GLOBALISATION, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND MELANESIA: 
THE NORTH NEW GEORGIA SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

ABSTRACT

This paper is about globalisation, the state, and community development in Melanesia. The paper draws on the concept of “weak state–strong society” and explores the influence of the Christian churches, non-government organisations, and kastom in shaping development and social change in a Melanesian society. The paper takes Solomon Islands as its focus and a case study is made of the North New Georgia Sustainable Social Forestry and Rural Development Project – a re-afforestation program established on the island of New Georgia in the late 1990s. Through this case study, the emergence of a locally-derived and locally-based approach to community and resource development is examined.

Since the eighteenth century, the fortunes, practices, opportunities and power of Pacific societies have been significantly influenced by changes in the strategic, economic and normative order at the global level. This will obviously continue to be so. But, as in the past, this will not simply be a “fatal impact” of powerful global forces on local vulnerable societies but a “messy entanglement” in which it will matter how particular societies, and the South Pacific collectively, organise their response or create opportunities (Fry 2000, 2).

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing movement of global forms and processes into the developing world is a matter of considerable inquiry and a central question is that of past, present, and future impact. Where this impact brings powerful and obviously mixed fortunes to developing societies, it is important to explore local responses. Furthermore, it needs to be asked where and how such societies now seek to turn “globalisation” to advantage. In this paper, these questions are brought to bear on the circumstances of the Pacific Islands and Melanesia, with particular reference to Solomon Islands. My analysis is informed by the concept “weak state–strong society”, augmented by reference to the significance of AusAID to this series is acknowledged with appreciation.
of the Christian churches, non-government organisations (NGOs), and kastom (indigenous power relations, customs, ways) in development and social change in Melanesian states, including the Solomons. In this context, a case study is made of a community-based commercial-scale re-afforestation scheme, the North New Georgia Sustainable Social Forestry and Rural Development Project (the north New Georgia project). The project was established in the late 1990s through local initiative and local financial investment under the direct guidance of an indigenous church and its leadership. Since that time, the project has sought to mitigate longstanding community problems – unsustainable logging, intergenerational inequity, youth unemployment – with the support of non-local technical advice and in a vacuum of similar state-based activity. Where the community of north New Georgia has in this way commenced re-afforestation of customary land, it has also begun to forge direct links with the transnational community with a view to establishing long-term relations with advisers, financiers, and markets for its forest resources, without domestic government involvement. An examination of the project affords a rare glimpse of a local, developing-world community working through problems associated with its engagement in national and transnational political economies. While project outcomes are far from conclusive to date, this examination points to rich possibilities for local initiative and aspiration and also to the capacity of elements of the transnational community to match such initiatives. It also points to ways in which long-standing arrangements between state and society in Melanesia allow considerable space for “non-state” factors in the task of development. Such factors include the Christian churches, NGOs, and kastom.

GLOBALISATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN MELANESIA

According to Hoogvelt, “The nature, extent and significance of globalisation is at the heart of debates about the contemporary world economy and the predicament within it of what we used to call the Third World” (1997). McMichael describes globalisation as an era of “postdevelopmentalism” in which the pursuit of nationally-managed economic growth is in demise in the wake of structural adjustment policies and their long-term implications (1996, 148). While development remains a key organising principle in state-based political economy, its deployment is dispersing across many other arenas of governance. For the Pacific Islands and Melanesia, the shift away from exclusive state action in the task of development operates in the context of states (and their nations) of recent construction, most having gained independence only in the last thirty years (Otto and Thomas 1997, 1). With colonial and post-colonial forces – precursors to contemporary globalisation – having played a strong hand, these states are often described as ‘weak’; hence, national governments remain pre-occupied with the task of creating and maintaining new political economies and in doing so face characteristic institutional problems in the areas of coordination, organisational and financial capacity, and centralisation. Such states are not wholly able and/or willing to maintain social control, preserve stability and cohesion, provide basic services, manage and control the national economy, and retain legitimacy. The weak state’s difficulties exist however in conjunction with “hidden strengths” located in the dynamic network of relations between the state and broader society (Dauvergne 1998b; Migdal 1988, 1998). This correlation explains why so many weak states persist where they might otherwise have been expected to perish. It also points to ways in which long-standing arrangements between state and society in Melanesia allow considerable space for “non-state” factors in the task of development. Such factors include the Christian churches, NGOs, and kastom.

