The Routledge Handbook of International Local Government

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Local government in the Pacific Islands

Publication details
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Published online on: 03 Sep 2018

How to cite: Graham Hassall, Matthew Kensen, Rikiaua Takeke, Karibaiti Taoba, Feue Tipu. 03 Sep 2018, Local government in the Pacific Islands from: The Routledge Handbook of International Local Government Routledge
Accessed on: 26 Sep 2023

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Graham Hassall, Matthew Kensen, Rikiaua Takeke, Karibaiti Taoba and Feue Tipu

Pacific societies and government

The contemporary Pacific Islands region includes 14 independent states and 8 dependent territories, whose combined populations amount to some ten million inhabitants. Approximately one half of all Pacific Islanders live in 100 rapidly expanding towns and cities and are classified as ‘urban’, while the remainder inhabit villages and settlements. Exact numbers are hard to establish due to the rapid pace of urbanisation. A 2012 report by the Asian Development Bank estimated that the urban population was growing at twice the rate of national population rates. Migration from rural areas and outer-islands thus contributes to declining populations in these areas while fuelling unprecedented population density in urban centres. The approximate populations and land areas of these 22 Pacific nations and territories are indicated in Table 9.1. These regions are classified by the United Nations as ‘small island developing states’ (SIDS), a designation in which each term is significant.

Table 9.1 Pacific Island country populations as at June 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/country or territory</th>
<th>Most recent census</th>
<th>Population count at last census</th>
<th>Land area (km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MELANESIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>837,271</td>
<td>18,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>268,767</td>
<td>18,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>7,059,653</td>
<td>462,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>515,870</td>
<td>28,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>234,023</td>
<td>12,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8,915,584</td>
<td>540,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MICRONESIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated States of Micronesia</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>102,843</td>
<td>701</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, they are small in population and land area (but in most cases, possessing large maritime exclusive economic zones). Setting aside the remarkably small Pitcairn Island, which has an official population of 57, the smaller dependent states such as Niue and Tokelau have populations under 2,000. Sovereign states such as Nauru and Tuvalu have populations of 50,000 and up. Ten of the states and territories have populations between 100,000 (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Tonga) and 800,000 (Fiji). Papua New Guinea is by far the largest of the Pacific Island states, with a population of more than 7,000,000.

The archipelagic setting of the Pacific states is a second unique characteristic, which influences the shape of society and government, including local government. Whereas island societies had traditional arrangements for commerce and exchange, most also developed their own distinct language, culture and leadership. Authority was thus more often exercised at local level than across island groups, such that the idea of government administered from a central location only emerged with the development of a main administrative centre during a period of colonial rule. This colonial experience shaped the political and economic circumstances of what are now termed ‘developing’ countries.
Graham Hassall et al.

The place of local government in Pacific Island states

Constitutional arrangements across the Pacific – which range from kingdoms to republics – generally focus on delineating government at national and provincial levels, and leave the question of local government to subsidiary legislation or else to the realm of ‘customary law’. For this reason, the roles and responsibilities assigned to local government, the levels of fiscal decentralisation, the opportunities (or lack thereof) of autonomous revenue streams, and the complexity of scale vary significantly across the region. There are an estimated 900 sub-national government bodies across the Pacific. Papua New Guinea alone has approximately 6,000 elected or appointed local government councillors, while local level officials in the remaining countries and territories number approximately 900.

Historically, Pacific Islanders governed local communities at village level. The emergence of urban areas, in which local government was established as part of the modern state, is thus a relatively recent phenomenon. In some countries local government has only been established in urban areas and not rural, and there is a tendency for urban populations to replicate traditional patterns of social organisation and leadership in their new settings. Jones has recently commented on the tendency for populations to replicate village formations in their new urban settings:

In 2012, it was estimated that 800,000–1,000,000 Pacific urban residents lived in native and traditional villages and informal and squatter settlements and, by the end of 2015, this number is likely to have risen to more than 1 million residents. (Jones 2016)

Pacific cities and urban centres foster regional economic integration and national development. They are focal centres of economic growth, are often seats of government and administration at national or provincial level, national windows and gateways, and centres of higher education, among others. They are also well-placed to be the service and support centres for surrounding rural hinterlands and/or smaller rural towns. However, there are just four designated capital cities in the Pacific – Port Moresby, Port Vila, Honiara, and Suva, the remainder being urban centres on land leased from their traditional owners by national government entities, but remaining, in a formal sense, nothing more than modern urban villages. Tonga’s centre of government, for instance, Nuku’alofa, although commonly regarded as one urban area, is actually a fusion of Kolomotua (the old village) and KoloFo’ou (the new village). Samoa’s main administrative centre, Apia, has a similar circumstance: both contain their nation’s capital, but neither is governed by a local government authority. Papua New Guinea’s National Capital District, where Port Moresby is located, exists on land leased long term from the Motu-Koitabu people. Other capitals are similarly located on leased customary land and disputes arise periodically – such as with Vanuatu’s Port Vila. In the case of Kiribati, the country is regarded as being 100% urban due to its population density, and has just three declared towns or urban councils: Teinainano Urban, Betio Town and Kiritimati Urban.

Nauru could also be considered 100% urban, now that 169 traditional villages have become slightly more than 100 interconnected communities. Whereas the number of villages in Solomon Islands is not tracked, the number for Samoa is known to be 330, and for Tonga, 170. In the case of Palau, Koro is the only recognised town, although Melekeok has been constructed as the seat of the nation’s capital, and there are 21 additional towns and villages.

Papua New Guinea has made the most far-reaching attempts to devolve the legal, financial and administration arrangements between central, provincial and local levels of government. In Vanuatu, Local Governments are responsible for Area Councils, which in turn comprise multiple villages. The size and population of the Area Council is not legally binding and so there
Local government in the Pacific Islands

is no threshold to how many villages or people can make up an Area Council. In Solomon Islands, Local Governments are responsible for Wards, which likewise are made up of a number of villages and communities. In Tuvalu, ‘local government’ takes the form of an island council established for each of its eight inhabited islands (Hassall and Tipu 2008).

The scope of local governments thus differs from one Pacific Island Country to the next, and a major challenge concerns the delineation of power, roles, and responsibilities. A few additional examples will demonstrate the variety of constitutional arrangements in place.

