



***GLOBAL COOPERATION July 2006***

**In this summer edition Michael Raper ICSW Regional President for South East Asia and the Pacific talks about development in the Pacific with lessons for all regions.**

The following is a paper given by Michael Raper at a meeting of the Fiji Council of Social Service (FCOSS). The Fiji Council has been a long term member of ICSW. FCOSS has demonstrated its commitment to the value and importance of international partnerships and is a partner in global advocacy for people who live in poverty. As a member of ICSW, FCOSS shares with other ICSW members a passion for social justice and a commitment to providing a voice for otherwise voiceless vulnerable people living in poverty.

Michael Raper as regional president has been building links for the task ahead in the Pacific region. He has visited NGOs in the Pacific islands to learn about the organisations and the issues they confront. Mr Raper has been building important links between Pacific island organisations, his own organisation (Australian Council of Social Service) and ICSW. The aim is to build partnerships between NGOs so they can learn more from each other and support each other in the difficult tasks that lie ahead.

Neither individuals nor markets will solve the problems that confront the peoples of the Pacific. Governments have a major role but they must first put their own houses in order. To do this, they need partners, particularly NGOs

Over the past two years, governments, business and the markets have done poorly for the Pacific. Overall, the performance of Pacific Island countries has been poor. The region suffers from high unemployment and joblessness. Government services have failed to meet public hopes let alone expectations. Several countries suffer from social or political instability and serious crime. Some countries face daunting health and environmental challenges

Without and upturn in economic growth, the future for these countries is, at best uncertain, at worst bleak.<sup>1</sup>

There is no shortage of prescriptions to address these issues. The most important is the Pacific Plan, adopted by the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) in October 2005. The Plan establishes an important vision for the region.

“Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should, and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives. We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed. We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values and for its defence and promotion of human rights. We seek partnerships with our

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<sup>1</sup> “Pacific 2020”, May 2006, Australian Government. AusAID.

neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all.”

The Plan has a number of implementation strategies that are built on the four fundamental pillars of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

There is a compelling case for economic growth which the NGO sector needs to embrace. Economic growth is essential to address poverty, primarily through delivering employment growth. Economic growth is needed to address the mounting health threats, both through communicable (eg HIV/AIDS) and non-communicable diseases (eg cancer), both of which are on the rise in the region.

Confronting these challenges will require significant responses from governments and recognition by them that they need to include in their budgets expenditure on education and training, health care, housing, urban infrastructure and waste management.

No country has reduced poverty significantly without significant economic growth. Thus there is a compelling case for economic growth.

Economic growth is often mishandled. The dominance of the market as the primary force often leads to economic growth and wealth for some, but not for all.

The question civil society must ask, through our NGOs, is: “who is to benefit?”

Even in rich countries high economic growth does not necessarily lead to low unemployment, to jobs for all, or a fair distribution of the riches and economic gains

There is a major role for NGOs to play in addressing these issues through advocacy for social justice. Social development and economic development are inseparable. It is not a question of establishing a strong economy first and then letting social development trickle down later.

Michael Raper said that NGOs should contribute to the Pacific Plan at local, national and regional level. In addition civil society from a pro-poor perspective should monitor, advise on changes and advocate new directions where necessary. Civil society brings a voice based on the real, lived experiences of our members, our constituents, our clients.

Whilst NGOs have a very special role in service delivery, monitoring and advocacy, they cannot act alone. NGOs do not have the resources and the capacity to act alone.

Civil society is at its best when it seeks out and establishes partnerships with governments, local authorities, businesses and the corporate sector and most importantly other NGOs. (Working together, not in competition).

NGOs must choose their partnerships and not have them thrust upon them.

NGOs must be very clear and uncompromising about the purpose for which they were established. There is a risk in partnerships, especially funding partnerships. Funding partnerships can take NGOs away from their purpose. Too many NGOs have come to suffer what the Canadian NGOs have called “mission drift”. This occurs when the funding takes the organisation away from its mission and purpose. The other undesirable consequence is “advocacy chill” where silence is bought for the price of receiving funding.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a very popular or fashionable notion. It has led to increased opportunities for partnerships with corporations looking to improve their reputation and increase their business by being perceived as “good corporate citizens”. Most corporations, however, take a minimalist view of CSR limiting it to “do no damage” and “return something to society through some sponsorship or NGO funding”. Mostly, CSR is limited to charity work and providing direct assistance to people in poverty. Support for peak or advocacy bodies is rare. However, CSR does provide the occasional valuable and mutually advantageous partnership.

