

# Some partners are more equal than others: EFA and Civil Society in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu education policy processes

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*This article considers a parallel marginalisation of Education for All (EFA) as a holistic approach to education, and the civil society actors and coalitions who address sidelined Dakar goals of early childhood care and education, adult literacy, quality and non-formal education. I argue that in spite of over two decades of EFA rhetoric prizes national ownership and broad participation, education policy processes in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, including attempted sector-wide approaches, have incorporated only dominant financial donors and narrowed conceptions of state leadership. One corollary has been a focus on the Millennium Development primary education and gender goals. The 2009 inauguration of the Civil Society Education Fund, through the EFA Fast Track Initiative, offers potential for reversing the situation. I present evidence from critical discourse analysis (CDA) of EFA policy documentation and processes, including fieldwork and interviews with key policy actors, conducted from 2007-2009. I consider how language and intertextuality instantiate elements of dominant global discourses in national education policies, and demonstrate pervasive inequalities in policy participation.*

[Keywords: EFA, Civil Society, CDA, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu]

## Introduction

More than two decades of EFA rhetoric has prized national ownership, enhanced partnerships and broad participation for improved basic education on a global scale (OECD, 2005, 2008; UNESCO, 1990, 2000). This campaign, or global policy, has been promoted at multiple levels, through governments and organizations regionally and nationally. However, education policy processes in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, including attempted education sector-wide approaches (SWAs), reflect ambiguous responses to EFA as a holistic and inclusive program. Processes continue to be fostered by dominant financial donors, sustaining narrower conceptions of state leadership. Although consultation has incrementally moved to engage selected members of civil

society, such engagement has neither been regular, nor institutionalised. Policies have focussed on the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary (formal) education and gender, to the exclusion of the four other Dakar goals concerning early childhood care and development, quality, adult literacy, and ongoing educational opportunity (including life-skills and non-formal education). In addition to gender equality, marginalised groups were the main actors addressing these goals.

The Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) was approved under the EFA Fast Track Initiative as a ‘stand alone project’ from 2009 - 2012 (World Bank, 2011b, p.48). Regional civil society organisation, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBae), managed a competitive process of awarding grants to national education civil society coalitions to improve policy advocacy and work on EFA. Coalitions in PNG and Vanuatu received funding under the program and have begun to increase their activities and profiles.

## Research Background and Methodology

In comparing education policy processes in six aid-receiving countries in South-east Asia and the Pacific, I focussed on the role of language in instantiating and sustaining elements of dominant global discourses in national education policies<sup>1</sup>. This entailed a critical discourse analytical (CDA) approach, with a basis in critical development theories (Fairclough, 2003; Schuurman, 2009). CDA comprised two main aspects: the analysis of written texts, and the supporting analysis of policy contexts through fieldwork interviews and observation. The first sections of the article therefore set out an important component of CDA in identifying some key, albeit necessarily condensed, aspects of regional and national historical, political and social contexts for EFA and education policy processes.

For these non-written aspects of CDA, including policy contexts and formation mechanisms, an ‘ethnographic epistemological approach’ to fieldwork was taken. Observations and semi-structured interviews, in English<sup>2</sup>, were conducted between 2007 and 2009 (Blommaert, 2010, p.187). I identified 31 informants in Vanuatu and 28 in PNG through a combination of purposive and opportunistic sampling of academic, government, bilateral, multi-lateral, international non-government organisation (NGO) and NGO<sup>3</sup> educational development

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<sup>1</sup> This research formed the basis of the doctoral component of an Australian Research Council Linkage grant, with the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) as the industry partner.

<sup>2</sup> Because EFA policy forum meetings are conducted (and documents produced) in English at national, regional and global levels, I conducted interviews in English. Although the focus of this research has been on transfer between global, regional and national policy activities, the lack of interviews and documents in French, Bislama, *Tok Pisin* and local languages represents a limitation, especially in terms of sub-national policy processes.

