

14. Regionalism: Performance and Promise

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Le régionalisme – réalisations et espoirs

Cet article examine les réalisations et la promesse du régionalisme dans le Pacifique en considérant les accords commerciaux et économiques, la fourniture de services et les facilités de soutien (appelées également le développement sectoriel), les réactions politiques et en matière de sécurité et le Conseil des organisations régionales dans le Pacifique (CROP) en mettant l'accent sur le Forum des Îles du Pacifique et la promesse d'une plus grande intégration et d'une plus grande coopération régionales par le biais du Plan Pacifique. Cette question des réalisations et des promesses pour le régionalisme appelle des réponses variées, l'une d'elles étant que les résultats de l'énergie globale dépensée en vue de l'intégration régionale sont quelque peu mitigés. On n'a pas obtenu les rendements attendus de cette intégration régionale. Par conséquent, cela vaut-il la peine d'investir ? En outre, les résultats du régionalisme, quelle que soit la façon dont on le définit, ont besoin d'être examinés et mis à la disposition de tous ceux qui ont un intérêt à la question afin qu'ils soient en mesure de les juger. Une autre proposition est le besoin d'un examen plus approfondi du régionalisme. Quelles sont les réalisations de ce régionalisme ? Quels sont les difficultés et les défis auxquels il doit faire face ? Quelles en sont les réussites ? Quelles en sont les perspectives et les promesses ? Cet article retrace l'évolution du régionalisme dans le Pacifique et présente une réponse personnelle au défi qui consiste à le construire et le promouvoir tel qu'il s'articule dans le Plan Pacifique.

Introduction

From the outset, some qualifications are necessary. As a regional public servant involved in coordinating the implementation of some initiatives in the Pacific Plan, this chapter may be biased towards regional integration. The topic suggests several things. One is that the overall energy put into regional integration has been somewhat mixed. The perceived returns on investment in regional integration have not been delivered. Therefore, is it really worth the

trouble in investment? Moreover, the performance of regionalism, however that is defined, needs to be examined and laid out for all stakeholders to assess. What has regionalism achieved? What are the challenges and difficulties? What are the successes? What are the prospects and what are the promises?

Regionalism as it is defined by the Pacific Islands Forum will be revisited after a review of the regional governance architecture. But from the outset, several publications on regionalism should be acknowledged in contributing to the discourse and might also help to share perspectives on the subject. These include the publication edited by Graham (2008) on models of regional governance, Bryant-Tokalau and Frazer (2006) on redefining the Pacific, the article by Freitag (2006) on regional integration in the South Pacific, and Fry (2005) on the regional governance infrastructure. Reviewing these works bring out the importance of the subject as well as its complications and dynamics. Fry's paper is notable for its analysis of the evolving phases of pooled regional governance, overlapping in different time periods covering different issues.¹

For this discussions, regionalism will be considered under the following headings: trade and economic arrangements; service delivery and support facilities (also referred to as sectoral development); political and security responses; Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) with a specific focus on the Pacific Islands Forum; and the promise of greater regional integration and cooperation through the Pacific Plan. The performance of and promise for regionalism should speak for itself.

Regional Trade and Economic Arrangements

Many trade arrangements have been entered into by many independent Pacific Island states for many different developmental objectives. These include the belief that economic growth would be stimulated, jobs and employment opportunities would be created, and the national economies would diversify and grow. Often it is the challenge to the abilities of Pacific states to generate revenue to support public expenditure away from the traditional tariff-based revenue generation and the subsequent exposure of national industries to international competition which generates much scepticism about trade arrangements. Concessions to these concerns have often been addressed through trade preference arrangements but have over the years been gradually negotiated away to free trade agreements.

¹ Fry (2005) describes five main phases, beginning with comprehensive regional integration (1971-74), overlapping and advancing with sectoral integration (1971-1978), moving with increased collective diplomacy (1979-90), and intertwined with regional security community (1984-89) and the harmonisation of national policies (1994-2003).