An indigenously-expressed Christian faith and locally-based Christian churches are extensively represented throughout Melanesia. Douglas describes Melanesian Christianity as “an intimate lived experience and a strategy mobilised pragmatically to achieve private and public ends” (2000b, 6). Trompf finds that in Melanesia “religious organisations (whether national or regional) are enmeshed in political activities concerning economic development and foreign aid” (1991, 2). Melanesian NGOs are similarly engaged in various and extensive development activities, in this case linked to recent structural adjustment programs and consequent state withdrawal from or loss of capacity in assisting subnational groups and causes (McMichael 1996, 150). Schoeffel further finds that some NGOs active in Melanesia “have come to believe that by-passing government is actually a virtue in itself because
of the predatory characteristics of the state” (1997, 3). Kastom as a key source of identity and meaning in Melanesian states and communities is also likely to shape action in pursuit of development and social change.² Douglas suggests that indigenous values in Melanesia are “usually flexible and open to new things and ideas” (pers. com., Canberra, 12 December 2001) while Lawson (1997) and Otto (1997) argue that the power of kastom lies in its deployment as an oppositional concept to “the west”. Where the state has struggled, political action directed towards development has thus been undertaken in other arenas: the Christian churches, NGOs, and kastom. This proposition will now be discussed with specific reference to Solomon Islands.

“WEAK STATE” AND “STRONG SOCIETY” IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands gained independence from Britain in 1978 and from the outset has suffered strategic disadvantage including a narrow resource base, remoteness and isolation, a limited domestic market, and ecological and economic vulnerability which have mitigated against state capacity (World Bank 2000, 3). At the same time, administrative capacity has been severely undercut by weaknesses in institutional integrity ranging from mismanagement, arbitrary decision-making, and lack of transparency and accountability, to aid dependency and unsustainable resource development (Dauvergne 1998b, 142-4; Larmour 1997, 1998, 2000; Tisdell 2001b; World Bank 2000, 3). This has in turn been accompanied by broad problems of national cohesion that have culminated in intermittent talk of secession and a disastrously disruptive coup in 2000.³ Overall, the status quo is producing worsening education and health indicators which suggest that “de-development” is occurring (Tisdell 2001b, 2). The rate of population growth is over 3.5% and is amongst the highest in the world (Tisdell 2001b, 13). Distributive problems are considerable with 1% of households in the capital, Honiara, taking 50% of total earnings (World Bank 2000, 14). Around 47% of the population is aged 0-14 years (Kabutaulaka 1998, 16) and youth unemployment is high (well over 10%) (World Bank 2000, 14).³ The Solomons measures amongst the lowest in the Pacific region on the Human Development Index and maintains a world ranking of 147, placing it in parity with Guinea, Burundi, Senegal, and Bangladesh (World Bank 2000, 13-14).

Whereas the state is demonstrably weak, certain elements in broader Solomon Islands society are conversely strong. The church is perhaps the most influential institution in Solomons life with 95% of the population belonging to a Christian denomination. To a greater or lesser extent, the major churches – United (formerly Methodist), Seventh-day Adventist, South Sea Evangelical, Catholic, and Anglican – are spread throughout the archipelago (Weir 2000, 49). At times, this cheek-by-jowl diversity has resulted in considerable interdenominational rivalry but in recent years such tensions have been put largely (though not conclusively) to rest through the ecumenical activities of the umbrella organisation, the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) (Weir 2000, 49). Notwithstanding negative impacts on indigenous beliefs and practices, the churches have pioneered the provision of education, health, and other community projects and services. The churches are also influential in shaping perceptions and understandings of development, thereby establishing themselves as major stakeholders in the development process (Kabutaulaka 1998, 46). For Kabutaulaka, “the church has become so powerful that development agencies and the state cannot afford to ignore this institution as an important vehicle for implementing development programmes” (1998, 49).

