FOSTERING PEACEFUL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC UNDER THE 2030 AGENDA

Anna Naupa and Derek Brien
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Fostering peaceful sustainable development in the Pacific under the 2030 Agenda

By

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Abstract

Often characterised as a region of relative peace due to the absence of inter-state conflicts, the Pacific island region is not immune to violent conflict. Episodes of violence, political unrest and instability have hampered development; a ‘business as usual’ approach to development does not guarantee that the Pacific will remain peaceful in the future. The link between peace and development is a central tenet of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledging the inter-connectedness between the drivers of poverty and conflict. This presents an opportunity to integrate and expand on traditional concepts of development and security. A holistic consideration of the social, economic, environmental and governance factors underpinning peaceful and prosperous societies sits at the heart of this transformation. Political and policy responses can either pave the way for peace and development—or build up tensions and, eventually, trigger conflict.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (the ‘peace goal’) is a key policy opportunity to safeguard development gains in the Pacific. Fostering peaceful sustainable development in the Pacific will require a re-thinking of the development approaches taken, particularly where pervasive exclusion and inequality are linked to potential drivers of conflict. This paper highlights four areas for attention: resource scarcity, migration and displacement, urbanization, and exclusion and inequality. As a threat multiplier, climate change exacerbates all of these development challenges, and the policy urgency is immediate. Future conflict can, however, be avoided. The paper offers that for Pacific island countries, policy emphasis on strengthening institutions – both formal and informal – combined with conflict-sensitive programming will go a long way to mitigating drivers of conflict and realizing the intent of SDG 16 as ‘the peace goal’. Acknowledging limitations in

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the reach of and access to Pacific island state institutions, many such solutions will necessarily be through informal structures. At a regional level, a revisiting of the Pacific Human Security Framework 2012-2015 in the context of the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16 may also offer new ways to guide and monitor peaceful development.

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*Keywords:* sustainable development, conflict prevention, peace, institutional policy, effective institutions, governance, climate change, Pacific small island developing States
I. Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations system acknowledged that it needed to do more to address the root causes of conflict, in partnership with others, through inclusive and equitable development\(^1\). In so doing, there was recognition that a better appreciation of political economy dynamics, together with social and institutional arrangements, is critical for building bridges between development and peace. The inextricable link between peace and development is central to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).\(^2\) SDG 16 specifically seeks to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” Its existence highlights the importance of including peace in any measure of sustainable development. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda’s focus on sustainable development and conflict prevention extends beyond the absence of conflict or violence, taking instead a holistic consideration of the social, economic, and environmental factors that underpin peaceful and prosperous societies and the governance that either paves the way for peace and development or triggers conflict. This creates a policy window for fostering what has been termed ‘positive peace’ (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2016).

Peace is essential for fostering and safeguarding sustainable development. The cost of pervasive conflict – violent or otherwise – is detrimental to achieving sustainable development. Similarly, development can at times promote conflict. The foundations for sustaining peace — institutions and social cohesion — are fundamental to countries’ resilience to conflict and development ‘shocks’. Socio-economic inequality and exclusion dilute social cohesion and create further vulnerabilities where governance institutions are weak. Conflict-sensitive development approaches are essential if the Pacific is to realise the ambition of all SDGs, not least SDG 16, and ‘leave no-one behind’. These approaches must be context-driven, inclusive and holistic in pursuing socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

Characterised as a region of relative peace, the Pacific’s hard-won development gains remain vulnerable to the ‘slow violence’\(^3\) of exclusion and inequality – which may be gradual, often invisible, yet pervasive - from which societal tension and conflict can grow. There is no guarantee that the Pacific will remain peaceful in the future with a ‘business as usual’ approach to development policy and practice. This paper presents the case for why Pacific policy developers, planners, and development partners must embed conflict analysis in development planning and expand policy attention to the structural issues of inequality and exclusion that underlie sustained and peaceful development.

This paper reviewed over 100 academic and policy papers, reports, and media articles to assess common themes around peace and development in the contemporary Pacific. It provides an overview of the multiple dimensions of peace in the Pacific, and highlights four areas for attention: resource governance, migration and displacement, urbanization, and exclusion and inequality. The

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\(^2\) The preamble to the 2030 Agenda includes the determination ‘to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence’, noting that ‘there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.’

\(^3\) The concept of ‘slow violence’ is often used to describe environmental threats that take place gradually, and often invisibly, and which challenge development gains, for example climate change. It can also be applied to political and structural contexts where masculinized politics and gender inequalities can compound insecurity.
paper follows with sections on the role of climate change in exacerbating all of these development challenges, and the urgency for policy emphasis on strengthening Pacific institutions – both formal and informal – to realize the intent of SDG 16 as ‘the peace goal’. It concludes with policy recommendations for Pacific island countries.

II. The multi-dimensional nature of peace in development in the Pacific

Peace is multi-dimensional, and in a region as diverse as the Pacific, comprising 19 developing island countries and territories, these dimensions are periodically captured by global indices such as the Fragile States Index, the World Bank’s Governance Indicators, (specifically the Political Stability and Absence of Violence indicator) and the Global Peace Index, amongst others (see Table 1). The Human Development Index (HDI) perhaps provides the most comprehensive data-set for the Pacific island region, inclusive of human rights considerations, and while it does not capture the broader structural and institutional policy environment relating to inequalities and exclusion, is a useful proxy that highlights areas needing attention. In 2016, for example, the HDI ranked Palau 60th, while Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands ranked 154th and 156th out of 188 countries respectively due to poor scores for human security and inequality.

