

Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)

Cumulative Report 2003 – 2006

The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) emerged from a regional conference on globalisation, trade, investment and debt held in Fiji in May 2001. Organisations, community and church groups present at the conference pointed out the lack of understanding of free trade and globalisation, and especially of the various impacts on the communities of the small vulnerable economies of the Pacific. There were concerns about the lack of public information, and a desire to promote informed discussion and debate on free trade and globalisation. The conference pointed out the need for an independent regional medium through which awareness could be raised and the truth about economic globalisation told.

A Steering Committee made up of representatives from the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC), the Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)- Pacific, and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA) therefore began meeting to set an agenda for PANG in 2001 and a PANG office was set up in September 2002.

PANG has been one of the most outspoken Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Pacific on free trade, economic reform policies, regional policy-making processes, and the agendas of multilateral and bilateral donors. On some issues, it has been the only voice. PANG has assumed an important watchdog role on Pacific Island states and on the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and has been looked to by other CSOs for leadership in taking on regional governments and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on economic and trade issues.

PANG's success in this role can be seen from the feedback of other CSOs and the public from around the region, and the range of issues and concerns that have been highlighted, campaigned and provoked. The value of an organisation like PANG has been expressed across the region. These are some selected comments:

The article "Who controls the Pacific?" caused a lot stirring here when it was published.
Yehiura Hriehwazi, Editor, The National, PNG

I agree with you on the point that lack of research makes our policy makers run our Pacific nations blindly. I am thinking of PNG which is going to 'dogs'
Mathew Yakai

Let me congratulate you on your coverage of trade issues. Your statement in Nadi was in our local newspapers ... our peoples are still grappling with what it is they can get from free trade, WTO accession, PICTA, PACER, Cotonou, etc. It is all overwhelming and I too am trying to keep up with developments as I am far from being convinced with any positive outcome of this for our peoples.
Fiu Elisara, OLSSI Samoa

PANG has been involved in advocacy, networking, and disseminating information on globalisation and trade. Information has been sent out on a variety of issues. For

example, PANG sent out information on the GATS position of the European Union (EU) and its impact on the Pacific, the struggle of the Kananam people of PNG against impact of tuna operators, the struggle of women working in fish factories in Fiji, the dangers of genetically modified food, progress on the Pacific free trade area agreements, the growth of rural poverty, and articles and information on globalisation and its impacts on the Pacific in general. This has generated greater awareness and much discussion and debate, not only in Fiji, but also on the region. PANG's list-serve and mailing list has as a result grown steadily regionally and internationally, and is used by many other networks.

The major impact has been to provide a leading alternative voice on globalisation issues in the Pacific, as well as providing alternative research, information and analysis. A positive aspect of the work has been the level of discussion and debate that has been provoked on development issues. A major strength of PANG has been advocacy, campaigns and visibility, and a strong media input. PANG has succeeded in addressing some of the issues that no other CSO in the Pacific has addressed in terms of campaigns and advocacy, such as Pacific free trade agreements and Transnational Corporations.

The information produced by PANG has influenced other groups in the region, such as the PNG National Council of Churches, National Community Development Trust (NKDT) in Vanuatu, the Civil Society Network in the Solomon Islands, Ole Siosiomaga in Samoa, Consumer Council of Fiji, Council for International Development in NZ. As an example NKDT in Vanuatu wrote an article in the national newspaper after receiving information on the EU position on GATS from PANG. The article challenged their government to respond strongly to the demands from the EU.

PANG's views have often been sought by journalists in Fiji on a number of economic and social issues. Some of the articles have been republished in other country newspapers such as the Vanuatu Trading Post (the biggest newspaper in Vanuatu) and the PNG National, the second largest newspaper in Papua New Guinea. In addition, interviews by prominent regional radio stations such as Radio Australia's Pacific Beat, Radio New Zealand International, Pacnews, and Radio Fiji have broadened PANG's scope outside of the Pacific region as well.

In the last three years, PANG's major research and advocacy project has been focused on the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER). Following its critique in 2002 of a social impact assessment of the Pacific Islands Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) commissioned by the Forum Secretariat, PANG focused on a substantive analysis of PACER. To undertake the research and analysis work PANG commissioned Professor Jane Kelsey of the Law Faculty at Auckland University. The two resulting publications "Big Brothers Behaving Badly: The Implications for the Pacific Islands of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER)," released in April 2004, and "A People's Guide to Pacer: The Implications for the Pacific Islands of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER)", released in August 2004, generated much media coverage (feature articles, opinion columns, radio and TV interviews and talk-back shows etc), as well as public discussion and debate. Requests for copies of the reports came from a wide range of organisations and people, diplomats, consultants, academics, students, government departments, CSOs and community groups, Foreign Embassy officials and inter-governmental agencies. A public lecture/seminar by Jane

Kelsey co-organised by PANG and the University of the South Pacific Economics Department likewise generated much discussion and debate.