Tonga’s 1875 constitution established a constitutional monarchy and declared all land as being possessed by the Crown. Land is then managed on the Crown’s behalf by the holder of a noble title – whose family is from that region but who may well live in town or abroad rather than in the village. Some villages belong to chiefs, and some belong to the government. In government villages the town officer acts like a chief, and reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is under the office of the Prime Minister. The size of land available to individual families for cultivation is decreasing. Local government is provided through the District and Town Officers Act (Chapter 43 of Tonga’s consolidated laws). Twenty-three district and 155 town councillors are elected every three years in local election to undertake a variety of administrative tasks (there are some seven districts on the main island). These councillors have little autonomy: they report monthly to a district officer, who then reports quarterly to the Office of the Prime Minister. In a sense the town officer acts as an intermediary between the noble, the government and the people. Although town officers receive government salaries, they generally work without a clearly articulated budget or work programme (Bennardo and Cappell 2008). Changes to the system of local government are being considered, albeit very slowly. The government is considering how best to establish a town council (Kolo) in Nuku’alofa, as there is appreciation of the fact that the current system is not sufficiently responsive to the city’s administrative needs.

Vanuatu (‘the New Hebrides’ prior to independence in 1980) is a unitary state. Local government comprises six provincial councils as well as area councils, and municipalities for the urban townships of Port Vila (the capital, on Efate) and Luganville (on the northern island, Espiritu Santo). There are approximately 2,150 villages in the country. Each province has an executive, and local area councils have a secretary who resides in the villages and who report directly to the secretary-general of the provincial council. Councils are elected through an open constituency system every four years. The mayor is elected by the councillors from among themselves on an annual basis. There are also co-opted members appointed by the minister of internal affairs from such social segments as women, youth, chiefs and churches. Port Vila City Council, the nation’s capital, has been suspended on a number of occasions for misconduct or illegality, and there are considerable on-going tensions over land issues. The provincial level government covering the island of Efate, where Port Vila is located, is seeking to address land conservation issues through its ‘Efate Land Management Area Initiative’.

Kiribati, a unitary state with a beretitenti (president) as both head of state and head of government, is divided, formally, into five districts. Although the Constitution is silent on the matter of local government, three urban and town councils, and 20 island councils have been established on the country’s inhabited islands. Councillors are elected for a four year term by a first-past-the post system on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The last council elections in 2016 saw 233 councillors take office. Mayors are elected councillors who can nominate themselves to run in mayoral elections, which take place after council elections, in a similar fashion to elections of MPs. Councillors can determine mayoral candidates through preferential voting when the number of candidates exceeds four. Councils also include ‘special members’ who are male elders’ (unimwane) representatives, nominated members selected by the councillors to represent women’s, youth’s or professional groups, and ex-officio members who are members of
parliament. Each council is required by law to have a senior executive officer who is the town clerk (for urban councils) or clerk to the council (for rural councils). The clerk has oversight over government-seconded officials based at the council, schools, clinics and elsewhere, as well as direct control over staff recruited and paid for by the council. From July 2017 all elected councillors receive salaries from central government.

The Kiribati Local Government Association was established in 2012 as an advocacy body through which mayors can speak on local government issues with central government, and with development and other partners. General meetings are held biennially. The association is financed by members’ annual contributions of $1000, irrespective of their size, and holds memberships in such international local government bodies as Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and United Cities and Local Government, Asia and the Pacific (UCLG ASPAC).

The position of local government in the Republic of Fiji has changed through the impact of national political events. As a result of Britain’s importation of indentured labourers from India early in the twentieth century, the country has both an indigenous Fijian population and an Indo-Fijian population. Whereas some Indo-Fijians continue to farm on land leased from iTaukei (indigenous Fijians), a majority live in urban areas or informal settlements. Fiji’s two cities (Suva, and Lautoka) and eleven towns were led by democratically elected leaders, and the Fiji had one of the few Local Government Associations in the Pacific region, until the elected bodies were abolished by Fiji’s military administrators in 2009 and replaced by appointed administrators.

Prior to 2006, Fiji’s cities and towns were administered under two principal laws – the Local Government Act of 1985, and the Rotuma Act of 1978 (applicable for the local council on that island only). In all, there are some 32 pieces of legislation relevant to the functioning of local councils in Fiji (Fiji Local Government Association 2008a). In addition to the municipal councils there are 17 rural local authorities and 14 provincial councils, which link the government to approximately 1200 villages, under a separate governance arrangement known as the iTaukei Affairs Board (formerly the Fijian Affairs Board). The existence of this separate ‘Fijian Administration’ concerned exclusively with the well-being of indigenous Fijians ‘parallel to’ the government ministries which administer the affairs of the country as a whole adds an additional level of complexity to local government in Fiji. Whereas a number of reviews have advocated radical changes to this system, and even its dismantlement, separate Fijian institutions have continued to exert considerable influence over public administration at national, provincial and local levels.

Papua New Guinea has a unitary form of government and three tiers of administration: national, provincial, and local. There are 21 provincial governments, plus the National Capital District of Port Moresby, and 326 local-level governments (which include both urban and rural local-level governments). For administrative purposes, the provinces are divided into 89 districts. Local-level governments are further divided into 6003 wards and each ward comprises hamlets, villages and non-traditional villages. Although no official data exists enumerating the number of villages and hamlets, Port Moresby, Lae, and Mount Hagen are categorised as cities and there are at least fifty towns.

Papua New Guinea is the only Pacific Island country that has established a ministry for inter-governmental relations. Local government for all provinces except the Capital District is provided under the ‘Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government’. Port Moresby, on the other hand, is administered through the National Capital District Commission, which is presided over by a provincial premier. Provincial assemblies comprises members of the national parliament from that province, a representative of the urban local-level governments, one women representative, three representatives of traditional leaders/chiefs, and up to three further nominees.
The status of local government in Papua New Guinea is in flux. In 2007 the heads of rural local governments (the Presidents of the local governments) were removed from the provincial assemblies through amendment to Section 10 of the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Level Governments, but this was struck down by the courts in 2010, and in 2015 the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission proposed replacing local level governments with a lesser number of ‘district development agencies’ – a proposal that has been accepted by the O’Neil Government formed following 2017 general elections (Constitutional and Law Reform Commission/Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs 2015a, 2015b). Given the extent of urbanisation in the country, Papua New Guinea is the one Pacific nation to have developed a national urbanisation policy (for the period 2010–2030), which is overseen by an office of urbanisation.

Samoa has a unitary form of government with a head of state elected by the government every five years. There are only two spheres of government, national and local. There are 11 districts, and local government comprises of all the traditional villages (village councils), of which there are 247, including urban authorities. Under the Local Government Act 1985 the National Minister is empowered to upgrade existing town to city status; create councils, alter boundaries, approve by-laws and regulations, and when deemed necessary, dismiss a council and appoint an administrator to replace it.