The activities of NGOs in the Solomons provide a second, alternative platform for the pursuit of development (Roughan 1997). Bennett suggests that: “Excluding the churches, the strongest empowering force in the rural Solomons is the NGOs.” As with the churches, NGOs are a diverse group and competition and friction frequently arise among various parties (Dinnen, pers. com., 13 December 2001). This is to some extent managed through the umbrella organisation, Development Services Exchange (Australian Council for Overseas Aid 2000, 35-6). Bennett (2000, 274) finds considerable political lobbying, agitation, and even subversion to be in evidence in environmental NGO activity in the Solomons. Likewise, women's groups, both church-based and non-aligned, are gaining increasingly prominent profiles in what Solomon Islanders now often refer to as “civil society”. The activities of these groups are frequently linked to conflict resolution and peace-brokering in the face of civil unrest (Douglas 2000a, 12; 2000c; Liloqula and Pollard 2000). Women's groups are also involved in health, education, and employment-generation activities (Australian
Council for Overseas Aid 2000, 7). According to the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (2000, 7), “Many women's groups have positive proposals for such ventures and the capacity to harness the energies of their communities.” Given the strength of the activity of NGOs in Solomon Islands, it can be argued that, as with the Christian churches at the turn of the previous century, Solomon Islanders are now in the process of selecting those aspects of NGOs best suited to Melanesian life in the twenty-first century (Bennett 2000, 274).

Kastom can be a vital, robust, and highly complex resource in development processes in contemporary Solomon Islands. Kabutaulaka comments that “cultural traditions and introduced ways of life continuously interact and impact on one another. Social transformation and the making and implementation of development policies are influenced greatly by both ways of life” (1998, 18). Indigenous styles of leadership and forms of power relations must co-exist with a Westminster parliamentary system. Customary land title must sit alongside state efforts to mobilise resources.

The significance and potential of Christian churches, NGOs, and kastom in development activities in the weak Solomon Islands state will be illustrated with specific reference to the north New Georgia re-afforestation project.

THE NORTH NEW GEORGIA SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Context and foundations
While forest resource development is the key economic sector in the Solomons, forest resource management is an arena of very considerable administrative weakness (Dauvergne 1998b). Problems include inadequate monitoring, weak regulatory arrangements, and the corruption of regulatory institutions and arrangements through patronage, bribery, and other means.6 The seriousness of this situation is underscored by Montgomery who argues: “There is no other country in the world as dependent on log exports as Solomon Islands, and more critically, there is no fallback position. Once the forests are gone there is no alternative” (1995, 75). Logging in the Solomons is underpinned by a fierce commercial presence from Asian multinationals and an opening up of customary land.

This has ensured that log production increased from 380,000 cubic metres in 1991 to over 800,000 cubic metres in 1995-96: about 80% of this occurred on customary land (Dauvergne 1998, 106-7). At 1996 rates, commercial forest resources were anticipated to reach depletion within thirteen years; some foresaw depletion occurring within as little as eight years (Montgomery 1995, 75). During the same 1991-97 period, around SI$31 million in economic surplus was forgone because of log export duty remission and exemptions while SI$481 million was lost through the under-invoicing of log exports (Martin 2000, 5). Bennett comments:

The government has failed to maximise the market value of logs because of its tardiness since 1980 with funding the timber and tax control capacities of the Forestry Division and the Ministry of Finance; millions of dollars of potential revenue have sailed out to sea in undeclared shipments, as mislabelled species or via the mechanisms of transfer-pricing (2000, 366).

The environmental and social impacts of unsustainable and poorly managed logging are also far-reaching. Silvicultural practice has been poor. Soils, watersheds, and sacred sites have been mismanaged. Re-afforestation and rehabilitation have been infrequently and inadequately undertaken. Wide ranging social conflicts have also emerged (Bennett 2000, ch.13).

These many and particular corollaries of a weak state have been well represented in the region of north New Georgia where commercial scale logging began in the 1960s under UK-based Lever Pacific Timbers (Levers) (Bennett 1987, 128). Levers’ efforts here were marked with difficulty rather than industry, since negotiations with the Solomon Islands government over an option to work the area were repeatedly stalled and disrupted by local “protest” through to the mid-1980s. This disruption turned on disagreements among customary landowners who disputed issues of leadership and representation, as linked to unresolved questions about land tenure and timber rights, in their relationship with Levers. There were also concerns about Levers questionable record in social and environmental impact management on Kolumbangara (Bennett 2000, 218). Related tensions spilled over into judicial and legislative arenas and despite due process remained unresolved. Matters came to a head in the early 1980s when Levers
refused to enter into direct negotiation with the various aggrieved landholders (Bennett 2000, 220). When Asian-based logging competitor Golden Spring International demonstrated an apparently greater understanding of local leadership and social relationships and also promised attractive infrastructure investments in association with logging activities – a clinic and roads for example, which had not been provided for by the state – Levers chose to withdraw from the contest. Extensive clear-fell logging began. Over time, Golden Spring International failed to invest adequately in sustainable logging. And while the disruptive activities of north New Georgians delivered arrangements for logging that apparently matched local aspirations for resource development, they also militated strongly against any potential investment in re-afforestation even from aid agencies (Bennett 2000, 246). With the state also unwilling and/or unable to enforce or pursue sustainability generally and re-afforestation specifically for the duration of this period, these matters lay idle while forest resource extraction continued apace until the mid 1990s.

