Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

State Society and Governance in Melanesia

ISSUES AND MECHANISMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: EXAMPLES FROM SOLOMON ISLANDS

PETER LARMOUR

Governments are being asked to become more 'accountable' to the legislature, to the media, to the private sector and to citizens. This paper looks at some issues in accountability, and at some mechanisms by which it can be achieved. It uses examples drawn from Solomon Islands.[1]

The word 'accountability' has several related meanings in English

- actions be open to inspection and challenge
- actions follow rules or expected standards
- the financial books are in order (Day and Klein 1987: 4).

The South Pacific Forum Finance Ministers have adopted eight principles of 'best practice' for public accountability (Box 1). They deal with two related kinds of accountability–financial and political.

Financial accountability is a means of controlling expenditure. Where public expenditure is a large part of the economy, it becomes an important tool of economic policy. It is a way of managing large bureaucracies. Political accountability is a way of achieving democracy. Accountability may be direct, when voters ask candidates, Members of Parliament or Congress,

or public servants to explain themselves. Or it may be indirect, when voters elect representatives who in turn demand accountability from public servants.

Political and financial accountability have developed in different ways (Day and Klein 1987: 4–31). Political accountability has developed with democracy. Financial accountability has developed as a neutral, technical way for leaders, democratic or not, to manage their subordinates. Historically, these two forms of accountability came together in the office of an auditor general, responsible to Parliament or Congress. The office gave politicians, representing the people, the ability to call the government to account for its expenditure. Michael Harmon defines accountability as

> an authoritative relationship in which one person is formally entitled to demand that another answer for (that is, provide an account of) his or her actions; rewards or punishments may be meted out to the latter depending on whether those actions conform to the former's wishes (Harmon 1995: 25).

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EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE FOR FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Budgetary processes, including multi-year frameworks, to ensure Parliament/Congress is sufficiently informed to understand the longer term implications of appropriation decisions.
2. The accounts of governments, state owned enterprises and statutory corporations to be promptly and fully audited, and the audit reports published where they can be read by the general public.
3. Loan agreements or guarantees entered into by governments to be presented to Parliament/Congress, with sufficient information to enable Parliament/Congress to understand the longer-term implications.
4. All government and public sector contracts to be openly advertised, competitively awarded, administered and publicly reported.
5. Contravention of financial regulations to be promptly disciplined.
6. Public Accounts/Expenditure Committee of Parliament/Congress to be empowered to require disclosure.
7. Auditor General and Ombudsman to be provided with adequate fiscal resources and independent reporting rights to Parliament/Congress.
8. Central Bank with statutory responsibility for non-partisan monitoring and advice, and regular and independent publication of informative reports.

Source: Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre 1998.

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Harmon identifies important aspects of accountability, and where it may break down. First, accountability is a relationship. It takes two to play: someone must ask, and someone else answer. If it's not asked for, then it may not be given. For example, parliament must ask for reports, as well as the public service provides them. Senior staff must ask junior staff what they are doing. Increasing accountability may involve

- increasing the demand for it (by the media, by pressure groups, by clients of public services), as well as
- increasing the supply of it (by information officers, auditors and the producers of public services).

Second, it involves a balance between 'answering' and 'doing'. Reporting takes time and resources. Too much 'answering' may prevent enough 'doing'. It may divert people from their real job to producing the data that satisfies their superiors.

Third, it is an authoritative relationship. That authority may not be recognised, or rejected by people called to account. There may be competing sources of authority, to which a person feels accountable. Differences in levels of formal education, or gender, or ethnic origin, may undermine the authority required to elicit accountability. For example, in developing countries, officials have sometimes rejected the authority of ministers on the grounds that they were educated, and the minister was not. Sexism, racism and suspicion of people from different ethnic groups may similarly obstruct accountability.

Fourth, accountability is not a master–slave relationship: the accountable person is free to choose to argue back, and leave. Accountability

involves a dialogue, rather than the unilateral assertion of one person's power over another.

Fifth, calling a person to account assumes they are in control of their actions, and could have chosen otherwise. They cannot be held accountable for things outside their control, or for outcomes that are dependent on the strategic actions of other, independent, people. Sometimes these may be excuses ('no transport', 'no staff', 'not my job', 'his fault'). But in a small, open, price-taking economy like those in the South Pacific many aspects of the economy are outside the control of public officials.

Sixth, it is often hard to identify who, or what, caused an outcome, and hence to decide who is accountable for it. Public policy problems are often complex, involving a number of independent actors. While the government cannot be held accountable for the actions of the private sector, for example, or a cyclone, it can be held accountable for its actions towards the private sector, or in disaster relief

Harmon's definition refers to 'action', and some complaints about accountability are about excessive activity, such as Ministers dealing directly with developers, directing Public Works teams and so on. Others have to do with inactivity. The Ombudsman's requests for information are not answered. Allowances are not paid. Ministers complain of public service caution, and proceduralism. Accountability may deal better with restraining activity than motivating inactivity. Different remedies may be required for activity and inactivity. For example, to try to deal with inactivity, Solomon Islands public finance legislation was recently amended to include sins of omission, as well as commission: failing to collect revenue, causing losses (*Public Finance and Audit Act*, s20a).