The main division in local government is between the village (fono) and urban authorities. However, they operate as a single-tier. Fono are required to establish executive committees and land boards. The village councils which administer local affairs are composed of ‘matais’ who are the heads of extended families. Local councils are wholly responsible for pre-school services, and share responsibility with one or more other spheres of government for policing and civil protection, education, family welfare services, water and sanitation, cemeteries and crematoria, slaughter-houses, sports and leisure, religious facilities, district heating, agriculture, forests and fisheries, economic promotion, trade, and tourism. Much of local government staffing is supplied by the Public Service Commission, which retains the authority to discipline and dismiss staff. Central government staff are also seconded to local authorities. Individual local authorities are not subject to independent scrutiny.

In Solomon Islands, Honiara City Council was established under the Local Government Act, until the Honiara City Council Act of 1999 provided Honiara City with the same ‘local government’ status as the provincial governments. Noro in Western Province is a Town Council under authority of the Town Council Ordinance 1990. There are other urban areas, but they do not yet have standing as local government entities (although Gizo in Western Province and Auki in Malaita are progressing toward town status). Local communities in the remainder of the country are administered by Provincial governments under the Provincial Government Act 1997. Honiara city council’s dissolution in 2004 was the fifth such dissolution since independence in 1978. The city subsequently experienced civil unrest in April 2006 triggered by the politics of post-election formation of the national government but also associated (in the evidence submitted to a Commission of Inquiry into the 2006 riots) with the lack of development and opportunities in and around the capital city (Parker 2010).5

Global and regional dimensions to local government

While globalisation undoubtedly creates opportunities for small states such as those in the Pacific, the anticipated integration of markets, when combined with the small scale of island economies, narrow production and export bases, and limited resources and capacity constraints, makes them ever-more vulnerable to external shocks, particularly climate-related shocks, which are likely to increase in frequency and intensity with the impact of global warming and sea-level rise.
In general, local government bodies in Pacific Island states all share these complex characteristics and complex environmental and institutional challenges. UN-Habitat has played an important role in sharing global experience that can benefit the region (UN-Habitat 2007). The future direction of the global agenda for local government development was signalled in the UN Secretary-General’s opening remarks to Habitat III in Quito in October 2016:

Local and regional governments are now seen as key partners for national government to implement their development and economic programmes. Many governments have taken on the principle of subsidiarity. That has required them to strengthen the capacity of local and regional governments, so that decisions can be taken at the most local or immediate level possible.

At regional level, the Pacific Urban Agenda was developed in 2003 through the Pacific Urban Forum, a platform established by regional organisations (including CLGF Pacific, UNESCAP, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and UN-Habitat) to coordinate and advocate sustainable urban futures strategies for the region. The Agenda identified the need for greater attention to local planning and management, for linkage between local plans and national plans and priorities, and for responses to the increasing threats to urban community cohesion; it was endorsed by UNESCAP in 2004 and by the Pacific Island Forum leaders in 2005. Although it resulted in the development in 2011 of a regional Pacific Urban framework, the Pacific Urban Agenda never gained solid political support at regional level. It did not succeed in getting onto the annual agenda of the Pacific Islands Forum Leader’s meeting – an agenda that sets policy priorities at regional level.

Nevertheless, a Fourth Pacific Urban Forum was convened in 2015 by UN-Habitat and CLGF to develop a NEW Pacific Urban Agenda. Just eight countries participated, together with urban policy makers and practitioners, local government representatives, donors and development partners, academics and representatives from the private sector. Representatives of national ministries of finance and strategic planning agencies, and of national offices responsible for local government and urban management, were invited for the first time.

The 2015 meeting identified three dominant themes: (i) integrated planning and strengthening rural–urban linkages, (ii) peri-urban management, and (iii) ensuring inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and local authorities. The rapid growth of unplanned informal settlements continued to be a major issue: they are the fastest growing form of urbanisation, but they are not always considered in national urban plans for provision of social services and infrastructure. Other pressing issues are the high population density on the small atolls of Micronesia (in 2013 Betio, Kiribati, had a population of near 13,000 living on a land area of 1.2 square kilometres), and the vulnerability of Pacific Island countries to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change (tropical storms and cyclones, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis and storm surges). Bearing these and other challenges in mind, the New Pacific Urban Agenda addresses four overarching themes: (i) enhancing social equity, (ii) strengthening resilience, (iii) growing urban economies, and (iv) strengthening urban governance.

**Enhancing social equity**

It is important that towns and cities be well planned, as this facilitates land use, more affordable housing, and more equitable access to basic services, and encourages urban growth. Such planning implies having greater control over the unplanned and spontaneous emergence and growth informal settlements. These dwellers deserve equal rights and opportunities in regard to access to land and housing, and to such basic services such as water and sanitation. Urban planning,
policies and legal framework must become more ‘pro-poor’ in emphasis, and issues of gender, youth, disability and livelihoods need to be included in urban development initiatives so that wider social equity concerns are given equal and more balanced consideration in programmes and projects. Planning toward these ends requires participatory consultation with urban dwellers and more specifically those in informal settlements, just as it requires support from higher political levels, and from development partners. The agenda accordingly calls for up-scaling and embarking on housing and settlement upgrading programme, and strengthening partnerships across sectors and among national and regional stakeholders.

**Strengthening resilience**

The impacts of natural hazards and climate change on Pacific Island countries have resulted in unprecedented social, economic and environmental costs, particularly for the most vulnerable communities which lack the means, capability, or infrastructure, to cope with disasters. These risks need to be factored in to urban strategies, planning, and management. Enhancing resilience of infrastructure, enforcement of laws and regulations, and strengthening of institutional capacities need to be built into community preparedness, and response and recovery actions of climate risk planning, in order to adapt to impact of climate change. The integration of cost-efficient green technologies in sustainable infrastructure as well as reducing pollution and energy consumption in urban areas and investing in water and waste management are also important to advancing sustainability and producing economic and social benefits. The New Pacific Urban Agenda recommended four key actions to build urban resilience and environmental sustainability: (i) embark on integrated climate change vulnerability, pollution and greenhouse gas assessments of towns and cities; (ii) develop integrated climate change adaptation, resilience and low emission action plans; (iii) integrate climate change adaptation, resilience and low emission actions into urban policies and plans; and (iv) ensure that climate change adaptation is resilience building and low emission concerns of the Pacific towns and cities are integrated in global climate change negotiations.