<sup>3</sup> The UNESCO interpretation of civil society organisations (CSOs) is applied here: “In the context of EFA, civil society can be understood as all non-governmental and non-profit groups and associations involved in the education for all drive. It embraces NGOs and campaign networks, teacher unions and religious organizations, community associations and research networks, parents’

stakeholders<sup>4</sup>. Comparison of these discursive elements included analysis of the construction contexts of the EFA National Action Plans (NAP), and national education policy group arrangements maintaining EFA. Analysis moved recursively between national education policy formation contexts (EFANAP plan formation and policy groups or mechanisms), the micro-levels of textual content embedded in and resulting from those processes (the EFANAP and, where available, shadow reports). Movement between texts and other contextual aspects of the research was iterative, and repeated. I anchored analysis of written content and language in an interpretation of texts as constituent elements of contexts at multiple levels (Bray et al., 2007). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to detail results, comparing the EFANAP against the UNESCO Guidelines was one aspect of intertextual analysis. It revealed the striking degree to which content, language and process are aligned with global institutional conditions and recommendations. Such close adherence is, again, in tension with UNESCO Guidelines and EFA emphases on nationally owned and locally relevant approaches.

I treated policy documents as an “outcome of political struggles over meaning” (Taylor, 1997, p.26). This involved emphasising the inherently political nature of policy formation by considering ways policies are forged from struggles between actors and approaches, and characterised through omission, by the work of those excluded from official processes. In characterising “policy as the politics of discourse” (p.34), Sandra Taylor (1997) foregrounds “the linkages between the various levels of the policy process with an emphasis on highlighting power relations” (p.32). Lexical and syntactic analysis of documents therefore also considered assumptions, authorial voice, audience and discursive content, again possible to present only to a limited extent in this article. The combination of document and contextual analysis in CDA captures the *socially constructed* nature of policy issues occurring in given contexts to “determine whose interests they serve” (Gale, 2001, p.383). Emphasis on policy formulation at formal and informal “sites of engagement” revealed the effects of the marginalisation of civil society contributions, and of EFA goals beyond the MDGs of formal primary schooling and gender, on quality (McCormick, In press).

Intertextual analysis can demonstrate ways dominant educational development discourses and norms are reinforced through language and become embedded in national policy discourses and procedures through multiple channels. I compared how documents and discursive elements are in turn incorporated intertextually in the EFANAP, alongside citations of other events and texts relating to education and development. Intertextuality within the architecture of educational development documentation and procedures has served to reinforce neo-liberal discourses and norms as the only legitimate, or official, policies. In the process,

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associations and professional bodies, student groups, social movements and others.” When NGOs are referred to it is therefore in distinction to these other types of actors (UNESCO, ND).

<sup>4</sup> The whole study included 104 informants in six countries: Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

policy options, actors and/ or aspects of education less relevant to that project have become sidelined.

## Language and Sub-Regional Pacific Development Contexts

This section begins by outlining some of the contextual and historical components identified through CDA, which contribute to understanding development dynamics and power hierarchies, and the role of language in these processes. This also gives a background to the construction and identification of regional and sub-regional contexts and processes.

The name ‘Melanesia’, intended to take in PNG, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, was popularised by the French explorer and naval officer Jules Dumont d’Urville in 1832, and has been characterised by Australian archaeologist Geoffrey Clark (2003) as part of “an abstract and overarching hierarchical structure that was placed on the Pacific in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p.158), and consolidated over two centuries of European exploration, colonisation and use (Tcherkezoff, 2003). The endurance and pervasiveness of such external classifications are, to a degree, echoed in global development categories and structures, where country labels in terms of level of economic development, might be substituted for degrees of ‘civilisation’ (see column 5 of Table 1).