Finally, demands for 'greater accountability' can create their own problems: a tendency to pass the buck, work to rule, or avoid risky activities that depend on the cooperation of others.

ISSUES IN ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS TO POLITICIANS

These general problems of accountability are compounded by special problems of accountability in parliamentary democracies. Ministers have the legitimacy of being elected, and public servants do not. There are often disputes between Ministers and departmental heads, or Permanent Secretaries. For example, the Solomon Islands constitution provides that Ministers will have 'general direction and control' over their departments (s40). Ministers sometimes complain that Permanent Secretaries resist, obstruct or fail to come up solutions. Permanent Secretaries sometimes complain that ministers interfere and bypass them.

Security of tenure and fixed salaries for public servants restrict the range of 'rewards and punishments' available to Ministers to ensure Permanent Secretaries are accountable to them. Reflecting the politics of decolonisation in the 1970s, when it was drafted, the Solomon Islands constitution contains strong protections for civil servants against politicians. It vests the power of appointments and dismissal in an independent commission (s116). It gives the Prime Minister, not individual Ministers, a small say in the appointment of Permanent Secretaries, and their transfers (s128).

Solomon Islands is not unusual in the tension between politicians and public servants. The proliferation of minders, and special advisers, appointed outside the public service is a symptom of the tension. Comparative studies of minister/official relationships in developed countries have found both carrying out similar, shared, tasks of 'political management' (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981).

Attempts to distinguish policy from administration, and make ministers responsible for policy, and public servants for

implementation, have not been a success. Ministers are accountable to individual constituents and citizens on the effects of government activity upon them (licenses, school fees, and so on). Under Westminster parliamentary conventions, they are accountable for the actions of individual public servants. Similarly, public servants are interested in policy—sometimes more so than ministers.

Planning processes in Solomon Islands have tried to combine political and official perspectives (for example, Medium Term Development Strategies, or Programs of Action). However much politicians and planners may agree, plans are not blueprints, waiting to be implemented. Implementation is an interactive process between the 'political managers' at the centre, and those in the departments, and in the field. Particularly in small open economies, politicians and planners face uncertainty, and depend on the behaviour of others.

Since the 1970s, there has been traffic to and fro—public servants have gone into politics, and back again. There may still be good reasons to protect public servants from unfair or partisan politicians. There are also new reasons to be concerned about ineffective and unmotivated public servants. One answer is to make public servants externally accountable to others apart from politicians. These might include

- professional associations, who set standards and sanction their members
- clients/consumers
- stakeholders, particularly the private sector which makes decisions on investment, and hence employment.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF PROFESSIONALS

A combination of political and financial accountability to Parliament/Congress suited the minimal states of the nineteenth century, where legislatures were mainly concerned that governments carried their tasks out economically. However, it copes less well with twentieth century states which employ professionals to deliver health, education and other services, and where performance is hard to measure (Day and Klein 1987:15). A characteristic of professionals is that they regard themselves as accountable to their peers, or perhaps their clients, rather than parliament. Doctors are an extreme case of self-regulation, but other service providers like teachers, or technicians, are similarly resistant to external accountability to parliament.

A persistent tension around accountability in the Solomon Islands public service has been between professional officers (surveyors, nurses and teachers) and others. Professionals typically face dual accountabilities—to professional standards, administered by professional association—and to Permanent Secretaries and ultimately Ministers, who may for good budgetary, equity, or other reasons wish them to lower their standards. Other staff without professional associations often feel that only they, and their colleagues, understand the nature of their work, and so resist being held accountable for it.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN STATUTORY BODIES

A typical form of governance in Solomon Islands has been the statutory corporation, whose board may be appointed by a minister, and whose reports go to Parliament. The creation of a statutory body reweighs relationships of accountability. Statutory independence is meant to reduce the day-to-day accountability to the government. Reorganisation as a cost centre may increase financial accountability, or at least make subsidies more visible, and hence accountable.

Politically, appointments (and the threat to sack) have made boards more effectively accountable to ministers than the mainstream civil service, which is protected from sacking by the Public Service Commission. There are continuing complaints of ministers stacking boards with their supporters, and appointing people to reward them for service rather than competence.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Solomon Islands' continuing policies of decentralisation have had a number of purposes: to change the pattern of distribution of services; to distribute political power in ways that reassure minorities that the most populous islands will not dominate; to allow services to be tailored to regional differences. Decentralisation can also increase the accountability of officials to local pressures, though these may be a local élite at the provincial headquarters (a 'mini-Honiara'), rather than more distant villagers. Distance can also attenuate accountability to the centre.

