

Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh & Evan Hamman (eds.) (2020). *Environmental law and governance in the Pacific: Climate change, biodiversity and communities*. Routledge. 328pp. pbk. ISBN: 978-0-3675-0289-8. US\$43.99.

Here is a monumental contribution to the global discourse, shedding light on the profound environmental challenges faced by the Pacific Island countries and territories (PICs). It serves as a critical exposition of the delicate balance these islands must strike in developing a governance regime that addresses their immediate environmental concerns as well as the gravity of the threat posed by climate change.

This work takes a dual approach: it meticulously addresses specific areas of environmental concern, such as the preservation of wetlands, protection of biological diversity, safeguarding of natural and cultural heritage, sustainably managing marine resources, and regulating mining activities: these are the lifeblood of these island nations, intricately tied to their cultural identity and economic survival. Yet, beyond these vital concerns lies a far graver reality: the very survival of the PICs is in play. In this review, the focus is on this latter theme, since the book dwells on this stark reality, while occasionally touching upon the broader environmental challenges that compound these PICs' plight.

Despite contributing less than 0.02% to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, PICs are on the frontlines of what the UNDP has described as a "triple planetary crisis": climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The economic, social, and environmental costs borne by these islands are staggering, threatening not just their livelihoods, but their very existence.

The book highlights the coexistence of formal legal frameworks, rooted in the common law and civil law traditions introduced through colonization, alongside deeply entrenched customary laws that have governed these societies for generations. This blending of legal traditions creates a unique and complex legal environment, but one that is essential to grasp when addressing environmental concerns in the region. Formal legal systems, often modelled after those of colonizing powers, bring with them a structure and set of principles that may clash with the customary practices and values of local communities. Vanuatu is cited as an example: its Constitution entrenches customary law as the primary source of law for lands held under customary forms of tenure.

The plural legal framework underscores the inherent complexity in crafting and implementing environmental laws that are both effective and culturally sensitive. It requires a nuanced understanding of how these legal systems interact, where they converge, and where they diverge. The book uses this foundational exposition to explore how these plural legal systems influence environmental governance in the PICs, shaping everything from resource management to the enforcement of environmental regulations. This backdrop is critical for anyone seeking to grasp the legal landscape of the PICs and the unique challenges they face in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation.

The book's authors delve into the critical challenges of mitigation, adaptation, and compensation for loss and damage in an insightful and thought-provoking manner. However, they fail to offer a deep analysis of the issue of (the lack of) financial resources in the PICs to adequately address these challenges. Finance is the 'elephant in the room'; leaving a significant gap in the discourse, one that scholars and policymakers must urgently address. The rousing words of Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, that "*Fiji, it its fight to save the planet and its people from the catastrophic impacts of climate change, is working to be a net-*

zero greenhouse gas emitter by 2050”, are encouraging but limited. The costs associated with mitigating and adapting to climate change – such as building resilient infrastructure, relocating communities, and restoring damaged ecosystems – are staggering. Compensation for loss and damage adds to this financial burden, placing a nearly insurmountable strain on their limited resources.

How else can PICs finance the necessary actions to ensure their survival in the face of climate change? One avenue worth exploring is the role of international financial mechanisms. Some frameworks, such as the Green Climate Fund and various insurance schemes, already exist; but these are often insufficient, inadequately funded, or mired in bureaucratic challenges that delay access to the critical resources. There is a pressing need for innovative financial solutions that go beyond traditional aid models; including debt relief, climate bonds, or more equitable distribution of climate finance that prioritizes the most vulnerable nations. Perhaps the debate should now move to the topic of climate reparations.

Climate reparations encompass a broad and complex range of proposals and actions and acknowledge that the pursuit of developmental objectives, beginning with the Industrial Age around 1760 in Great Britain and followed by a minority of nations, were underpinned by the use of fossil fuels. This dependency has led to a massive increase in GHG emissions, resulting in significant climate change. The concept acknowledges that the pursuit of developmental objectives, beginning with the Industrial Age around 1760 in Great Britain, were underpinned by the use of fossil fuels by a minority of nations. This dependence has continued for centuries, so inflicting profound economic and social harm on much of humanity, particularly in developing countries. Climate reparations recognise that climate change can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on developing countries. These impacts are mainly due to the overwhelming contribution of developed nations to GHG emissions. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" must translate into tangible support that meets the scale of the crisis.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the discourse on climate change and environmental law in the Pacific. PIC survival depends on homegrown strategies, but also on the global community’s commitment to providing the vital resources to implement those strategies. It is a clarion call to action. It lays bare the existential dilemma facing PICs and urges the global community to recognize that these islands’ destiny is inextricably linked to the broader fight against climate change, which is a global imperative.

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