**Table 1. Selection of geographical, historical and national characteristics**

National Character Sub-region: Country	Population (millions) 2000; 2009	Land area (1000 ha)	Provinces	Independence & Coloniser(s)	UN Country Classification	Official; & estimated number of languages
<i>South Pacific:</i>  PNG	5.387; 6.732	45 286	18 (20 from 2012) +National Capital District & Bougainville	1975, Britain, Germany, Australia <sup>5</sup>	Emerging & Developing	Tok Pisin, English, Hiri Motu; 820+
Vanuatu	0.19; 0.24	1219	6	1980, Britain, France	Least Developed Country	Bislama, English, French; 115+

Sources: World Bank (2011a); FAO Statistical Yearbook (FAO 2010)

‘Melanesia’ has undergone multiple political and social discursive adaptations. The first Prime Minister of a newly independent Vanuatu, Father Walter Lini promoted a discourse, which he called “Melanesian Socialism”. In 1983, the inter-governmental *Melanesian Spearhead Group* was formed by the above nations, establishing a preferential trade agreement for the sub-region. In his

<sup>5</sup> In 1884 the land was divided into the colonies of British New Guinea and German New Guinea. In 1902 the former was placed under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australia. They were unified in 1945 and placed under ‘international trusteeship’ in 1949. The Territory of Papua and New Guinea remained under Australian rule, renamed Papua New Guinea in 1972.

treatise on the ‘Melanesian Way’, Papua New Guinean philosopher and politician Bernard Narokobi (1980) attempted to shift the discourse, offering his view that:

... Melanesians are guided by a common cultural and spiritual unity. Though diverse in many cultural practices, including languages, still we are united and are different from Asians or Europeans .... We are a united people because of our common vision. (p.7)

These adaptations of colonial discourses demonstrate how imposed labels and structures may have continued relevance for education and policy formation in particular political and social contexts, underscoring the importance of critical analysis within historical and social context (Bray, 1993; Puamau, 2005). Historically, experience of multiple colonisers has in part determined the trajectories of PNG and Vanuatu as nation-states (see column 5, Table 1).

Numerous educators and researchers from within and outside the Pacific have considered education and wider social change, and have attempted to navigate the notions of unity within diversity, and of common conceptions of development that respect local particularities and those identified as ‘traditional’ elements (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Demerath, 2000, 2001; Maclean, 2004; Puamau, 2005; Seneviratne, 1997; Thaman, 1993). The equally contentious concept of a ‘Pacific way’ has been employed and debated in parallel to subregional political cooperation, between governments, CSOs and educators (Lawson, 2010). At the 2005 meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum, the regional Pacific Plan was produced.

Such coordinated organisation has also occurred for education. As Priscilla Puamau (2005) states of the *Rethinking Education in the Pacific Initiative* (RPEI), “The important point to note regarding the RPEI is the emphasis placed on Pacific people deciding for themselves what is best for their communities” (p.8). In Vanuatu, the *Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together* initiative stemmed from the RPEI, some of which debate infused the EFA National Action Plan (Sanga et al, 2004).

At the first meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum’s education ministers in 2001, the Forum Basic Education Action Plan was produced. Puamau (2005, p.8) continues:

It could be argued that it was the ‘voice’ of the [Pacific] initiators of the RPEI and their successful lobbying... that resulted in the development of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) and ultimately the birth of the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (The PRIDE Project).

The PRIDE project, the intended mechanism for implementing the FBEAP<sup>6</sup> and improving regional basic education, was active in Vanuatu and PNG in funding research, resource production and training, specifically in the areas of early childhood and primary education. In PNG, provincial education plans were supported through the PRIDE Project, as was the development of the Monitoring

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<sup>6</sup> The FBEAP was replaced in 2008 by the Pacific Education Development Framework 2009-2015.

and Evaluation Framework implementation. It has, however, been argued that PRIDE was unable to reconcile its original aim of realising Pacific educationalists' visions for the basic education of Pacific youth with more process-oriented donor priorities (Coxon & Munce, 2008). This echoes a broader trend, emphasised nationally and sub-regionally, of ongoing high levels of aid dependence through which policies have been heavily influenced by geopolitical dynamics geared to global priorities and dominant donors' national economic and security interests (AusAID, 2007; Bray, 1993; Cassity, 2008; Coxon & Munce, 2008; Luteru & Teasdale, 1993; Puamau, 2005).

A consistent theme in education and development debates, indeed across most areas of governance, and economic and social life, has been that of ni-Vanuatu and Papua New Guineans attempting to reconcile already diverse sets of indigenous beliefs and practices with imported or external norms and structures (Ahai & Faraclas 1993; Demerath 2000: 2001; Coxon & Munce 2008). In addition to being subject to these concerns, education plays an implicit role in enabling the recognition and navigation of these complex relationships and their ramifications.