The creation of elected authorities and provincial or local level creates inevitable tensions over accountability. When, as in Solomon Islands, provincial governments depend on central government grants the link between political and financial accountability embodied in the nineteenth century office of the auditor general is broken. Politically, public servants are accountable to provincial politicians. Financially, they and the politicians are accountable to the central government for grants. Central governments may be tempted to use the financial accountability of provincial governments to make them more politically accountable to the centre, as has happened with suspensions of provincial governments in Papua New Guinea.

In any case, where provincial governments deliver services, public servants are also directly accountable to their clients, rather than either level of politicians.

Popular demands for public accountability tend to short circuit the chain of accountability by service providers, through parliament, to the people. Public servants in rural areas find themselves directly accountable, like it or not, to farmers or parents of schoolchildren.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO DONORS

Donors themselves introduce extensive demands for accountability (often justified in terms of their own domestic accountability, or accountability to the boards of multilateral banks). These create demands for official time, and detailed information (copies of plans, reports, legislation, etc). Use of consultants, like other forms of privatisation, creates difficulties for accountability.

MANAGERIAL REFORMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Managerial approaches to public service, like those recommended in Public Sector Reform programs, and greater use of contracts, involve issues of discretion, and accountability.

Accountability implies a minimum of discretion—it must have been possible for the person to have done otherwise. Managerial ideas tend to hold managers accountable for outcomes, but be less inquisitive about how they were achieved. Managers are meant to assess risks, but not be discouraged by them.

A contract (for example between a department head and a Minister or the government and a firm) has to balance a desire to be specific, and the need to allow for risk, contingencies, and the strategic action of others. Williamson (1975) argued that for some tasks the 'transaction costs' of deciding upon and administering a contract were greater than the potential efficiencies. It might be cheaper to do things in-house, by flexible directions from above, than by contract.

The activities of the public service can be thought of as a chain linking inputs, through processes, to outputs that led to outcomes in the world. A budget, for example, specifies inputs to be processed according to financial regulations to produce outputs, such as a functioning hospital. Public servants may be made accountable at each step.

Managerial approaches try to make public servants accountable for outputs (numbers of clients served, kilometres of roads built). Accountability for outcomes is conceptually more difficult, as outcomes depend on the actions of

others. Some outcomes—like education—are co-produced with their clients—students, as well as teachers. Others, like 'improved health' depend on many factors, of which government outputs are only one. The causal link between government outputs (kilometres of roads) and outcomes (rural development) may be complex, and unclear. Nevertheless, politicians are often called to account for development outcomes, whatever the role of government outputs in achieving them.

Accountability for outputs or outcomes also allows the government to consider whether the public service itself is the right instrument to achieve them. Grants to non-government organisations, or purchases from the private sector may achieve the same results.

Some complaints about accountability have to do with process, as well as outputs and outcomes. Officials are said to be rude, late, or unfair in their decisions. These aspects of process may be reflected in poor results, but they are important items for accountability in themselves. Process is distinctive issue for the public sector, where officials typically have a monopoly of provision (so dissatisfied clients have no alternative to turn to), and where they dispose of coercive power (like the police).

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Issues of accountability are not just limited to the public sector. Directors of companies have to reconcile accountability to shareholders, customers, and employees. The head of the Chamber of Commerce has foreshadowed the establishment of an Institute of Directors, with training in issues of 'corporate governance'.

These issues become more extensive when privatisation expands the scope of the 'private sector' to include activities previously made accountable, perhaps imperfectly, through government mechanisms. The Ombudsman, for example, is concerned that corporatisation of Works, and Posts, has removed them from the scope of his office. Complainants have nowhere to go.

The government recognises that privatised utilities will require new regulatory structures to guard against the new owners using abusing their monopoly position (which may be a result of their dominance of a network, or a privilege granted by the government). Owners are likely to find themselves accounting in detail about, for example, pricing decisions, and their behaviour towards potential competitors. New regulatory agencies will require skills not readily available in the existing public service, and provide an account of their activities.

Processes of privatisation themselves provide opportunities for favouritism. In Solomon Islands, a tender process exists for sales of government assets, but its use in grants of land has lapsed. Publication of tenders and the names of successful bidders make the process of allocation more accountable, and may deter corruption. Businesses that benefit from government grants and concessions may resist being made publicly accountable, as in the reports of physical intimidation of the publishers of newspaper which has been publishing reports of grants of land to a prominent Solomon Islander businessman—including land on which a courthouse is built (*The Solomons Voice,* 1 May 1998). This example shows the importance of the media, public and private, in creating accountability.

