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**“Wishing good, merely, is a lukewarm charity; but doing good is divine”**

~ James Lendall Basford

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## **THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE: CORPORATE HARM ON THE FRONTLINE IN THE PACIFIC**

*Small Pacific nations are easy prey for big business, writes Amy Sinclair.*

The natural wealth of Pacific nations is disappearing overseas. Unseen and unheard, the voices of Pacific Island communities on the frontline of deforestation, irresponsible mining and seabed exploitation are being overlooked and human rights abuses are going unchecked in remote rural regions. Voices from the Pacific need lifting to overcome the tyranny of distance and ensure that businesses operating in the region respect human rights.

The Pacific Ocean is a treasure trove of islands, hiding an abundance of precious resources. Cloaked in hardwood forests, rich veins of copper, bauxite and gold lie in its earth and rare mineral deposits sit buried in its sea floor.

Previously untouched, many Pacific Island countries are poised to experience escalating exploitation by foreign-owned companies headquartered in Australia, China, Malaysia and Indonesia. Without regard to [international rules](#) requiring respect for human rights in business, this threatens the sustainability of life in the Pacific for future generations.

Revenue streams from natural resources are a key source of actual, and potential, income for many Pacific nations. Cash flows from natural resource extraction can be directed to improving schools, infrastructure and health services, aiding development and relieving poverty and inequality. Many Pacific countries are well placed to fund fairer societies.

And yet, in much of the region, its people face seemingly insurmountable challenges to ensure they receive a fair share of sovereign wealth for themselves and their children. Their inheritance is being chopped-down, dug-up and shipped-off at an alarming rate.

States keen to attract overseas investment often unwittingly welcome irresponsible companies with open arms, grateful for injections of foreign capital into struggling agrarian economies burdened by debt. Local laws may be conveniently forgotten. Those charged with protecting

the local people and enforcing regulation repeatedly turn a blind eye, sometimes colluding directly with the very companies they are employed to control.

The activities of foreign-owned extractive companies can be hugely damaging to local communities, with few benefits flowing. Mining operators are shipping tonnes of earth wholesale, to be processed offshore. Logging, another high-risk sector, occurs both legally and illegally. Licences, often obtained in highly questionable circumstances, have led to widespread deforestation in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Deforestation rates in both these nations are amongst the highest rates globally, fuelling an [international trade in illegal timber](#). Corrupt practices further diminish the rule of law, impeding equitable profit-sharing between companies and customary landowners.

Local communities are inadequately equipped to counter these challenges. To access the internet, a villager in the Solomon Islands may spend six long hours in the back of a truck travelling along poor roads. Or a week by ferry to reach the capital on erratically scheduled passenger ferries to check the progress of a complaint at the police or Ministry of Forestry. This is no match for the satellite dishes and instant access to Honiara officials enjoyed in the logging camps.

[Seabed mining](#), we are told, will happen many kilometres offshore, well away from local communities and fish stocks. Its impacts say the mining companies, will harm neither the people nor their food supplies. Those who depend upon the Pacific's blue economy have a different perspective. They have seen the results of the exploratory testing and the clouded water it creates. When the mining company divers come, they fear for their futures and those of their children. Once mining licences are granted, they believe the damage caused by exploratory drilling will be replicated on a grand scale, polluting Pacific waters, destroying fish stocks and harming life along the shoreline.

A bonanza of exploitation is underway in the Pacific. The voices of affected communities, often isolated by great distances and limited means of communication, are going unheard. They have been overlooked by the rest of the world and abuses are going unchecked.

A unique capacity-building program on Business, Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals held in May in Fiji, aimed to challenge this reality. Organised by the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs ([PIANGO](#)), Citizens Constitutional Forum ([CCF](#)), the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), [Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#), University of New South Wales' [Institute for Global Development](#) and the Diplomacy Training Program ([DTP](#)), the event brought together participants, representing civil society in eight Pacific countries.

The pilot training and research program was developed to equip Pacific communities with tools to address the challenges of unchecked economic encroachment into their lands and lives.

It is a small drop in a wide ocean, but ideas, like ripples, can spread far and wide. As the human rights of communities are increasingly impacted by new and developing business activities across the Pacific, its people need support so that when they speak out, their voices are heard far and wide, and reach the places where action can bring change.

Sources: [The Tyranny Of Distance: Corporate Harm On The Frontline In The Pacific](#), New Matilda, Amy Sinclair, May 18 2018 | Submitted by Ruth Crowe and abridged by Kendall Benton-Collins.



