WHO IS LEADING THE PACIFIC ISLANDS, AS A REGION?

Graham Hassall*

It is often remarked that Pacific Islanders identify more with their place of birth and ethnic group than with their nation or with Oceania as a whole, and that more encompassing identities such as a "Pacific Islander" are only established amongst those who travel abroad, whether for work, education, or other purpose. The Pacific nations have had many prominent leaders at national level, but even in such cases, many of these leaders have worked for constituency-level good more than they have striven for national good; even fewer have served the interests of the Pacific as a whole. This paper thus explores the question "Who is leading the Pacific, as a region?" Global institutions and processes are looking for regionally coherent responses from the Pacific Islands, but whereas some coordinated response is being achieved, countervailing and separatist trends continue to remain significant.

The decision to look at regional identity in the Pacific in this paper was sparked by a personal experience. Following the launch of the "Pacific Plan" in 2004-5, then Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Greg Urwin, had the idea of initiating an annual lecture featuring leaders of the Pacific states. The Forum would partner with the Governance Programme at the University of the South Pacific (as it then was) in inviting national leaders to Suva to present their thoughts on future directions for Pacific regionalism. Tongan Prime Minister Dr Felete Sevele was invited first because Tonga was chair of the Forum in 2006 – but with no response. An invitation was consequently sent to Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea Michael Somare – again with no response. Secretary-General Urwin eventually sent an invitation to each and every then leader of government, none of whom accepted it (although several responded politely, citing pressure of other government business).[1] Regionalism, clearly, was not a priority. As Finin observed when assessing the 2011 Pacific Forum held in Auckland:[2]

> Many of the decisions in the 18-page Communiqué were settled well in advance of the meeting … The need to advance the PIF's long-stalled "Pacific Plan" to promote regional cooperation and integration – initially akin to the EU – was endorsed and remains uncontroversial, based largely on the fact that most Pacific governments appear to have little interest or involvement.

* Associate Professor, School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington.

1   The idea of a "Leader's Lecture Series" was revived to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2011. Three lectures were held: Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu (Vanuatu) on 3 March; Tuilaepa Sailele Malielgaoi (Samoa) on 21 July; and John Key (New Zealand) on 11 August.

2   GA Finin "Power Diplomacy at the 2011 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)" (2011) Asia Pacific Bulletin 2.

This is not to say there is no leadership at regional level, for there are significant activities promoting vision, providing coordination and driving implementation. So what is the relationship between national leadership and regional leadership in Pacific Islands' context?

Pacific identities, like those elsewhere, are multi-layered, and contextual. Citizenship is based on nationality – there are 14 sovereign states in the region (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) and eight non-sovereign or dependent states (New Caledonia, Guam, American Samoa, French Polynesia, Pitcairn, Tokelau, Mariana Islands and Wallis and Futuna). However, some of these sovereign and non-sovereign states retain constitutional ties to other countries (as with those within the "realm of New Zealand": Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau) and independence cannot be equated with any particular degree of social and economic development, since some dependent countries have higher HDI ratings, and higher GDP than independent countries, and residents of dependent territories have citizenship rights in such metropolitan countries as New Zealand, France and the United States of America.

However, citizenship is not the only source of identity and, indeed, the majority of Pacific Islanders do not possess a passport. In rural areas, particularly, where the reach of "the state" can be faint, identity is more often based on culture than on law and rights. Ethnically, peoples of the region belong to one of three broad culture groups: Micronesian, Melanesian, or Polynesian, which guide their way of life, but even then, to be more specific, identification is with more local communities as a consequence of archipelagic geographies and histories.

One possibility is that "regional identity" in the Pacific context is generated more as an external imposition rather than one generated by impulses within the islands. After all, such terms as "southwest Pacific" were generated outside the region rather than within it, and as Graham demonstrates, membership in the "Pacific" region and its institutions is problematic, if not contested (with Australia and New Zealand being members of the Pacific Islands Forum; and France, Australia, New Zealand and the United States being members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, etc).[3]

One impetus to regional coordination has been the need for a combined response to such global criminal activities as drug production and passage, people smuggling, money laundering and the transportation of small arms. This combined response occurs through participation in such bodies as the Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) convened by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), or such networks as the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), a 41-member international organisation

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3   K Graham "Models of Regional Governance: Is there a choice for the Pacific?" in K Graham (ed) *Models of Regional Governance for Pacific Island States: Sovereignty and the Future Architecture of Pacific Regionalism* (University of Canterbury Press, Christchurch, 2008) 19.

coordinated by regional and global agencies (including the United Nations, IMF, FATF, Asian Development Bank, ASEAN Secretariat, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and World Bank).[4]

The "global war on terror" also required policy responses from Pacific states, notably concerning the strengthening of customs standards and procedures. Other security threats that are global in nature, such as climate change, may affect states globally but have more significant consequences for islands with low-lying land masses, since sea-level rise and adverse/extreme weather events threaten food and water security, economic security, and health security.