**Growing urban economies**

The 2015 Pacific Urban Agenda suggests that cities be recognised and used as drivers of national economic development. Pacific Urban cities and towns currently account for 60–70% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) in their respective countries, and hence deserve proper planning of urban growth and investment to expand employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth. The potential role of the informal sector in this growth has to be recognised, as does engaging in public-private partnerships that enhance the delivery of basic services. The Agenda recommends four key actions toward the objective of growing urban economies in Pacific Island countries: (i) strengthening understanding of the importance of strong urban economies for national economic development; (ii) developing local economic development projects that are based on Pacific opportunities; (iii) empowering local governments to develop integrated Municipal finance and economic strategies; and (iv) leveraging the private sector as well as the informal economy in local economic development plans.

**Strengthening urban governance**

The fourth pillar of the Pacific Urban Agenda concerns the strengthening of urban governance. Of the many Pacific Island countries and territories, just Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and
Tonga, have articulated urban policies and legal frameworks. The challenge of strengthening urban governance requires not only the establishment of good institutional arrangements, but ancillary subsidiary legislation, policies, and work programmes. Building capability for local government in developing countries requires investment in human resources, especially to manage finances and data, but also to communicate with the public and the many stakeholders in other levels of government, the private sector, civil society, and development agencies. To achieve these outcomes, the Agenda recommends seven key actions: (i) develop national urban or urbanisation policies; (ii) periodically review these policies to ensure their alignment with urban priorities; (iii) identify gaps in policies and legislation; (iv) review existing urban and local policies and legislations to ensure that they adequately reflect urban priorities and enable local development and urbanisation; (v) strengthen the capacities of urban professional, policy makers and leaders at national and local levels; (vi) strengthen the capacities of institutions mandated to implement the policies; and (vii) monitor the implementation of such policies with national and local government.

Notwithstanding the recommendations concerning the four themes set out above, all parties to the Pacific Urban Agenda acknowledge its limited status as a non-binding declaration in support of local government which is yet to be fully recognised by national governments or prioritised by the main regional intergovernmental organisations: much additional advocacy is required. The Pacific Urban Agenda is one element of ongoing policy dialogue not only in the Pacific Islands, but in the Asia-Pacific, and at global level. It has been consulted on at the 6th Asia Pacific Urban Forum in October 2015, the CLGF conference in Gaborone, Botswana in June 2015, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in November 2015; and at UN-Habitat III in Quito in October 2016. CLGF is working with the Caribbean Urban Agenda (CUA) to establish a SIDS Urban Agenda, in an effort to build stronger representation of small island developing states in international forums. The UN’s ‘Agenda for Sustainable Development’ for the period 2015–2030 includes many goals that are relevant to the goals of improving local government in the Pacific Islands. Goal 11, for instance, which seeks to make ‘cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’.

Challenges confronting local government

As already noted, local government bodies in the Pacific are generally shaped by their legal status, which varies across the region from full constitutional recognition to recognition in statutory legislation through an Act of Parliament. Only a handful of local government systems in the Pacific are recognised constitutionally. National efforts to provide local government (both rural and urban), which are supported by international development partners and by the four pillars of the region-wide ‘Pacific Urban Agenda’, include a number of cross-cutting issues, the most pressing of which include clarity concerning intergovernmental relations; adequacy of financing; and effective decentralisation and service delivery; the place of traditional authority; human and physical infrastructure development; adequate response to climate change adaptation; and the on-going challenges of development coordination. These are discussed below.

Intergovernmental relations

The quality of relations between local government and other levels of government is crucial to how well local governments deliver goods and services and meet other desirable goals (Devas, Alam, Delay, Koranteng and Venkatachalam 2008). The term ‘intergovernmental relations’ commonly refers to relations between central, regional and local governments, as well
as between any of these. Interactions may be ‘horizontal’ or ‘vertical’ in as much as they may concern relations between branches of government at a similar level – such as between national departments – or between some departments at national level and others at provincial/island or local level when making plans that span their various jurisdictions.

The lack of distribution of authority to diverse levels of government suggests that many Pacific states continue to adhere to the ‘old paradigm’ of government that places the ‘central government’ at the centre of decision-making. This belief that the ‘centre’ knows more, or is more capable than the ‘periphery’ in matters of governance is reinforced by the lack of capacity development in outer areas and in ‘lower levels’ of government. While we presume that this lack of devolution is part of the explanation for the slow pace of economic and social development in the Islands, such an assertion should ideally backed up with empirical research, which is currently lacking. Only further inquiry can identify, for instance, whether those local government authorities that have greater autonomy are giving better service provision than centralised ones.

There is little evidence of systematic ‘horizontal’ inter-governmental relations (i.e. systematic communication between governmental bodies that share peer relations rather than vertical relations in which one is subordinate to the other). Local Government Associations have only been formed, for instance, in three countries – Fiji, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea, although other neighbouring counties have large numbers of local governments. The lack of systematic procedures for decision-making about provincial and local issues, and the ready acceptance of ‘informal’ decision-making and dispute resolution procedures that tend to rely on personal acquaintance between government officials at different levels, increases the possibility that these ‘familiar’ or personal relations become nepotistic or based on biased reasoning and criterion. All these findings suggest that the ‘interface’ between the modern ‘centre’ of government and the ‘traditional periphery’ – as lived in towns, settlements and villages, remains difficult and in need of development in law, policy, and practice.

In Solomon Islands, post-conflict development programmes have addressed some of the challenges for Honiara city, but these do not include the further articulation of intergovernmental arrangements for the overwhelming majority of Solomon Islanders who live in village settings. The foremost informal mechanism is a biennial Provincial Premiers Conference. Some provincial governments have enacted Ordinances to organise, govern, and control village and community affairs (examples include Makira Village Peace Council Ordinance 2006, Temotu Local Governance Ordinance). A Provincial Government Review Committee’s 1999 recommendation to remove Provincial Assemblies and introduce constituency governing councils in order to bring national and local government bodies into closer contact was disturbed by ethnic unrest in the country and never fully considered. A draft federal constitution first submitted to parliament in 2004 but still incomplete by the time parliament rose for the 2010 general elections referred to ‘local communities’, without clarifying the structure, funding, and responsibilities, of government authorities at local level. As at May 2017 the draft constitution proposed adoption of State and Community Government authorities, but left the form of Community government to the decision of the States.

Apart from an extensive literature on decentralisation in Papua New Guinea, and on urbanisation in the Pacific, there are few studies, if any, that focus on intergovernmental relations in the region. This is no doubt due to the highly centralised systems of government that most small states continue to operate. They have not followed the observation by some federalism scholars that societies having significant cultural and political diversity adopt federal systems that allow for expression of this diversity (Kincaid and Elazar 2000). Although the federal ideal has given impetus to constitutional aspirations at different times in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, only
the Federated States of Micronesia is expressly constituted as a federal nation-state. Papua New Guinea remains a unitary state with a degree of devolution in practice – and with the unique arrangements for the ‘autonomous’ province of Bougainville, constitutionally recognised and entrenched on the basis of the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2000. Notwithstanding this lack of literature – and indeed, a lack of easily available primary data – the issue of intergovernmental relations is of critical importance to the Pacific states at this time.

