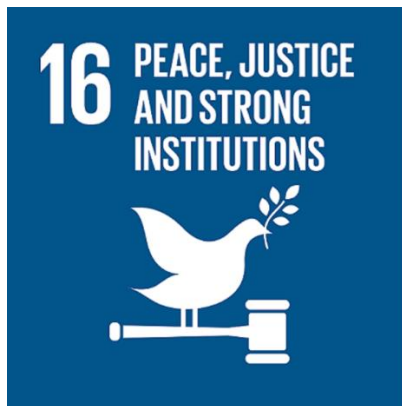


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Promoting peace in the Pacific

Transforming the Pacific through Sustainable Development Goal 16



Submission to the Senate inquiry into the Sustainable Development Goals

Submission by Peacifica: Mansi Bhatt, James Cox, Mimosa Hill, Leona Wedderburn,
Claudia Whitaker

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Peacifica
PO Box 73
Petersham NSW 2049
www.peacifica.org

Summary

This submission calls for the Australian Government to prioritise Sustainable Development Goal 16 in its Pacific aid programs and policy. It argues that peaceful and inclusive societies, justice and effective institutions are transformative components of the SDG framework. It proposes a **Pacific-based Peacebuilding** approach as a pathway to achieving Goal 16.

Peacifica recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Prioritise SDG Goal 16 in its aid policy and programming for the Pacific region. This will require re-orientation of Australia's Pacific Islands program around the promotion of human security, inclusive governance and the mitigation of conflict drivers, with the aim of creating sustainable, positive peace
2. Prioritise a Pacific-based peacebuilding approach in its support for SDG Goal 16:
 - a) Conduct inclusive assessments of local contexts and conflict risks to enable shared planning for peace and development
 - b) Support the development of locally derived indicators of progress to establish local ownership and ensure that actions realistically respond to local understandings of peace and security.
3. Build on RAMSI's success in the Solomon Islands by promoting grassroots peacebuilding activities (including empowerment of women and youth, reconciliation and climate change impact mitigation) as a complement to ongoing institutional strengthening
4. Develop a rigorous policy framework to guide efficient, effective, timely and accountable responses to protracted crises, including through multi-year funding agreements that strategically address the root causes and chronic indicators of crises.

Section 1: Introduction: SDGs and the Pacific

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set the agenda for the world's collaboration on some of the most pressing issues. Governments need to commit fully to the Goals' realisation at home and abroad. Particular responsibility rests on those governments, like Australia's, with the means to stimulate serious change.

For Australia, there is nowhere more important with regard to the SDGs than our close neighbours in the South Pacific. We have deep cultural, geographic and economic ties with the region. It is an increasingly strategically significant part of the Indo-Pacific, and of high strategic importance to Australia. As a major power in the region, we have a demonstrated commitment to engage positively with our neighbours and we share a particular history of involvement in Pacific security initiatives. However comprehensive attention to fulfilment of SDG 16 remains marginal in comparison to many other Western states.

Goal 16 is recognised to be a particularly important goal due to its transformative nature. It is a cross-cutting theme across the SDGs, and progress towards this goal has the potential to create a platform from which many other Goals can be realised (GPPAC, 2017: 3). Equally, failure to realise Goal 16 implies weak institutions, injustice and increased risk of conflict, which would undermine other goals.

Peacifica suggests that Goal 16 should be considered as essential for sustainable development, including in the South Pacific, but that its realisation will require a transformed approach to Australia’s aid program. Australia’s aid program in the Pacific currently prioritises economic growth and security, which are important but insufficient components of a peaceful and prosperous region. Peacifica is calling for a re-orientation of Australia’s Pacific Islands program around the promotion of inclusive governance and the mitigation of conflict drivers, with the aim of creating sustainable, positive peace.