## Educational and Political Histories

### Papua New Guinea

PNG has a highly decentralised and still-evolving system of democratic government; its constitution explicitly focuses on nationally centred development and values (Ahai & Faraclas, 1993; May, 2003; Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006). At Independence in 1975, the constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea established a key aim a central tenet in common with EFA, making an explicit call for "universal literacy in *Pisin*, *Hiri Moto* or English, and in "*tok ples*" or "*ila eda tano gado*"'" (Government of PNG, 1975, preamble). The constitution is unambiguous as to the purpose and role of education as a component of the national developmental philosophy of "integral human development":

We accordingly call for...education to be based on *mutual respect and dialogue*, and to promote awareness of our human potential and motivation to achieve our national goals through self-reliant effort... for *every person to be dynamically involved in the process* of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others. (Italics mine) (Government of PNG, 1975)

The notion of equality is foregrounded, explicitly in terms of gender. Also clear is the importance of individual agency and development through collaboration, as opposed to coercion.

Not until the 'Matane Report' of the late 1980s was internal pressure for universal education, of the locally and nationally relevant type stipulated in the constitution, expressed formally as a goal at the national level. This included a challenge against the 'English only' policy entailed in the colonial powers' push

for creation of a governing elite. Matane's report informed the 1991 Education Sector Review and subsequent first National Education Plan (GoPNG 1994), setting in motion not only the structural reform of the education system, most aspects of which are still in progress today, but also a national discourse for education with relevance for all Papua New Guineans, in line with the national principle of 'integral human development' (McCormick, 2008).

Concurrent with the national public sector reform required in PNG by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, vernacular elementary education was reintroduced, with a three-year bridging program for transition into English teaching at primary level<sup>7</sup>. In practice, some in communities and schools did not welcome nor implement the return to instruction in local languages. English was regarded as a potential conduit to future opportunity; success was based on depictions of the "West" as the superior model (Ahai & Faracras, 1993). PNG has, however, been represented internationally as a successful model for postcolonial countries navigating education based not only on "Western" and national elite interests, but also local contingencies and demands (Klaus, 2003; Nagai, 1999, 2003).

Underlying dynamics can also be related to individual and community loyalty to clan and kinship ties, or the *wantok*, an aspect of *kastom*, particularly in rural areas further from the influence of central government; unreconciled with contemporary bureaucratic and institutional practice, which in turn has complicated addressing corruption. However, care must be taken in that:

Both ethnicity and wantokism are important, but the terms and what they are thought to explain are applied nation-wide in spite of the well-known diversity of who different communities consider wantokism, [and] the various ways that 'ethnicity' is used... (Nelson, 2009, p.21)

Nelson goes on to invoke class as another important element, which underscores the importance of considering elite cohesion in processes of institutionalised normative transfer for EFA policies (McCormick, In press).

## **Vanuatu**

From 1906 to 1980, the more than eighty islands comprising what is now the Republic of Vanuatu were unified for the first time as a sovereign territory, under British and French rule. The only British-French condominium was alternately, and to some more appositely, known as the "pandemonium" (Hindson, 1995, p.329). At Independence, the new name of Vanuatu, meaning 'land eternal', signalled a break with its colonial past. Vanuatu's distinctive history of dual colonisation has combined with its striking linguistic diversity to render educational development challenges particularly complex and enduring. Legacies of the condominium include the contentious dual education system, which has

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<sup>7</sup> The logistics of the 'bridging' years presented challenges, particularly for teacher training and retention. The debate as to the duration of vernacular learning is complex and ongoing, inhering as it does the potent combination of elements of traditional *kastom* association as well as of future aspirations.

affected educational aid, assessment, content, resources and training, with decentralisation and governance. The politicisation of language choice has exacerbated its divisiveness as an issue for education. Education has been an implicit component of language debates in terms of linguistic medium and content, compounded by its potential to shore up the power and longevity of the Francophone or Anglophone camps. Political divisions parallel the language issues discussed above, including the Decentralisation Act of 1994 that divided the country into six provinces after much disagreement.