Solomon Islands has a vigorous non-government organisation sector, particularly the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), which is involved in building awareness as well as delivering services (Roughan 1990). Their accountability—to funders, or members, in Solomon Islands or overseas—is also an issue.

MECHANISMS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Tables 1 and 2 list various mechanisms for accountability, give examples of their use in Solomon Islands, and make rough assessments or comments on their performance. Table 1 deals with organisational mechanisms, while Table 2

lists the mechanisms available to politicians, where (as in Solomon Islands) the public service is independent.

Table 1 begins with assumption that most people want to do a good job—the other mechanisms can only be additional, or marginal to this basic motivation. The cheapest form of accountability is reliance on the norms and values of individual public servants.

Some of the complaints about accountability in Solomon Islands go to questions of values, particularly the suspicion that public servants are more identified with family, and *wantoks*, than the ideas about service to clients, or nationalism. Accountability as a concept assumes that people are agents, choosing to act or not to act, interpreting rules—cultural or statutory—rather than dumbly following them. It is also a matter of 'talk' as well as 'action', so it assumes a common language or shared understanding of what work in the public service is for. This may be harder to achieve in a society with many indigenous languages, and valued cultural differences. Public sector reformers urge a shift in the language in which people account for their actions to each other—from compliance to results. The more important question of accountability may be that the language, whatever it is, is shared.

Accountability, as we saw above, may assume action. Yet motivations may be different in different parts of the public service, and in those parts where people see themselves as professionals, accountable to their peers. More boring or junior jobs may not motivate staff, in the public or private sectors. Clients get treated as unwanted distractions, or opportunities to exact bribes. Many of the complaints in Solomon Islands have to do with 'motivation', as do the stories of the ability of political and public service leaders to restore motivation, by example, sanctions, and incentives.

TABLE 1   ORGANISATIONAL   MECHANISMS   FOR   ACCOUNTABILITY

Method of accountability	Solomon Islands example	Comment
Self	Individuals want to do a good job	May be undermined by bad examples, or no training
Professionalisation	Doctors, lawyers, surveyors associations	May cut across political accountability
Publicity	Newspapers and radio	Low adult literacy Government controls radio Some intimidation of press Accountability issues for the media
Internal discipline	PSC regulations General Orders Financial Instructions	Reluctance to use
Pressure groups	–	Few, while Public Service union protects its members
NGOs	Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) Churches	Accountability may be limited to members/funders
Client surveys and charters	–	Not used

Source: from Peters, B. Guy, 1978. *The Politics of Bureaucracy: A Comparative Perspective,* Longman, London; interviews.

The second method, publicity, seems patchily effective in Solomon Islands. There are now several newspapers in Solomon Islands: *Solomon Star*, *Solomon Drum*, *The Solomons Voice*, *Sol-Tree News*, and *The Solmusic*. There is a government broadcaster, and private FM radio. Journalists are being trained in the techniques of investigative reporting. Accountability is limited by the circulation of newspapers, low levels of adult literacy, and government control of the most widespread medium, radio, which inhibits self-criticism. Officials may be reluctant to comment directly to the media, while leaders, like the businessman mentioned above, may overreact to public questioning. The media have their own issues of accountability over public complaints about their coverage, including intrusions into privacy.

There are widespread concerns about the absence of the use of internal disciplinary mechanisms, embodied in rule books.

Pressure groups in Solomon Islands are also patchy, though strong over customary land matters. The Chamber of Commerce was in abeyance, even intimidated, during the 1990s, but has now been granted a formal role in the reform process. The Trade Union movement is well established, and has a history of being critical of the government. However, the Public Employees Union naturally sides with the rights and interests of its public servant members, rather than those to whom they are accountable.

Non-government organisations have called the government to account, particularly over forestry policies. Solomon Islands is highly Christianised and Church leaders sometimes call governments to account for their policies. They may also bring individual public servants to account for their performance of duties in rural areas (for example, in school boards). More importantly, perhaps, Churches provide the normative framework, and concern with shame and reputation, that makes officials self-accounting, as moral agents or simply followers of rules.

Client satisfaction surveys are not yet used to judge the performance of public servants, nor do polling organisations try and tap popular opinion other than at elections.

TABLE 2   MECHANISMS TO MAKE OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE TO THE LEGISLATURE

Methods	Solomon Island examples	Comment
Budget changes	Pay freeze Redundancy packages	Focus of public sector reform program
Reorganisation	Decentralisation Creation /abolition of ministries Corporatisation Privatisation	Focus of public sector reform program
Investigation	Commission of Inquiry into Corruption, 1995	–
Ombudsman	Chapter IX of Constitution	Started reporting again in 1996
Constituency service	Constituency Development Fund	May be stronger at provincial level
Post audit	Auditor General	Reports up to date
Political executive	Reshuffles of public sector	Focus of public sector reform program

Source: from Peters, B. Guy, 1978. *The Politics of Bureaucracy: A Comparative Perspective,* Longman, London; interviews.