Regional and global trading partners have provided another impetus for Pacific regionalism. The European Union, for instance, has sought over many years a Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), under the Cotonou agreement between Europe and former colonies in Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Australian and New Zealand thinking about the Pacific is another source of encouragement toward regional thinking: in 1982 New Zealand parliamentarian Mike Moore advocated formation of a "Pacific parliament",[5] and in 2003 an Australian Senate Committee proposed a "Pacific Union". An AusAID report referred to integration and cooperation as "not options for the Pacific Island countries, but necessities borne of their small sizes …".[6] Discussion of a single currency for the Pacific Islands continues to be proposed, notably by Jayaraman.[7] Other scholarship has questioned the timeliness of regionalism[8] and the possible forms it might take.[9] This is not to say that regionalism does not have any Island roots. The contemporary Pacific does not comprise small island states operating adjacent and independently of each other, but, rather, small island states cooperating in regional governance arrangements that respect (somewhat jealously) national sovereignty at the same time that they seek avenues for collective endeavour. The organisations that comprise the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific are:

- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)
- Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed)

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4   Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering <www.apgml.org>.

5   M Moore *A Pacific Parliament: A Political and Economic Community for the South Pacific* (Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, 1982).

6   AusAID *Pacific 2020: Challenges and Opportunities* (AusAID, Canberra, 2006).

7   T Jayaraman and R Hou "Central bank cooperation and coordination in the Pacific Islands" (2002) 60 Development Bulletin 75; TK Jayaraman "Dollarization of the South Pacific Island Countries: Results of a Preliminary Study" (2005) 4 Perspectives on Global Technology and Development 197; TK Jayaraman "Regional Integration in the Pacific" (2005) USPEC Working Paper 16.

8   P T Powell "Too young to marry: Economic convergence and the case against the integration of Pacific island states" in S Chand (ed) *Pacific Islands Regional Integration and Governance* (Asia Pacific Press, Canberra, 2005).

9   J Bryant-Tokalau and I Frazer *Redefining the Pacific? : Regionalism Past, Present and Future* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006); K Graham, above n 3; J E Lane "Regionalism in the Asia-Pacific Area" (2008) 30 The Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration 1.

- Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (PIFFA)
- Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP)
- Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC)
- Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
- South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)
- University of the South Pacific (USP)
- Pacific Power Association (PPA)
- Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO)

Although the origins and current arrangement of the regional bodies that collectively constitute the (CROP) agencies are set out by Graham,[10] the basis for inclusion in the Council is eclectic, since the Council includes such colonial-era organisations as the multi-national South Pacific Commission (now styled the Secretariat of the Pacific Community) and the Fiji School of Medicine, together with newer and small organisations such as the Pacific Islands Development program (PIDP) based at the East-West Center in Hawaii and the Pacific Power Association, which obtained CROP status in 2007.

Furthermore, these agencies do not constitute the sum total of bodies that have a regional mandate, or regional interest, and may be supplemented by additional members in future. PASO, for instance, lobbied for entry to CROP for a number of years prior to admission.

The CROP agencies with the highest profiles are the University of the South Pacific (the tertiary training institution for 12 member countries) and the Pacific Islands Forum (which provides the political and policy secretariat for regional organisations and which acts as an intermediary between global agencies and the PICs) so it is understandable that the formation of regional identity is often associated with the politics of regional organisations. The "leaders meeting" and communiqué organised annually by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat possibly receives more media attention than any other event on the calendar.