Interest in a concrete form of sustainable forestry and re-afforestation for north New Georgia arose out of this set of conditions. It was spearheaded by a loose network of “non-state” individuals and groups linked together by the community-consultation activities of Golden Spring International (Dart, pers. com., St Lucia, 2 May 2001). In this context, key actors included the Rev. Ikani Rove, the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC), Greg Young, and Grant Doran. Rev. Ikani Rove was an influential and charismatic leader in the CFC and spokesperson for the local community. Consistent with local practices (kastom), Rove undertook a central visionary and leadership role in the north New Georgia project and all key decision-making flowed from and/or was finalised (in the specific case of technical advice, for example) by him (Young, pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). The CFC is an indigenous Christian church and had promoted intergenerational equity and sustainability in New Georgia with respect to logging through various means since the community’s earlier dispute with Levers (Bennett 2000, 220). Greg Young had worked for some time in mineral exploration in north New Georgia and was consequently well known and “accepted” by local community leaders. Grant Doran, an accountant and also involved in mineral exploration, was introduced to community leaders by Greg Young (Young, pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). Discussions among these individuals allowed for an exploration of Rev. Ikani Rove’s vision for sustainable forestry in north New Georgia. This was centred on twin concerns for medium to long-term income generation and the creation of local employment opportunities for local youth. It was based upon the perception of the need for direct technical assistance transfer in order to resolve specific scientific and technical re-afforestation problems (Davie and Dart 2000).

The area encompassed by the envisioned project covered around 40,000 ha. This area fell within the customary land areas of Nggrassi, Dukerna, and Lunga where logging was respectively completed, commenced, and not yet commenced. Dukerna and Lunga lay within the northern catchments of the proposed World Heritage area of the Morovo Lagoon. Land use therein would affect this multiple use area (Davie and Dart 2000, 13). With a vision for intergenerational equity emerging, the CFC provided seed funding of $AU100,000 derived from community savings to support an initial community request for a commercial-scale tree nursery (Young, pers. com., Brisbane, 24 January 2002; Davie and Dart 2000, 13). Grant Doran and Greg Young established technical support through Dr Peter Dart from the University of Queensland (Dart, pers. com., St Lucia, 2 May 2001). Project activities commenced officially in October 1999.

Project activities

Specific project activities involved the establishment of a commercial-scale tree nursery. The design and operation of this nursery was based on the experiences of the neighbouring Kolumbangara plantations. According to Dart, the basic principles of the project included a capacity to operate in a straightforward manner while allowing for a reasonable level of expansion and sophistication. With modest and sound beginnings, the infrastructure was designed to expand to a capacity of one million trees per year, equating to approximately 1000 ha of planting per year. With an emphasis on industrial plantation timbers and production, trial species included gmelina, eucalypts, and acacias. Native species were not considered at this early stage (Dart, pers. com., St Lucia, 2 May 2001). Closed seed lot material was initially sought from Kolumbangara plantations and germplasm material was developed from this. Thereafter, rammet garden trees were established and maintained. Cuttings were taken...
from these trees and vegetatively propagated in the nursery.\textsuperscript{15}

In the post-2000 coup environment, the field project remained in place. Indeed, it was located well beyond physical proximity to areas of instability within the Solomons. Australian-based technical advisers, however, were unable to visit the site as a result of security concerns in Honiara or to establish any communications with locals – there were no communications technologies in or near the relevant community. Despite this disruption, the project attracted the attention and praise of Western Province political leaders working towards reconstruction in the coup’s aftermath. Commenting under the auspices of the UNDP, these leaders promoted new models for rural development throughout Western Province as exemplified by the activities of the north New Georgia project (Pestelos 2001).\textsuperscript{16}

Institutional matters

The second area of project activity in north New Georgia related to institutional matters. Leadership here came from Greg Young and Grant Doran and resulted in the foundation of an NGO, the Rural Development Trust Board (RDTB), which was established in order to implement and undertake the long-term management of the project. The RDTB’s first task was to manage the specific relationship growing between the local community and its partners in development. As was stated by the RDTB: “institutional parties and rural communities required an entity with which they could deal as a neutral body independent from internal and external influences” (RDTB 1999, 2). In this sense, Young described the RDTB as a “bridging instrument” able to include the appropriate qualities of both the developing and developed world (pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). The key concerns of the RDTB were thus transparency, indigenous representation, and inclusiveness.