The increasing prevalence of the third national language, Bislama, and hundreds of local languages are significant for the quality of education and training (Early, 1999; Informants; Tryon, 1998). The daily reality for many ni-Vanuatu families is a tri-lingual or multi-lingual one (Early, 1999). Related to the use of Bislama, and its rise as a medium of instruction, are increasing levels of ‘urban drift’ and steady population growth.

Like PNG, the majority of Vanuatu is rural, with populations surviving on primarily subsistence agriculture; only around 13 per cent of land is used in the formal economy (Cox et al., 2007, p.5). According to Cox et al. (2007), “most ni-Vanuatu are not direct participants in economic development. The tourist industry and the offshore financial centre are mainly expatriate controlled, and the benefits accruing to the local population are limited. The profits from land transactions have accrued mainly to expatriate speculators” (p.6).

Tensions between ni-Vanuatu culture, colonial legacies and contemporary economic and social dynamics remain evident in the Vanuatu education system (Regenvanu, 2009). The National Council of Chiefs, the *Malvatumauri*, actively maintains elements of *kastom*, navigating the balance with Western structures of government. The authority of chiefs prevails at the local level (Cox et al., 2007). However, “The institution of chief is largely a modern invention, emerging out of the interaction between missionaries, the colonial government and the diversity of local political forms they encountered among the ni-Vanuatu” (Bolton, 1998; Cox et al., 2007, p.47). In terms of education, the academic nature and imported components of curricula and assessment, which focus on individual outcomes with an aim to qualification, represent some aspects of this. The past effects and relevance of these approaches continue to be debated, as exemplified in a statement by cultural leader and Member of Parliament Ralph Regenvanu (2009):

... our basic education system is still largely premised on the colonial rationale of producing bureaucrats to run the state administration. Formal schooling at primary and secondary levels actively contributes to the loss of knowledge and skills that allow an individual to function as a member of their own community and a part of the traditional economy. (p.33)

Politics in Vanuatu has been characterised by instability and frequent governmental changes, although has not led to the violence experienced in other countries in the region. Patronage continues to dominate over policy considerations, wherein “it is clear that politics is deeply influenced by pre-existing cultural norms. Traditional society is based on complex relationships of reciprocity between leaders and their communities” (Cox et al., 2007, p.ii). One

area of education policy clearly affected by such political jockeying, observed in relation to PNG, Vanuatu and other poorer countries, has been the focus on the issue of school fees for formal education (ASPBAE, 2007).

## **Civil Society and Education Policy Coordination in the Pacific**

Members of NGOs in PNG and Vanuatu reported a number of active sub-regional civil society links working in education. These included including the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), cited as an important source of information, as well as model, for the broader coalition of Vanuatu development NGOs (VANGO 2008). A number of other organisations in Fiji, for example the *Women's Crisis Centre*, were reported by NGOs in Vanuatu and PNG as a focus for information sharing as well as financial and 'capacity building' support (Informants). The NGOs *Wan Smol Bag* and *Live and Learn* work in a number of countries in the sub-region, including PNG and Vanuatu. Indeed, educational films and materials produced by *Wan Smol Bag* in Vanuatu and used in New Zealand and Australia are a rare example of 'South to North', or poor to rich, country transfer.

Pacific civil society is gradually being included in regional governmental EFA forums, with PIANGO having earned consultative status in the Pacific Islands Forum, with international NGOs and multilaterals UNESCO and UNICEF. The latter UN agencies have sub-regional offices in Apia and Suva respectively. Acknowledgement of the importance of CSOs in the Pacific Basic Education Framework is indicative of recent shifts, although this has been limited mainly to the early childhood care and education sub-sector (Pacific Forum Education Ministers, 2009, p.3).