A People's Guide to PACER was specifically designed to inform and stimulate debate and discussion among Pacific people, including CSOs, trade unions, churches, media and other communities. It was launched at the Pacific Civil Society Forum meeting in Samoa on 3 August, which was held in parallel with the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting. Designed as a basic educational resource and training tool, the Guide was welcomed by partner CSOs.

Another hugely effective advocacy and research project was the Draunisalato Award for the worst company operating in the Fiji Islands in 2003. It generated much publicity, discussion and debate and captured the public's imagination. It was also controversial. The story of the awards made the main headline news in Fiji and there were numerous letters to the editors of the newspapers from the public in support for the award.

The success of the award, and the publicity, discussions and awareness it created for consumers and the public reinforced the belief that having an award nominated by the public to scrutinise the operations of companies is a positive thing. The award was a method of taking companies to task for the way they operate and suggest or demand procedures, processes or actions for them to improve their operations.

PANG's work has generated public debate and discussion in Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the region, contributed significantly to extending public understanding of the implications of regional trade agreements, and given CSOs a resource and training tool to assist them work further on these issues.

The Pacific Civil Society Forum in Samoa mandated PANG in August 2004 to organise actions and events towards the launch of negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Pacific ACP countries on 10 September 2004 in Fiji. PANG organized and hosted a well-attended and engaging workshop on 7 September in Fiji. Meetings between national and regional CSOs and Unions were facilitated in preparation for the workshop, and this brought often rival organizations together to get the workshop off the ground. It was a success story of CSOs putting aside differences and working together to face a common issue. The workshop and the following CSO statement to the regional negotiator were well covered by the media. It also raised awareness and the profile of CSO concerns with regards to trade negotiations.

In 2005, PANG launched Kelsey's report "A People's Guide to the Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement" that was commissioned by the World Council of Churches office in the Pacific. PANG held press conferences, a CSO workshop and a panel debate. The events caught the attention of the media, and this led to further awareness raising among the public. The panel debate attracted representatives from the EU and the Fiji Government, and led to heated discussions with the EU. This was a great opportunity for CSOs to challenge the EU's agenda directly, and it was a thought provoker for the Government Officials who stated that they considered an EPA because there was no other alternative. This argument has later been undermined by a report by the ECDPM

which outlines alternatives for EPAs, and PANG's work has contributed greatly to convince the Fiji Government to consider alternatives to the Pacific EPA.

A direct impact of activities carried out by PANG in changing people's attitude, including people in decision-making positions, is the Tongan Government's decision to defer ratification of their WTO accession for a year. This was a direct outcome of advocacy efforts by Tongan CSOs which began working to stop Tonga's accession from November 2005 – after they were alerted to the bad terms Tonga was agreeing to and their implications firstly by Claire Slatter of PANG. She had a meeting with CSOs during which she advised that Tonga was trying to complete its accession process in time for the Hong Kong Ministerial in December 2005.

Slatter's two case studies of Tonga and Vanuatu, have contributed greatly to increase awareness of the dangers of trade liberalisation and trade agreements. These case studies provide specific examples of how people's lives are affected, and this builds up the evidence that CSOs can use in their work for social justice.

We now see that in some places such as Tonga resistance in recent months has been very high and ordinary people's understanding of how global and local economic policies affect their everyday lives is strong. This was clearly indicated by the outcome of a survey carried out by Tongan CSOs which returned an almost 90% vote in favour of deferment of ratification to allow impact studies and further consultation with the people to be held. Samoan CSOs are very likely to follow Tonga's lead as Samoan government efforts are stepped up to attain accession before Samoa loses its LDC status.

PANG has been working for several years to build awareness of the dangers and implications of trade liberalisation, and to raise attention to the fact that governments are signing onto trade agreements without consulting citizens, or paying attention to what CSOs and people's movements are saying about impacts.

The activities that PANG has undertaken are all part of public education and building awareness and critical thinking. Wide dissemination of our publications amongst CSOs through meetings, etc. has also helped build understanding and has started to create a small groundswell of critical opinion. This was evident at the 2006 Pacific CSO Trade Conference that Oxfam NZ organised. Having 60 people representing a broad cross section of CSOs all sharing a strong critical perspective on trade liberalisation did not develop/ come about overnight. Critical thinking has been percolating for several years, and PANG's work has contributed significantly to this, and to the increasing level of awareness and understanding about trade issues particularly. This is how advocacy and change happens – it does not happen overnight. One sees the cumulative impacts over a period of time. PANG has worked in a sustained way to build understanding and critical perspective on globalisation and trade issues, and we are the only Pacific Islands based organisation which works in a dedicated way on trade liberalisation issues. We are now starting to see that a critical perspective is becoming widely shared among CSOs in the region. We certainly take part of the credit for that.

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