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Agenda success?

The prospects for sub-regional human rights arrangements in the Pacific

A thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Politics

at Massey University, Manawatu,

New Zealand

Kathryn Susan Hay

2011
Abstract

Regional human rights institutions have been established in all United Nations (UN)-defined regions except for the Asia-Pacific. Although as a region the Asia-Pacific faces myriad human rights challenges, the diversity of countries and cultures and absence of a shared sense of regional identity inhibits momentum to form a regional mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights. Within this region several sub-regional configurations exist. The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), whose members include fourteen small island states, Australia and New Zealand, is the primary political body in the Pacific section of the broader Asia-Pacific region. The vision of the PIF emphasises the promotion and protection of human rights in the Pacific. Human rights issues have, however, tended to be addressed within individual countries, and Pacific leaders have paid little attention to the idea of sub-regional human rights arrangements (SHRAs) as a means of supporting human rights objectives.

Within the PIF complex political and institutional processes shape the work of the Pacific leaders and affect which ideas are focused on and advanced. Within the policy process agenda setting is a critical element as new ideas and policy solutions can only be implemented after they have been deliberately considered and agreed upon by the political decision-makers. Several elements shape the agenda setting process: the framing of issues and possible solutions by policy advocates, the availability of appropriate venues in which decisions can be made, and opportunities to have ideas presented to the decision-makers. If the political decision-makers, in this thesis the PIF leaders, agree to advance and implement a policy idea then agenda success has occurred. This thesis examines the prospects for agenda success of SHRAs in the Pacific.

Twenty two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with selected experts from throughout the Pacific. These empirical materials were triangulated with secondary sources. Analysis of these materials highlighted that all components of the agenda setting process are evident in this case study of SHRAs in the Pacific. In particular, interrelationships between the framing of issues and alternative solutions, venues and policy advocates, previously understated in other agenda setting research, are able to be identified. Certain conditions, such as political instability, international obligations,
environmental challenges, and the current scoping exercise, provide opportunities for policy advocates to push their ideas.

Further, the results of the research identify several contextual factors that are shaping the agenda setting process in the PIF. These include historical, national, sub-regional, international, cultural, economic, and geo-political factors, and issues of sovereignty. Before Pacific leaders are likely to agree to the advancement of SHRAs in the Pacific they will also need to be convinced that the idea is both feasible and immediately important. Therefore, although there is moderate evidence of the preconditions for agenda success being in place, the receptivity and political will of the PIF leaders is critical, and will, in the final instance, determine agenda success for SHRAs in the Pacific.
Acknowledgements

The doctoral journey is long and sometimes arduous but ultimately one of reward and satisfaction. I have endeavoured to rely on my faith in God throughout this journey and gratefully acknowledge the “peace of God that transcends all understanding” that has sustained me during the ups and downs, both personally and professionally over the past five years (Philippians 4v7).

My heartfelt love, thanks and appreciation is extended first and foremost to my husband Craig Steed who has been a constant support throughout the highs and lows of this journey. Words cannot adequately explain how much I have appreciated you believing in me. With our wonderful children, Emma and Zac Steed, you have also helped me ensure I have maintained a balanced lifestyle and not let this ‘book’ become all-consuming. I hope that in some way you will feel a shared sense of accomplishment as this thesis comes to a conclusion.

Associate Professor Richard Shaw and Professor Regina Scheyvens have been, without a doubt, the best supervisors I could have ever hoped for. Your wisdom, unflattering support, encouragement and guidance have made this journey so much more enjoyable and achievable. I have certainly had moments of ‘muddling through’ and Richard, I have most definitely needed and appreciated your vast knowledge of the political process to help me from getting completely stuck. Regina, I have valued your ‘development’ perspective which, while new to me, was always thought-provoking and enriching. Thank you to you both for disproving my initial skepticism about having friends as supervisors.

A special thanks to the participants who agreed to be interviewed and gave generously of their time and expertise. I am honoured you were willing to share your knowledge with me. Thanks also to Dale Anderson for transcribing the interviews and Tim Nolan (blackant@snap.net.nz) for transforming my tables and figures. Thank you to the IT consultants at the Massey University library who were extremely valuable sources of formatting knowledge.

I am appreciative of the financial support from NZAID, the Vice Chancellors Committee, Massey University, the Australian National University, the Pacific Islands Political Studies Association, and InterRights and the Victoria University of Wellington.
Law School for fieldwork costs and conference attendance. These opportunities enriched my learning and enabled me to receive valuable feedback as the research evolved.

My colleagues in the School of Health and Social Services, Massey University have been gracious and understanding throughout the research. Rachael Selby, Dr Kieran O’Donoghue and Professor Steve LaGrow have been encouraging and accommodating Directors, enabling me to maintain some form of balance with my teaching and other work responsibilities. Litea Meo-Sewabu has also kindly and generously shared her knowledge and friendship and familial ties back in Fiji.

There are several other people to whom I am thankful. They include Associate Professor Christine Cheyne for her sage advice several years ago to treat the PhD process as a project with several small milestones along the way, and Professor Robyn Munford for mentoring me as a young graduate student and providing me with opportunities to continue my academic career when I became a mother. Also, thanks to Karen Shepherd and Dr Bronwyn Wood, my fellow students along the way for sharing this academic journey with me. I have also appreciated many of my friends and family ‘checking in’ from time to time and attempting to understand why the thesis was taking me so long to write! Thank you for keeping on asking.

Finally, I am thankful to my parents Juliet Hay and Bob Hay for instilling in me the value of education and the importance of following one’s dreams.
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIPO</td>
<td>ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APF</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRB</td>
<td>Human Rights Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IACHR</td>
<td>Inter-American Commission on Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAWASIA</td>
<td>Law Association of Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPs</td>
<td>Members of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-government Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organisation of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHCHR</td>
<td>Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIF</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIFSec</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sub-regional human rights arrangements</td>
</tr>
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<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
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<td>United Nations High Commission for Human Rights</td>
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