Table 1. Multiple measures of peace but inconsistent Pacific coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global indices</th>
<th>Pacific coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption Perceptions Index</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragile States Index</td>
<td>Fiji, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Solomon Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Peace Index*</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Governance Indicators</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
<td>All (excl. Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue and Tuvalu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Peace &amp; Security Index</td>
<td>Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) is developing a Pacific Peace Index in 2018.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team for Preparedness and Resilience Capacities has developed the Index for Risk Management (INFORM) as a predictive measure for peace and conflict in a humanitarian context focusing on exposure, vulnerability and capacity to address conflict. Within this index, notwithstanding the Pacific’s data availability challenges, Papua New Guinea ranks as a high-risk country for conflict, with an even mix of countries in the medium-to-low risk categories (see Figure 1).

4 The Pacific region includes the 12 Pacific island countries with a presence in the United Nations that are full members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu; and the following countries and territories that are associate members of ESCAP: American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue and the Northern Mariana Islands.

5 Pacific island States are only occasionally included in global indices often due to the lack of full-set of data required for the construction of the index. The Fragile States Index focuses on state governance and vulnerability to collapse or conflict. The Global Peace Index focuses on societal safety and security, ongoing domestic and international conflict, and militarisation.

6 See www.inform-index.org.
Figure 1. Index for Risk Management (INFORM), 2018


The INFORM index’s measure of coping capacity is of most relevance to the structural aspects of peace and conflict and assesses governance and institutional capacity. The index’s weakness, however, is in its assessment of human and natural hazards for Pacific small island developing States (SIDS). While the Pacific scores highly for natural hazards, INFORM does not consider climate change risks or related uncertainties such as coastal erosion. The absence of violent conflict (a measure of human hazards) pulls down the Pacific’s overall ranking, showing it to be less vulnerable overall – despite the fact that the constant barrage of natural hazards and disasters in the region are threat multipliers for inequality and exclusion, which also present challenges to governance systems and often erode development gains. A very resilient country is able to withstand and respond to external shocks such as natural hazards, whereas the same shock can be a precursor for conflict for less resilient countries.

Similarly, SDG 16 re-focuses attention on the broader dimensions of peace and conflict in development through strengthening national institutions, but still needs to be contextualised for the Pacific (as do the other SDGs). The Institute for Economics and Peace (2018) has highlighted the difficulties in measuring SDG 16 in the Pacific. Nevertheless, SDG 16 is a policy opportunity for governments to focus on peace, justice and strong institutions in ways that resonate with their national contexts.

For the Pacific, a multi-dimensional approach to peace and conflict within development has in the past been facilitated through *The Human Security Framework for the Pacific (HSFP)* (2012-2015) developed by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. It provides five principles for addressing causes of conflict, monitoring conflict escalation and strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms, suggesting that interventions need to be preventative, localized, collaborative, people-centred and inclusive (see Figure 2). It also highlights the interconnectivity of the five elements of human security (political, economic, environmental, community/family/personal and

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social) and the necessity of an integrated approach to development. This is to ensure that Pacific peoples are secure and safe from threats to their wellbeing, and can enjoy political stability, sustainable economic development and social fulfillment. The HSFP was reviewed in 2015 and abandoned due to its generalist approach and lack of monitoring. However, the HSFP principles resonate with the approach taken under the 2030 Agenda and the revival of a more targeted HSFP may serve the region well in the SDGs era. Pacific Island Forum Leaders’ 2017 commitment to develop a new comprehensive regional security architecture recognised the importance of an expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, as well as humanitarian assistance, environmental security and climate change.

Figure 2. The key principles of the Human Security Framework for the Pacific (2012-2015)

III. A ‘mostly peaceful’ Pacific

With the notable exceptions of the prolonged independence struggle in New Caledonia (1980s), the Papua New Guinea/Bougainville Civil War (1989-97), the ‘Tensions’ in Solomon Islands (1998-2003), and repeated coups in Fiji (1987, 2000 and 2006), episodes of national conflict, unrest and political turmoil in the Pacific have generally been short-lived, and in many cases peacefully resolved, including through ongoing peacebuilding efforts such as in Solomon Islands. Underpinning its standing as a ‘pacific’ region is a long history of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, high levels of social resilience (Brown, 2006), and the limited availability of arms, in addition to widespread respect for the rule of law. Regional security cooperation has also played a role: In 2000, Pacific Islands Forum member States adopted the Biketawa Declaration as a regional security cooperation mechanism in the wake of the Fiji coup and ethnic tensions in the Solomon Islands. The Biketawa facilitated the regional assistance mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from 2003 to 2017.

Despite episodic violent conflict, the Pacific is not, however, exempt from persistent violence. Rates of interpersonal violence against women are amongst the highest in the world. Neither is

the Pacific immune to the causes of conflict. These include rising economic and social inequalities, land tenure and management issues, strained governance and institutional capacity, high youth unemployment and alienation, and poorly managed urbanisation (PIFS, 2008). Furthermore, the Pacific is as vulnerable as every region for the risk that a conflict will re-onset.