Civil society in PNG comprises a variety of actors who are involved in education and processes of EFA policy and related normative transmission. Active amongst these groups are unions, in education the *Papua New Guinea Teachers Association*, "the first to demonstrate their solidarity in their claims for pay increases in 2000" (Dickinson-Waiko, 2003, p.257). Tertiary students conducted successful protests against structural adjustment policies in 1995, particularly relating to land rights, and have contested user-pays systems for health and education. Women's groups have also been increasingly active, particularly those affiliated with churches, discussed below. University of PNG Professor Anne Dickinson-Waiko (2003) has noted, on the other hand, that:

Donor interest in civil society comes from a global realisation of the failure of democratic institutions to gain a firm grounding in many developing countries such as PNG. Political cronyism, endemic corruption, patronage politics and bureaucratic inefficiency have paralysed those democratic institutions created in 1975. (p.262)

The civil society actors that collectively make arguably the most significant contribution to education in PNG and Vanuatu are the churches; their role, especially at provincial and local levels, is long established. Having from early on combined a proselytising role with the impartation of locally relevant skills,

they have tended to support the ‘Integral Human Development’ approach to basic education (Hauck, Mandie-Filer & Bolger, 2005; Nita, 2006). Diverse, widespread support means that:

The churches themselves have undergone a remarkable transformation in the last twenty-five years in terms of both localisation in both personnel and ritual and a search for their place and purpose in a young Pacific nation...now very much an indigenous church ...the churches are the largest formal organisation with a mass following and a capacity to span ethnic and clan loyalties. (Dickinson-Waiko, 2003, p.253)

While the churches are recognised as having imported ‘Western’ practices, their adaptation to local contexts is acknowledged in the legitimacy with which they are regarded (Hauck et al., 2005, p.17). Their incorporation into the formal education system is recognition of their crucial role in social service provision, along with contributions to health care. The church was “...the first national institution to recognise women as individual persons by providing the opportunity for women to organise as women and as citizens...” (Dickinson-Waiko, 2003, p.264) and accordingly have supported platforms for women’s involvement in education, politics and society. Church work is strong locally in the areas of early childcare through *tokples priskuls*, girls’ education and adult literacy, and at the national level through the Churches Education Council.

The PNG Education Action Network (PEAN) is a national education CSO coalition formed in 2003 with support from regional civil society organization ASPBAE, and is affiliated with the Global Campaign for Education (ASPBAE, 2007). PEAN members include: ADRA; Bible Translation Association; Peace Foundation Melanesia; Conservation Melanesia; PNG Teachers Association; YWCA; and the PNG Trust (Orapa, 2009).

At the time of fieldwork in 2008, key donors, including an international NGO working in education, were unaware of the existence of PEAN. This is in spite of a 2007 literacy survey conducted in New Ireland and the National Capital District, the results of which had clear policy implications<sup>8</sup> (ASPBAE, 2007, pp.4-13). Subsequently, in 2009, PEAN gained funding through the EFA Fast Track Initiative’s CSEF, established in December 2008 after consistent regional and global CSO advocacy (World Bank, 2011b). The PEAN has since articulated core aims for increasing the coalition’s profile and work. Coalition goals are:

1. To advocate and promote increased levels of literacy and life-long learning opportunities for all citizens including disadvantaged groups.
2. To increase and promote active participation by CSOs and wider community in education policy and budget processes through research and advocacy.
3. To promote achievement of Education For All Goals through awareness and campaigns in collaboration with coalition members, development partners and governments.

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<sup>8</sup> Key findings related to four important EFA goals: youth participation in education, adult and youth literacy levels that were significantly divergent to the most recent household survey data from 2000, and quality of education.

4. To facilitate and establish a National Civil Society Education Fund to strengthen CSO engagement and participation in education policies. (Orapa, 2009).

As in PNG, the role of the churches in education in Vanuatu is strong, with Cox et al. (2007) noting that, “The combination of chiefs and churches can be patriarchal and socially conservative” (p.48), and has contributed to inter-generational conflicts. The churches contribute locally and nationally, through the National Vanuatu Christian Council, with a small but growing number of NGOs addressing the environment, education, gender and land issues. Communication and transportation linkages have proven difficult; however, they have not prevented some subregional and regional cooperation. The theatre and video productions of local NGO *Wan Smol Bag* eloquently tackle these and other social issues affecting education such as unemployment and HIV and reach a wide audience across the nation’s, and Pacific, islands. As noted above, materials and performances have been shared regionally.