Early trade preference arrangements for Pacific states include those granted by the United Kingdom in the mid-1960s when former colonies joined the European Economic Community and later incorporated with Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific states as well as the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) under the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1971. Initially, the Pacific states entered these agreements individually as they became independent self-governing states and were followed by others. Fiji, Samoa and Tonga entered Lomé in 1975 and other Pacific states entered into the series of Lomé agreements in 1979, 1984, 1990 and later the broader Cotonou Agreement (1975) – the flagship of the ACP-EU development cooperation. The EPAs which are under negotiation, involving individual states and groups of countries will replace the Cotonou agreement. Only Fiji and Papua New Guinea have signed onto Interim EPAs on Trade in Goods Agreement as both need to maintain market access to the EU, especially for sugar and tuna respectively. Currently, Fiji's sugar preference is suspended as part of the EU sanctions following the military coup, placing at stake approximately 26 per cent of its total export earnings.

Aside from the developmental objectives, the need to export their raw materials to sustain national economies inadvertently brought Pacific states into the broader arena of globalised and regional trade and economic arrangements. The inherent risks, threats, challenges and benefits are all an integral part of this process. Trade agreements however provide the broad governance framework under which trading parties agree to conduct commercial exchanges, investment and trade in goods and services.

Other notable trade arrangements with an economic growth agenda initiated at the bilateral level have been entered into between Pacific states with Australia and New Zealand, and between Pacific states. Some bilateral agreements interface with other regional agreements. For example, the Papua New Guinea-Australia Trade and Commercial Relations Agreements (PACTRA) was complemented by the South Pacific Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA) in 1980 at the Leaders meeting in Kiribati and which was later incorporated into PACTRA. Trade between the 14 Forum countries is limited, estimated at only 2 per cent of their total trade (Dearden 2008). The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) are amongst the most notable examples of reciprocal and non-reciprocal trade agreements between and amongst Pacific Island countries. The former was initiated and put into place by leaders of the three Melanesian states – Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in 1993 and Fiji later in 1998. The agreement commits MSG members to liberalise trade over 8 years from 2005.

Unlike the MSG trade agreement, PICTA essentially laid the basis for a free trade agreement and economic integration through the Pacific Islands with its

region-wide arrangement. It was signed by 14 Pacific Island states² along with the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER), with Australia and New Zealand in 2001. Reviewed through the Forum Trade Ministers Meetings which is held once a year, PACER sought 'to provide the 'stepping stone' to allow Forum Island Countries to gradually become part of a single regional market and integrate into the international economy'. While tariffs were scheduled to be reduced to zero by 2010 and 2012 for different Pacific Island states, exemptions and protection of certain industries exist. PICTA is broad minded in that it recognises other trade agreements of its members such as the Cotonou agreement, SPARTECA and the Compact of Free Association.

The recent trade and economic integration agreement with Forum countries, PACER Plus, is anticipated to assist in 'furthering regional integration and helping to create opportunities for economic growth and prosperity in Forum Countries, including employment'. Some observers, notably NGOs are not convinced and believe the prospects for some Forum Island countries are not good. Others contend that PACER and PACER Plus attempt to offer the Forum Island region the real prospects for economic integration. To help overcome Fiji's 'isolation', Leaders in 2009 agreed that the Fiji military regime would not participate in the PACER Plus negotiations but Fiji officials would be briefed following each negotiation meeting and who would also convey Fiji's concerns.

For the northern Pacific the Micronesian Presidents' Summit is another sub-regional political platform for Micronesian leadership to provide a collective sub-regional voice on a range of issues affecting their region as well as to develop a collective position and direction. Similar to the Pacific Islands Forum and MSG, outcomes of the Micronesian Presidents' Summit are issued at the end of their meetings. The Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau operate under a Compact of Free Association with the United States which ends in 2023. Trade arrangements, especially exports to the United States are an integral component of the Compact arrangement. The Compact arrangement, aside from providing a broad framework for economic development and assistance, self-government and national defence and security, provides these Island states privileged immigration access to the United States. Monetary aid to the Federated States of Micronesia is approximately US\$90 million, about US\$60 million a year for the Republic of the Marshall Islands and about US\$450 million over a period of 15 years for the Republic of Palau under the Compact arrangement. Concessions for this arrangement include permitting the United States to deploy troops, undertake military exercises and test fire missiles until 2066 with an option to extend it to 2086. Claims arising out of

2 All the Forum Island Countries, except for Australia and New Zealand signed this agreement.

US nuclear test at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls are deemed to be settled. These Island states are restrained from acting contrary to the security and defence agreements.