These issues are compounded by emerging global challenges that transcend national boundaries, including climate change, religious extremism, political populism, rising rates of migration, transnational crime, and an intensified competition for resources, including fisheries. Moreover, the region is close to global security pressure points such as the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

As the world undergoes this period of significant change to the status quo, guaranteeing peace and development is not a given. According to the 2017 Global Peace Index, there has been a decline in peacefulness across the world over the last decade. Considered holistic strategies are required at national, regional and global levels. If countries are to address the roots of conflict and protect any development gains, policy must not only keep pace with shifting trends, it must also be situated in the context of the harmonisation of traditional organs of development and security. This will ensure stronger, more resilient societies where people and their governments are better equipped to withstand internal and external shocks.

Future development shocks are likely to resonate around the Pacific’s particular vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events, economic constraints to improving levels of development, as well as risks associated with the ‘youth bulge’ and rapidly changing populations. Together these factors have the potential to overwhelm small government administrations, to further erode the traditional economic and social protection systems, and to increase levels of poverty, hardship, vulnerability and exclusion (Moustafa and others, 2014). The sources of these challenges are multi-dimensional and increasingly complex, and pose serious risks of reversing hard earned development gains, and of triggering socio-political upheaval.

Within this setting, the Pacific region is contextualising the new global development agenda and rethinking its security cooperation arrangements under the Biketawa Declaration. The intent here is to formulate a new regional security policy which would set “the foundation for strategic future regional responses recognising the importance of an expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change” (PIFS, 2017). This coincides with the rapid changes occurring in global power dynamics and the repositioning of the United Nations system to deliver the 2030 Agenda. The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development developed in 2017 guides regional responses for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs within the context of national plans, the United Nations global SIDS framework - the SAMOA Pathway - and the Pacific Islands Forum’s Framework for Pacific Regionalism to deliver “a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity”.

IV. Achieving peaceful sustainable development – where are the pressure points/conflict risks?

A key question for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is: how can the Pacific, which reported limited progress under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), achieve sustainable development in the context of economic constraints, climate change, natural disasters, and changing populations? What are the Pacific region’s pressure points for the attainment of peaceful sustainable
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A review of over 100 academic and policy papers, reports, and media articles assessed emerging common themes around peace and development in the contemporary Pacific: (1) resource governance; (2) migration and displacement; (3) urbanization; and, (4) exclusion and inequality.

A. Resource governance

Pacific island economies have limited options for growth, and are reliant on their natural resources. As terrestrial and maritime resource-rich states, the productive sectors – agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining - have been a fulcrum for development in Pacific island countries. Despite these natural endowments plus high levels of aid, economic and social development has lagged, a situation that has been described as the “Pacific paradox” (Toatu, 2001). While resource development has contributed to economic growth, the combination of resource depletion and weak governance creates conflict risk. For example, in Papua New Guinea, the weak governance of resource-based rents has been identified as the single factor most likely to undermine prospects for sustainable growth (Avalos and others, 2013). Similarly, in Kiribati, problems with water and sanitation infrastructure persist despite high fisheries revenues and a growing Sovereign Wealth Fund (Beitau, 2014). Uneven development and exclusion due to the problematic distribution of benefits, has combined with rent-seeking behaviour, corruption, poor governance and underdeveloped human capital to create numerous, often violent, localised conflicts.

Land disputes are among the leading causes of tension and conflict in the region, where resource development often competes with widespread subsistence activities for food security (Crocombe, 2008). In Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea in the 1990s and early 2000s, real estate, logging and mining sector activity, were the cause of numerous instances of intertribal conflict, as well as violent disputes between companies and tribes. Where state institutions fail to ensure good governance in relation to natural resource industries, local tensions are often exacerbated. The weak governance of resource-based revenue, in terms of accountability, transparency and government capability in the delivery of services has a particularly corrosive impact on equitable and peaceful development. The adequacy and enforcement of environmental protection legislation that protects the sustainability of countries’ productive sectors is an ongoing concern.

Coastal fisheries are emerging as sites of potential resource tension. Offshore, foreign-based fishing is responsible for about half of the value of the region’s fisheries. Coastal fisheries, (whether commercial or subsistence) constitute 12 per cent of the total economic value of the region’s fisheries resource (Gillett and Cartwright, 2012). For many islands, particularly the low-lying atolls, coastal fisheries are major sources of food and livelihood, but overfishing of tuna stocks and illegal inshore commercial fishing has increased recently.9 Additionally, coastal

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9 From 2016-2017 there have been an average of 1-2 media reports per month in the Pacific region of arrests of
fisheries are expected to become less productive due to the degradation of coral reefs by climate change-induced bleaching events and increased cyclone intensity, as well as domestic environmental pollution and degradation.

The triple burden\(^\text{10}\) on Pacific islanders—reduced economic potential, depleted environmental reserves and greater food insecurity—underscores the need for policy attention on conflict prevention and human security in development.

**Box 1  Conflict-sensitive resource management**

Recognising the need for forward-thinking policy relating to food security and environmental protection, a number of Pacific island countries have already put in place coastal fisheries management plans, and are collaborating in the monitoring, control and surveillance of illegal fishing. In addition, the Cook Islands Government has created the world’s largest marine protected area to ensure sustainable management of the country’s marine resources, working closely with traditional communities.

