Vanuatu Education Policy post-2015: 'alternative', decolonising processes for 'development'

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This article is based on ongoing research in Vanuatu and the wider Pacific. It maps multi-level roles that education and development policy actors, and civil societies in particular, have increasingly been playing in official education and development policy activities. Most recently this has been in relation to the 'post-2015' agendas and processes that contributed to creating the 'sustainable development goals'. I argue that the decolonising discourses of self-reliance that gained traction in national independence movements have maintained emphasis in Vanuatu civil society and government approaches to national education and development policy. In considering these processes, I employ critical discourse analysis to interrogate some implications of current global(-ized) discourses and frameworks for education and development through lenses of decolonising regional histories and dynamic geo-political regional power relations.

Dynamic, indigenous kastom beliefs and practices are central to most aspects of life for most ni-Vanuatu people (Regenvanu 2010). They have been a foundation for the recognition and revitalisation of the 'traditional economy' and 'alternative' visions of development (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs 2012). Related aspects of traditional/modern dialectics have long underpinned education and development processes and thinking; their negotiation at the interstices of complex economic, historical, and political changes through multi-level education, governance, and research relationships has been striking. The associated policy relationships are as rich and promising—and as disparate and varied—as those in the field of comparative and international education.

Keywords: Vanuatu, Melanesia, education and development policy, SDGs, SIDS, youth

INTRODUCTION

In Vanuatu's six provinces, consultation on the 2016-2030 National Sustainable Development Plan is underway as I write, following two years of government work on the plan (Cullwick 2016). Vanuatu is an archipelago of over eighty islands, each exposed to the variations of both natural and man-made environmental challenges that have significant influence not only on daily life, but also on approaches to planned 'development'. Vanuatu and its citizens, like many contexts and peoples in Oceania and elsewhere, continue to reconcile and recover identities that were challenged, even erased, during the colonial rule that was overthrown just a generation ago (Regenvanu, 1999; Sanga et al., 2004; Thaman, 1993). In spite of such legacies of suppression, multilingual *ni-Vanuatu* peoples, who collectively represent the highest national per capita number of languages in the world, have continued to live by the land and

ocean in alignment with related *kastom* beliefs and practices. There has been increasing formal policy articulation and recognition of what are identified as 'traditional'—or what, for the rest of the paper, in relation to Vanuatu and Melanesia, I refer to as *kastom*-oriented—approaches to 'development' and aspects of daily life.

In this article, I present analysis of the education and development policy environment of Vanuatu and, to a lesser extent, Melanesia, in which decolonizing, *kastom*-based discourses are simultaneously negotiated with international development initiatives within globally influenced policies for education. Dynamic, indigenous *kastom* beliefs and practices have been a foundation for the recognition and revitalisation of the 'traditional economy' and 'alternative' visions of development in Vanuatu, with increasing institutional support in the past decade (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, 2012; Regenvanu, 2010; Forsyth, 2014). The article first reviews contemporary discourses that underpin education and development approaches in Vanuatu, and relates them to multiple and multi-level interests that have been deployed discursively to frame ongoing issues and positions. Contemporary international development discourses and education programmes include: post-2015 processes that culminated in the sustainable development goals (SDGs); work on small island (developing) states (SIDS); 'new' developments in regionalism in Oceania and the Pacific islands; changing roles for a wider range of non-state actors; and a shifting policy focus on youth. I analyse these particularly in relation to non-government organisations in Vanuatu working in education and with youth, and their involvement in and knowledge of sub-regional and regional policy processes for building post-2015 and sustainable development agendas.

METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of education policy actors and processes has been the core methodological approach of this study. I have analysed written and enacted discourses in education policy activities, multi-level documentation, websites, groups and processes of the past decade (building on prior research into the EFA programme since 1990) through semi-structured interviews, observations and inter-textual and thematic text analysis. In CDA, key lenses of language, power and voice are central to understanding (and changing) naturalised social processes that may be inequitable or unjust (Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 2003; Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). Policy actors contribute to define and shape education policies through initiatives at multiple levels of activity, including through global social policy programmes such as Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and what were first 'post-2015' and then 'sustainable development' agendas (McCormick, 2016; 2014; 2012; 2011).