Some Pacific states (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga) have joined the successor of GATT, the World Trade Organization (1995) which has stronger enforcement powers as well as the challenges of multilateral trading system. Papua New Guinea aside from Australia and New Zealand is the only Pacific state that is a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which also advocates trade liberalisation and the gradual reduction of barriers to trade.

Trade and economic arrangements set out the conduct of trading countries within a legally enforceable framework which, aside from trade in goods and services, and as articulated in PACER, 'provide a framework for cooperation over time to the development of a single regional market'. Essentially, the new regional trade arrangements, like earlier ones, make this inevitable but for Pacific states to explore alternative revenue strategies. Substantial opposition is expected given the narrow economic and revenue base for many small island states with growing public sector costs without a correlating increase in public revenue.

Like trade and economic arrangements, a new regional effort endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2009 is the Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination which in many respects complements regional effort at improving and coordinating development outcomes, assist Pacific states address global financial and economic impacts and strengthen the long-term economic resilience of the region. The Compact is currently being worked on.

Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)

CROP was formerly known as the South Pacific Organisations Coordination Committee. It was replaced with the CROP in 1988. Before the implementation of the Regional Institutional Framework (RIF) there were 11 agencies each with different roles and functions, and with their own governance structures in serving the region. Chaired by the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, it 'exists to ensure that regional organisations pursue their collective aim of achieving sustainable development in the Pacific Island Countries in the most effective and efficient manner' and that this can be achieved 'through coordinated and cooperative action'. CROP is the vehicle for the formulation and dissemination of the regional strategy on development priorities and exists to

provide services to Pacific people. Striving to ensure that regional organisations service the needs of the people of the Pacific Islands is an ongoing consideration of Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum. The RIF which has been underway since 2007 not only reduces the number of regional organisations but seeks to minimise duplication of functions and to reduce wastage of regional effort.

Member organisations of the CROP based outside Fiji are the Forum Fisheries Agency (1979) situated in Honiara, Solomon Islands, the Pacific Islands Development Programme (1980) based in Honolulu, Hawaii, and the Samoa-based South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) established in 1980. The SPC is headquartered in Noumea, New Caledonia with a branch in Fiji. New branches are being set up in the region. The rest of the CROP are based in Fiji. Education service providers include the USP (1986), the Fiji School of Medicine (1885) and the South Pacific Board of Education Assessment (1980). Investment and infrastructure enhancing service providers are the Pacific Power Association and South-Pacific.travel. Technical service providers include the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Programme (SOPAC) established in 1972 and which is now absorbed into SPC.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum

Perhaps the two most pivotal regional organisations are the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community was established in 1947 as the South Pacific Commission by Great Britain, France, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. It is the oldest technical organisation delivering specialised services covering land and human resources, agriculture, health and demographic statistics to 22 Pacific Island territories.

The Pacific Islands Forum is considered as the regional body that sets the Pacific region's political and economic policy agenda. It is made up of 16 sovereign independent Pacific States³ and has been around since August 1971. Forum Observers include Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, the Commonwealth, the Asian Development Bank and Timor Leste as a Special Observer. Its creation was initiated by Pacific Island leaders, in particular the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of Fiji, as an informal regional forum with for Pacific states to discuss issues of politics, trade and services and as vehicle to register its voice on regional and

³ Members of the Pacific Islands Forum are Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga and Vanuatu.

international issues that affected the region. Over the years, it has grown to take a formal structure. In 2005, Leaders adopted the new Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum as an intergovernmental organisation at international law (see also Spillane 2008). The Agreement also updates the Forum's purpose and functions to reflect the vision and direction taken under the Pacific Plan. As a way of facilitating regional cooperation and integration Leaders agreed to broaden the Forum's membership by establishing new associate and observer membership categories (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005).

Basically, the Forum has no formal rules governing its operations or the conduct of its meetings. The agenda is based on reports from the Secretariat and related regional organisations and committees, ministerial meetings as well as from members. Decisions by the Leaders are reached by consensus and outlined in a Forum Communiqué from which policies are developed and work programmes are prepared. The Head of Government of the host country is the Chair of the Forum until the next meeting.