Many Pacific island governments are taking innovative measures in resources-based development, drawing on the strength of cultural institutions to foster peaceful development. For example, in Vanuatu land reforms that embrace customary land governance and safeguard community resource rights have institutionalized conflict-sensitive land development.

These initiatives underscore the inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach that engages with multiple governance systems (both state and non-state based) to pursue resource-related development in a conflict-sensitive manner.

**B. Migration and displacement**

The 2030 Agenda recognises “the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development”\(^\text{11}\) and the need for human-rights based migration, which applies to both sending and receiving communities, and to local domestic mobility hubs. Expanding migration opportunities have the potential to transform sustainable development and regional integration (Berkelmens and Pryke, 2016) and to provide adaptive solutions for resource-constrained countries. Nevertheless, the processes of migration and displacement may cause grievances if not addressed in a conflict-sensitive manner. This section addresses both internal and external/international migration, distinct from urbanization which is discussed in section C.

Migration is already occurring across the region as a ‘release valve’ that provides decent work opportunities for resource-constrained countries in the Micronesian and Polynesian sub-regions.

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\(^{10}\) The issues of reduced economic benefit and environmental depletion have been previously described as a ‘double burden’ on Pacific island countries’ fisheries, however we also suggest a third burden of growing food insecurity, particularly for low-lying atoll nations that rely significantly on coastal fisheries for their subsistence. See: United Nations, *The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A report on vulnerability and exclusion in a time of rapid change* (Suva, 2014) p. 117.

\(^{11}\) A/RES/70/1 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para 29.
Migration in response to climate change-related hazards is also occurring (Oakes, Milan and Campbell, 2016). Migrant-sending countries often enjoy relatively easy access to larger labour markets, and tend to have lower rates of population growth, easing pressure on GDP growth that helps increase living standards. Remittances also benefit their national GDPs significantly (Stahl and Appleyard, 2007). Recently, migrant/refugee receiving Pacific island countries (PICs) have also benefitted from economic inflows, although this has been contentious (e.g. Australian Government-run detention centres on Manus Island, Nauru, and Papua New Guinea).

In contrast to the preferential immigration access granted to citizens of some PICs through post-colonial arrangements with metropolitan powers, citizens of Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu have to date had few opportunities to move abroad. These six countries are amongst the most vulnerable in the region, had difficulties meeting the MDGs, and, in the case of the Melanesian countries, have the highest rates of population growth (Adelman and others, 2005; Opeskin and MacDermott, 2010; PIFS, 2015). Governments in the region are increasingly looking to labour mobility as an adaptive measure, focusing on protecting migrant workers and securing decent work opportunities.

Migration policies possess a range of development implications that may lead to potential conflict. Increased pressures on already stressed social and physical infrastructure (Milan, Oakes and Campbell, 2016) from rural-urban mobility, concerns over prolonged depopulation in migrant-sending centres (PIPP, 2010), ‘brain drain’ and the social costs of temporary and seasonal labour migrants due to family separation, are some potential problems. Furthermore, global remittance flows are in decline in part, because of the breakdown of traditional social support mechanisms (World Bank, 2017; UNFPA, 2015).

External migration due to climate change, while improving adaptive capacity of households, has in some cases—as in the Kiribati Government’s 2014 purchase of 5,500 acres of land in Fiji—sparked concerns over integration, and competition for land and resources (Ellsmoor and Rosen, 2016). Similarly, displacement (whether temporary or long-term, voluntary or forced), caused by disasters and climate change impacts can cause upheaval for individuals and communities, and can inflame tensions as competition for resources increases. Policies that tap into traditional resilience and response mechanisms that provide for relocation, exchange and sharing of resources in times of crisis provide conflict sensitivity to migration processes (Kiddle and others, 2017).

In considering circular mobility, some countries are facing difficulties around the reintegration of citizens who have been forcefully repatriated for criminal offences abroad (Pereira, 2014). In 2016, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders highlighted the growing number of criminal deportees from metropolitan countries as a regional security risk. A Pacific study by Pereira (2011) found that the

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12 The citizens of the Micronesian stated in Compacts of Free Association with the United States (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands) have right of access to the United States and territories in exchange for reciprocal military access and foreign policy influence. New Zealand extends citizenship to residents of its former territories (Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau), and also provides preferential visa access to citizens of other Polynesian countries, notably Samoa and Tonga - who also enjoy relative ease of access to Australia and the United States.


14 Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau all have far greater proportions of their population living in New Zealand than at home, and the Micronesian states are amongst the highest per capita net emigration rates in the world. See Pacific Institute of Public Policy, Micronesian exodus. Pacific Institute of Public Policy, Discussion Paper No. 16 (2010). Available from http://pacificpolicy.org/2010/12/micronesian-exodus/.

average length of time people who had been deported had spent outside of their birth country was over 20 years. In addition to social stigma and discrimination, which often prevents employment or access to services, some returnees have poor language skills and cultural connectedness. Migration policy responses will need to find ways to further draw on the region’s culture of strong family and kinship ties, and deepen these amongst diasporic communities.

Where migration in the Pacific may once have been considered simply in terms of gaining access to opportunity overseas, it is now an increasingly complex interaction of social, political and economic factors. This transformation demands better balancing of the interrelationships between competing domestic and international positions. The range of issues impacting on peace and development include the balance of inward and outward migration flows, returning migrants, depopulation, migration impacts on social structures, the processing of refugees, and the region’s role in emerging global compact on safe and orderly migration.