The adequacy of a nation’s legal framework for inter-governmental relations is fundamental. Legal frameworks establish the extent to which administrative, legislative and adjudicative powers and responsibilities are formally delegated to various levels of government. In the Pacific context, each system of government has inherited a legal framework and tradition from its colonial past and this may account for the endurance of a mentality that favours centralised rule-making and distrusts out-lying areas. Indeed, some of the smaller states see local government as an unnecessary expense; so, for example, Nauru abolished local government in 1996. Fiji’s Military government appointed administrators in place of elected councils in 2009.

Another example of such tensions can be found in the Cook Islands. Central government’s concern at efficiency and minimising expenditure – particularly in areas where it could identify duplication of effort and responsibilities – has been influenced by the country’s struggle with public expenditure deficits over a long period. Although during the decade 1985–1995 Cook Islands’ real GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4.5% while population growth was just 1% per annum, government over-expenditure led to the accumulation of debt, and implementation of a structural adjustment programme advised by the Asian Development Bank. A 1993 proposal for development of the ‘outer-islands development’ was finally implemented in 2000, but in that same year the report of a ‘Commission on Political Review’, while endorsing the principle of devolution, felt it had been ‘taken too far in the case of the Island Councils, which have been given some tasks for which they are not be well equipped and may not become well equipped’ (Cook Islands Commission of Political Review 1998).

The central government came to regard local government as a troublesome entity. In 2004 the Woonton Government refused to hold national and local elections at the same time, claiming there would be too much ‘social upheaval’. It proceeded with the general election in September that year but only agreed to the outer island local elections in November under the threat of legal action. Then, in 2008 the national government removed the three district councils on the main island, Rarotonga by repeal of the Rarotonga Local Government Act, while retaining local government councils on the outer islands. On Rarotonga, local government responsibilities were handed to members of parliament and to the ministry of internal affairs and social services. The government made this decision – which understandably upset the members of the vaka (local councils) of Takitumu, Te-au-o Tonga and Puaikura – on the premise that councils were not fulfilling their responsibilities in cleaning and clearing community roadsides, streams and road drainages, that this task could be undertaken more efficiently by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. For their part, the vaka argued that funds made available by the central government were insufficient to undertake these tasks.

**Financing**

Sub-national governments have key roles in the delivery of many basic services in the Pacific Islands (in health, education, roads, agriculture, etc.). In general, however, they face chronic shortage of revenue, and even though revenue could be increased in the larger centres through enhanced collection capacities, this would not remedy the more general situation in which the demands for services in urban areas are outpacing innovations in governance financing at either
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central or local level. The financing of local government is thus a concern for all Pacific Island countries and territories. Hassall and Tipu (2008) have noted the critical condition of local government financing in Pacific cities and towns.

For a variety of reasons, few local authorities generate or otherwise receive funding sufficient to meet the growing expectations for service delivery in urban areas. Firstly, national governments face their own fiscal constraints, and do not easily agree to transfer funds to subnational levels of government. Fiscal decentralisation means that each level of Government has some discretion to make expenditure decisions and raise revenues. With the active encouragement and support of the World Bank, USAID, ADB and others, fiscal decentralisation has become part of a reform agenda to strengthen regional and local governments to meet such challenges as ineffective and inefficient governance, macroeconomic instability, and inadequate economic growth (Kee 2003). The World Bank views fiscal decentralisation and strengthened local government in terms of more discretion in decision-making, along with globalisation, as one of the most important forces shaping governance and development today (World Bank 1999) and at least 62 out of 75 developing countries with populations of five million or more adopted some form of fiscal decentralisation during the mid-1970s (World Bank 1997; Bahl and Wallace 2007).

Whereas most local government systems across the Pacific obtain funding through central government grants, property taxes, and business licenses and taxes, there is great variation in the use of fees for waterfront development, physical planning, vehicle registration, airports, roads, recreational facilities, markets, bus stations, gaming, and domestic animals.

The negligible flow of funds from Fiji’s central government to the urban areas has required municipal councils to work within meagre resources derived from their own revenue streams, but these are insufficient to cover the costs of local government (Hassall, Nakagawa and Tipu 2009). In its 2008 submission to the Review-Reform of Local Government Committee, the Fiji Local Government Association re-emphasised the dilemma that the councils ‘do not do well in terms of finance’ (Fiji Local Government Association 2008b). With minimal fiscal transfers by way of grant, Fiji’s municipal councils have to become self-sufficient or otherwise devise new and innovative ways of raising extra capital to finance their several service and work-related projects.

In Samoa the Assembly of Pulenu’u and its executive committee promotes intergovernmental relations, but these conducted through informal as much as through formal mechanisms. The central government makes transfer payments to local authorities for capital development on an ad hoc basis.

In Tonga the responsibility for revenue collection and expenditure remains a function of Central Government, and there is no separate budget for town administration (e.g. communication costs or transport costs of town councillor). Taxes are collected by Central Government which then provides for capital works, and salaries and wages, for district and town officers. Entrepreneurs start businesses with a permit paid to the ministry of labour and commerce rather than to local authorities. As Tongan society is based on mutual ‘self-help’, local developments are funded through ‘concerti’ – entertainment programmes held by committees focused on the church, water, women, sport – as well as by central government inputs and the efforts of the nobles. If a health clinic needs repair the town officer will work with the relevant committee, which can have up to twenty members, and then sub-committees with additional members. The government is moving toward the establishment of village councils, and is looking at how villages can raise revenues. An ‘experiment’ with citizen participation in local governance is under way in the village of Lapaha, where the community has established committees to take on decision-making responsibilities, in a system that blends Tongan tradition with contemporary
practices. They are working with the CLGF Pacific Project on the village council scheme and are watching the progress in Lapaha closely.

In Tuvalu, inter-governmental relations are implicitly guided by the Falekaupule Act 1997, and there are no additional laws covering issues such as fiscal transfers. Severe financial constraints facing Tuvalu and the inability of central government to provide adequate budgetary support to local government led to the creation in 1999 of an innovative financing mechanism for local government in the form of the Falekaupule Trust Fund, as part of a larger decentralisation process specifically to help finance development on the outer islands (Graham 2005). Since its establishment, the Falekaupule Trust Fund has made significant contributions annually by way of block grants to the eight island councils (kaupules) for budgetary and development project support. In addition, central government have other grants for the salaries of core staff in the island councils. The nature and size of these grants has remained constant and has not been reviewed since 1997.