Sustainable Development Goal 16

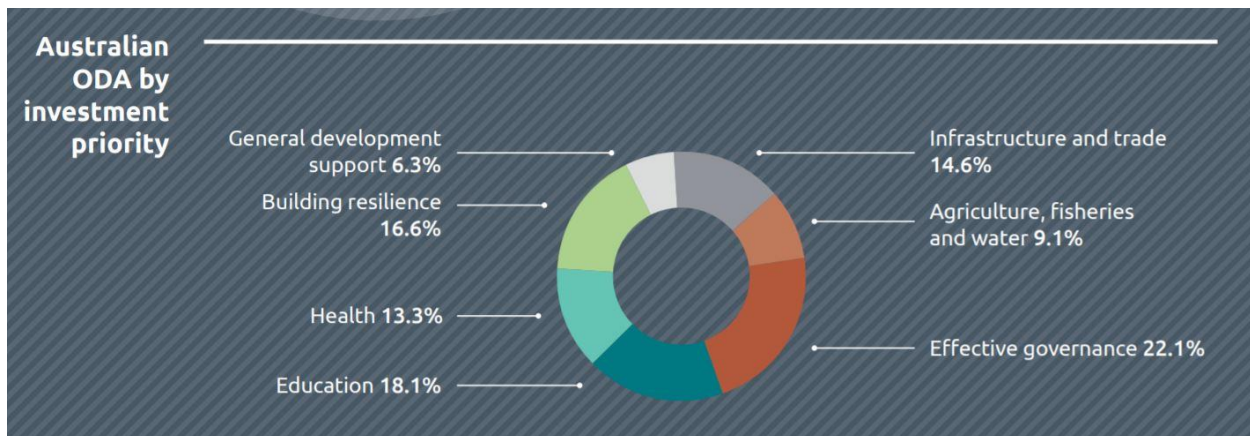
- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development,
- Provide access to justice for all
- Build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

In addition, realisation of Goal 16 depends on comprehensive consideration of two other goals: Goal 5 - Gender Equality, and Goal 13 - Climate Action.

Section 2: What Australia is currently doing

Priorities and spending

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Aid Budget Summary 2017-18 links Australia’s ODA strategic investment priorities with every United Nations SDG, although without precise allocations of programs and budgets to specific SDGs (see Figure 1). ODA spending and regional engagement is characterised by a commitment to the international rules-based order: economic governance, security, human rights treaties, and governance outcomes.



Source: DFAT Aid Budget Summary 2017/18: vi

Framed under this overriding objective of Australian economic prosperity and security is Australia’s *Pacific Regional Aid Investment Plan 2015-16 to 2018-19*, which identifies the objectives economic growth, effective regional institutions, healthy and resilient communities, and empowering women and girls (DFAT 2015). Australia plans to invest \$1.1 billion in the Pacific in 2017-18.

Economic growth is the key objective, in line with Australia’s strategic interests in the growth of private sector investment and increased trade, as articulated in the Foreign Policy White Paper and elsewhere. In addition the \$2 billion committed to the Pacific Maritime Security Program over the next 30 years continues to be framed as a response to transnational security threats in the Pacific, and takes an overly securitised approach (DFAT 2017). Peacifica has previously identified Australia’s securitisation of aid as

detrimental to the livelihoods of Pacific peoples and antithetical to human security (Cox, Schmeidl et al 2017, Peacifica 2017). A human security perspective would respond to root causes of human *insecurity* and promote resilience and peace. It would contribute to the “stable and prosperous Pacific” that is an Australian policy priority (DFAT, 2017b)

The 2017-18 aid budget does include elements that potentially contribute to human security: \$141 million to promote peace, justice, and inclusion in the Solomon Islands; \$5.4 million for the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Initiative; \$300 million on climate change and resilience in the Pacific; and \$4 million for the Pacific Sports Partnerships (PSP) program.

The Solomon Islands, one of the region’s most vulnerable countries, has however received a further cut of 13.3% in funding 2017-18 to 2018-19, following the end of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Support for peacebuilding in the Solomon Islands is all the more important, to build on RAMSI’s successes and promote grassroots peacebuilding activities that were outside its mandate. This is an opportunity to deliver a transformative approach to peacebuilding using lessons of RAMSI with a human security approach.

Governance

‘Effective governance’ features prominently within the ODA program, and particularly in the Pacific, where 36.4 percent of Australia’s Pacific investments support effective governance. Programs create “the conditions for growth through a rules-based and stable investment environment, supporting development through better public policy and financial management and helping to promote more accountable and transparent government in our region.” (DFAT 2017a: 64). Australia’s governance programs emphasise “support to the political context” in order to engage in action that is “politically feasible and economically desirable”, with “country-led reform initiatives” and local development solutions. Yet opportunities to embed SDG 16 in Australia’s ODA have been obscured by the fact that SDGs are a dot point rather than a framing device (DFAT 2018).