### Box 2 Labour-based migration

Temporary labour migration has been a widely-used and relatively successful development strategy in PICs over the last couple of decades that serves the dual purpose of addressing domestic unemployment and alleviating pressures on basic services. Kiribati’s seafarers scheme has endured for two decades, and remains popular amongst male i-Kiribati. Many PICs have actively participated in New Zealand’s Regional Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme, which together with Australia’s Seasonal Worker Program, has given over 12,000 Pacific islanders work opportunities during 2015-2016, and generated approximately US$60 million in remittances per year for the countries of the region. PICs’ focus has been on securing ongoing access to these programs. But the opportunity also exists to build on this success by aligning education and skills training for the region’s youthful population to the need created by the ageing workforces in Australian and New Zealand. The Australia-Pacific Technical College, launched in 2007 to boost hospitality skills and promote labour mobility was intended as a first step in this direction. However, a recent assessment notes that despite gains in skills development, graduates had an emigration rate of only 1.5 per cent due to barriers that limit migration opportunities for Pacific islands graduates.

### C. Urbanisation

Internal migration within Pacific island countries, in the form of urbanization, remains an under-recognised area of policy attention, despite towns and cities across the region becoming ‘hubs’ for socio-economic exclusion and inequality. While the region has a Pacific Urban Agenda in place, the subnational focus has been unable to sustain high-level political attention, despite the prevalence and growth of informal urban settlements in the region. Generations of urban dwelling underscore that the Pacific’s urban issues are more than temporary.

Limited infrastructure, overcrowding, few employment prospects, patchy urban services, financial insecurity and land tenure insecurity, particularly in the burgeoning informal settlements, are chief amongst the litany of Pacific urbanisation challenges. Static economic growth, weak urban governance and management, land disputes and the permanency of urban populations compound

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urban social issues. As hubs for economic activity and service delivery, the Pacific’s urban centres are under pressure to provide services equitably in the face of high urban population growth rates. Up to 50 per cent of Melanesian urban populations live in informal settlements where poverty and hardship rates are high. Urban settlements are frequently on marginal land and are vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change impacts; in the case of the low-lying and atoll countries such as Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, coastal erosion is shrinking urban areas.

Those who live on ‘the fringe’ face widespread inequalities that are potentially destabilising; urban-based social safety nets can’t keep pace with costs of urban living, and cash incomes are inadequate replacements for traditional resources that provide livelihood security. Mushrooming informal settlements, particularly in the larger Melanesian countries, are often sites of crime and violence.

Figure 3. Proportion of Pacific populations living in urban areas (percentage of total population)


To date, Pacific government responses to the ‘urban challenge’ have focused primarily on infrastructure projects. Community governance and social issues have received varying levels of attention, although this is beginning to change, for example in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The concept of ‘urban resilience’, traditionally considered in terms of disaster risk reduction and infrastructure, is a new policy frontier for Pacific governments who have committed to addressing both socio-economic and environmental dimensions of urban resilience.

19 See footnote No. 17.
in the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, endorsed by Pacific Leaders in 2016. This refocused attention on urban affairs is a welcome policy opportunity to achieve the ambition of the Pacific Urban Agenda. Policies that go beyond ‘infrastructure and services’ to also address the inequalities that feed underlying social tensions are particularly needed.

**Box 3 Conflict-sensitive urban initiatives**

**A. Solomon Islands**

Solomon Islands has a high concentration of urban youth, so countering high unemployment, boredom, substance abuse and violence is a peace-building policy priority for government. To manage potential conflict, the Solomon Islands Government has pursued skills training initiatives, and entrepreneurship fostering programmes. The ‘soft skills’ (i.e. non-technical skills pertaining to, *inter alia*, social interaction, character and work ethic) imparted during the course of these initiatives have helped to deter crime and have contributed to social stability, as well as providing economic opportunities for urban youth. Additionally, with United Nations peacebuilding support, efforts are underway to engage youth in the peace process with society and leadership through inclusive space for dialogue and reconciliation, and implementation of the peace policy.

**B. Fiji**

The Pacific’s urban development challenges in PICs and their associated demographic challenges—such as the ‘youth bulge’—have elicited a range of strategies to address potential drivers of conflict. Fiji, with over 50 per cent of its population living in cities, and 70-80 per cent of these people live below the poverty line, has begun to recognise the rights of informal settlers and extend services to them, building concrete ties between the informal and formal sectors.

**D. Exclusion and vulnerabilities – inequalities in access, opportunity and participation**

As a region, in 2015 the Pacific reported the greatest difficulty in achieving poverty reduction under the MDGs. Despite efforts by governments, income and food poverty, and unequal access to basic services persist. The Pacific is far from achieving full equality for all its citizens, particularly in relation to income (see Figure 4).

The urbanisation of poverty, gender inequalities and social exclusion are some of the persistent drivers of vulnerability and insecurity in the region. The exclusion of marginalised groups – young people, women and the elderly – from political life and from full economic participation, coupled with imbalances in access to resources, are indicators of the ‘slow violence’ compounding human insecurity in the Pacific.21

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Figure 4. Inequality in the Pacific (Gini co-efficient where 0 = full equality)


1. Gender inequality

In the mid-2000s, the Pacific reported some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world: Tonga (79%), Samoa (76%), Kiribati (73%), Fiji (72%), Vanuatu (72%) and Solomon Islands (64%)\(^{22}\). Intra-household inequality like this, along with women’s limited access to justice in both traditional and formal systems, have significant socio-economic development implications. These are the economic costs of violence, such as lost work days and cost to health systems, and the societal costs, such as reduced access to education that constrains future participation in the formal sector. All Pacific island countries, except Tonga, have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and accompanying legal frameworks criminalising gender violence are in place or in train.