The administrative arm of the Forum is the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, based in Suva, Fiji. It acts as the Secretariat for Forum related events, implements decisions by Leaders, facilitates the delivery of development assistance to member states, and undertakes the political and legal mandates of Forum Meetings. The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General. The Forum Officials Committee (made up of representatives from all Forum governments) is the governing body for the Secretariat and oversees its activities. The Secretary General is also the permanent Chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) that brings together the eleven main regional organisations in the Pacific region. The Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC) made up of officials from all Forum member countries which is also chaired by the Secretary General oversees the implementation of the Pacific Plan.

The formation of the Forum was the expression of many things, one of which was certainly about how Pacific Islands states, then making their preparations for independence, sought to address the trade and economic challenges posed by remoteness, smallness, isolation and resource limitations – issues which the Pacific Plan is currently grappling with today. It was and is about functional regional cooperation some of which has been discussed above. The list of topics considered by the leaders over the years includes the establishment of the FFA, regional shipping, regional civil aviation, trade agreements and marketing, the environment, the USP and relations with a range of international organisations and the admission of new members.

Regional Service Delivery and Support Facilities

Regional approaches to overcoming capacity limitations in service delivery and support at a national level is perhaps an area where the greatest gains have been recorded. Benefits to the region have flowed from tertiary education, transport, shipping, telecommunications, fisheries, environment and investment support. Since its establishment in 1968, the University of the South Pacific (USP) whose main campus is situated in Suva, Fiji has contributed significantly to the human development needs of many Pacific Islands states in the areas of science and technology, law and politics, economics, accounting, education and others. The USP has campuses in Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, and a school in Vanuatu offering degrees in law. Partly to harmonise educational standards across the region, the South Pacific Board for Education Assessment was created in 1980 but under the Regional Institutional Framework (RIF) aimed at re-aligning regional organisation, it will merge into the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

In order to provide shipping services in the region, the Pacific Forum Line (PFL) was established in 1977. Its fleet of vessels service ports linking Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Twelve Forum member governments own PFL. Air Pacific, Fiji's national airline evolved in the 1960s through the joint collaboration of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji was designed to tackle the challenges of long distances which separated many Pacific Islands. Unlike the USP, support for Air Pacific did not go far enough as other Pacific states relinquished their shareholding to establish, albeit with mixed results, their own national airlines, leaving Fiji to develop Air Pacific. To overcome the air services problem and to liberalise the aviation market in the Pacific, Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu signed the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement (PIASA). The aviation sector however remains vulnerable to global fuel and energy crisis, including financial setbacks.

The establishment of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in 1979 to support the management of the Pacific region's biggest fisheries resources and maximise the returns on its harvest of fish on a sustainable scale on behalf of Pacific states is considered a success story (Tarte 2006). FAA assists its members negotiate the sale of fishing licenses to countries like Japan, Taiwan, Korea and the United States. It also undertakes monitoring and surveillance programs against illegal fishing and works closely with the SPC on scientific programs and with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on trade and investment matters.

Technical assistance on environmental management and climate change is provided by the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) which was established in 1973. Geoscience matters covering mineral exploration,

petroleum, water management and community natural disaster and risk management is provided by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), established in 1972. Under the current RIF process, some of the work of SOPAC will merge with the SPC and the SPREP.

In terms of investment development several service delivery vehicles offer that support. In harnessing the tourism potential of the region, the South Pacific Tourism Organisation now renamed as 'south-pacific.travel' was established to promote and market the potential of the Pacific as a tourist destination. In 2007, the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO) was created to support private sector organisations in the region. The Oceania Customs Organisations (OCO) based in Suva, Fiji offers support to Pacific states to help monitor and audit imports as well as the movement of goods, including contrabands and to maximise the returns in revenue for governments as well as to protect national consumers.

Other regional organisations that provide technical and advisory support on security related matters include the Pacific Islands Police Conference based in Wellington, New Zealand, the Transnational Crime Unit and the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference. New challenges which have harnessed a collective regional voice in the international fora include climate change and related environmental issues as well as the global financial crisis which not only test the vulnerability of small islands in the region but also the ability of regional organisations to response to these challenges.