Transparency was ensured through the RDTB’s institutional arrangements which saw the Trust established under Solomon Island law as a charitable trust. It was also a Unit Trust of the Pacific Development Fund (PDF), a not-for-profit Australian company established by RDTB members to act as trustee (Davie, Dart, and Young 2000; RDTB 1999, 2). This arrangement ensured that the RDTB was subject to auditing and scrutiny by Australian-based, internationally-recognised financial and legal firms, KPMG Chartered Accountants and Deacons, Graham and James Lawyers.

Indigenous and developing world representation was assumed and assured from the outset since the RDTB arose out of a consultative process involving north New Georgia community leaders and Solomon Islands politicians and public servants along with Australian scientific and other advisers (Davie, Dart, and Young 2000, 8). To date, an unofficial two-thirds “Melanesian” majority has been maintained in board membership (Young, pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). Both the RDTB and the PDF had strong links with the Solomon Islands Government and were endorsed by the then Solomon Islands prime minister, Ulufa‘alu.

The assurance of inclusiveness was of some concern in the establishment of the RDTB. Here inclusiveness refers to the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders with respect to a given RDTB issue area (Young, pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). Potential stakeholders included the north New Georgia community and customary landholders, provincial and national Solomon Islands governments, rural development, social, and environmental advocacy NGOs, logging companies, mining companies, intergovernmental organisations, the University of Queensland, and the Queensland State Government. Thus, as one of its key guiding principles, the RDTB stated: “We seek to involve a broad range of philosophical positions in our decision making mechanisms by inviting participation from diverse fields and activity. This involves public, private, civil society participants from the local, national, regional and international levels” (RDTB 1999, 1).

The mission statement of the RDTB is as follows: “Our Mission is to facilitate the sustainable development of natural resources in rural areas through a quest for sustainable human development that holds the peace and spiritual wellbeing of the family and wider community as the most valuable resources of all”. The RDTB aimed to be organisationally self-sustaining (including operational costs) (RDTB 1999, 1). Founders and members took considerable pride in the unusual principles, scope, and structure of the Trust compared to the more typical business of development in Melanesia (Young, pers. com., St Lucia, 6 September 2001). With the RDTB in place, project partners sought to extend the scope and reach of this new NGO’s financial and management mechanisms. Dialogue was undertaken with members of parliament in Solomon Islands with a view to establishing
DISCUSSION

The north New Georgia re-afforestation project emerged in the context of the latest phase in Melanesian political histories, characterised by the shifting operation of global forms and processes within the region and related strains on young Melanesian states. These broad themes are here addressed using the concept “weak state-strong society”, illustrated with specific reference to the position and influence of Christian churches, NGOs, and kastom in postcolonial Melanesian societies. Understood in this way, the story of the north New Georgia re-afforestation project points to the possibility for political and economic development activity to occur outside the more typical state-based platforms for such action. It indicates that where states are weak and in many ways failing, communities can nonetheless be strong and can marshal action and resources towards substantial and sophisticated development activity.