Policies that comprehensively address gender disparities in political, economic and social affairs and in access to environmental resources are a practical means of getting better development outcomes and maintaining peaceful and prosperous societies.

In 2012 the Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration committed countries to greater action. Achieving the ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires enhanced efforts to combat gender violence and the gender disparities that breed violence, in particular through exploring policy bridges between traditional and formal access to justice and support for peaceful communities. There have been several progressive initiatives in this regard in Bougainville, where women played a critical role in brokering peace in the post-conflict context, and in Vanuatu, which has connected its dual governance systems (traditional and state-based) to foster social stability.

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2. The youth challenge

While young populations are a challenge shared across all PICs, 2030 projections suggest this will be a continuing challenge for Melanesian countries in particular (see Figure 5). The concentration of the ‘youth bulge’ in the Pacific’s urban centres calls for greater attention to youth development policies and youth participation, particularly when the links between disenfranchised and under-educated youth and youth-driven violence are well-established23.

Figure 5. Proportion of Melanesian populations aged 15-24 years, 2016 and 2030 projections

Source: SPC 2016.

Policy approaches amongst Pacific island countries to date include vocational skills training, employment programs and entrepreneurship schemes, as well as sports development. Where island states have brokered arrangements with neighbouring metropolitan countries, such as Australia and New Zealand,24 government policies encourage out-migration of young people from both urban and rural areas to join temporary work schemes. The impact of such schemes on inclusion and youth empowerment are mixed, however. As Solomon Islands has experienced, continued investments in youth empowerment are fundamental to mitigating youth-driven crime and violence, and ensuring that youth are not ‘left behind’ in sustainable development (see also Box 2).

3. Exclusion in development

Optimism about the region’s generally positive economic outlook (especially the increasing investments in ICT and labour mobility), however, must be tempered against the vulnerability of PICs and their limited ability to meet the increasing demand for public services, which is significantly compromised by rising levels of sovereign debt.25 This poses the risk that governments may have insufficient resources or policy space to meet the needs of their peoples. Conflict and instability find fertile ground in such circumstances, especially when high levels of youth unemployment, sub-standard service delivery, and inequality in resource sharing (including

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24 See previous discussion under the Migration section, Section IV. B.
food and water) are already extant.

While development is an essential means of avoiding conflict, it can also be a trigger if it results in marginalisation, perceived or actual. Even a cursory reflection on the region’s recent history suggests that the potential of domestic and external shocks warrants ongoing vigilance to protect development gains, and to prevent any outbreaks of conflict.

V. Climate change as a threat multiplier against peaceful development

Exacerbating development conflict pressure points is the threat multiplier of climate change.

Pacific island countries are amongst the highest at risk of natural disaster, with the average annual cost of direct losses estimated at USD 284 million. For some of the smaller economies, this means the cost of a single event could exceed annual GDP. The category 5 Tropical Cyclones Pam and Winston that struck the region in 2015 and 2016 were estimated to have cost 61 per cent of Vanuatu GDP and 31 per cent of Fiji GDP respectively.

Between November 2013 and June 2015, the Pacific experienced nine extreme weather-related events; five of these had significant humanitarian consequences that impacted a quarter of the total population of the eight affected countries (see Figure 6). The region is now bracing for the prospect of higher intensity, more frequent extreme weather events, including unprecedented out-of-season cyclones. Additionally, climate change will bring more saltwater intrusion, prolonged heavy rainfall and flooding, higher temperatures, droughts, and more violent tropical cyclones.

The impacts of climate change are directly linked to the adequate provision of the basic determinants of health and well-being, food, water, and shelter. The potential for direct disruptions to agriculture (from flooding, drought, and saltwater inundation) and fisheries (rising sea temperatures, coral bleaching, coastal erosion) have been well established, as has the likelihood of increased water stress and damage to property. Often overshadowed by damage to life and livelihoods, however, are the health implications, including the toll that disaster trauma (dealing with loss of family members, housing, livelihoods, crops and livestock) exacts on mental health. Positive mental health is fundamental for coping, and when this is compromised, it can

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26 Including tropical cyclones, floods, storm surges, droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis.
28 Based on government estimates of cost and ESCAP statistical data on gross domestic product.
33 While there has been an increased number of studies of the economic impact of mental health issues on the economies of high-income countries, for example depression was estimated to cost at least US$ 800 billion in 2010 in lost economic output - a sum expected to more than double by 2030 (World Bank, 2017), less clear is the understanding of the impacts on development gains in low and middle-income countries (see for example, L. Cruz and others, 2013). The gap in understanding has led to a joint World Bank-WHO (2017) initiative focused on ‘bringing mental health issues from the periphery to the centre of the global development agenda’.
elevate stress and vulnerability. The overwhelming majority of people with mental health issues are living in poverty, poor physical health, and are subject to human rights violations.\textsuperscript{34}

**Figure 6. People affected by extreme weather-related events in Pacific island countries, 2013-2017 (per thousand population, per year)**

![Chart showing people affected by extreme weather-related events in Pacific island countries, 2013-2017 (per thousand population, per year)](chart-image)


The impacts of climate change also fuel infectious illnesses like typhoid, malaria, dengue, cholera and diarrheal disease,\textsuperscript{35} further burdening the region’s fragile health systems. Changing lifestyles and diets, particularly amongst growing urban populations, have driven a shift from traditional staples to imported, nutritionally poor foods.\textsuperscript{36} In addition to driving the region’s non-communicable diseases (NCD) crisis,\textsuperscript{37} this shift is contributing to a decline in agricultural production, and a corresponding increase in susceptibility to global supply and price shocks in foodstuffs.