In response to the global energy crisis, and in response to the Leaders' directive, increasing effort is being made to draw more Pacific Islands countries to sign onto the Forum's regional initiative on bulk petroleum procurement. So far, only Nauru, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands signed. Other Forum countries are expected to sign up after consulting their governments. The idea of the bulk purchasing of fuel to save small island states money has been on the agenda of Pacific meetings for years. The global crisis and increasing price of fuel and which forced the Marshall Islands to declare a state of emergency, beckons more Pacific Islands to seriously consider the Agreement. The bulk procurement project essentially promotes the idea of a single market and economy in the Pacific - towards the creation of a single Pacific market where this is seen as a potentially important strategic response to overcome the issues of market smallness and isolation needs to be considered thoroughly given it benefits for the region. Its main rationale in response to the recent crisis in the petroleum market in the Pacific should expand into other possibilities through the strength presented by a single market. The possibilities for developing a coordinated regional strategy or package for the Pacific region in readiness for the impact of the global financial crisis therefore should not be undervalued. Certainly, the

potential of the Pacific's regional architecture to respond to critical regional and global crisis remains to be fully realised, including the opportunities available through multilateral arrangements.

Political and Security Responses

Forum Leaders in the opening section of the vision statement of the Pacific Plan 'believe that the Pacific can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives'. Except for the separatist rebellion in Santo, Vanuatu, the region enjoyed a relatively quiet and peaceful transition to Independence. In recent years, however, the demise of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law in Fiji which has experienced four military coups in under 30 years, the 10-year long civil conflict on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the political and ethnic tensions in the Solomon Islands in the early 2000s and the riots in Tonga in 2006, reminds the region of the costs of internal threats to the welfare of the people and governance.

The Biketawa Declaration

Noting the important need to play a role, a regional mechanism – the Biketawa Declaration – was endorsed by Leaders in 2000. The Declaration is essentially a guiding tool which seeks to develop a collective and coordinated regional response to national conflicts and crisis in the region but which at the same time recognises the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its members. The Declaration was invoked in 2003 where a police-led operation restored law and order, supported by regional peacekeepers, and a programme of assistance strengthened the justice system, restored the economy and basic services in the Solomon Islands. The intervention now known as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) received the full support and endorsement of the Solomon Islands and all Forum members. This was a significant milestone for the Forum in regional cooperation.

The Biketawa Declaration was again invoked in 2004 on Nauru's request in response to the economic crisis and the threats posed to its national security and stability. Both scenarios were different. For the Solomon Islands, it involved the restoration of law and order, economic recovery, governance rehabilitation with recovery projected to be achieved in the long-term. It also includes a rebuilding of trust, setting aside and reconciling differences and re-forging relationships between different communities and amongst the different ethnic groups. As has been witnessed from other conflicts, in Bougainville and more recently, riots in

Tonga, the wound and scars of internal conflicts need the benefit of time to heal. For Nauru, however, the problem was financial and economic mismanagement needing a long-term task of rebuilding and reforming its economy. The spirit of cooperation, consultations and partnership between RAMSI and the Solomon Islands has matured over the years leading to the conclusion of the Solomon Islands Government – RAMSI Partnership Framework in 2009. It has also attracted the interest from other governments to be part of the regional effort. The success of the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru (PRAN) and the effort of the Nauru government has restored Nauru on a path to sustainable economic recovery and development. PRAN ended in 2009 although ongoing economic, social, infrastructure, and development challenges continue to receive the commitment of support from Forum members of its reform agenda.

The situation in Fiji however has presented the Biketawa Declaration with yet another test of its versatility and ability. Given recent comments that the Biketawa Declaration has failed with regard to Fiji, and is therefore ineffective and should be abandoned, it is imperative to shed light on the regional effort on Fiji, at least from the Forum’s perspective. At the request of Fiji, several consultative mechanisms were established to try and resolve the impasse between the Government and the military since 2007. These mechanisms included an Eminent Persons Group which reported to the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting in Port Vila, Vanuatu in 2007 and later in Auckland in 2008, the Ministerial Contact Group, and the dialogue process between Fiji and other Forum members through the Forum-Fiji Joint Working Group; and a Special Forum Leaders’ Meeting in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in 2009. The Fiji-Forum Joint Working Group under the Chair of Papua New Guinea, and comprising senior officials from Australia, Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, held a total of 35 meetings between 2007 and early 2009. Aside from discussing the standing issues such as the restoration of civilian rule, upholding the 1997 Constitution, and the cessation of human rights abuses, the Fiji-Forum Joint Working Group had oversight over the report of the independent technical assessment of an election timetable for Fiji and of the coordination of donor assistance for the census and election process. Reporting to the Eminent Persons Group, the Ministerial Contact Group, the Forum Foreign Ministers through to Forum Leaders, this Fiji-Forum Joint Working Group maintained the “bridge” with Fiji and kept discussions alive and active for a return to parliamentary democracy. Essentially, an uncooperative and less politically discerning leadership remain a major barrier to early restoration of parliamentary democracy for Fiji, and thus deny the potential for conflict resolution in the Biketawa Declaration.⁴

⁴ The independent technical assessment report of an election timetable for Fiji found that from a technical point of view, a parliamentary election was feasible in the first quarter of 2009, or earlier in November 2008.