Australia’s approach to governance has the potential to address key governance- and institution-related conflict drivers in line with Goal 16, however it is limited by the fact that Australia implements a top-down, institutional approach to governance. This approach addresses only half the governance challenge as it ignores the demand side of governance relationships. There is little evidence of a conception of inclusive governance or of engagement on governance with local-level actors and civil society (DFAT 2017a: 64). Such interventions are critical for sustainable improvements in governance, and for it to make the fullest contribution to positive peace.

The nominal alignment of effective governance to Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships) continues Australia’s commitment to pursuing economic advantage while promoting liberal democracy, a ‘fair go’ and human rights for all (Peacifica 2017: 8). However, the top-down, institutional perspective on governance and state-building limits the choices available to Australia’s aid program (DFAT 2017a: 65) and increases the likelihood of unresolved local grievances becoming larger problems.

Section 3: What we need to do differently to achieve a transformative solution

Australia needs to deepen its understanding of its own strategic interests in the South Pacific to enable a holistic, human-security-oriented approach. This would recognise the interconnections between the SDGs, their influence on regional and national Pacific Island Country (PIC) priorities, and the need to

assure sustainable peace. Achieving such peace and justice requires a recognition of, and meaningful response to, conflict drivers that are present in the region.

While observers of the South Pacific tend not to look at it through a lens of peace and conflict, Peacifica considers that past violent conflicts - in Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Fiji - combined with present conflict drivers like resource competition, gender inequality, governance challenges, economic hardship, institutional weakness and climate change create an environment in which the risk of violent conflict will increase. As the cost of violence is increasingly well known - not only financially but also in the 'role that violence, conflict and insecurity play in constraining development' - promoting peace in the Pacific is a sound investment (Ackman et al., 2018: 8; UNSC, 2015).

Many of the SDGs recognise and respond to such conflict drivers. Goal 16 in particular recognises the need for strong institutions to support the development and longevity of social, political or ecological change, as well as inclusive and accessible justice systems that redress grievances from conflict to ensure the continuation of peace. A focus on Goal 16 and hence the creation of sustainable, peaceful environments will thereby act to provide a viable context for the fulfilment of a number of other Pacific regional- and country-level priorities, as well as reducing the risk of future violence. This is the nature of Goal 16 as a transformative goal.

Pacific Island country priorities

A Goal 16-led approach supports the priorities of Pacific Island countries themselves. PICs have developed core regional priorities through the *Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development*, which lists six regional priority areas for sustainable development (Pacific Islands Forum 2017):

1. Climate change and disaster risk reduction
2. Oceans and fisheries
3. Poverty reduction, reducing inequality and improving quality of education
4. Improving connectivity (ICT)
5. Non-communicable diseases
6. Empowering women and girls, and people with disabilities

These regional priorities both contribute to and are contingent upon addressing underlying conflict drivers. The implementation of the Roadmap, however, is dependent on the development of institutional capacities which require sustained, long-term approaches and investment.

Regional institutions have also emphasised the economic, ecological and cultural dimensions of conflict. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) recognises the interlocking political, economic, environmental, social and interpersonal factors that support human security. Key strategic outcomes in the PIFS Framework for Pacific Regionalism include *promoting people-centred development* and *strong Pacific governance for a peaceful and stable region*. These outcomes combine efforts towards a human security approach with the promotion of good governance, democratic structures and practices and representative decision-making.

The coordination of the United Nations' SDG response in the Pacific through the *United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022* localises the SDG framework into six strategic outcomes. Outcome 5, Governance and Community Engagement, seeks to 'develop innovative mechanisms to increase interaction and consultation with citizens, focusing on marginalised groups, in particular women and youth' (UN Pacific 2017). Marginalisation and discrimination on social, economic or political levels are noted conflict drivers and have been the impetus for increased radicalisation of youth and violence in the region (ADB 2017: 109).

Several PIC National Development Plans produced post-SDG formation account for underlying conflict drivers the consequent need for governance and justice institutions. Vanuatu’s National Development Plan 2030 identifies ‘Peace and Justice’ as a key feature with importance placed on gender-responsive planning and enacting political reforms for greater transparency, stability and representation. Similarly, Solomon Islands’ National Development Strategy 2016-2030 categorises a ‘Unified nation with stable and effective governance and public order’ as a primary objective. Peacebuilding is a key component of Solomon Islands policy, and the need for post-RAMSI reconciliation and accessible justice for grievance response is well recognised.

