these experiences should be researched, documented and publicised.

In Papua New Guinea, the National Monitoring Authority, which is supposed to monitor service delivery, was revived recently. As part of this revival, it established a short list of service indicators that national and provincial governments are required to report on each year. There is discussion on how communities can be involved in this monitoring and reporting process, and provincial administrations are being encouraged to enter into dialogue with civil society organisations to obtain feedback on areas for improvement.

Specifically, civil society organisations can contribute to good political governance in number of very practical ways that governments should support.

> Periodic sample surveys of service delivery can be undertaken based on a select number of service indicators. Such surveys need not be expensive, but can potentially have major impact through the publication of their results.

> At a local level, information can be sought on local government budgets and their allocation, and organised feedback can be provided to the local administration. (In Papua New Guinea. the National Economic and Fiscal Commission has agreed with some provincial governments to make public the annual national grants to provinces.)

> Issues of governance – whether related to policy implementation inequities, corruption or resource misallocation – can be raised through the media.

The press and academia

The press and
academia can
influence governance
through research and
discussion, by
encouraging debate
and by presenting
government views
and messages.

The press and academia have potentially strong influences both on politicians and on the electorate who vote them into office. Academia needs to add its voice more consistently to the calls for more responsible governance on the part of holders of public office. Indigenous academia can wield great influence through research and publications, as well as by providing locally managed facilities for leader education. The local press has an important 'watch dog' role to play, giving kudos for good practice when it occurs, while critiquing and publicly condemning malpractice. The role of these two bodies needs to be promoted actively by development partners.

The press and academia have played important roles in influencing government behaviour and performance in Solomon Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Samoa. An example is Pacific Media Watch, which is an independent, non-profit, non-government organisation comprising journalists, lawyers, editors and other media workers, dedicated to examining issues of ethics, accountability, censorship, media freedom and media ownership in the Pacific region. Launched in October 1996, it has links across the region.

Governments committed to good governance would do well to encourage:

> debate within academia and the press on social and economic issues of importance to their countries

> research by academia and discussion within the press on particularly contentious governance issues such as devolution, intergovernmental resource sharing, land management, and privatisation, and

> the media to present key government views and messages, particularly when public opinion is essential to carrying forward certain decisions.

Business investment interests

Business interests also influence governance practices within a country, though sometimes negatively. Business interests can subvert governance within a country through 'money for favours'. This is often the case not only in the Pacific but all over the world and in developing and developed countries alike. It is important for business interests to realise that good governance and a level playing field are in their longer term interests. Also, they have no better way of ensuring a safe and fair return on their investment than by promoting good governance among the holders of public office. The influence they wield in the community can be powerful if it is organised and public.

In most Pacific countries, chambers of commerce exist and in some they have developed useful relationships with the government. In Papua New Guinea the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council is an influential body that brings together the government, the private sector and civil society to discuss key development issues and challenges.

Specifically, it is important for the private sector to organise itself and for government to encourage organised discussion with the private sector on issues such as business sector regulation, impediments to doing business, infrastructure requirements, taxation systems and their potential impacts on business. All of these issues are critical to investment, which in turn is a key accountability of government to promote.

PACIFIC 2020 VISION ON POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

A 2020 vision of effective political governance within the Pacific region might include:

> vibrant and transparent electoral systems that offer opportunity for strong, nation-wide political parties to be elected on mandates that have been clearly enunciated and openly debated

> parliaments that function effectively and provide a strong oversight of the executive

Business interests have no better way of ensuring a safe and fair return on their investment than by promoting good governance among the holders of public office.

> judicial and other oversight bodies that are well funded and work effectively to protect the rights of the people

> truly accountable executive governments that encourage robust debate on policies, support a merit-based public service and efficient administration systems, and are open to being held accountable by the public

> genuine partnerships between the leaders and the people, through which civil society and the private sector are provided greater access to information on governance issues, and a larger role in working with government to enhance progress, and

> governments that are open to dialogue and trade with regional and international partners, and to working towards greater regional integration and cooperation for mutual benefit.

Evidence has shown that effective political governance can dramatically change the social and economic landscape of a country and region. Bold economic and social decisions that are so often necessary to hasten a country's progress typically lie within the power and responsibility of the leadership. Experiences in other parts of the world have demonstrated that enlightened leadership, supported by a vibrant civil society, can change the path of a nation. There is no reason why it cannot also happen in the Pacific.

Pacific countries are therefore at a crossroad, with two very clear directions to take. And in large measure the decision on which direction to take lies with the current leaders of these nations and their citizens.

The countries can embark on a determined and committed journey to more effective governance, or allow the status quo to continue. While there is movement toward better governance, it is erratic and slow. In the meantime, the impacts of poor governance continue to take a heavy toll on social and economic indicators.

However, if the leaders of these nations openly accepted the challenge of moving forward quickly and decisively on strengthening and reforming political governance, and called for the active participation of the citizens in this endeavour, many of the Pacific nations could look positively different in 2020. We could then look forward to a region living up to its enormous potential and rewarding its talented peoples with the opportunities they deserve.