Vanuatu does not have a set formula for its intergovernmental fiscal transfer. However, it has been estimated that approximately 70% of the grant is earmarked for administrative expenses and the remaining 30% for small capital projects. A Decentralisation Review Commission reported to parliament in 2001 that the system of provincial and municipal councils in place since independence in 1980 was ‘centralized, politicised, expensive and non-participatory... confusing, inefficient, and expensive and results in considerable duplication, which is wasteful of Vanuatu’s limited resources’ (Government of Vanuatu Decentralization Review Commission 2001).

The Commission made 197 recommendations for consideration by the government covering all aspects of planning, financing, staffing, service delivery, and constitutional and legislative reform – a review sufficiently weighty as to earn a place in New Zealand’s Development Program Strategy for Vanuatu for the period 2006–2010.

One difficulty encountered when the Area Council Development Plans (ACDP) were drafted for the islands in the southern province (Tafea) concerned lack of clear definitions for the scope of the ‘nasara’, ‘village’ and ‘community’ – the basic units of society that the plans were to serve. Area council secretaries in Vanuatu mediate between local governments and area councils (which consists of villages and people) but do not have set work plans or job descriptions. They are, furthermore, mostly appointed on the basis of political affiliation, and thus respond to the interests of their party more than to whatever plan exists. Aware of this situation, the national government is currently seeking to apply a ‘bottom-up’ approach, whereby area councils plans commence with identification of needs at village level, then provincial level, and then national. The government is also seeking to regularise the position of area council secretary, to ensure that the needs of all communities are addressed equally rather than on the basis of political affiliation.

A second challenge to the financing of local government in the Pacific concerns capacity and competency. Local authorities empowered to raise revenues through taxes, levies, and licensing face their own challenges, beginning with administrative competence regarding revenue collection, but also including the small size of the economy under their jurisdiction, especially with the low ratio of rate-payers to non-rate papers is considered (it is common for a town’s public facilities to serve many more non-rate paying inhabitants than rate-payers – the squatters who reside informally either within a town’s jurisdiction or immediately beyond it).

A third factor affecting local government financing is that few Pacific countries have established in law or policy routine procedures for allocation of resources to sub-national levels of government.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, where financing arrangements for funding provincial governments have been an issue ever since the country gained independence in 1975 (Axline 2008) provincial governments raise funds from three main sources: (i) locally generated revenues
such as local taxes, charges and receipts collected by the provincial administration; (ii) transfers of shared nationally collected taxation revenues, such as VAT/GST, and mining and petroleum royalties; and (iii) grant transfers from the national government. They also receive recurrent grants from the national government.

The first post-independence funding formula was based on providing each province an equal amount of kina per head. However, for several reasons this arrangement resulted in highly inequitable resourcing of government at provincial level: firstly, some provinces also received substantial mining royalties and GST (these tax transfers were worth more that the grants received from the national government) but no corresponding downward adjustment to the grant provided by the central government, and secondly, the real cost of service delivery within provinces varied greatly depending on geographic complexity. There were, furthermore, delays with actual transfers of legislated and pledged funds.

Revenues received by local level governments – unlike those of provincial governments – have not varied significantly (although it is known that urban LLGs are better able to collect taxes than are rural ones). There are a few very high-revenue mining and oil-rich local level government areas but the majority are in rural areas, and raise negligible revenue: In 2005 it was estimated that the 286 rural local-level governments had combined revenues of about 1 million kina to offset their costs.

A review of the relevant legislation by the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission in 2009 found local governments:

\[
\ldots \text{in the provinces have been either intentionally or unintentionally, subjugated and somewhat made irrelevant or even redundant, in service delivery} \ldots \text{at the great risk of making the people’s directly elected government redundant in the eyes and minds of the people themselves}\ldots \text{local governments now are totally ineffective in service delivery and only exist for political reasons – simply as ‘window curtains’ displaying the presence of government in the remote parts of the country.}
\]

(Kalinoe undated)

In addition to these conventional mechanisms for raising and distributing revenues, there are two mechanisms that complicate intergovernmental relations in Papua New Guinea, namely the automatic inclusion of politicians at higher levels of government in lower levels, and the disbursement of significant levels of funding through members of parliament for direct project implementation at local (constituency) level.

The first of these arrangements, according to which members of the national parliament automatically become members of government at lower levels, emerged from dissatisfaction with the performance of provincial and local governments over an extended period of time. Unable to have the public service deliver services to satisfactory levels, members of parliament by-passed the traditional lines of responsibility and legislated for themselves via the Provincial Government Reform Act of 1995 a direct role in implementation.

\textbf{Decentralisation and service delivery}

City or municipal entities face the challenge of clarifying of roles and responsibilities with national government. Given the diverse terrain and social histories of the Pacific Island countries and territories, one would presume that establishing effective Local-level government on sound principles of decentralisation and local-level representation would be an ideal way to provide services to isolated villages and scattered islands. In practice, governance in much of the
region remains highly centralised, and many villages and communities do not gain the benefits of local government. For some this is due to factors such as geographic isolation, but for others it is due to the absence of effective service delivery mechanisms, capacity, and capability. The failure of local government to deliver the much needed community services is in part due to outdated legislative and policy frameworks including scarcity of resources – finance, capital, and technical/administrative, as well as the absence of robust M&E frameworks. Moreover, the current practices and procedures of local government bodies are not very well aligned with the changing environment.

The Fiji military justified its take-over of the country in December 2006 in terms of poor governance and endemic corruption. Following the dismissal of the government, the dissolution of parliament, the disbandment of the great council of chiefs, and the termination of all permanent secretaries and various senior public servants, the ‘interim government’ turned its attention to local government. Although a report commissioned to investigate local government operations (Fiji Local Government Association 2008a) recommended that local government be retained despite a range of problems facing the sector, the government proceeded with dismantling elected councils. The challenge facing Fiji’s municipalities is provision of council services in the face of high-numbers of non-rate-paying residents (who include both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians).

In Vanuatu most government departments and even NGOs are duplicating their service and responsibilities. Most of the work that is done by one department always overlaps what another department is doing and is responsible of. For example, under the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, the Department of Lands has an office responsible for urban planning. This same office can be found under the Department of Local Authorities and their roles and responsibilities are the same. Another is the granting of permission for a development. The developer is always left confused as who he/she should approach, whether the Port Vila Municipal or the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) or the Department of Geology and Mines to get a permit to develop a land or to extract resources. This leads to the granting of funds by ADB into certain government departments to strengthen their safeguards procedures when it comes to issues related to the delineation of power, roles and responsibilities.