In the absence of "deep integration" amongst the PICs, in such forms as economic, customs, or political union, the CROP agencies, with PIF as lead agency, exemplify the new "network governance"[11] in Pacific context, with all its strengths and weaknesses. Spillane[12] has explained how the Pacific Islands Forum emerged on the basis of political cooperation rather than legal agreement – a situation that suited the PICs' "soft" approach to regionalism until the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) required a more detailed accountability framework. During this period there was also a push within the United Nations to clarify the nature of regional organisations, which

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10   K Graham, above n 3.
11   RAW Rhodes *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001).
12   S Spillane "The Pacific Plan 2006-2015: Legal Implications for regionalism" in K Graham, above n 3, at 72-82.

forced the organisation to establish a more robust constitutional framework.[13] Although a "Pacific Plan" was initiated in 2005 to improve regional responses to sustainable development, economic growth, good governance and security, progress toward regional integration has been slow. Some PICs still impose visa requirements on each other's citizens, and maintain tariff barriers. Although the Forum prepared a treaty for signing in 2005, only nine member countries have yet done so, and this may be linked to an ambivalence within sub-regions of the Pacific which are asserting their own identities at the same time as they continue to support a whole-Pacific regionalism. These groups include the *Small Island States*, established in 1987,[14] the *Melanesian Spearhead Group*[15] in the Southwest Pacific (2007), the *Polynesian Group* to the east and a grouping of Micronesian states in the North Pacific.[16]

The Pacific's regional governance, in other words, remains cooperative and fluid rather than constitutional and law-bound, and liable to fragmentation and disassociation (sometimes on specific issues by sector or country) as much as to strengthened collaboration. In his 2011 Leader's Lecture to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Pacific Islands Forum, Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielgaoi explained the virtues of sub-regional groups in these terms:[17]

> Besides the preservation of languages culture and traditions, sub-regionalism may also provide better platforms for the effective and efficient delivery of programmes that not only benefit the immediate sub-region but the region as a whole. … I therefore see sub-regional approaches as complementing and re-enforcing region-wide efforts to address issues and problems facing the whole Pacific. Sub-regionalism should not replace region-wide approaches where these make the best use of resources in serving the interests of individual countries and the whole Pacific region. The idea of a Polynesian subgroup was broached at informal discussions at the Retreats of the Fiji Forum in 2006 and the Tonga Forum in 2007. Last year in the margins of the Port Vila Forum I had in-depth conversations with some of the leaders and provided them with material on what a Polynesian sub-group might look like and its objectives, but given the vagaries of political life, there are, I think, only two still in office.

Success in any endeavour is dependent on visionary leadership. In the case of establishing a regional identity in the Pacific, the early champions of regional collaboration were national leaders, including Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Sir Tom Davis, who recognised the need for regional solidary in the context of broader political and economic frameworks. But it could be

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13　K Graham "'We Have Come to a Fork in the Road … Now We Must Decide': Human Security in Context" UNU-CRIS Occasional Papers (2004) 0-2004/17; K Graham, above n 3.

14　Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau.

15　Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and FLNKS (New Caledonia) – see <www.msgsec.info>.

16　CMNI, Guam, FSM and its states, RMI and Palau. In 2011 the Micronesian Chief Executives Summit issued its 15th communiqué which announced, amongst other things, the establishment in Guam of the Office of the Micronesian Center for a Sustainable Future, a Regional Workforce Development Council and Pacific Workforce Investment Group.

17　T S Malielgaoi "Pacific Regionalism : A tale of lessons, identity and boundless opportunities" (2011) <www.forumsec.org>.

argued that most political leaders in the Pacific focused on nation-building rather than region building.[18] Such champions of nationalism as Walter Lini in Vanuatu and Michael Somare in Papua New Guinea are less known for their contributions regionally. Bernard Narokobi led the way in thinking about a Melanesian mentality and ethic, but did not play regional roles.[19] Sir Pita Kenilorea was primarily a Solomon Islands nation-builder but took on regional leadership responsibilities for short periods.[20]

The main vehicle through which political leaders of the Pacific Island countries have exercised regional leadership has been the leader's meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum. Although this event occurs over just two to three days each year, its policy implications extend far beyond this, since it affects the work program of regional bodies continually, whether in the lead-up to decision taking, or in post-decision implementation phases.

The administrators and managers within regional organisations comprise the next critical layer of regional leadership. These "regional public servants" form a professional cadre who have built intimate understanding of the region over several decades. These currently include Neroni Slade, Jimmy Rogers, Iosefa Maeava, Feleti Teo and Andie Fong Toy, amongst others. The non-governmental organisations that have a regional focus (called by the Forum "non-state actors"), such as the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Pacific Conference of Churches, also have leaders capable of influencing regional policy settings.

At the level of new graduates and young professionals, such organisations and networks as the Pacific Leadership Program and Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue deliver training programs designed to foster "next generation" leadership capability.

