Global Justice Overcoming Poverty

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**"We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."**
**~ Pope Francis**

Photo by Nicolas Weldingh on Unsplash

## CLIMATE INEQUALITY: OCEANIA

A report published by Oxfam in November 2023 looks at the crises of both climate breakdown and runaway inequality in Oceania. Analysis by Oxfam shows that Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand's richest people are responsible for huge carbon emissions, while people in the Pacific are paying the highest price in climate impacts and have fewer resources to cope.

- In Australia in 2019 the top 1% by income emitted 22 times as much per person as the bottom 50% of people on low incomes.
- Since 1990, the top 1% have almost doubled their total emissions, at a rate almost 2.5 times faster than the bottom 50% over the same period.
- The top 1% of Australians by income emitted more carbon pollution than all 14.7 million passenger vehicles in the country.
- The top 1% of Australians by income emit almost 200 times more carbon pollution than the entire population of Vanuatu, with fewer people.
- Australia's top 1% out-emit all 2 million people that make up the total population of Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Kiribati, by 17 times to one.

Climate inequality facts for Aotearoa New Zealand are similar:

- In New Zealand, the top 1% by income also emitted 22 times as much per person as the 50% of people on lower incomes.
- The bottom 50% were responsible for just 20% of emissions. Total emissions for the top 10% by income exceeded those of the bottom 50%, despite the latter constituting 1.9 million more people.
- One New Zealander in the top 1% by income emits as much as 149 people from Kiribati.

These facts show that in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand emissions are highly unequal, with the richest generating massive emissions, while ordinary people emit less and have limited means to control their carbon footprint. Comparing the emissions of these richest people to those in the Pacific Islands, the inequality is even more extreme.

People living in the Pacific Islands have little responsibility for causing climate change and are being hit the hardest by the climate crisis. They are facing more ferocious cyclones, which are destroying homes and communities; sea level rise, combined with erosion and salt water intrusion, is impacting homes and food gardens; ocean acidification and loss of coral reefs are depleting fish stocks; and droughts and loss of fresh water springs are impacting agriculture and fresh drinking water.

In early 2023, Vanuatu was hit by twin Category 4 Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin, followed by twin earthquakes of 6.6 and 5.4 magnitude. These events affected 80% of the population, in the worst affected areas 90% of crops were wiped out, and total damage estimates surpassed 40% of Vanuatu's GDP. Then in late October 2023, Cyclone Lola, the earliest Category 5 cyclone ever recorded in the Southern hemisphere, hit Vanuatu, causing further devastation. According to the Notre Dame Global Adaption Index the Pacific Island nations are among the countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts. By contrast, per capita, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are among the wealthiest countries in the world and have the resources to cope with the current climate challenges they face with bushfires, floods and droughts and with future challenges, if they appropriately tax the growing number of billionaires and properly prioritise climate adaptation, disaster compensation, and poverty alleviation in their budgets.

The complacency associated with this inequality – both in impacts and capacity to cope – must come to an end. According to the United Nations, without Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and other high emitting countries taking bold and immediate action to phase out fossil fuels, global targets to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius will be missed.

This downward spiral can be stopped, and a safer world for all can be created by acting on inequality, poverty and the climate breakdown together.

*Source: 'Climate Inequality: Oceania – Why we must create climate equality and a Blue Pacific for the 99%' by David Tran, Josie Lee and Nick Henry, November 2023, published by Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Aotearoa and Oxfam in the Pacific.*

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## FROM CHAOS TO REFORM IN PNG: LESSONS FROM MORAUTA'S LEADERSHIP

In the wake of the recent declaration of a state of emergency in Papua New Guinea (PNG), a sense of anger and profound sorrow has enveloped observers and citizens alike. The city of Port Moresby, normally bustling with life, now echoes with the sounds of a country grappling with its most profound crisis in recent history. The streets are scenes of desolation, marked by the charred remnants of looted shops and supermarkets. The palpable tension has led to the deployment of over a thousand troops, a desperate measure to restore order in a city brought to its knees.

The eruption of violence and lawlessness, resulting in the tragic loss of at least 22 lives, isn't an isolated incident but a symptom of deeper, systemic issues. The immediate trigger was an apparent pay cut for public servants (which the government says was due to a payroll error), but the roots of the unrest are entangled in a complex web of economic mismanagement, rising costs, high unemployment, and a pervasive sense of injustice among the public.

This situation in PNG might lead some to believe that change is an unattainable ideal, especially in such tumultuous times. However, the lessons learned from Sir Mekere Morauta's tenure as prime minister offer hope, demonstrating that even in the darkest of times, comprehensive reform is possible. Morauta's leadership in the early 2000s was characterised by a determined push for economic stabilisation, public sector reform, and enhanced transparency. His approach was marked by a vision to instil fiscal discipline, streamline government operations, and foster a climate conducive to sustainable economic and social development.

