

“Building Back Better” - Business, Human Rights, the SDGs and the Climate Emergency in the Pacific Online Capacity Building Program August 2021

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Summary:

Over 30 participants from 15 Pacific Island nations participated in this 4-week online capacity building program in August 2021. The program was organised by the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the Pacific Region in partnership with Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Citizens’ Constitutional Forum (CCF) and Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC).

This online program, coinciding with the 10th Anniversary of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and in the lead-up to COP 26 in Glasgow, responding to the climate emergency, built knowledge and capacity to promote business respect for human rights and sustainable development in the Pacific. The course involved eight online sessions of 1.5 hours over four weeks. It is part of a wider sub-regional strategy of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and OHCHR and part of a longer-term capacity building strategy of PIANGO, BHRRC, CCF and DTP.

Trainers in the program included Professor Surya Deva, Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, Professor Justine Nolan, Director of the Australian Human Rights Institute, Claire Slatter, PIANGO Director, Siale Ilolahia, Margaret Wachenfeld, Dr Matthew Baird, Joshua Cooper, and John Southalan.

Participants in the program came from civil society, government institutions and business organisations. There was a focus on the negative impacts of the extractive industries, including forestry, mining, fisheries and Deep-Sea Mining. The growing intersection of environmental and human rights standards was also explored. The program was enriched by the sharing of specific cases from across the Pacific.

A full report of the program will follow. The following is some selected feedback from the participant feedback surveys on the program.

Selected Feedback from Participants¹

What were the HIGHLIGHTS of the program for you, and why?

- The first week's presentations on the UN Guiding principles. It was so clear and linked up (finally!) how businesses can be responsible and in what ways e.g. investors, vs. employers vs. customers. Also explaining how the Protect, Respect and Remedy framework works in theory and practice!
- The issues discussed and guidance provided during discussion were so insightful that I was in awe of the experts.
- It was the whole experience: the content, the modes of presentation, the interaction with students, the inclusion of experts who work every day to bring to life the rights articulated in the various UN instruments.
- I came into the first session with literally little to no understanding of how Human Rights. I literally applied to the course as a means to 'have something to do' during the pandemic. After the first session I was so filled with so much information that I was quite overwhelmed. However, all the sessions thereafter greatly intrigued me. The session was so useful that it inspired me greatly, particularly in terms of increasing my understanding of Human Rights and the existing frameworks both international and national and how I can apply myself to grow the understanding and awareness of Human Rights and its related issues that are prevalent but more often neglected in my community.
- The highlight for me was when Josh Cooper presented on how his team in Hawaii put local twist to the 17 SDGs by giving them relevant to the local context. This was of great interest to me, because it was something that could be applied to the context of Fiji. It may be a lot of work to initiate but in the long run the effects and positive outcome it could influence will be of great wealth for the Human Rights moving it from merely a movement (in Fiji) into a necessity of every day living as it should. I was also very interested in how Environmental Law was viewed from a Human Rights perspective.
- The course is very useful and there were so much content provided which was good. I also like that the organizers provide materials in a timely manner and also providing the recording right after the class. I also like that participatory nature of the course and being able to share experiences, while also maximising the chatbox for questions that are immediately addressed. I hope for the next run, there will be more experiences in other Asian regions (Southeast Asia, South Asia, etc) - though of course understandable that the course is largely focused on the Pacific.

¹ These comments were selected from the end of course evaluation surveys sent to program participants.

- The topics were logically sequenced, starting from a broad overview then zooming into more ground experiences. I also like the mix of resource persons and their expertise. Lastly, the chance for participants to share actual experiences was very good.

What aspects of the training will you be able to apply? If possible, please tell us about what you will do after the course.

