

Business, Human Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Pacific: A Civil Society Capacity Building Program

25 – 29 March 2019, Fiji

From 25-29 March 2019, 27 civil society advocates (16 women) from 7 Pacific Island countries - Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea came together to build their knowledge of human rights and share experiences of the impacts of the private sector in the Pacific. At the end of the capacity building program they established a new regional Pacific Human Rights and Business Network.

The capacity building program was organised and facilitated 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 ([BHRRC](#)), and the UNSW Institute for Global Development ([IGD](#)) and the Diplomacy Training Program ([DTP](#)). The participants represented NGOs, trade unions, community-based organisations, environmental groups, academia, and faith-based groups.

Sessions were led by Professor [Surya Deva](#) – Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UNWG), [Justine Nolan](#) - Associate Professor, Faculty of Law at UNSW Sydney and Associate Dean, [Amy Sinclair](#) – Regional Representative, BHRRC, [Joshua Cooper](#) – Academic in Human Rights Law, Releshni Karan and Dip Magar from the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific.

The program enabled sharing of knowledge and experience and built the knowledge, skills and capacity of community advocates to protect and promote human rights and sustainable development in the Pacific, including through effective engagement with the UN's Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures.



Figure 1: The Australian High Commissioner hosted a reception for participants, trainers and program partners at his residence in Suva

The program helped build knowledge of international human rights standards and mechanisms that can be applied and integrated into effective advocacy strategies and address the challenges of unchecked economic encroachment. There was a focus on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants shared concerns over the practices of businesses in the Pacific region and the negative impacts on some communities – with a major focus on the extractive industries (mining/forestry) and on tourism developments.

This program followed a successful pilot program in 2018 and responds to the need to develop the knowledge in civil society, business and government of relevant human rights standards including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – and how these relate to development planning and projects. The commitment of the participants to establish a new network on Human Rights and Business in the Pacific will help to ensure the sustainability of outcomes and the program partners are also committed to continuing their collaboration on these issues.

April 2019 – Details of curriculum, participants, trainers and partners available at www.dtp.unsw.edu.au