Morauta's reforms were aimed at pulling PNG back from the brink of economic collapse. He focused on restructuring the public sector, managing public debt, and revamping the financial system. His government introduced the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* to curb excessive borrowing and established the *Central Banking Act* to reinforce the autonomy of the Bank of Papua New Guinea. These reforms were designed to lay a foundation for a more accountable and efficient government. The current crisis is the culmination of a two-decade deviation from these foundational reforms.

Riots, police strikes over pay cuts and general lawlessness are manifestations of a government that has lost touch with its people. The administrative error leading to the pay cut is emblematic of the inefficiencies and lack of accountability that plague PNG's public sector. As PNG grapples with this crisis, it is crucial to look at Morauta's reforms and understand their significance in today's context. The need is not just for a change in government but a radical overhaul in governance. The focus should be on establishing a transparent, accountable administration that prioritises the well-being of its citizens. Moreover, the international community's role in supporting PNG through this crisis is pivotal. Aid and development efforts must be aligned with the long-term goal of building resilient institutions and governance structures. The path to recovery and stability is challenging, but with a commitment to genuine reform and good governance, PNG can hope to emerge from this crisis stronger and more resilient.

If there is to be a silver lining, the state of emergency in PNG is a stark reminder of the critical role governance plays in a nation's development. It is a call to action for PNG's leaders and the international community to prioritise sustainable development, transparency, and accountability. The nation's future hinges on the ability to learn from past reforms and to embrace a governance model that truly serves its people. As observers and partners, we can only hope that this crisis becomes a turning point, leading PNG towards a future marked by stability, prosperity, and justice.

*Source: This is an edited version of 'From chaos to reform in PNG: lessons from Morauta's leadership' by Matthew Morris, 22 January 2024, which first appeared on Devpolicy, published by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University. Matthew Morris was an economic adviser to Sir Mekere Morauta from 1999 to 2002 and continued to work for him in later years.*

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## PACIFIC PREDICTIONS: A LOOK AHEAD AT 2024

As the new year gets underway, now is the time to look ahead to what will be significant in the Pacific islands region. The Pacific will play a small part in the year in which more than half of the global population will go to the polls. We have already seen Dr Hilda Heine sworn in as the tenth President of Marshall Islands following elections late last year. With Tuvalu voting at the end of January, it is interesting to see if a change of government might affect the future of the Falepili Union with Australia that was signed in November 2023.

The elections in Solomon Islands are scheduled to take place in April. These are the first general elections since the controversial "switch" in 2019 which saw diplomatic relations between Solomon Islands and Taiwan come to an end and China established as a leading development and security partner for Sogavare's government. Sogavare can point to last year's Pacific Games as a stellar achievement for his government and one in which the support of China was key. But this is unlikely to have much resonance for those Solomon Islanders who live outside Honiara and for whom the games were largely irrelevant. Other Pacific island countries holding elections this year are Palau (November) and Kiribati (date to be confirmed). Also Vanuatu is expected to hold its first-ever referendum on proposed constitutional changes intended to address chronic political instability.

As in recent years, narratives around climate change and those centred on "traditional" security concerns will become increasingly enmeshed. The apparent acceptance of the significance of climate change as a security threat by partners such as the US is no doubt welcome. However, it is not enough to assuage concern among those who warn against the increased militarisation of the region. Preliminary findings from the Rules of Engagement project, led by Associate Professor Anna Powles and me, show that "defence diplomacy" has become an important aspect of international engagement with Pacific Island countries. We can expect this to continue throughout this year. We need to understand better the extent to which these engagements add to feelings of security and safety in Pacific communities and how, if at all, they influence how Pacific people feel about the relationships between their countries and their international partners.

Internal security threats will be front of mind in Papua New Guinea, and likely elsewhere in the region. Given the mix of cost-of-living pressures, political instability, and a feverish (social) media environment fuelled by rumour and counter-rumour, maintaining social cohesion will become increasingly challenging.

With globalisation in retreat and geopolitical competition on the rise, there is every reason to expect that the high tempo of international strategic engagement with Pacific policymakers, businesses, civil society leaders, and communities will continue in 2024. While this provides numerous opportunities to secure resources for development and other initiatives, it can also create a serious burden in terms of transaction costs, particularly for small resource-constrained administrations. Last year, the government of Solomon Islands announced that it would have a "block out" period during which senior officials are unavailable to meet with visiting delegations.

At the regional level, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is still in the process of determining how best to manage the increased attention the organisation is receiving from countries that want to become dialogue partners. There are currently six applications awaiting consideration (Denmark, Ecuador, Israel, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine). Last year at the PIF Leaders Meeting it was made clear that the ongoing review of regional architecture includes a refreshed framework for engagement with dialogue partners – one that is led and driven by Pacific priorities.

*Source: This is an edited version of 'Pacific Predictions: A look ahead at 2024' by Tess Newton Cain, 23 January 2024, which first appeared on Devpolicy, published by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University. The author's Pacific Predictions have been produced annually since 2012.*

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