The north New Georgia project is noteworthy in the first instance because the relevant local community initiated it. The project’s activities were also established on community-derived seed funding. From the outset, the local community participated in and owned (including financially) the re-afforestation scheme. The project was established in ways quite usual in Melanesia generally and the Solomons specifically via the direct participation of a Christian church – in this case the CFC. Working towards pragmatic ends, the CFC initiated the project, put forward finance derived from community savings, secured and maintained community support, and established appropriate advisory and technical relations – broad-ranging action that might otherwise have been undertaken by a government agent. That the CFC is an independent indigenous church heightens the impression of indigenous agency and ownership. Just as importantly, the presence and contribution of the CFC was underscored by leadership in local and customary forms (kastom) in the person of the Rev. Ikani Rove, the CFC and community’s spiritual leader. The project’s germ lay in Rove’s vision for intergenerational equity and the creation of opportunities for local youth employment. Likewise, Rove’s presence secured ongoing participation from all relevant stakeholders. Formal institutional arrangements secured through the newly-established NGO, the RDTB, delivered strong project management...
which directly linked local aspirations with concerns for transparency and accountability. These arrangements also allowed for a novel positioning of the project with regard to domestic government. Given a weak state, the complementary network of relations between state and society was sufficiently robust to accommodate and encourage this unusual arrangement which enabled external relations between local and extra-national project stakeholders in the absence of (though with the support of) Solomon Islands government participation. This in turn points to a self-conscious cosmopolitanism on the part of the north New Georgia community and other project stakeholders. Access to the transnational environment – particularly technical, institutional, financial, and market resources – was fundamental to the project’s overall structuring. The project’s substantive achievements demonstrate that work in the field initiated by the local community and assisted through external technical advice is viable as are the innovative institutional arrangements designed to support this relationship. To date, instability and uncertainty associated with the 2000 coup and its fallout has ensured that the next phase of project activity remains largely in abeyance. Nonetheless, an ongoing commitment to the project has continued and awaits the resolution of the political problems of the central government of Solomon Islands.

For Solomon Islands, the north New Georgia project is significant to the extent that it points to possibilities for new community-based approaches to the development and management of forest resources – the nation’s core economic sector. These approaches are potentially more compatible with customary land ownership than their antecedents. This is a significant matter when it is remembered that more than 80% of forestry activity occurs on customary land and that unresolved conflicts with respect to customary land are central to political tensions throughout the Solomons.

The north New Georgia project also offers new approaches for sustainable resource development. With large tracts of the north New Georgia region (indeed, much of the Solomons) already clear-felled and the task of re-afforestation long eluding concerned parties, this is an important development. Where forests and their resources are central to local community life and also a solitary avenue to the cash economy, the importance of sustainability can not be over-emphasised. The implications for local ecology and biodiversity in the long-term absence of re-afforestation are obvious as is the denial of human potential where such a situation persists. Finally, the north New Georgia project offers important alternative arrangements for the management of transparency and accountability matters which have been a longstanding problem in the forestry sector and also in the disbursal of development assistance finance throughout the Solomons. In structuring community development activities transparently and accountably, problems of mismanagement are minimised while opportunities for participation in mainstream economic life are maximised.

In the final analysis, much of the observable achievement attributable to the north New Georgia project remains in the realm of potential. The establishment and operation of a tree nursery is an important practical development but the broader technical and institutional dimensions of the project will remain largely untested while the next phase of activities is in abeyance. And despite very deliberate efforts to construct the project outside the ambit of national politics, the project and hence its contributions to community development have been greatly disrupted by the 2000 coup and its aftermath. Although these distracting broader events have had a large impact on the project and its activities, the important ways in which the re-afforestation scheme co-exists with and feeds into local (and also provincial, national, and international) power relations have not been adequately unravelled. Associated matters are likely to include: disputes within and between customary land owner groups; linkages into local political ambitions and political structures; contentions about distribution, equity and inclusiveness; and managing appropriate association with formal and informal community, state, donor, technician, NGO, and corporate practice and institutions. Each of these matters points to new and as yet unexplored theoretical and empirical concerns linked to questions of sovereignty, legitimacy, agency, democracy, and representation, and may in time demand much of the institutional forms and processes associated with the project – and others like it.

CONCLUSION

I now return to my key theoretical interests: an exposition of the place of globalisation and the involvement of state and society in development activity in Melanesia. As the north
New Georgia case study demonstrates, where the state is inadequately undertaking the task of development, other social agents are able to move some way towards filling the gap. This in itself is not unusual and has been widely observed and frequently advocated throughout the developing world. What is unusual in the case of north New Georgia is the demonstration of ways in which the organisation of globally-orientated economic potential may soon be effectively located at the community level for the purposes of community development and largely without state involvement.

