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**Pacific Island Labour Programmes in New Zealand: an
aid to Pacific Island Development?**

A Critical Lens on the Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

The New Zealand Recognised Employer (RSE) Policy was designed to remedy labour shortages in the horticulture/viticulture industry early in the twenty-first century. It was the first New Zealand contract labour migration programme to be designed with the explicit intent of the development of the source countries, consisting mainly of small Pacific Island States. This research sought to examine within a historical context whether the programme was beneficial to the source countries and communities, and whether the programme met the expectations of international labour conventions which New Zealand has signed. An attempt was made to discover whether, when compared with antecedent programmes in New Zealand and North America, the RSE represented a new paradigm in the design and implementation of a contract migrant labour programme.

The field work was carried out for twenty months between December 2011 and August 2013, involved a grower survey and over 100 semi-structured interviews with Government officials, horticulturalists, migrant workers, pastoral care workers, and other interested parties. Time in southern Vanuatu was divided between interviewing migrant RSE workers in Port Vila and visiting 100 village communities on Tanna Island. Assessments were made of access to the programme for the rural and urban poor and of the positive and negative impacts of the programme.

Positive features observed included the benefits of close government monitoring of worker accommodation, the transparency of the remuneration, the interest of many employers in assisting workers to remit funds to source communities, house building and infrastructural benefits gained by many workers, and the transfer of useful skills. Negative features included the powerlessness of the workers to negotiate their work conditions, the failure of some employers to address workers' specific needs, the social dislocation of some workers leading to alcohol abuse, the frequency of work interruptions due particularly to weather conditions, the excessive work hours on some nightshifts at minimum wage, and a lack of connection between recruitment patterns and areas of greatest need.

The RSE policy has come about in an era of migration optimism. Since the mid-1990s the total global flow of remittances has exceeded the level of official development assistance. However most literature regarding remittance flows and transnational communities is set within a context of diaspora. The RSE was carefully designed to prevent overstaying of visa entitlements, in order to prevent any growth of diaspora. Consequently the overall financial flows in the case of Vanuatu are small compared to such sectors as tourism, and the position of the RSE in the migration-development nexus is somewhat contradictory.

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List of Abbreviations

ACC	Accident Compensation Commission
ATR	Agreement to Recruit
AOG	Assembly of God
BOT	Board of Trustees
CPI	Cost Price Index
CSS	Critical Social Science
DOL	Department of Labour
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America
ESU	Employment Servicing Unit
EPZ	Economic Protection Zone
FOL	Federation of Labour
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
IRBD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (part of World Bank complex)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MWC	Migrant Workers' Convention, shortened form of
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment
MIRAB	Migration, Remittances, Aid, and Bureaucracy
NBV	National Bank of Vanuatu
NZCTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSS	Positivist Social Science
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer

SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Programme (Canada)
SITE	Small Island Tourist Economy
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist, Seventh Day Adventism
TMWP	Temporary Migrant Worker Programme
UNHDR	United Nations Declaration on Human Rights
VCC	Vanuatu Cultural Council
VSA	Volunteer Service Abroad
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand

List of Terms

<i>Abu</i>	Elders in Vanuatu, similar in meaning to <i>kaumatua</i> in Aotearoa/New Zealand
<i>Bracero</i>	Refers to a migrant worker from Mexico in the United States
<i>Dagongmei</i>	Coastal migrant labourers from inland China lacking urban status, usually women under 30.
<i>Gongren</i>	Higher status workers in Chinese cities.
<i>Hukou</i>	Chinese registration system which classifies people according to principally urban and rural status and defines their citizenship entitlements.
<i>Kastom</i>	Translates literally to custom or customary, but in a reified sense which places a set of traditional belief and practice on a quasi-religious footing
<i>Manuka</i>	Native shrub known to New Zealand farmers as scrub, often the first plant to reappear in regenerating bush
<i>Nabanga</i>	Variety of banyan tree integral to community life on Tanna Island
<i>Nakaamal</i>	Historically named communal space shaded by <i>Nabanga</i> tree, also known as dancing ground, where meetings and major social events take place and kava is drunk. Village centre.
<i>Stumpa</i>	Literally a stump, used in horticultural context to refer to a single plant being pruned or harvested
<i>Swaggers</i>	Casual labourers who carried a small “sugar bag” with their belongings and walked rural roads in search of short term employment and meals
<i>Tan</i>	Territorial space on Tanna Island normally bounded by ravines
<i>Vakameasina</i>	The name given to the New Zealand Aid Programme’s contribution to the RSE through after work training in computer literacy and related skills
<i>Whare</i>	Small dwelling which in farming parlance refers to a hut used by labourers for accommodation
<i>Yeni</i>	Spokesman for Tannese community