Natural disasters have similar threat multiplier implications to development. As a region highly vulnerable to natural disasters (Vanuatu and Tonga rank first and second most vulnerable countries out of 171 on the 2016 World Risk Report), safeguarding development gains from natural disaster is an ongoing challenge. Regular livelihood shocks and major disruptions to economic and social systems have the potential to overwhelm formal and informal governance systems—the very structures that underpin peace and facilitate development—unless policy attention is given to these systems as a central component of national disaster preparedness.

National and regional integration of climate change and disaster risk reduction is advancing, and is often coupled with community adaptation outreach. For example, in response to the regional non-communicable diseases crisis, efforts are being made to promote a return to ‘island diets’ in concert with climate change adaptation initiatives to build the resilience of food production systems, addressing the risks from changing rainfall patterns and saltwater intrusion to staple food


\textsuperscript{35} http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2017/cop23/en/.

\textsuperscript{36} Johann Bell and others, “Climate change and Pacific Island food systems: The future of food, farming and fishing in the Pacific Islands under a changing climate”, CCAFS and CTA (Copenhagen, Denmark and Wageningen, the Netherlands, 2016).

\textsuperscript{37} See www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/7/10-010710/en/.
crops like taro and cassava.³⁸

Kinship obligations to provide food and shelter in times of disaster can supplement limited state disaster aid, but they also increase financial and social strains on families, particularly those in urban areas without access to subsistence crops. Reliance on relief aid can sometimes diminish traditional mechanisms. Acts, or perceptions, of political favouritism, can fuel tensions over the distribution of relief efforts. In 2018, the temporary mass relocation of the entire population of Ambae island in Vanuatu provided an example of a disaster response managed in tandem using traditional coping systems and a state-run humanitarian disaster response; it highlighted the need for multi-stakeholder engagement³⁹ to ensure peaceful outcomes.

Globally, climate finance flows have increased significantly. Across the region, 59 per cent of climate finance is for adaptation activities, with the largest single share supporting ‘enabling environments’, which includes activities to mainstream climate change into sector policies, planning and management, —mainly in the energy, forestry and water sectors.⁴⁰ The opportunity for Pacific governments to use climate finance flows to help address persistent inequalities and support conflict-sensitive approaches must be taken.

Over the last decade there has been considerable debate over the role the United Nations Security Council should have in the consideration of climate change.⁴¹ While political divisions persist, the discussion has furthered a broader discussion of climate change within the context of peace and sustainable development.⁴² The security–climate change nexus traverses social security (health and wellbeing); resource security (food, water, land, energy); national security (sovereignty, especially for the low-lying atoll states facing an existential threat); and international security (global peace and stability). Ensuring strong and resilient institutions to traverse these issues in times of multiple disasters is also a key element. Arguably, the peace-development nexus in the Pacific is necessarily a climate-peace-development nexus.

The urgent need to deal with climate change and its threat multiplier effect to existing development challenges in the region underscores why the Pacific must focus on its governance systems and conflict-sensitive development under the 2030 Agenda.

VI. The common thread: Strengthening effective institutions in the Pacific

The ability of political and social institutions to cope with shocks to stability like conflict is key to sustaining peace in development. Peaceful and inclusive societies depend on effective and

³⁹ The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP) 2017 – 2030 provides high level strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters, in ways that promote the active engagement of diverse groups, both individually and in partnership.
⁴¹ The Pacific through its grouping in the United Nations (The Pacific small island developing States - PSIDS) has long lobbied for climate change to be considered an issue of global peace and security and that it should be on the agenda of the Security Council. The following article provides an overview of the engagement of the United Nations Security Council on climate change. See www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-08/the_security_council_and_climate_change_an_ambivalent_relationship.php.
accountable institutions at all levels, both formal and informal and where there is space for participation and dialogue. However, attention to informal institutions has been *ad hoc* in Pacific policymaking, tending to focus on the rule of law, as in the examples of the land courts of Samoa and Vanuatu.

As previous themes have highlighted, the Pacific’s persistent development challenges are amplified by the context of increasing resource scarcity, imbalances in migration policies and deepening urban inequalities. Combined with the threat multiplier of climate change, Pacific policymakers must urgently step up to steer development efforts to deal with these conflict pressure points in a manner that facilitates balanced, inclusive development by engaging with the full range of national institutions.

The simmering insecurities diminish the region’s progress towards sustainable development, and suggest that traditional aid-dependent development approaches are insufficient for facilitating transformational development. As a region that draws strength from the rich and diverse traditional heritage that has long provided sustenance, social stability and resilience, truly transformational and peaceful development necessarily involves ‘policy bridges’ between customary and formal systems.