I complement the CDA approach with critical globalisation and postcolonial theoretical perspectives that have served to foreground decolonising regional histories (Bhaba, 1994; Tikly, 2004; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2015). Through this research, I have sought to identify and understand whose experience, knowledge and voices are included, and what kinds of contributions and roles they play in policy formation at multiple levels. This has involved investigating, for example, how participatory education and development policy processes are, and in what ways 'sustainability' has been deployed or understood. Driving questions for the research have included:

- (How) are multi-level processes inter-related? (How) do national and regional discourses and initiatives 'feed up'?

- (How) are global processes relevant to national and/or local contexts; (how) are they perceived as relevant?

Discussions with a range of Vanuatu education actors have provided powerful, if mixed, insights for better understanding these policy discourses and related processes.

More specifically, I have considered which civil societies and non-government actors have participated in education policy processes in Vanuatu. Also included is analysis and mapping of shifts in actors and participation of non-governmental education coalitions. I undertook twelve semi-structured interviews with government and non-government education policy actors in Port Vila in 2015, and where I had previously visited multiple times since 2009, including for doctoral research (McCormick 2014; 2012; 2011). I met with eight employees at six organisations and four from government agencies[i]. In order to maintain anonymity, I refer to individual participants throughout the paper by randomly designated letters of the alphabet. Interviews can offer only partial insights at particular moments in time. I am aware that particular aspects of my identity as a female, non-*ni-Vanuatu* researcher would have potentially influenced our interactions and perceptions in varying ways and to different degrees (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). As far as I could, I engaged with this aspect of researching as a 'foreign' guest in a society by discussing with participants my prior time in Vanuatu with my family, my professional and personal relationships, and previous work researching and teaching in the sub-region. I obtained approval to conduct the research from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) and the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee. I undertook to make all materials, including this article, available to the VCC and the participants who generously gave their time in what, I hope, was recognised as a mutual commitment to contributing, however modestly, to education and our understandings of it in our region.

The interviews for this research were undertaken just a month prior to Cyclone Pam in March of 2015, the implications of which cannot be documented in any substantive way here, but must be recognized as an example of the significance of climate-based vulnerabilities and contextual influences on education and development. This is particularly so for small islands in the Pacific Ocean in terms of exposure, infrastructure, recovery, and resources; indeed, Vanuatu is considered amongst the most 'vulnerable' in the world to natural disasters. On returning to Port Vila in November 2015 to co-host the regional education conference from which this Special Issue of the journal resulted, the damage to facilities, landscape, and even to the hub of the Vila market, were visible and yet already significantly restored in those few months. Conference delegates from 11 countries were impressed by the evident achievements, resilience and will of *ni-Vanuatu* people in the recovery efforts, and in offering a warm welcome (www.ocies.org). For the USP Emalus Campus and local accommodation, catering, and Ministry representatives to have agreed and contributed to hosting an international conference, that included a mini-lesson demonstration in Bislama, based on the national language policy, and so soon after a national disaster of such scale, merits our acknowledgement, respect and thanks being recorded again here.

MULTI-LEVEL EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSES, NETWORKS AND TRANSFER

For over a quarter of a century, formal global programmes of development— including EFA, the MDGs and now the SDGs—have attempted to frame funding and programmes of education

in nations, many of them former colonies, that are identified as developing or poor by various measures. In many aid-receiving countries, tensions have long-existed between these and locally-derived approaches embedded in decolonising aims and practices[ii]. Often, conformity to externally pre-defined, 'measurable', international development conditions or indicators has been required in order to receive funding (Sanga, 2011; Thaman, 1993).

Alongside associated multi-level negotiation processes for education and development, the long-existing community, *kastom*-based approaches such as those seen in Vanuatu's celebration of the traditional economy, or the sub-regional Melanesian 'Alternative Indicators for Development' programme, have not until recently 'counted' as 'development' (Malvatumauri, 2012). As *ni-Vanuatu* anthropologist, former head of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and politician Ralph Regenvanu has frequently written (1999; 2010), the prioritisation of a model of formal schooling aimed at employment in either bureaucratic government roles or a 'global economy', and derived from what are now post-industrial societies, has not proven appropriate or successful for the majority of the Vanuatu population. Such a version of development has been aligned with a particular manifestation of modernity or modernisation, and a liberal capitalist version of progress that is oriented to consumption, productivity, economic growth, and global economic integration on that basis, and the form and role of education within it as geared toward that purpose (Tikly, 2004; Shuurman, 2009; Regenvanu, 2010).