These layers of regional leadership capacity within the regional governmental and non-governmental organisations is supplemented by the considerable presence of international agencies, some of which have a regional constituency and others more global. These are mostly branches of the United Nations Organisation (UNDP, WHO, ILO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCAP, UNHABITA, UN Women),[21] the Bretton Woods agencies (IMF and World Bank), and the Asian Development Bank.[22]

18   I Johnstone and M Powles (eds) New Flags Flying: Pacific Leadership (Huia, Wellington, 2012).

19   B Narokobi *The Melanesian Way* (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, Suva, 1980); B Narokobi *Life and Leadership in Melanesia* (IPS and UPNG, Suva and Port Moresby, 1983); B Narokobi "Concept of Ownership in Melanesia" Occasional Paper of the Melanesian Institute (1988); B Narokobi *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet: Law and Custom in Melanesia* (University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1989).

20   P Kenilorea *Tell It As It Is: Autobiography of Rt Hon Sir Peter Kenilorea* (Center for Asia-Pacific Studies, Taipei, 2008).

21   See <www.pacific.one.un.org>.

22   See <www.adb.org/offices/pacific/main>.

Although much of the focus of these agencies has been achievement of the Millennium Development Goals,[23] the coordination of development assistance and facilitation of regional approaches to development outcomes has been of equal significance.[24] The extent of the challenge that development coordination presents to the PICs is indicated in Table 1, which charts some of the more significant governmental and non-governmental bodies with regional work programmes in the Pacific Islands. The extensive number of global and international agencies, dialogue partners engaged in both multilateral and bilateral arrangements, development agencies and networks, and CROP agencies which coordinate such agencies and networks as well as generate projects of their own, helps in indicating complex governance arrangements currently in effect in the Pacific at regional level.

The Pacific Islands, as a region, has not one but several sources of leadership. Principal amongst these is the Forum Leaders Meeting, through which national governments and development partners channel their policy preferences via regional mechanisms that culminate in agenda setting by the Forum Officials Committee, prior to decision-making at the political level by the PIC national leaders meeting as a whole.

In addition to being somewhat embryonic, Pacific regionalism has the virtues of collaborative and cooperative networks as well as the shortfalls. Since this level of governance is not representative, in that political leadership is at national level with some democratic spaces also existing at local and provincial levels (not at all uniformly across the Pacific) – but definitely not at regional level – accountabilities for regional governance policies and program effectiveness is affected more by the decisions and preferences of funding agencies and national governments than by the public. Consequently, few national leaders highlight regional programs and commitments in their public discourse, and whilst there is little polling of public opinion in Pacific Island Countries, my estimate is that few citizens of the 14 PIC member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum would have knowledge of the CROP agencies that are facilitating capacity building, policy development, or in some cases programme implementation, at regional level. Regional public servants do not have the profile of national public servants, such that the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum or the Director General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community would have less public recognition in most member countries (apart from their own country of origin) than permanent secretaries and other senior public servants. It therefore remains relevant to ask, "Who

23   C Flore-Smereczniak "The Millennium Development Goals" in B Lynch and G Hassall (eds) *Resilience in the Pacific: Addressing the Critical Issues* (New Zealand Institute of International Affairs and Institute for Policy Studies, Wellington, 2011) 63.
24   Anon "Pacific Islands Forum: Strengthening Development Coordination" (2010) 40 Environmental Policy and Law 164.

is leading the Pacific, as a region?", and to note that this leadership is being exercised mostly by regional public servants, interacting with development partners and country-level public servants, often in collaboration with non-governmental organisations, using development assistant resources and priorities on behalf of a Pacific public which remains to be constituted.

Table: Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies With Regional Work Programs in the Pacific Islands

	Government agencies and networks	Programs	Civil Society Organisations
Global level	UN Agencies, WTO, IMF, EU Dialogue partners (Canada, India, South Korea, United Kingdom, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, United States, Japan, Philippines, France, Italy, Thailand)	MDGs, post 2015, WSIS, Paris Principles, Treaties, Climate Change, Human Rights, Rio + 20	World Social Forum, TI, Oxfam, Faith-Based Organisations
Asia-Pacific level	ADB, UNDP, ESCAP, Habitat, FAO, AusAID	Country Programs Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers	
CROP agencies	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed) Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (PIFFA), Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), University of the South Pacific (USP), Pacific Power Association (PPA), Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO)	The Pacific Plan Agency work plans	PIANGO, Faith-Based Organisations IUCN FSPI PCC
Other regional organisations and networks	Eg: Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON), Pacific Islands Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network (PIANZEA), Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG)	Network meetings, joint and country-level programs	Commonwealth Local Government Programme (CLGF) Pacific Program