The Vanuatu Education Partnership Action Coalition (VEPAC) is Vanuatu’s national education CSO coalition, also linked closely with regional organization ASPBAE. Although VEPAC also qualified for the CSEF funding, there is less information available about its membership and work. VEPAC has been cited as having organised a 2004 pre-election education policy meeting for candidates to outline policies (University of the South Pacific, 2011). Newspaper reports share general results of a literacy survey conducted by VEPAC and refer to its partnership with ASPBAE and the Ministry of Education (Marango, 2011).

As with the PEAN, at the time of fieldwork in 2009, the coalition was unknown amongst key education stakeholders, including a number of education Ministry employees who were not aware of VEPAC’s existence. It was also unknown amongst other CSOs, in spite of its being listed in the Strategic Plan (2008-2012) of Vanuatu’s wider CSO coalition, the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO) (Vanuatu Association of NGOs, 2008, p.14). In spite, also, of those regional and global links discussed, there is no institutionalised role, nor established channel for CSO contributions to education policy debates and processes. This suggests that the policy influence and role of VEPAC remains embryonic and limited.

## **Uneven Aid Relationships for EFA in PNG and Vanuatu**

Official Development Assistance (ODA) in PNG in the 1990s was selectively targeted and patchy, bypassing government structures and with little coordination between international and national actors. The short-term nature of projects contributed to weakness in local leadership and resulted in superficial improvements; excessive assessment, monitoring and implementation conditions are seen to have perpetuated the exclusion of local participants (Department of Education 1999; World Vision 2006). In addition, aid to PNG has been found to be largely focussed on physically accessible, safer places, so is potentially implicated in widening poverty gaps (Government of PNG, 2004).

Given their historical ties, and its regional strategic significance, PNG and Vanuatu have long been a priority in Australia's ODA scheme. AusAID funding represents the majority share of aid to education. Inherent in the relationship is both cooperation through attempts at genuine partnership, and dependency, with Australia's ongoing presence characterised as 'boomerang aid' and, at worst, self-interested neo-colonialism (Informants).

At the time of fieldwork in PNG, a donor coordination group was in the earliest stages of formation, with UNICEF designated as its lead agency to reduce the perception of AusAID as the dominant agency (AusAID, 2009; Informants). The PNG education sector-wide approach has been under development as the Education Sector Improvement Program, a component of AusAID's Education Capacity Building Project 2004-2015, since 2005 (AusAID, 2009). It involves participation of diverse stakeholders at local levels, although does not specify a channel for input or policy role for CSOs. A 2009 AusAID report assessing progress of the education SWAP noted that "More ongoing support is required if a sector-wide program is being advanced", cautioning more generally that:

A culture of preferring projects over other forms of aid was deeply embedded in the practice of Australian aid. This resulted in power and influence residing with managing contractors and the consultants they employ. This undermined capacity to develop joint strategies grounded in strong policy dialogue between AusAID and partner governments. In PNG in particular, the presence of a considerable volume of long-term technical assistance needs more detailed review. (AusAID, 2009, p.6)

Aid to Vanuatu has been characterised as fragmented, with a lack of co-ordination between government departments, but also between donors (Government of Vanuatu, 2004). Conditional for receiving aid, "Pressure from donors to produce comprehensive development strategies has produced documents with limited ownership across the administration" (Cox et al., 2007, p.iii).

The Vanuatu EFANAP makes two clear points related to how the role of donors in education is perceived. The first notes the disjointed nature of funding and how, "the still largely fragmented and uncoordinated aid for education is believed to be a major contributor to poor outcomes in education in Vanuatu" (Government of Vanuatu, 2004, p.17). The other point concerns curriculum content and the need for internal debate "as to what is education and what is it good for", which "is often taken for granted in the Western World" (Government of Vanuatu, 2004, p.73).