There have, of course, been mixed interpretations and levels of support for these and other visions, and how to achieve them. Acknowledgement and incorporation of what have been identified as locally relevant aspects of sustainable approaches to education and development in Vanuatu, as elsewhere in the region, have increased (Malvatmauri, 2012; Forsyth, 2014). As one observer very clearly put it: "…focusing on the formal economy as a top priority will not foster sustainable development outcomes in Vanuatu...." (Forsyth, 2014, p.1). Such seeming disjuncture with aspects of official development aid discourses and practice began even before struggles for independence a generation ago, thus representing continuity for Vanuatu and the region (Regenvanu, 1999; Sanga et al., 2004). Calls for ongoing decolonisation and increased autonomy of approach and participation were included in national EFA plans, and again reflected in regional critiques of the MDGs that were widely asserted in the post-2015 preparation stages (McCormick, 2014).

Government and civil society leaders' regional reflections in the aftermath of the global program of the MDGs have been consistent with long-expressed messages about aid and education (McCormick, 2014). They identified what was useful about the MDGs, and what was omitted—in word and/or deed. In particular, the focus of strategy and delivery on formal primary schooling to the neglect of ECCE, adult literacy, and quality has been widely noted in the sub-region. These concerns were expressed in regional 'post-2015' documentation and fora, including the Pacific Framework and Pacific Plan review process (Republic of East Timor, 2013). Their related views on future directions for policy focus include: a call for genuinely participatory policy processes, and for ownership; "management" of external donor and multinational interests; inclusion of a range of not-for-profit and private actors (however not-for-profit organisations contested the unequal degrees of access and representation for private actors), and a need for 'alternative', contextual conceptions of poverty and well-being.

While statements delivered by *ni-Vanuatu* politicians in high-level post-2015 agenda processes, for example by the Prime Minister or UN representative, have been more qualified in their apparent acceptance of growth-oriented development approaches than those of not-for-

profit civil society organisations, there is still an unequivocal message regarding the need for ownership, equity, and equality in development processes. In late 2015, at the Post-2015 Development Summit, the then Prime Minister asserted that,

> *...development cooperation must become more effective and aligned to country programs and goals. Development aspirations must be country driven, firmly grounded in national development policies and practices. Development partners must make predictable and readily available financing, immune from conditionality, to SIDS and LDCs... implemented through an approach that is open, transparent, data driven and that deviates from' business-as-usual. Our approach must shift from a north-south framework of interaction... reviewing development priorities and the way in which resources are channelled... (GoV, 2015).*

In light of environmental changes and other shared policy concerns, there has been an intensification of the activities and networking between SIDS worldwide, framed in the Barbados Plan of Action and Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2014). The Prime Minister also refers to the discourse on SIDS, emphasising that, "For small developing island states like Vanuatu, resources must be channelled to genuinely boost human resources and production capacities" (GoV, 2015).

Education actors and organisations in Vanuatu share information and skills through multi-level links and in 'triangular' cooperation with traditional donors and 'southern' donor partners. The regional CSO Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)—funded by Australia, New Zealand and a range of donors and international non-governmental organisations—has served as a uniting organisation in areas of advocacy and research training, information sharing, and resource mobilisation for a number of Pacific and Melanesian countries, including PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Moreover, national education CSO coalitions in Melanesia—Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy (PEAN), Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy (VEPAC) and Cooperation in Education in Solomon Islands (COESI)—have been united for regional information sharing and training sessions. They have created networks and carved spaces in education policy deliberations for EFA and national strategies, within which they have been building their platforms for post-2015 and SDG engagement (ASPBAE, 2016; VEPAC, 2013; McCormick, 2014). Furthermore, a range of new mechanisms for funding, monitoring and sharing is emerging, for example online tracking such as that on the SDG Philanthropy Platform, where contributions are measured and analysed against SDGs retrospectively to 2010 http://sdgfunders.org/sdgs/goal/quality-education/lang/en/.

Through these kinds of advocacy, funding and networking activities, the related policy architecture for the SDGs has expanded to take in a wider range of non-state actors, of which not-for-profit civil society is just one part. However, although processes have 'widened' since formation of the MDGs and EFA, they remain technicised in terms of agency approaches at multiple levels, and politicised (ASPBAE 2014). Examples of other regional contributions to the post-2015 processes include a University of the South Pacific (USP) Youth Forum feeding into UNDP post-2015 processes and promotion through a Pacific youth Facebook group. However, as one Port Vila participant from a youth organization stated unequivocally, "global and regional goals support national and local aims, not vice-versa" (B). The next sections consider how national organisations in Vanuatu viewed and participated in the post-2015 processes and development of the SDGs.