On 1 May 2009 Fiji was suspended from the Forum. Fiji briefly returned to re-engage with Forum members through the Forum-Fiji Joint Working Group but this has since fallen through although not officially abandoned. Seeking to remain engaged with Fiji on an ongoing basis has been of paramount importance to the Forum and the Biketawa Declaration. Essentially, it was the state of crisis in Fiji and the Solomon Islands in 2000, which led the Forum to adopt the Biketawa Declaration, mainly because the Forum needed a mechanism to deal with such a crisis, and more importantly, there was a political consensus in the region to create one. The Declaration also saw a clear shift in the region's attitude to serious crises in the region, compared to its response to the 1987 coups in Fiji. The Declaration contains guiding principles and provides measures for a regional response to help a Forum member, which is in need of urgent assistance. The Declaration should also be seen in the spirit of regionalism as promoted by the Pacific Plan but also mindful of and sensitive to sovereignty. Engagement through diplomacy underpins the Biketawa Declaration to build the bridges through ongoing dialogue – irrespective of time.

It is therefore perhaps presumptuous to view the Biketawa Declaration to be endowed with the versatility and utility of application to all manner of conflict and crisis across the region. Further, it is also erroneous to visualise the Biketawa Declaration as having an unlimited reservoir of magical powers to resolve, to provide answers to and to fix (including offering successful regional responses) every national conflict and crisis. Such an observation is over-simplistic and reflects a poor understanding, as well as disregard and appreciation for the complex socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic environment from which the conflicts and crisis arise. To write-off and to discard the Biketawa Declaration because it has been unable to assist Fiji through the challenges that it has encountered is both short-sighted and foolish. It is short-sighted because it denies other Forum member states the opportunity to draw on members' collective resources during their times of strife. It is foolish because its absence does not afford others in the region a mechanism for a collective regional response to problems. Rather, the Biketawa Declaration is only a mechanism, a guiding tool now available to the region with the capability to provide a collective regional response to crisis. It would however be more constructive to assess the strengths and limitations of the Biketawa Declaration and to suggest ways it could be made to be more effective. However out of three situations of crisis that the Biketawa Declaration was invoked; two have been constructive. One perhaps is complicated.

Regional Integration and Cooperation: Regionalism

The decision of Forum Leaders in 2004 to strengthen regional cooperation and integration and endorsed in 2005 through the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration is an ambitious undertaking on regionalism in the region. The Plan which has a general timeframe of 10 years seeks to enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security, by attempting to channel the development effort all regional organisations, donors and development partners through a single plan.

The Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC) has oversight over the implementation of the Pacific Plan. In recent years, the decision-making process has been streamlined to bring CROP into the PPAC process to provide regional direction and collectively implement the decisions of Leaders. Key regional ministerial meetings comprising of relevant ministers from the Forum countries that deal with regional matters beyond the Pacific Plan and which also feed into the annual Forum Leaders' meetings and which also implement Forum decisions include the Forum Economic Ministers Meetings⁵ and the Forum Trade Ministers Meetings. The Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting is activated to deal with crisis issues under the Biketawa Declaration with educational matters handled by the Forum Education Ministers.

Strengthening regional cooperation and integration in the Pacific as it is proposed by Forum Leaders involves exploring three concepts of regionalism. The first is about cooperation and how this is allowed to happen. It involves setting up the process for dialogue and processes between governments. The second is provision of good and services at the regional level. This is about freeing governments from managing some service because it is economically advantageous to pool resources and expertise, and minimise wastage, reduce costs of services but increase the coverage of beneficiaries. Where diseconomies of isolation significantly affect logistical issues in service delivery, one solution would be to deliver the service through a sub-regional or a grouping of a few countries. If it added value to the national effort, even better! And where resource constraints are always going to be problem, consideration in favour for regionalism is sensible.