Most government departments in Vanuatu and even in other Pacific Island countries are more reactive than proactive in their daily, monthly and annual operations. For example, the international funding associated with climate change, community resilience and disaster risk reduction attracted much attention and local area councils, so that whereas they are now better informed about the impact of climate change and the increased intensity of natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, but there has as yet been little implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures at area council level. By focusing on projects each time they are offered by development agencies, provincial planners and local area council secretaries risk losing sight of their roles in implementing Vanuatu’s existing long-term development goals.

Papua New Guinea’s history of service delivery at provincial and district levels has been described as ‘chequered’ (May 2009). At least 18 provincial administrations7 and approximately 313 local-level governments provide services through more than 80 district level offices for the 85% of the population who live in rural areas. These services include health centres and aid posts, immunisation and ante-natal care, supervision of deliveries, inspection of primary and elementary schools, agricultural extension patrols to improve crop and food production, fisheries extension; and maintenance of health facilities and schools.

In 2009 the Department of Provincial and Local Government published a ‘Determination Assigning Service Delivery Functions and Responsibilities to Provincial and Local-Level Governments’ to clearly delineate which services were the responsibility of which level of
Papua New Guinea’s Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS), the blueprint of the government’s development agenda, emphasises the delivery of government services to the sub-national level. Accordingly, the country’s three core objectives for undertaking fiscal decentralisation are: providing effective funding of government activities at the same levels they were provided before decentralisation; apportioning funding among provinces to redress the great levels of inequality in service delivery within them, and increasing funding to allow expansion of delivery of services to the population (Axline 2008). These core objectives have been referred to as stabilisation, equalisation and development, and are somewhat similar to the core objectives for fiscal decentralisation proposed by Richard Musgrave, who refers to the stabilisation, distribution and allocation functions (Kee undated). Irrespective of plans and the theory, the reality of poor coordination of service delivery in Papua New Guinea is clear and partly discussed above.

Recognising the shortcomings of the arrangements, parliament amended the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments (OLGPLLG) in 2008 and also passed the Intergovernmental Relations (Functions and Funding) Act. The new arrangements sought to improve both the distribution mechanism and the formula for funding of provincial and local-level governments, and also established the National Economic and Fiscal Commission (NEFC) as an independent Constitutional advisory body to provide independent advice on OLGPLL grants and other transfers.

Provincial assemblies thus comprises members of the national parliament from that province, a representative of the urban local-level governments, one women representative, three representatives of traditional leaders/chiefs, and up to three further nominees, and the heads of rural local governments.

The second funding mechanism, the ‘constituency development funds’ administered through the ‘District Services Improvement Program’ exists in both Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. At the current time, each member of Papua New Guinea’s national parliament receives an annual 10 million kina allocation for the local constituency – an amount sometimes in excess of the funds available to other government agencies and departments operating in the region. There is growing concern about the use of DISP funds in ways intended to shore up political support, and in ways that perpetuate patronage networks rather than implement public works and services responsibility and transparently, and through coordination with the programmes of line agencies.

In Solomon Islands there has been discussion of federal solutions to the problems of service provision since independence in 1978, with very little action. In Vanuatu, efforts have been made to devolve more responsibility to provincial government level, though not local government.

**Traditional authority**

One common factor which prevails in almost all Pacific Island countries is the tension between democratic local government systems and traditional/customary governance, which affects both central and local government. This has resulted in experimentation with different local government models in some of the Pacific countries, resulting in recentralisation of powers and functions, with some local governments facing a struggle to maintain their planning and operational roles. Customary law and authority remain strong at local level, and this ‘strength of custom’ has an impact on how effectively local governments can establish themselves and play a role in governance and development at local level.

The strong position of villages in Samoa, for instance, derives not only from tradition but from their recognition in the Village Fono Act 1990. Village councils (fonos) comprise traditional chiefs (matais) and every family has a matal who is a member of the council. The village mayor
(pulemu’u) is elected by council members from among themselves for a three year term using a first-past-the-post system. The staffing of the village councils is provided by the central government through the Public Service Commission. A dispute in Vaimoso settled by the Samoan Lands and Titles Court in April 2009 exemplifies the continuing authority of the Samoan village. Former Cabinet Minister Vatu Mutilator Siafaua Vui had been ostracised by the village in 1999 for calling a meeting that he was not authorised to call, and had further antagonised village leaders by participating in the bestowal of a chiefly title in a manner that he was not entitled to. The matai ordered the punishment of mu le foaga (the burning of the person’s home and belongings) but was thwarted by police and church leaders, and they subsequently rejected the ifoga (formal apology) that the court had ordered Vui to make. He was then ‘banished’ from the village for statements about the dispute made to the media. Vui’s appeal to the court was dismissed and he and his immediate family were given one week to leave the village.

In Kiribati, the traditional male elders group, Unimwane, have effectively ‘abolished’ the elected council several times, by various means, including the pressured ‘voluntary’ resignation of the elected councillors en masse, so that the Mayor, who was the centre of the crisis, had to resign since there was no council.

In Solomon Islands, in contrast, the modern system of government does not recognise traditional leadership roles and responsibilities, despite the fact that chiefs at local level assist their communities in making critical decisions concerning natural resource use, dispute resolution, and other matters. In recognition of this, the Sogovare government announced in 2017 that it has commenced drafting a ‘Traditional Governance Bill’ that seeks to ‘enhance and empower’ traditional chiefs and local customary authorities.

**Human and physical infrastructure development**

Rapid urbanisation growth has brought substantial challenges for urban managers and political leaders in areas of planning, infrastructure provision, employment, human settlements, and the management of climate change among many others. Urbanisation and growth of urban wealth has not been balanced in the region and inequalities remain significant in some areas. This is further compounded by the shortfalls in urban infrastructure investment as experienced in many parts of the region. The local context was expressed succinctly in a report on a workshop for City and Town Managers in Papua New Guinea held in May 2006:

Local governments in the Pacific region operate in a changing and uncertain social, political and economic environment. Challenges such as rapid urbanization with its inherent increased management responsibilities, decentralization, high expectations from the citizens, resource constraints, service delivery and implementation gaps, good governance, citizen participation and community mobilization, remoteness, political volatility and effective working relationships with traditional structures all add to the strategic management and decision making responsibilities of local leaders.