Employing a Pacific-based peacebuilding approach

Peacebuilding is a complex undertaking. Established approaches have prioritised the strengthening state institutions of governance and security and instituting democratic government. However critiques of this approach have pointed out its insufficient consideration of local civil society and prevailing social, political and economic practices (with consequences like the protracted violence in Afghanistan). ‘Critical’ or ‘hybrid’ approaches to peacebuilding have been proposed as a way to address this. These champion inclusive, place-based approaches in which locally generated plans, informed by deep understanding of the context and sensitivity to conflict risk, shape interventions with both local and external engagement. They go beyond a simple absence of violence to engender a climate of positive peace.

Within PICs the prioritisation and implementation of Goal 16, including inclusive governance and a nuanced Pacific peacebuilding approach, is critical, as its realisation will determine the outcomes of all other SDGs. The ability to reduce the risk of violent conflict and other crimes, strengthen governance and foster accountable, inclusive institutions from local to national levels will influence the effectiveness of PICs in their strategies to eliminate poverty (Goal 1), promote gender equality (Goal 5), mitigate against climate change (Goal 13) and secure marine resources for livelihoods (Goal 2, Goal 14).

Accordingly, the most strategic way Australia can seek to address Goal 16 is through the prioritisation of comprehensive peacebuilding efforts that are grounded in the reality of Pacific life and informed by the perspectives of Pacific civil society and governments. ‘Critical peacebuilding’ aims to address underlying conflict drivers across society and build robust social structures and institutions, thereby reducing the occurrence and recurrence of violence from the bottom up. Building on this, pursuing a ‘Pacific-based peacebuilding approach’ in Australia’s Pacific aid policy and programs would work to address challenges to peace and promote a context for sustainable development.

Positive Peace

Positive peace represents the presence of justice, and of social systems that enable the peaceful resolution of conflict. It embodies the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.

A Pacific-based peacebuilding approach would include the following key pillars:

1. Recognition of the interdependent relationship between people and the environment that exists in the Pacific. This relationship underlies the organisation of life for Pacific communities: their values, culture, identity, social relations, livelihood, legal frameworks and resource management. It must be not only taken into account, but capitalised on to promote a climate of positive peace. Building on this, the Pacific model seeks climate justice, acknowledging the threats of climate change as key future drivers of conflict.

2. It is locally grounded, and therefore highly contextual, building on indigenous knowledge and social capital. Solutions come out of the dialogue between this grounded knowledge and the support of external government and civil society networks.
3. It is inclusive, particularly of women, who are essential agents for sustainable development. It prioritises focus on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, which in the Pacific is widespread, persistent and unacceptably high.
4. Inclusion of youth and marginalised groups is necessary to enable sustainable peace efforts. An important aspect of this is creating opportunities for youth engagement in mainstream political and economic processes.

Many of Australia's present development activities in the South Pacific could contribute to a Pacific-based peacebuilding approach. Robust institutions of government are essential, as are sound economic fundamentals, gender equality and effective police. But so too are issues that are not well represented in the aid program, including an active and engaged civil society, promotion of social equality and an awareness of how seemingly unrelated issues may promote peace or conflict. Pacific-based peacebuilding would start with inclusive assessments of local contexts and conflict risks, on which shared planning for peace and development would ensue. Locally derived indicators of progress would be essential to establish local ownership and ensure that actions realistically respond to local understandings of peace and security. Local indicators would also assist in the collection of disaggregated data, helping to ensure that 'no one is left behind'.

Section 4: Recommendations

Peacifica recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Prioritise SDG Goal 16 in its aid policy and programming for the Pacific region. This will require re-orientation of Australia's Pacific Islands program around the promotion of human security, inclusive governance and the mitigation of conflict drivers, with the aim of creating sustainable, positive peace
2. Prioritise a Pacific-based peacebuilding approach in its support for SDG Goal 16:
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4. Develop a rigorous policy framework to guide efficient, effective, timely and accountable responses to protracted crises, including through multi-year funding agreements that strategically address the root causes and chronic indicators of crises.

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