A growing area of opportunity and challenge for NGOs, particularly peak bodies, is in forging international partnerships, both on a bi-lateral basis and on a regional basis.

Governments are increasingly operating on a regional basis – through regional groupings of governments such as the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Regional groupings of government present national NGOs and regional NGOs like the Pacific Islands Association of Non Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) and ICSW South East Asia and Pacific Region with a real challenge and a most important responsibility. Business and other pro-market lobby groups are very active in these arenas. NGOs need to make sure there is a balance. The non government sector needs to ensure that social justice is not ignored. NGOs need to ensure that issues relating to social development, social welfare and social protection are part of policy considerations.

Social development includes education and training (a basic 12 year lifetime entitlement for all), employment, housing and shelter, water and other basic infrastructure.

Social welfare includes policies to ensure health care i.e. the provision of universal, free, high quality primary and hospital care for all. In addition it includes disability services and age care services.

Social protection includes protection against trafficking of women and children; programs to provide protection against HIV/AIDS; protection against domestic violence; protection against loss of income through injury, unemployment or disability.

For NGOs to be strong and active contributors they must be properly funded. It is part of the responsibility of governments in democratic societies to fund the voice of the disadvantaged.

There are real challenges ahead for all partners in the Pacific if they are to ensure that the Pacific Plan is given a real chance of being implemented.

No organisation, no government, no country can address, let alone solve these problems alone.

As the Pacific Plan acknowledges, partnerships are needed at the local, national and regional level. The NGOs of the Pacific must embrace those partnerships with other NGOs locally, nationally and regionally through PIANGO and with governments, nationally and in the region through PIF.

In doing so they will have a special role and a special responsibility to ensure that economic policy is balanced by social policy. They need to ensure that economic growth is not achieved at

the expense of social justice. They need to ensure that the concerns and needs of the most vulnerable, those most in need are not overlooked, but rather are placed at the forefront through example and through robust advocacy.

### **New publication.**

#### **Policy Engagement: How Civil Society Can be More Effective**

Authors: J. Court, E. Mendizabal, D. Osborne and J. Young

Civil society organisations (CSOs) make a difference in international development. They provide development services and humanitarian relief, innovate in service delivery, build local capacity and advocate with and for the poor. Acting alone, however, their impact is limited in scope, scale and sustainability. CSOs need to engage in government policy processes more effectively.

With increased democratisation, reductions in conflict, and advances in information and communication technologies, there is potential for progressive partnerships between CSOs and policymakers in more developing countries. However, CSOs are having a limited impact on policy and practice, and ultimately the lives of poor people. In many countries they act on their own or in opposition to the state, leading to questions about their legitimacy and accountability. Their policy positions are also increasingly questioned: researchers challenge their evidence base and policymakers question the feasibility of their recommendations.

The first part of this report shows why and how better use of evidence by CSOs is part of the solution to increasing the policy influence and pro-poor impact of their work. Better use of evidence can: (i) improve the impact of CSOs' service delivery work; (ii) increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of their policy engagement efforts, helping CSOs to gain a place and have influence at the policy table; and (iii) ensure that policy recommendations are genuinely pro-poor.

The second half of the report outlines how CSOs can engage more effectively in policy processes. It includes strategic and practical advice regarding how CSOs can overcome the main challenges to policy engagement. In some countries, adverse political contexts continue to be the main barrier to informed policy engagement. But often, the extent of CSOs' influence on policy is in their own hands. By getting the fundamentals right – assessing context, engaging policymakers, getting rigorous evidence, working with partners, communicating well – CSOs can overcome key internal obstacles. The result will be more effective, influential and sustained policy engagement for poverty reduction. The publication can be found at:

[http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/Policy\\_engagement.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/Policy_engagement.html)

### **5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health**

10 to 14 December 2006, HK Convention and Exhibition Centre [www.swh2006.com](http://www.swh2006.com)

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