Table 2 lists a number of ways in which politicians can make public servants accountable to them, in spite of security of tenure and fixed salaries. The requirement for parliamentary approval of the budget, largely made up of public service pay, imposes accountability on broad categories of activity, as does the ability to create, merge and otherwise reorganise government. Commissions of Inquiry may call individual officials to account.

The Constitution provides for three independent offices, particularly involved in accountability—the Auditor General, the Ombudsman Commission and the Leadership Code Commission. (In fact, the Act provides for three Commissioners, but only one has been appointed).

THE AUDITOR GENERAL

The Auditor General is supposed to make annual audits of all government accounts, and report on them to Parliament. There has been a backlog in completing these audits, but in 1998 the Auditor General published reports for 1993, 1994 and 1995. However, these reports are heavily qualified. For each year the Auditor General identified

> …a fundamental failure in the system of recording and controlling accounting transactions and insufficient audit evidence to support certain transactions and accounts (1993:2, 1994:2,1995:2)

His reports list dishonoured cheques to government (worth SI$1.4 million in 1995), cash advances to public officers (SI$4.5 million), and muddles over loans to statutory bodies.

THE OMBUDSMAN COMMISSION

The Leadership Code Commission and the Ombudsman Commission have different, but related, functions under the constitution (these functions are combined in a single office in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu). The Ombudsman Commission investigates individual complaints against administrative action, such as delays or unfair treatment. Most complaints come from

public service employees themselves. In 1996/7, for example, it dealt with 337 cases, concluding that 30 per cent were 'justified'. The most complained-against Ministry was the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. The Ombudsman Commission has powers to investigate particular cases, but not 'policies', or court decisions. It tries to resolve complaints by negotiation with the department complained against.

The Ombudsman Commission reports to Parliament. The office dealt with complaints, but no reports were made between 1991 and 1995. Reporting began again in 1996, and 1997. In these reports the Commission complains of lack of cooperation from departments

> …the major contributing factor to the lack of completed cases was the sluggish, untimely or simply non responsiveness of the authorities/bodies complained against (Solomon Islands, Ombudsman Commission 1997:1)

The office of the Ombudsman addresses concerns of individual complainants, but the reports of the Commission show that the office is overwhelmingly servicing the complaints of public servants, within the system, against things like non-payment of allowances. Only a handful of complaints come from non-public servant clients and consumer of services (though politicians have complained about non-disbursement of Constituency Development Funds, Solomon Islands Ombudsman Commisssion 1997:74). The Ombudsman's complaints against provincial governments are all about unfair treatment of employees, rather than, for example, failure to provide extension services to farmers.

THE LEADERSHIP CODE COMMISSION

The Leadership Code Commission is mainly concerned with 'conflict of interest'

> …a situation where the Leader has to make a choice between his personal interests and his obligations as a Leader (s12).

Leaders include national and provincial politicians, and all public servants. The Commission requires all leaders to make a bi-annual declaration of their assets, directorships and so on and those of their spouses and children over 18. A four-page form, inviting officials to list their directorships, shares, gifts, assets, and business transactions involving more than SI$500 is distributed to the estimated 10,000 people, including all public servants, covered by the act. The Act says that leaders, who accept personal benefits by reason of their official position, or bribes, are guilty of 'misconduct in office'. So are leaders who face a 'conflict of interest' over their shareholdings. Leaders, whose companies have contracts with the government, must get permission to do so from the Leadership Code Commission.

The Leadership Code Commission argues that it is necessary to be realistic about the business interests of leaders. Salaries are low, and extended families put demands on them. The Commission provides a means of supervision of leaders, though there must be practical difficulties of maintaining surveillance over the 10,000 people who have filled in forms. The Act allows the Leadership Code Commission to take into account 'the value to the development of Solomon Islands as a whole of the investment the leader has made' in deciding if a conflict of interest may occur. Shortages of skills, for example in surveying, may make it appropriate that government professionals also operate privately. If the lifestyles of leaders suggest their expenditure is higher than the income they have declared, the Commissioner can question them.

When people complain about 'accountability' in Solomon Islands they are sometimes complaining about individuals (X doesn't answer the phone), and sometimes about institutions (the Y authority does not report to parliament). In a small place, a line between individuals and institutions may be hard to draw.