VANUATU PERSPECTIVES

As a number of participants observed, Vanuatu and, particularly Port Vila, has a large range of active non-government and civil society organisations relative to the size of the community. There are many organisations working in different areas of education and with youth. Over the years, organisations' degree of activity and survival has depended externally on funding continuity, delivery and scale, and internally on leadership and will. The Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy Coalition (VEPAC) has become significantly more active in recent years for all of these reasons, and in relation to the connectivity and networks with groups throughout the sub-region and regionally through the ASPBAE as discussed above. VEPAC members, like those of the other coalitions in Melanesia, include local and national organisations—NGOs, teachers' unions, churches, women's, and other issue-focused organisations—but, as some participants noted, not all organisations working in education in Vanuatu are members of VEPAC. One felt that there were competing aims, and that as an organisation they instead needed to focus on their activities, while another was unclear about the nature of VEPAC's work, beyond the literacy survey conducted in Shefa in 2010. That survey was commended a number of times for having offered a very useful, if sobering, insight into the state of literacy in that province—Participant D described the levels of literacy found as a "shock to the community"—and for galvanising increased interest and will.

While the governance of these formal groups is increasingly recognisable as 'modern' or 'Western', it is important to underscore that *ni-Vanuatu* communities and people have long been bound in many activities, beliefs, language and, especially, relationships, by *kastom.* In this sense there have been long traditions of active, informal civil society that both echoes and is entwined with the real influence of the traditional economy and in which *kastom* activities are implicated. An example of this is the woven mat education, making, offering and trading as promoted in a recent project by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre; VCC's cadre of field workers throughout the islands has at different times played pivotal roles in education around these and other forms of civic engagement. The Pacific Institute for Public Policy (PIPP) is another organisation that is currently playing a highly active role at multiple levels related to the promotion of the SDGs. The PIPP's work in this area included the Ministry of Education's citizenship curriculum, which involved a high school debating competition that culminated in a final round on SDGs held in Parliament house with Ministerial and Department of Education representation, and other distinguished observers (McGarry, 2015). Wan Smol Bag is another local organisation that has been highly active in youth and education policy and practice in a range of ways and at multiple levels, throughout both Vanuatu and elsewhere in the region, but is yet again different to both of those just described in its foci on health and youth.

A number of participants referred to successes in education resulting from formal donor, government and community policy initiatives and planning over the past decade. These included the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy (VESS), the Vanuatu Education Road Map (VERM) and VERM's successor the Vanuatu Education Sector Programme (VESP). These all tied in with the wider development programme seen in the Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA) national development plan that precedes the national sustainable development plan that is currently being negotiated (GoV, 2006). The core education aim in the PAA plan was to, "Develop a distinctively ni-Vanuatu education system" that would, "empower future generations to become self-reliant in managing their own life and careers as individual members of their community, society and the nation as a whole" (GoV, 2006). Among other initiatives supporting the achievement of that aim have been the school grants and the national

language policy. One participant (E) noted that these activities have better responded to education needs in the provinces. Participant J also emphasised the positive responses of communities to tangible signs of action and change through the VESP goals for literacy and numeracy, and reported that they see that benefits are reaching rural communities where they may not have previously, for example in the language kits and support for teachers. Another participant (I) did highlight differences in policy and implementation, for example in relation to the well-regarded school grants programme, and in headmasters' understandings of policy, seen as still at times unclear.

The following sub-sections present insights gained from analysis of the interviews along two main lines of inquiry: the education actors and organisations involved in contributions to education and their knowledge of and involvement in processes for post-2015 and sustainable development agendas; and the cooperation, partnerships and integration of organisations in national and multi-level policy planning and processes. I then briefly discuss participants' additional perspectives on the post-2015 and SDGs, and Appendix 1 outlines ten targets tied to SDG4 for education, and relates them to the Vanuatu education context and policies.

Education organisations and post-2015 and SDG processes

Of the 12 participants interviewed, six responded that they had not heard of the post-2015 or SDG processes, while the other six knew of the post-2015 and SDG processes, and that their organisation had been either indirectly or directly involved. One participant had been directly involved in the multi-level policy deliberation processes themselves in relation to youth. Five considered that they had been indirectly involved.