- Recommending that all economic development initiatives ensure they work with companies that comply with global and national labour and human rights policies and standards and laws.
- I recently founded an Innovation Hub in Fiji and would really love to have experts in this course be able to talk with the community that I currently have with me and get them to network more on these issues to advocate for solutions.
- There are many aspects that the training can be applied to my current place of work I may need to discuss those another time, but one aspect that the training has been useful is in my work particularly as a document drafter for His Excellency the President. In the 2nd week of training there was a speech to be prepared for His Excellency and while the organising organisation submitted a draft that my team had to work on to suit his Excellency's main vision, which is 'A pillar of national unity'. The Speech was for His Excellency's address to the 7th Pacific Regional Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services - virtual meeting. As a drafter I was able to include some of the data and information as well as include mention of the IPCC 6th Assessment Report that was released on August, 2021. This gave great content for His Excellency's speech and ensured that the matter of Human Rights linked with Climate Change, Sustainability and Generational Rights and Equity were included in the narrative that is being spread.
- I'm currently working on alternative socio-economic models in the Global South and learning more about UN mechanisms and OECD guidelines are good foundation for this work.
- Argumentation about the EIA being considered mandatory even if national legislation says it is not; and the pressure put on contractors from OECD countries to listen to the concerns of stakeholders. Also using SDGs to support argumenatation. I will use what I have learned in my advocacy work as Secretary for a traditional leaders organisation, and in mentoring work with emerging younger environmentalists.
- The aspect of during research for treaties that have ratified by states - and reporting channels that we can use in order to report issues in adhering the treaties in our own context
- Compile a environment and human rights abuse case for the people in Baining area, the traditional landowners where the University of Natural Resources &

Environment is located. Oil Palm and logging activities is expanding very fast with little benefit going right through to the majority of land holding groups.

- As being a member of the Environmental Physiotherapy & Physiotherapist working with children & Adults..I will defend the rights of children with disabilities, able people & advocate, making campaign against the Proposed Deep Sea Tailings Placement in Morobe sea by Wafi Golpu mine to conserve & protect the marine biodiversity so that the sea/rivers is free of chemicals for the people to use.

How could PIANGO / CCF / DTP / BHRRC / OHCHR provide further assistance to help you apply what you have learned in this course?

- If there were a elearning platform that my hub community could subscribe to and also be apart of the network updates on this so that we can help create awareness on these important topics.
- Provide courses that participants can be able to study virtually and be used as academic purposes
- Linking me to funding support both finance and technical support. Need funding support to carry out community trainings and awareness on Free Prior Inform Consent targeting the Baining area to better mobilize people's power.
- it could provide technical backstopping or a network in the Pacific.
- Creating network with each one us the participants.

Do you have any specific ideas or suggestions about ways in which participants can continue to engage and interact online?

- Perhaps setting up a "community" on social media. When I attended a SDG forum in Korea in 2019 we set up communications after via whatsapp.
- This may sounds ridiculous, but I hope that there is an existing platform (kinda like a blog?) or perhaps one could be created where participants can write/contribute their experiences and stories (both positive and negative) to ensure that there is a space where stories and ideas are available. I have other things I would like to share, but I shall stop there. Thanks.
- Aside from the directory, maybe a list serve/email list for sharing info/updates, or social media pages, or LinkedIn account if there is none yet.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the program to help us improve future courses?

- It was great! The combination of applied and theory is so important! When you're trying to research these areas yourself its so hard to link up the dots. Please never underestimate the importance of clearly explaining even the basics.
- Thank you so much again for this course, it is very useful and I enjoyed it. Too bad I was not able to join all the live sessions due to schedule conflict, but managed to review the recording and materials afterwards. I hope these remain accessible even long after the course. I am also open to continue engaging with DTP and the alumni, and if ever there is anything I can do from my side of the world (Southeast Asia), please let me know. All the best and let's all keep safe! I still hope to meet you guys in person someday :)
- The course is amazing, maybe to continue give an assignment that participants can further collaborate with an organization or govt ministry in building the capacity of participants in issues - and how the org/govt ministry is enforcing/promoting treaties in their country.
- Development of a full-time certificate course can be explored to better equipped human rights defenders.