The Leadership Code Commissioner distinguishes his office from the Ombudsman Commission by saying he deals with individuals, who have reputations that must be protected, whereas the Ombudsman Commission deals with complaints against the public service system. The Leadership Code Commissioner himself is critical of the combination of these offices in Papua New Guinea, and the public inquisitorial style of the Vanuatu Commissioner. Leaders sometimes make mistakes, he says, and the Commission must take care to protect reputations. The Leadership Code Commission favours surveillance, counselling and (eventually) dismissal from office, rather than prosecution. The Act also provides for complaints against 'alleged or suspected misconduct in office', but the Commission has not encouraged complaints, on the grounds that it has not got the staff to cope with the number of complaints it would expect to receive. Two former policemen form the Commission's investigatory staff.

Public complaints to the Leadership Code Commission run at about four a month, compared to about twenty a month for the Ombudsman Commission. The Leadership Code Commission is concerned that greater publicity about the right to complain would lead to a flood of complaints that the staff in his office would not be able to process. The Secretary to the Commission says it has taken six leaders to court, several being acquitted, and the others receiving fines of less than the thousand dollars maximum the Act provides (a relatively small amount compared to the opportunities that, for example, the forestry boom has offered). There is no requirement in its legislation for the Leadership Code Commission to account to anyone.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO CLIENTS FOR SERVICES

Solomon Islands constitution talks about accountability up and down, referring to relationships between politicians and permanent secretaries, and between senior and junior staff. The Ombudsman Commission overwhelmingly

deals with complaints from public servants rather than the public. The Leadership Code Commission, as we have seen, is not actively encouraging complaints. Both offices recognise they need to travel more, and provincial tours would, no doubt, uncover complaints about the delivery of services, which are in any case are largely a provincial government responsibility.

Electoral pressures on MPs make them attentive to client concerns, but their ability to call individual public servants to account is very limited. Constituency Development Funds, allocated from the budget, directly to MPs, have been widely criticised as 'pork barrelling', but they can also be understood as a means of increasing responsiveness to client demands, by politicians whose tenure depends on maintaining popular support. The government is currently reforming the process of disbursing Constituency Development Funds, including requiring committee decision, and reports about allocations.

Mechanisms of accountability through ministers to parliament, or through an Auditor General, do not strongly differentiate between sectors of government activity. Nor do generalised complaints about a breakdown in accountability. In practice, however, the characteristics of particular government services affect the kind of accountability problems they face. Solomon Islands' existing systems of accountability already recognise differences between sectors. Statutory bodies are created in some sectors, rather than others, and the Ombudsman finds more complaints against some Ministries (particularly Education and Human Resource Development, and Police and National Security) than others.

Day and Klein's work on accountability in education, health, police, social services and water in Britain distinguished between the services in terms of their degree of
- direct political control, through elected boards
- professionalisation
- heterogeneity (that is, the number of different service products provided)
- complexity
- uncertainty (about objectives, and the means to achieve them).

They found that direct election did not make much difference. Elected or not, board members saw themselves as directly accountable to 'the community', rather than constitutionally accountable to local or national governments. They also found, with the exception of the water authorities, little sense of accountability for performance, not least because

> …the relationship between inputs and outputs is often difficult to discern…(and) the contribution of any particular service is difficult to isolate from the wider social environment (Day and Klein 1987:232).

There were also differences between services in board members' willingness to call service providers to account. This did not depend directly on the social status or degree of professionalisation or formal expertise. Doctors were hard to make accountable, but so were some ancillary workers in the health service. Police were hard to make accountable, whereas board members were confident about second guessing the decisions of social workers. Day and Klein conclude that the issue is the ability of service providers 'make their own activities invisible'—hard for outsiders to understand and get to grips with. It depended partly on their industrial strength within a sector, and partly on the characteristic of the service. Services ranking high on certainty, particularly water, were easier for outsiders to assess.

Paul uses Hirschmann's (1970) ideas about 'exit' and 'voice' to draw out differences in accountability between sectors. Exit refers to the presence of competing sources of supply, so that a dissatisfied consumer can turn to an alternative. 'Voice' is the ability to complain. Paul argues that

> …public service accountability will be sustained only when the 'hierarchical control' (HC) over service providers is reinforced by the public's willingness and ability to use exit and voice (Paul 1992:1048).

TABLE 3   VOICE AND EXIT CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICES

	Low voice	**High voice**
Low exit	Rural primary education Rural health Law and order for the poor	Urban water Electricity Regulatory services Irrigation
High exit	Urban low income housing Welfare/nutrition Urban transport	Urban primary education for the poor University Specialist health

Source: Paul, S., 1992. 'Accountability in public services: exit, voice and control', *World Development,* 20(7):1052.

He goes on to distinguish public services according to the degree of exit and voice available to their consumers.

Table 3 shows various services according to their voice and exit characteristics, and hence accountability. Low exit and low voice services in the top left-hand cell: consumers have few alternatives, and poor people living in rural areas have little voice to complain. High voice and exit services, like university education and urban transport, in the bottom-right cell, serve better educated clients in urban areas. They are more likely to complain ('voice'), but also have the possibility of 'exit' to private services, so they may just give up and leave. High voice and low exit services in the top-right corner are those most likely to be accountable: their clients are ready to make a fuss, and they have no alternative.