Participant A worked for a government-affiliated department that had initially started discussing post-2015 two years previously, but reported that it was never a focus in the local education partners' group. However, other education partner group members were aware that the coalition VEPAC, also a member (discussed above), had made a submission about post-2015 processes. Participant B had been involved directly in two consultations, those at national and international levels related to the national sustainable development plan and the UNDP, also with input into the provincial development plans in 2014 and 2015. This participant strongly supported youth contributions and had mobilised discussions amongst youth in communities, with a view that even if they were not directly involved in the national sustainable development plan they could have input into the national meeting on issues such as economy, environment, and culture. The development of the PAA discussed above, had included national processes linked to the post-2015 dialogues. Participant C, whose organisation was not directly involved, was aware of 'rivalries' and agendas among different education actors, leading at times to some difficulty reaching consensus. Another participant (J), working with a government department, asserted the importance of community, and supported an 'opposite end' approach to outcomes, noting that community demand will be the 'big change' in terms of education provision.

Previously in this article I highlighted that in two areas—the economy and civil society— distinctions were made between formal and informal approaches. A similar sense of a division, whether artificial or partial, emerged in discussing and meeting with different departments and organisations in terms of informal and formal approaches to education.

For example, Participant K, from an organisation working with out of school youth in Port Vila and throughout the islands, works regularly with external providers through the National

Training Council and the organisation is partially funded by Oxfam International. Participant K said that at times there was some ambiguity for education in terms of which Ministry should be responsible. Indeed, Participant D referred to formal and non-formal education, which is managed by a separate Ministry, as 'parallel systems', and Participant I who works at an organisation involved in education and governance succinctly expressed that there is, "no cohesive body for education". Yet, despite this, many of these individuals and groups also discussed how they work together, as is detailed more in the next section.

Partnerships and integration of organisations in national and multi-level policy planning and processes

Participants discussed existing education networks within Vanuatu and the region, such as the VEPAC education coalition discussed previously and others for early childhood, women, and youth. Some of these are relatively new, and partnerships between ministries and other organisations have taken more consistent and cohesive forms with some actors and sub-sectors in recent years; for example, the early childhood education network is an area in which work has expanded rapidly in Vanuatu in recent years. Other examples are the networks developed around the SWAp (VESP), and the memorandum of understanding between VEPAC and the Ministry of Education. There is also inter-ministry coordination between the Tertiary and Further Education ministry, the Department for Youth and Non-formal Education, the Ministry of Education and the Commonwealth of Learning and Distance Education (Participant D). Individual organisations reported that they have collaborated and engaged in discrete projects within VESP, for example on different aspects of curriculum, civics education in high schools, work on Bislama resources, and in teacher education through the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) (Participants B, C, H, I and K). A range of other fruitful collaborations, related particularly to youth education, were reported, for example on the Pacific Leadership Programme, with the youth parliament, national youth council and Transparency International. Participants D and J commented that such integration is being deliberately extended, although time pressures between ongoing, daily work and innovation and reflection have been the reason that it has not happened more cohesively or rapidly. Almost all of those interviewed noted the pressures of time even while recognising the benefits, importance and utility of advocacy, sharing information, and working together. There were mixed expressions regarding the extent of integration and clarity of activities, positions, and roles in relation to others working in education.

Some additional observations emerged during the interviews that are worth considering in relation to multi-level education and development policy processes. Participant A recognised the 'different' mood around the SDGs as compared to the positivity that was tied to the 'newness' of MDGs, as the first concerted global agenda for development, and referred to the SDG's broader targets and increased numbers of indicators.

A key concern from a number of participants was related to youth. Participant B told how in its 2009 census, the Ministry established that 66% of Vanuatu's population is under 30; "youth is the context of the constituency". As Participant C stated, young people are pushed out of the formal system at secondary level because of costs, space, and people's relative lack of mobility in a nation where transport costs are extremely high and the majority of the population live in rural and remote locations. They emphasised the recognition of different needs amongst youth in different areas. Where employment is critical for urban youth, capital and the development of their own land are priorities for rural youth. In addition, Participant K discussed the range

of national recruitment and awareness raising activities to engage with youth, including print and radio media, Facebook, direct letters, and through youth leaders and church communities.