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## SCIENTISTS SEARCH THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS FOR RARE BAT SPECIES

Recently a group of researchers spent five weeks looking for five species of rare bats and flying foxes in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Of the five species the researchers were looking for, one is listed as vulnerable, two are considered endangered, one is critically endangered and one, the tube-nosed bat, has not been seen since 1907.

Sadly, the scientists did not find the tube-nosed bat, but they did find the flying foxes on the Banks group of islands in Vanuatu and on Nendo and Vanikoro islands in the Solomons.

“The Vanikoro one is a really interesting story where for a long time it was thought to be lost,” explained Dr Tyrone Lavery. “They actually thought it was from Guam and so for over a hundred years people thought it was missing until the 1930s when they found it again and now in this recent work we’ve been able to put it back on the map.”



Bats and flying foxes perform a vital ecological role pollinating flowers, spreading seeds and helping forests to regenerate.

Vanuatu Environmental Science Society CEO, Dr Christina Shaw, said the data they collected will be used to draw up conservation plans with input from local communities.

*Source: [Environmental scientists search South Pacific islands for five rare bat species](#), Pacific Beat, Liam Fox, 22 May 2018 | Photo: This rare flying fox was found in a remote part of Solomon Islands and photographed for the first time in years. Credit: Tyrone Lavery | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.*

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## WOMEN & CHILDREN UNDER SIEGE IN PNG: PART 2

In the [May issue of Pacific Outlook](#), we looked briefly at the troubling increase in homelessness and violence against women and children in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG) following the magnitude 7.5 earthquake in February. The estimated death toll from the quake is 100, although some reports place it as high as 150.

Unfortunately, the situation continues to be dire, with the destruction of homes and essential infrastructure compounded by tribal fighting in the area. According to the PNG government, more than 500,000 people were affected by the quake, 270,000 of whom still require immediate aid. Damaged roads are inhibiting access to remote communities and broken power lines are affecting crucial power supply to local health care centres and schools. Unable to return to their classrooms, students throughout the region must now fit into large local mess halls as an alternative space, while they wait for their schools to be rebuilt. Access to clean drinking water has also become an urgent concern.



The water supply at Pombreal Village, in the remote Southern Highlands, for example, has run dangerously low in the months since the earthquake struck in February. Landslides have contaminated a nearby creek, and now the entire community, some 600 people, relies on a single 5000L water tank. The community must ration the little water they have left, just a quarter of a cup for each child per school session.

One ray of hope for the village is the establishment of a UNICEF Education Programme run by Program Volunteer, Judy Olpis. She teaches the local children the basic principles of hygiene and provides them with a much-needed sense of normalcy. Her example has inspired Maxwell Konop, the Chairman of Pombreal Primary School, to support the construction of a new pit latrine toilet, a set of taps for hand washing, and two additional 5000L water tanks.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) have also been working with the Highland people to assist in the rebuilding and rehabilitation of their communities. Over the past few months, the ICRC have provided shelter and emergency household kits to 16,000 displaced people. They have also installed water harvesters and replaced tanks to ensure that people have access to clean water.

Aid efforts have been hampered, however, by continued tribal violence throughout the region - forcing many aid agencies to suspend their efforts in some areas. "In some cases, you might have people who have been displaced into in an area where there is a dispute over ownership of the land," Ahmad Hallak, ICRC Head of Mission in PNG said. "That's definitely a challenge, that's something to keep an eye on. And as time passes, if some of these displaced communities do not return, it's likely that it would aggravate tensions between them and some of the host communities."

Earlier this month, dozens of local councillors from districts in the Western Highlands came together to sign a series of guidelines on tribal fighting. The rules were signed in the presence of hundreds of people in Tambul-Nebilyer district, after being drafted with the support of the ICRC. The guidelines include avoiding the targeting of civilians and the destruction of civilian property during tribal fighting. "It remains to be seen how effective this will be, and to what extent it will reduce the consequences of future tribal fights if they do occur," said Hallak. "But it seemed to be received quite well."

*Sources: [Papua New Guinea: How the Highlands are coping after devastating 7.5 magnitude quake](#), International Committee of the Red Cross, 7 June 2018 | [Rules of war signed by communities in PNG Highlands district](#), Radio NZ, 12 June 2018 | [Warning over human displacement from PNG quake](#), Radio NZ, 11 June 2018 | [A community desperate for clean water in rural Papua New Guinea](#), Stuff, Ethan Donnell, June 6 2018 | Image credit: [UNICEF](#) | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.*

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