The north New Georgia case study thus described points to new dimensions emerging in Melanesian political life. The nation-state of Solomon Islands is indisputably weak while local Christian, NGO, and kastom-based activities and organisations have longstanding importance in the pursuit of community development and social change. With increasing local awareness of this nexus has come a new outlook towards the global and away from the national. The case study considered in this paper provides interesting insights into modern Melanesian political and economic processes and suggests possible novel intersections between local communities and international or globalising processes and structures. It is of course too early in the north New Georgia project’s life – especially given its disruption – for definitive statements about substantive activities, institutions, and their outcomes. At the very least, however, the project points to the purposeful pursuit of new arrangements for development by a sub-national community and the capacity of the international development assistance community to accommodate such an initiative. At the same time, it raises important questions relating broadly to sovereignty and democracy and the ways in which states and societies are structuring and will continue to structure development-oriented activities.
The constitution of every Melanesian state except Fiji contains direct reference to the Christian faith (Douglas 2000b, 5). Along with Christianity, kastom is directly referred to in Melanesian political life through the relevant constitutions.

The coup emerged out of conflict between Malaitan- and Guadalcanal-aligned groups and was linked to deeply held grievances over customary land tenure (Asian Development Bank 2000a, 2; Liloqula and Pollard 2000; Naitoro 2000; Tuhanuku 2000, iii).

Almost 70% of Solomon Islands adults are illiterate (World Bank 2000, 15). There are insufficient resources for universal primary/basic education and for the extension of this level of education (Tisdell 2000b, 18). Secondary and tertiary education are extremely limited (Tisdell 2001b, 18). Health indicators remain amongst the worst in the Pacific region with endemic malaria and a variety of infectious and parasitic diseases affecting large, though reducing numbers. There is an increasing incidence of non-communicable modern life-style diseases including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Infant mortality is relatively high at 38 per 1000 births (Tisdell 2000, 18). Around 36% of people do not have access to health services (Tisdell 2000, 18). Around 36% of people do not have access to safe drinking water (World Bank 2000, 15).

Around 75% of the population are under 30 years of age (Liloqula and Pollard 2000).

Bennett argues that inconsistencies and conflicts between central and provincial jurisdictions have allowed persistent problems to emerge (2000, 1). Dauvergne argues that serious flaws existed for many years in the structure and content of forest legislation and policies designed to capture timber rents (1998, 107). Montgomery finds that governments are unable to enforce policy and manage the inter-related tasks of resource development and environmental management (1995, 76). Montgomery also finds that management units are under-resourced, understaffed, and deficient in training.

The momentum of logging and its impacts has been greatly reduced by the East Asian financial crisis of 1997, reform to the forestry sector introduced by the Ulufa’alu government, and thereafter the coup in 2000 (Dauvergne 1998). Downturns in demand for timber in major Asian markets have naturally resulted in a slowing of production with some foreign companies suspending operations (Dauvergne 1998, 106).

Levers had been operating elsewhere in the Solomons since 1901.

Golden Springs Ltd was incorporated in the United States with its principle, Kang Wibosono, based in Indonesia.

The CFC was established in New Georgia more than 50 years ago. It has a large following throughout the Solomons and particularly in north New Georgia. The church is strongly involved in community development and pastoral care. In this connection, the CFC has been involved in land allocation decisions and has brokered related collective agreements (Dart 2000).

See Baird (2001) and Mealey (1999) for environmental problems in the Morovo lagoon area resulting from clear-fell logging.

Levers Pacific Timbers had managed timber operations on Kolumbagara throughout the twentieth century.

An automatic watering system supplied by a local creek was, for example, essential.

Gmelina aborea, Eucalyptus deglupta and Eucalyptus teretioruis, Acacia margium.

This procedure requires rooting material, hormones, and a misting system (Dart, pers. com., St Lucia, 2 May 2001).

Warren Paia, chairperson of the Western Province economic task force, praised the north New Georgia project for its innovative approach to a community initiative linked to mainstream economic activity. He also commented on the importance of the north New Georgia model whereby a local community engaged in a development project on its own initiative rather than wait for government assistance (Pestelos 2001).

In the case of the University of Queensland, the School of Land and Food Science in the Faculty of Natural Resources, Agriculture and Veterinary Science spearheaded the project while the Faculties of Arts, Biological and Chemical Sciences, Business, Economics and Law, Engineering, Physical Sciences and Architecture, Health Sciences, Institute for Continuing and TESOL Education, and Social and Behavioural Science expressed interest in contributing to the partnership. The Queensland Government was involved through the Department of Natural Resources, the Queensland Forestry Research Institute, and the Department of Primary Industries.
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