However, the Pacific’s rich heritage of informal and traditional social protection ‘buffers’, based on elaborate kinship-based social structures linked to resource rights, are under increasing pressure from monetisation in the transition from subsistence- to cash-based market economies.

Institutions—formal and informal, state-centric and community-centric—are the common thread in the facilitation of peaceful, inclusive, and equitable sustainable development. However, culture has at times been described as a ‘barrier’ to the development approaches that Pacific governments have pursued. SDG 16 offers many potential opportunities to move ahead on persistent development issues, to think beyond the existing development paradigm and to embrace the opportunities that Pacific cultures and local governance systems offer for achieving peaceful development, while maintaining a human-rights based approach.

A shift in mindset is required, to consider, the role of social and customary institutions in conflict-sensitive development. For example, the social problems associated with high numbers of unemployed young people in urban centres, are not simply a demographic problem, but as a consequence of a much more complex set of factors. Likewise, the challenges posed by migration have significant implications on social institutions at the sending and receiving ends, which warrant attention. Such a mindset dictates an evolution from the traditional security lens—in the youth example, to reinforce community policing with urban planning (for example, the creation of safe spaces for young people), economic management (notably, creating jobs), and social planning (for example, providing activities for people to engage in, as well as ensuring healthcare, education and training).

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VII. Policy recommendations

Sustainable Development Goal 16 presents a valuable policy opportunity for Pacific island countries to advance their sustainable development through mobilising attention to conflict-sensitive development. It highlights the importance of fostering peace in any sustainable development effort.

Balancing the traditional development focus on health, education and poverty with inclusive governance/institutions and conflict prevention must become a larger part of policymaking in the Pacific. Development processes are inherently sites for potential conflict, particularly in relation to issues of resource scarcity, exclusion and inequality. Effective and resilient social institutions are essential buffers against conflict. Fundamentally, the threats to peace based on exclusion, vulnerability and resource scarcity can be avoided with thoughtful policy and programming that goes beyond a ‘business as usual’ approach. Therefore, in fostering peaceful development under the 2030 Agenda, the following two policy recommendations serve to advance efforts to foster peaceful sustainable development approaches in the Pacific, drawing from existing good practice across the region.

A. Reinvigorated attention to the Human Security Framework for the Pacific (HSFP) is essential to support Pacific-style peaceful development in a holistic manner and advance the SDG 16 conversation in the region;

1. Drawing on lessons from the 2015 review of the HSFP, renewed attention within the context of a Biketawa Plus concept would include specific target areas for policy attention. The four issues highlighted here should be included: resource governance; migration and displacement; urbanisation; and exclusion and inequality. The Pacific Islands Forum could commission a rapid review of the HSFP in the context of the 2030 Agenda, SDG 16 and Biketawa Plus as a way forward.

2. Many aspects of human security are already being addressed by governments in a range of ways. However, the principles of the HSFP, and in particular the customary governance principles of the HSFP might encourage policy makers to turn their attention to challenges that have not previously been visible to them.

3. There may also be a need to develop new ways of monitoring human security in the Pacific.

B. Fostering peaceful development under the 2030 Agenda will require a rethinking of development approaches in the Pacific, that embraces working with state and non-state governance systems to increase the likelihood of peaceful development and stem ‘slow violence’ in the region. Efforts to localise SDG 16 will need to think beyond the global focus on weapons, violence and trafficking, to focus on more effective institutions in support of peace, sustainable development and conflict prevention;

1. The 2019 High-Level Political Forum will focus attention on SDG 16 (among other goals), which is an opportunity for reporting via voluntary national reviews and regional sustainable development reporting to demonstrate the Pacific’s contextualising of this particular goal.

2. Governments could include SDG 16 into national planning and operations, tailoring it to focus on domestic drivers of conflict based on pressures points around exclusion,
vulnerability and competition for resources.

3. This may require governments and development partners to provide policy space to incorporate conflict and context analysis into development planning, including domestic governance arrangements (both state and non-state), which in turn would guide better programming that, at minimum, does not exacerbate existing exclusions and inequalities, and ideally facilitates greater inclusion and equality.

4. This may require governments – supported by partners in the region - to invest in developing holistic strategies that can work with, not against, cultural and social institutions at local and regional levels. Hybrid conflict prevention mechanisms could be explored, for example, that can help create space for dialogue and participation at all levels.

5. Identifying ways to convene development and security/conflict prevention/peacebuilding practitioners and processes will be essential for ensuring a coherent approach to peaceful development – the Biketawa Plus process may be one such platform.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper highlights the policy opportunities presented by SDG 16, the ‘peace goal’, to safeguard development gains in the Pacific. Fostering peaceful sustainable development in the Pacific will require a re-thinking of development approaches taken, an increased emphasis on strengthening institutions – both formal and informal – and conflict-sensitive policy and programmes to mitigate drivers of conflict, exclusion and inequality. Acknowledging limitations in the reach of and access to Pacific island state institutions, many such solutions will necessarily be through informal structures. The potential for regional level initiatives, such as a revisiting of the Pacific Human Security Framework 2012-2015, to both complement national initiatives and provide a platform for regional innovation and knowledge exchange could be a viable way forward. Further policy research and innovation in bridging formal and informal institutions to support of peaceful development would also add value, and further identify additional risks and challenges that Pacific island countries may need to address through policy and practice.
References


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