

Broadcasting For a Better Future: A Pacific Perspective

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I would like to congratulate the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association for organizing this conference and the associated workshop on climate change. Thank you Elizabeth for inviting me to share my thoughts this morning with all of you. I am delighted to be here.

I was asked to address the issue of broadcasting around the theme of climate change in my presentation. However, when preparing my presentation, I worried about duplicating the efforts of the workshop that has just been concluded on climate change. I have therefore decided to broaden my presentation to deal with four issues:

- Broadcasting for what kind of better tomorrow for the Pacific islands? Unless we have a good grasp of what future we plan to broadcast for, we will not be able to optimally harness the development potential of broadcasting
- Climate change: an overview
- How can broadcasters help?
- How can broadcasting be improved for a better tomorrow?

Broadcasting for what kind of better future in the Pacific Islands?

The future of the Pacific islands, as defined by the leaders, is contained in their Vision Statement, which I reproduce below:

The Leaders believe the Pacific can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all 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 neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all (www.forumsec.org.fj).

The reference to sustainability includes climate change and its likely impacts, mitigation and adaptation strategies. The Plan hinges on a transition from current nation states to increased regional integration and perhaps even a European Union-like entity in the distant future. The future also implies a transition to a knowledge society that already dominates global economy and society. Pacific islands' future also depends on greater social cohesion to handle significant stresses from globalization and development; and in ensuring better health to overcome increasing levels of non-communicable diseases, and dealing effectively with the challenges of HIV/AIDS.

These are the main elements of the future of the Pacific Islands. In addition, there are also issues relating to how much control Pacific islanders will have on their futures, especially given rapid globalization; the increasing levels of aid required to ensure the sustainability of many of these societies; the growing assertiveness of larger players like Australia and New Zealand; and the re-emergence of interest among the major international players, both old and new, in the Pacific Islands that could make the Pacific islands once again an arena for big power politics.

Climate Change

With this overview of the kind of future we need to address, let me examine in some detail the issue of climate change. Climate change is now recognized as one of the biggest threats to human development globally. For the small Pacific islands, climate change and associated sea level rise and other impacts are matters of survival in many cases—and in all cases matters of serious consequence.

The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (henceforth IPCC) summarises the most recent and internationally accepted findings on the subject of climate change. What does it say about recent climate change? Let me summarize:

It argues that “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level” (IPCC, 2007: 30).

Between 1906 and 2005, global surface temperature increased by .74oC ; in the last 50 years, this has doubled.

“global average sea level rose at an average rate of 1.8 mm per year over 1961 to 2003 and an average rate of about 3.1 mm per year between 1993 to 2003”. By the end of this century, sea level could rise by .58M.

“The rate of increase in air temperature in the Pacific and Caribbean during the 20th century exceeded the global average” (WG2 Report to AR4, chapter 16: 690).

For the South Pacific, the surface temperature by 2100 is expected to be at least 2.5oC more than the 1990 level (IPCC, 2007: 694).

The IPCC 4AR, Working Group II identifies small islands, including those in the South Pacific, as one of four regions of the world likely to be especially affected by climate change. (The other three regions are the Arctic, Africa, and Asian mega-deltas). This report is available at www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar2-wg2-chapter16.pdf). I encourage everyone concerned about climate change issues in the Pacific to read this chapter.

Small islands share many characteristics that make them more vulnerable and reduce their resilience to climate change. These include small size, proneness to natural disasters and climate extremes, limited resource base, high population growth rates and densities, poorly developed infrastructure, extremely open economies, and low adaptive capacity.

What Impacts Are Likely for the Pacific?

We have already indicated that climate change will have significant impact on the Pacific Islands. Let us overview them.

Sea level rise

Sea level rise is “likely to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, erosion, and other coastal hazards, thus threatening vital infrastructure, settlements, and facilities”. For example, port facilities at Suva, Fiji, and Apia, Samoa, are likely to experience damage as a result of sea level rise combined with waves associated with cyclones. Tuvalu is already suffering from the effects of sea level rise with waves battering Funafuti during some high tides and strong winds.

International airports on small islands, which are mostly sited on or within a few kilometres of the coast and the main and often only, road network runs along the coast, will be seriously affected.

Coral reefs, fisheries, and other marine-based resources

The impact of climate change is likely to be severe on reefs, fisheries and other marine-based resources. According to the AR4, “coral cover across reefs in the Caribbean has declined by 80% in just 30 years, largely as a result of continued pollution, sedimentation, marine diseases, and over-fishing” (p.692). The Pacific islands can face a similar fate. The impact on fisheries will hugely affect the development of these islands, making the task of poverty reduction even more difficult.

Pressure on water resources

Water resources are likely to be seriously compromised. Many PICs rely on a single source of water, rendering them extremely vulnerable to natural variability in precipitation patterns and storms. Under all IPCC scenarios, a 10% reduction in average rainfall by 2050 would lead to a 20% reduction in the size of the freshwater lens on Tarawa Atoll, Kiribati—and many other small islands will be affected. The thickness of these lenses could be reduced by as much as 29 percent.