⁵ Endorsed by the Forum in 1999 as integral to supporting national economic development strategies, FEMM advises the Forum on issues of economic management and development, structural adjustment, identifies sectoral opportunities for region-wide approach to development. Ad hoc Forum ministerial meetings such as trade, aviation and communication were sanctioned by FEMM.

Regionalism is not about replacing or taking over national policies and programs. Rather, it seeks to support and complement them. For example, management of services under a regional initiative may be moved to a regional mechanism but not policy-making. This may seem contradictory, as many regional initiatives pool services into a regional body, away from the oversight of national governments. Sovereignty is enhanced as national governments have regional bodies implement their policy decisions (in effect, as service providers). Shifting service provision to regional mechanisms allows national governments to utilise national resources on core activities and priorities, thereby conserving resources on services that could otherwise be provided regionally.

The third is regional integration. This is about reducing market barriers. Physical barriers include land and sea borders and technical barriers include quarantine protocols, import taxes, immigration and border control. The general benefits include improved access to business and to consumers, increased economies of scale, competitive and affordable prices and increased choice of good and service. The examples of regionalism outlined above are currently being delivered by the regional governance architecture. It is already happening in the Pacific. In general, the existing regional governance infrastructure appears to support approaches that overcome capacity limitations in service delivery at the national level, and approaches that increase and expand economic opportunities through market integration.

For example, where Pacific states have existing ombudsman offices, the regional initiative is expected to add value to the work of the national ombudsman. It is not about replacing a national ombudsman with a regional ombudsman. Similarly, where audit services are under stress, a regional support mechanism would complement the national effort. Both ombudsman and audit initiatives are already providing support to the national effort. It is about mechanisms that also support and complement the national effort. In essence, a regional approach would be worthy of consideration where it strengthened, built and enhanced work at the national level.

Conclusions: What Do These Experiences Tell Us About the Prospects and Promise for Regionalism?

This paper is an attempt at putting together a large regional jigsaw puzzle that exists under the banner of regional integration and cooperation into manageable headings and perspectives. Obviously, if the question were posed to different stakeholders it would generate different perspectives given its complexity.

Certainly, the recipients or those for whom regionalism is intended such as the governments of the Pacific Islands and the people to whom initiatives and activities at the regional level are targeted, may paint a different picture.

However, the present regional governance architecture could be viewed as the building blocks upon which the experiences that are gained, the challenges that are confronted and tackled, the human and institutional capacity that is built and the knowledge that is acquired are laid. Such a foundation may later lead to a more ideal regionalism which some observers and commentators of regionalism want the Pacific to achieve; that is free movement of people, goods and services, common currency, shared economic policy, and a more coherent polity.

The current experiences however seem to suggest a region working its own regional governance architecture, perhaps sometimes in isolation from each other but somehow connected, that is nonetheless relevant to its perceived needs. The Pacific Plan, while ambitious in timeframe and purpose, does attempt to harmonise regional effort under the ownership of one umbrella. It seems to caution against imitating or copying other models from elsewhere, including the leap forward to what the Plan aspires. Several possible explanations have been put forward with respect to the model's limitations (Fong Toy 2006). One explanation is that the current forms and levels of regional cooperation are not really ready for the challenge of regionalism. Another is that the fundamental shift in thinking and approach to regionalism needs to be made. Yet another thought is an inability to really visualise the true enormity of regionalism – that is, the vision of Forum Leaders versus the ability of the officials to grapple with it. In response to regional and global challenges, the region is working within its current arrangements to service its people. Whatever the shortcomings, at least all of these regional governance infrastructures are well-founded and hold the potential to help the Pacific find its own authentic model.

The region does not need to look for a better and wholesome articulation of the vision for the Pacific. It was endorsed in 2005 in Papua New Guinea when the Pacific Plan was launched. The Pacific leadership which initiated the development and establishment of some of the political and economic institutions to promote both sub-regionalism and regionalism, is not short of potential to drive better regionalism.

Nonetheless, the experience from the region seems to suggest that delivery of services by service delivery organisations such as tertiary education, fisheries, and crisis interventions (such as RAMSI) appear to have greater credibility compared to areas of regional economic integration which seem to pit Pacific states against each other. Effort needs to be focused on arrangements that harness the diversity of the region in union.

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