Many of these measures are already being tried, in some form or other, in Solomon Islands. Paul's argument is that hierarchical controls (legislation, regulations, and so on) need to be tailored to take into account, and enhance, the different voice and exit characteristics of services in order to enhance accountability. For low-income urban housing, for example, where exit is already strong, they should encourage more voice. In rural health, where both are low, they should encourage both voice and exit. If they want to keep urban public services accountable, they should try and prevent the middle class from drifting away into private hospitals and private schools: if the middle class 'exits', there will be weaker voices left behind.

Paul goes on to recommend a set of measures for improving accountability by exit and voice. Exit measures include contracting out, public competition, deregulation and migration. Voice measures include participation, local government, public surveys and evaluations, media forums, and legal challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

The accountability of the Solomon Islands public service to parliament is purposely limited by the constitution. Nevertheless, politicians have a range of other ways of making civil servants accountable (Table 2), and have worked around the public service by appointing their own advisers and board members of statutory corporations, and by the creation of Constituency Development Funds. At the same

time, institutions such as the Ombudsman Commission and Leadership Code Commission have tended, in Solomon Islands, to act on behalf of public servants, and political leaders, rather than as means of making them accountable to the public.

The continuing tussles between politicians and public servants may be less relevant to the other methods of internal and external accountability listed in Table 1, including professionalisation, publicity, and pressure groups. Professionalisation is part of a wider tendency, identified by Day and Klein, for occupational groups to resist external accountability by making their work seem mysterious and complicated to outsiders. Participation cuts politicians out of the loop, by making public servants directly responsible to their clients. Both shifts in accountability—professionalisation and participation—are characteristic of service delivering states, like Solomon Islands.

Patterns of accountability differ between sectors, depending in part on the technical characteristics of the service delivered, and on the degree of industrial organisation among employees. These sectoral differences are partly reflected in the patterns of complaint to the Ombudsman, and in the pattern of creation of statutory bodies. Sectoral differences in accountability also depend, as Paul shows, on the extent to which clients have access to alternatives ('exit'), and the extent to which their complaints are heard ('voice'). Government regulations can be tailored to compensate for the absence of each, and both of these.

New, non-parliamentary, sources of external accountability are not automatically a good thing. The media and non-government organisations have accountability problems of their own. Professionalisation is an attractive form of self regulation, but can also involve controlling remuneration by limiting access and, as Day and Klein discovered, may be part of a more general tendency of groups to claim that their work is impossible to explain to others.

Professionalisation and participation, however, are characteristic of a service-delivery state that may be on the way out, as (in Solomon Islands) fiscal crises drive privatisation. Already corporatised entities like Works are, as the Ombudsman discovered, beyond the scope of parliamentary mechanisms of accountability. As the private sector grows in relation to the public sector, new relationships of mutual accountability will have to be developed, perhaps foreshadowed by the representation of the Chamber of Commerce in the committees involved in public sector reform.

NOTE

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State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project
The Australian National University

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Project was launched in January 1996 in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. The Project comprises three Fellows (Dr Bronwen Douglas, Mr Anthony Regan and Dr Sinclair Dinnen), a Convenor (Mr David Hegarty, on secondment from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and an Administrator, Ms Monica Wehner. It is funded by the ANU with financial assistance for project activities from AusAID.

OBJECTIVE

The key objective of the SSGM Project is to increase awareness and understanding of the problems of governance and of the relationships between society and state in Melanesian countries. Research, publication, conferences, workshops (in both Australia and the South Pacific), collaboration with institutions and scholars within the region and increased interface between the academic and policy communities are the primary mechanisms for achieving this objective.

ASSOCIATES SCHEME

As a further part of its outreach program, the SSGM Project has established an Associates Scheme designed to encourage scholars and professionals interested in all aspects of governance in Melanesia to affiliate with the Project and participate in its activities.

The Project also conducts a Professional Visitorship scheme for policy makers and leaders from the public and private sectors in Pacific Island countries to undertake structured visits to Canberra and the ANU to pursue governance-related interests.

CONFERENCES/WORKSHOPS/SEMINARS

The Project conducts a regular seminar series at the ANU on issues of current interest. Recent seminars include: *Governance in Fiji – Contradictions in the New Constitution*; *Local-level Economy in Bougainville*; *Governance, Civil Society and the Sandline Affair in PNG*; *Conflict on Guadalcanal*; *PNG's 1999 Budget - The End of Public Sector Reform?*; *Conflict Among Bougainvilleans – Implications for the Peace Process*; *Governance Issues in Rural Vanuatu*; *Institutional Reform in PNG*; *Managing the Australia-PNG Relationship*.