Human health effects

There is growing concern that climate change will adversely affect human health. Increasing temperatures and decreasing water availability are likely to increase burdens of diarrhoea and other infectious diseases on some islands. In Fiji, for instance, in 1998, Fiji had an

outbreak of dengue fever arising out of higher than normal temperatures, and it took 13 lives and cost between \$US3 and 6 million.

Economic impact – IPCC 4AR

The World Bank has projected that without adaptation, by 2050, agricultural economic costs from climate change are likely to reach between 2–3% of GDP on high terrain islands (e.g., Fiji) and 17–18% of GDP on low terrain islands (e.g., Kiribati). There will also be a significant risk to food security arising from these changes. The recent sudden surge in food prices and the scarcity of supply illustrate what can happen in the future.

What has been done So Far/Emerging responses?

As the Acting Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Viliami Tangi reminded us at the opening of this conference, climate change is a global problem and calls for international partnerships. The Pacific Islands have in fact been very active in relating to the global community on issues of climate change. This was seen to be especially effective at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg where the Pacific islands linked effectively with the Association of Small Islands States (AOSIS), G77, and other groups. Most countries have now legal frameworks for sustainable development. There is interesting work being done at the community level for sustainable management of marine resources, in association with international and regional organizations. There are programmes for the integrated water management in atolls, which are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts.

How can Broadcasters Help?

Broadcasters can assist significantly by highlighting the main development issues, in this case climate change, by promoting greater debate on climate change issues, and showcasing successes and failures.

The media can play an important role here in highlighting the current plight of the Pacific islands and the likely impacts if meaningful targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases are not agreed to by the international community. This is especially important now that post Kyoto arrangements are being discussed. The Pacific islands have done nothing much to add to the current stock of greenhouse gasses but are expected to be major casualties of climate change—and they need considerable assistance in dealing with the impact of climate change—this is a strong message that the media can send out.

How Can Broadcasting Be Improved for Broadcasting for a Better Future?

It is important for all of us to undertake periodic self-review. We need to consider how the broadcasting systems themselves can improve to ensure that they can broadcast for a better future. This brings us back to issues of education and training. It is clear that the level of education in the media in the Pacific islands needs to be upgraded to include more graduates and post-graduates; by including more science-trained graduates to handle the

scientific and technical complexities of many of the issues. These journalists need broad education to recognize the inter-relatedness of many of the issues we deal with.

Improvements can also come from linkages with other broadcasting systems, as is happening and which this conference illustrates. It is also important to have effective ethical and quality frameworks for broadcasting.

I am sure that with strong ethical and quality frameworks, combined with strong and credible self-oversight by the media, combined with effective engagement with governments (with inputs from international media and development agencies), the current tensions between governments and media can be managed more effectively.

Broadcasting should also enhance the capacity and opportunity of Pacific Islands to think deeply about their future and to formulate their thoughts and solutions. Programmes similar to the recent interviews and discussions around the WEF, and the Doha debates are need for the Pacific islands.

Here I wish to indicate that the University of the South Pacific has been running a successful journalism training programme. The University regards its media training programme as an important contribution to the improvement of development outcomes, and especially as a strong contribution to good governance since strong and free media are the cornerstones of good and effective governance and accountability. Despite the tight financial situation of the university, it is committed to retaining and improving this programme.

We welcome the partnerships we already have with the various news and media organizations and welcome greater involvement and support from these and other new partners. With its twelve member countries and its well-known USPNet that provides IT data, audio and video services over 33 million square kilometers that USP covers, and its fourteen campuses in 12 countries, USP is a natural partner in journalism education and training.

Conclusions

It is a given that the media is an increasingly important component of development, especially in highlighting vitally important issues. These are many and varied, but should include good governance and sustainable development, with particular focus on climate change and associated risks and needed responses.

The latest, fourth assessment report of the IPCC makes it abundantly clear that climate change is definitely occurring and accelerating. The Pacific islands are already experiencing the consequences of climate change and are particularly vulnerable to future consequences. They need to take a regionally-developed strong position internationally, and ensure that strong mitigation measures are taken internationally, especially by the larger and developed countries that are primarily responsible for the historical build-up of greenhouse gases, and

who possess superior financial and technical resources for mitigation. It is equally important that the Pacific Islands take strong adaptation strategies to deal with the consequences of climate change and ensure that their development strategies avoid compounding these problems in the future.

I encourage the media to play a developmental role in covering key issues both nationally, regionally and internationally; to highlight success stories as well as failures; to call for accountability for funds made available for climate change and sustainable development work; strengthen its own human and technical capacity to broadcast for development; enhance regional and international networks; and generally to make the community as a whole aware of climate change and other development issues. Only when the community is fully aware and empowered will we be sure that the key development challenges will be properly addressed.