*(Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2006)*

**Informal settlements and housing**

The most evident challenges associated with urbanisation are the increase in the number of peri-urban and informal settlements. Migration from rural areas and outer-islands contribute significantly to the growth of towns and cities and therefore to the challenges posed by urbanisation. This has made it necessary for Pacific Island countries to urgently establish new and innovative
mechanisms and structures to respond to these urban challenges. Rapid urban growth has resulted in over-crowding, congestion, and stress on social and economic infrastructures. The impacts are exceptionally great on towns and cities in small islands developing states of the Pacific because their small size and limited capacities and resources. The appearance of informal settlements and their rapid expansion is accompanied by extra demand for better access to basic services and policies to combat the problems of poverty and poor health that are common in such a sector of the community. Max Kep, director of PNG’s Office of Urbanization, reported to the Pacific Urban Forum 2015 meeting:

The vision of a new Settlements Upgrading Strategy was to develop inclusive cities and towns without informal settlements and the goal was to develop affordable and participatory measures for upgrading settlements. A National Settlement Upgrading Strategy was being drafted. Data was being collected for informed decision making.

(UN-Habitat, Commonwealth Local Government Forum and Alliance 2015: 6)

So, for example, in 2006 the NCDC published its Urban Development Plan to provide a basis for broad land use and service infrastructure planning to 2015 (National Capital District Commission 2006). The plan considered the Capital District’s transport needs, and notes in relation to roads a number of inconsistencies between law and practice relating to its 400 kilometres of arterial and minor roads.

**Climate change adaptation**

The vulnerability of Pacific Islands to adverse weather events has long been known, but in recent decades has developed a language, and a responsive methodology, to the issue, in terms building sustainability, resilience, disaster preparedness, and disaster threat reduction. Ironically, one source of increased vulnerability to natural disasters is the growth of necessary physical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, high-rise buildings, and communications systems, which are prone to damage if not built to extremely robust specifications. New technology has assisted in reducing threats to life through the use of sirens, radio, internet, and even SMS alerts. However, an additional layer of threat is now posed by climate change and sea level rise (which is manifest in changed agricultural seasons, increased salination of water tables, etc.). The fact that most Pacific communities, whether rural or urban, live in close proximity to the shoreline, adds to the degree of exposure to changed conditions.

**Development coordination**

The importance of establishing partnerships, alliances and coalitions with the community, the private sector, civil society etc., are increasingly evident; local government bodies need to understand the advantages to be gained from networking, and to developing capacity to work in partnership with others to plan and deliver key local priorities. Intergovernmental relations – both vertical and horizontal – are also an area that needs to be improved and strengthened. The relationship between local and central government is critical to effective institutional strengthening and policy development. The role of local government associations as bodies representing local government in intergovernmental dialogue is growing, and therefore emphasis should be on enhancing the capacity of these embryonic organisations in the region to continue to make sure local government deliver quality and efficient services to the community.
During the Pacific MDG Consultation on the post-2015 agenda held in November 2014, participants expressed concern over the breadth and complexity of the goals and targets. The challenge at the current time is to identify, prioritise and make the post-2015 agenda achievable for Pacific countries. Although each of the goals can be applied to the work of local government, Goal 11, which seeks to make ‘cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’, and Goal 17, which refers to establishing partnerships to achieve the goals, appear to be the most pertinent.

Key actors in development coordination for the development of local government in Pacific Island countries and territories are UN Habitat and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. The goal of ensuring effective intergovernmental relations and central government support to local government is an important component of CLGF’s Pacific regional project. Specific activities have included intergovernmental dialogue, particularly involving national/provincial/local government, traditional leaders and civil society in Tuvalu, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa and Fiji; and provision of advice on intergovernmental fiscal relations and fiscal decentralisation, urban development and management. Other developmental activities have included twinning relationships between municipalities in the Pacific and counterparts elsewhere.

UN Habitat’s most useful activities in the region, in addition to support for the Pacific Urban Agenda initiative, have been rapid urban assessments and policy support for settlement upgrading in a number of communities Additional support has been given to the Pacific by the Cities Alliance and the United Cities and Local Government for Asia and the Pacific (UCLG ASPAC).

Conclusions

In a number of ways the underlying concept and empirical acceptance of local government is yet to be consolidated in Pacific Island countries and territories. Even though Pacific communities traditionally lived at local level, the small island states and territories have focused in recent decades on the development of government institutions and processes at national level more than at regional or local. Few national constitutions recognise sub-national levels of government, which as a consequence only exist through subsidiary legislation and are easily modified by the government of the day. Notwithstanding this lack of institutional recognition and design, the demands placed on governments by urbanisation cannot be ignored, and have increasingly gained the attention of development agencies as well as the local communities themselves, and many lessons are being learnt. Local government arrangements include villages (mostly rural but also some urban; and mostly traditional but some consciously modernising), informal settlements, and formal municipalities. Adequacy of public sector finding is essential. The urban challenge is significant and complex, and therefore the way cities and towns are managed and urban issues are addressed must take into account these complexities. In order to address this myriad of new challenges, particularly when the emerging disruptions are becoming more difficult to predict, plan for, and adjust to, Pacific local governments will need to be resilient. To do this, they need to apply foresight strategies, be agile, able to evolve and adapt, be responsive and capable of capitalising on opportunities. Urbanisation should not be viewed as a problem but potentially as a powerful tool of democratic governance, economic growth, social inclusion and environmentally sustainability.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the following colleagues for providing source information or feedback on this chapter: Simon Kunai, Peter Mae, Melanie Phillips, Alotaisi Takai, Pita Vuki and Phillip Tussing.
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Notes

1 By ‘modern’ is meant that which exists in contemporary law – the laws in this part of the world often have their origins in common law, but as the countries are now into their 4th and 5th decade of independent government, they have had opportunities to repeal and replace the most odious of laws from the colonial period. The term ‘traditional’ is widely used in the region to signal laws, institutions, values, that pre-existed colonial impositions, and some of which continue in modified form today. Hence the term ‘traditional leaders’ is still accepted for use.


3 The ‘Districts’ have been in name only in the recent past, especially when ‘District Administrations’ phased out after Independence in 1979. Each Council operates for the particular island and the district connection is no longer functional or even referred to. However the term is still applied in some offices; for example, staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are grouped into ‘districts’ to determine the islands they deal with.

4 Nineteen were established at independence, plus Jiwaka and Hela created in 2009.

5 See www.comofinquiry.gov.sb.

6 Pacific Islands’ local government legislation is online at the Pacific Local Government Project at the University of Technology Sydney (see www.clg.uts.edu.au/research/paclocgov.html).

7 This does not include the three districts of Bougainville, which is now covered under different funding arrangements in its own Act, or the three districts in the National Capital District.

8 Traditional leadership is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this volume.

References