In relation to the first, regarding coordination, the formation of a donor group, the Education Partners Group (EPG) was an attempt to share information. The main donors to education making up the EPG include AusAID, NZAID, *Agence Francaise de Developpement*, the EU and UNICEF. Also represented were Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Peace Corps, which provided support in the form of volunteers, or "human resources" (Informants). The World Bank was described as a satellite or peripheral member of the EPG. China has some involvement in education, for example the Santo Agricultural College it

funded was reported as having a successful impact; however it does not attend the EPG (Informant).

Donor approaches to coordination were reportedly varied, and reflect not only the historical and linguistic rifts discussed above but also donor-nation legal and financial barriers (Informants). Donors' main focus has been basic formal education, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Informants revealed that civil society is not involved due to a perception that it may lead to fragmentation and a focus on micro-issues over policy considerations. An attempt made in 2007 to coordinate donor funds through the government under the Vanuatu Education Support Action Plan (VESAP) was at first identified as a sector-wide approach. It was, however, limited to basic formal education and to two donors and two government departments, and there has since been a deliberate move away from identifying it as a SWAp (Cassity, 2010; Informant).

No local CSO representation was found in national policy discussion and coordination groups in Vanuatu or PNG. EFANAP referred to CSOs primarily in relation to their responsibility for early childhood care and education and non-formal education. The education SWApS in both countries were financially based arrangements, initiated, led by and exclusive to donors and government. A lack of communication and coordination characterised relationships between these actors and education CSOs and their national coalitions. Surprisingly, the same was found of communication regarding CSO contributions and education within the major regional donor agency, where internal agency departments did not communicate or have knowledge of the respective education work of the other within PNG (Informants).

In the contexts of PNG and Vanuatu, radio, theatre and storytelling were influential genres and hybrid genres predominant both nationally and sub-nationally, alternately for advocacy, community education, information sharing and socialisation. Organisations such as *Wan Smol Bag* used these successfully in promoting marginalised EFA goals. Although partially funded by major donors, the importance of these activities for contributing to the realisation of a holistic and relevant EFA has been under-recognised in mainstream development approaches. Critical discourse analysis highlighted how information sharing at global, regional, sub-regional and state levels occurs through multiple media. In recent decades the availability, nature and reach of information has been transformed by the use of communication technologies including radio, websites and email. However, extremely uneven access to these technologies was found to have significant ramifications for engagement in, and processes of, educational development, again under-scoring the important role of CSOs in advocacy and in supporting the provision of information and services.

## **Conclusions**

Donor and government agencies in PNG and Vanuatu have pursued limited education policy partnerships and groupings, reflecting a more qualified and ambiguous form of state leadership. Although efforts at gaining broad input and participation have been made in relation to national education plan formation in

both countries, and the VESAP in Vanuatu, they have been one-off, and determined in nature and scope by governments and donors. CSOs expressed dissatisfaction at the selective inclusion of actors in these forums. Likewise, the lack of regularity or recognition of the continued importance of these contributions and exchanges constitutes a clear omission of critical actors from 'policy struggles' discussed at the start of the article. Indeed, it is telling that education CSO coalitions are internationally and regionally active and recognised, but were unknown to many national actors<sup>9</sup>. The preceding discussion has demonstrated the politics and related power relations characterising education policy processes.

A further omission derives from the emphasis placed by government and donor EFA policy approaches on the Millennium Development Goal of formal basic (primary) education. This has contributed to a three-fold marginalisation relating to the other EFA goals – through language; actors and funding. PNG and Vanuatu, with other countries in their region and sub-region, tackle important shared issues from perspectives of cultural, geographic and linguistic variation. This renders the need for regular education policy collaboration with civil society organizations and coalitions on education policy priorities more urgent. These are particularly challenging given communications limitations in highly decentralised and dynamic commercial, educational and social environments. The CSEF is promising in its potential for establishing strong channels and foundations for substantive national policy participation that addresses holistic conceptions of education and EFA. Expanding, maintaining, and realising this promise beyond the project end-date in 2012 will be the next challenge.

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<sup>9</sup> This is in spite of one observation that advocacy was focussing on other (not un-related) social and development issues, such as land reform (Informant).

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