A number of international Workshops and Conferences have been held including: *Accountability and Corruption in the Pacific: Evaluating the Roles of Ombudsmen and Leadership Codes*; *Women, Christians, Citizens: Being Female in Melanesia Today*; *PNG – Economics and Governance Update*; *Monitoring Peace in Bougainville*; *Pacific Islanders Abroad – Perspectives on Governance, Diaspora and Inter-Ethnic Relations*. Forthcoming Governance Workshops are planned for Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.

FELLOWS' RESEARCH INTERESTS

Dr Bronwen Douglas

Dr Douglas's research focus within the SSGM Project is on Christianity in Melanesia. She argues it is impossible to understand Melanesian nations and communities without an appreciation of the profound importance of Christianity to Melanesian people and the significant roles played by the churches. Her research has three major themes: (a) pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Melanesia and the negotiation of gendered local, national and global identities: (b) Melanesian women as Christians and citizens and the relevance for Governance of local women's groups; (c) how secular Western preconceptions have helped shape the production of knowledge about Melanesians and the delivery of aid and development programs.

Dr Douglas is keen to draw attention to key elements of civil society in Melanesia and particularly to the interests and potential of local communities and women's groups. Her recent publications include: *Traditional Individuals? Gendered Negotiations of Identity, Christianity and Citizenship in Vanuatu*, SSGM Discussion Paper 98/6, ANU, Canberra 1998; "Being Female in Melanesia Today: Indigenous Women's Voices 1998", *Development Bulletin*, 48, April 1999; *Across The Great Divide: Journeys in History and Anthropology*, (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998).

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Dr Sinclair Dinnen

Dr Dinnen's research project looks at the nexus between state and society in contemporary Melanesia with particular reference to violence and public order. The immediate focus is on forms of conflict in socially diverse and rapidly changing environments and the responses they generate at state and community level. He argues it is not possible to understand current forms or levels of conflict without an understanding of the complex intersections between the cultural, economic and political dimensions of change. Such an approach is necessary to the formulation of appropriate strategies to counter conflict, whether it be urban street crime, violence against women, ethnic tensions, or resource developments.

Dr Dinnen is particularly interested in criminal justice reform and in the potential for developing restorative (as distinct from retributive) solutions to conflict. In his view, the most promising approach for reformers and aid donors in the field of law and justice is one that builds on the strengths of Melanesian societies, consciously blending the new with the old, and one that places singular emphasis on community participation. Dr Dinnen is currently in PNG consulting on an AusAID project on national crime strategies. His recent publications include: "Restorative Justice in Papua New Guinea", *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, **Vol 25, No 3, Sept 1997**; "Criminal Justice Reform in Papua New Guinea", in Peter Armour (ed), *Governance and Reform in the South Pacific*, **SSGM, RSPAS, NCDS, ANU, 1998**; *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*, edited with Alison Ley, Asia-Pacific Press, ANU, **forthcoming**; *Law and Order in a Weak State; the Politics of Crime in Papua New Guinea*, Uni of Hawaii Press, **forthcoming**.

Anthony Regan

Mr Regan's main research projects look at the relationship of state and society in Melanesia with particular reference to, first, the conflict and peace process in Bougainville and, second, factors influencing the ways institutions of government operate, especially with respect to the interaction of constitutional law and the political, economic and cultural forces at work in Melanesia. His immediate focus is on the Bougainville conflict as an extreme manifestation of more general processes at work in Melanesia. Rapid social and economic change, and especially the development of a high degree of inequality in previously egalitarian societies, are producing deep strains that in Bougainville are manifested in ethnic conflict that is in fact largely a surrogate for other and more fundamental sources of tension. He is interested in examining the extent to which the underlying tensions that contributed to the conflict can be addressed by the present peace process and the institutional and development frameworks that emerge from it. Mr. Regan's current work on institutions of government relates mainly to ombudsmen and leadership codes in the Pacific and decentralisation policy in Papua New Guinea. Mr. Regan has been working as a constitutional adviser to governments in Bougainville since 1981, and is currently constitutional adviser to the Bougainville Administration, and through it, to the Bougainville People's Congress.

Mr Regan's recent publications include: *Political Decentralisation in a New State: the Experience of Papua New Guinea* (with R. J. May, joint editor), Crawford House Press, Bathurst 1997; "Case Study: Bougainville", in P. Harris and B. Reilly, eds., *Democracy and Deep-rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*, Handbook Series, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 1998, pp.171-178; "Causes and course of the Bougainville conflict", *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol.33, No.3, 1998, pp.269-285; "Submission to the Foreign Affairs Sub-committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry – Bougainville: The Peace Process and Beyond", in *Submissions: Inquiry into the Bougainville Peace Process*, Volume 2, Submission Numbers 25-30, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, pages 539-644.