In emphasising the precedence of the local and national over the global goals, Participant B cited the importance of the most recent Education Act[iii], also raised by Participant D, as something that will have real, tangible effects. A related point was made about school-based management, and the concern that students or youth representation is not present. In response to my mention of "Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together"—a book resulting from the Vanuatu conference in the regionally networked Rethinking Education in the Pacific Initiative (RPEI) and the PRIDE programme (Sanga et al, 2004)—during an interview, Participant J commented that in their view it discusses all the existing and long-standing issues, but that "timing, will and support are factors" in how and whether long-standing and acknowledged issues are addressed.

EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR VANUATU AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

The National Sustainable Development Plan for Vanuatu 2016-2030 is due for release later in 2016 (Cullwick, 2016). If all parties apply 'lessons learned', it could bring the nation closer to its long and frequently articulated self-reliance, and distinctly *ni-Vanuatu* vision, during a period that will also be framed by the SDGs. That global programme should, as asserted by one organisation leader, serve to support local needs and plans and not international or institutional interests. Perhaps inevitably, in light of the plurality that characterises the islands' geography, history and peoples, community dissonance during the consultation process has been reported. Some support promoting 'Christian Principles' as the basis of the plan, while others maintain the primacy of '*kastom mo kalja'*, (Bislama for *ni-Vanuatu* custom and culture), the latter supported by the President of Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs (Cullwick, 2016). It is the latest example in the 'young' nation's postcolonial history that challenges whether and how reconciliation between the sets of interests and priorities discussed in this article could or should be reached, either discursively within the plan that has undergone such attentive construction, or in the education and development strategies that its purpose is to support. A set of relationships that merits further investigation is that between youth movements and organisations and formal education actors and education ministries. It became evident that, as both non-government and government participants expressed, 'youth' processes were in many ways de-linked from formal education processes. While common education aims and activities were highlighted, in many cases only piecemeal connections existed.

Critical analysis of discourse can assist in better understanding the changing frames of reference that first serve to justify activities and spending conducted in the name of various types of 'development', and then to legitimate their actualisation. CDA also serves to locate the policy stakeholders who participate in the promotion and realisation of what are, at times, disparate visions. As documented in this research, national and regional perspectives expressed by both government and non-state actors have remained emphatic that local needs and *kastom*-oriented development perspectives should not be subordinated to the requirements of global programmes. Also strongly asserted is that processes of development must change, even as some gains have been acknowledged. The question remains of how this will be borne out in relation to those aspects of the SDGs that continue to promote a type of development and

education—or academic schooling that is geared to serving formal, 'modern' economies—in environments such as Vanuatu where they may be only partially relevant, and serve only parts of the population. Resources for education expansion are likely to remain a challenge for some time in the contemporary global financial and political climate. Likewise, the repeated reported existence of corruption may continue to slow progress to equitable provision of relevant education based on principles of social justice, whichever vision of that justice is supported. As Participant B evocatively captured it, "If there's no space for corruption then it won't continue, but if there's no light on it then it flourishes". The endemic corruption, to which a number of participants referred, has been cited as one of the justifications for the conditionality associated with aid to education noted at the start of the article.

Despite enduring tensions in embracing 'alternative' versions of genuinely sustainable 'development', however, in Vanuatu strikingly significant changes in recognised participation and process *have* been evident, and continue to extend. Evidence of these changes is in the support of Ministries, the participation of non-state actors—albeit to mixed degrees and response—and more broadly consultative, multi-level processes. In these ways actors and organisations can maintain and strengthen the important solidarities within national and (sub)regional relationships that they have been building, and consolidate regional and sub-regional learning, sharing and support in continued decolonisation. These discourses, initiatives and the relationships that support them could serve as models for decolonising and multi-level processes in which a wider range of actors legitimately negotiate and seek to reconcile elements of 'modern' with 'traditional' in approaches to education, development and sustainability. For some, such formal recognition of these possibilities for policy and practice as is being supported in Vanuatu and other Melanesian contexts is very long overdue.

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APPENDIX 1

Targets for Sustainable Development Goal 4

SDG4 Target	Key Issues for Vanuatu
4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Participants noted the high 'push out' at secondary level, and provisions of non-formal education and life skills or out of school youth. Other concerns were the lack of relevance of academic curricula noted elsewhere in Pacific island states, and language challenges. The SDG school debate and Ministry of Education's citizenship curriculum are an example of how this is being addressed (McGarry 2015).
4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	This was signaled as a priority goal in Vanuatu in the PAA and EFA documentation, with significant activity since 2010. There was a summit for the first time on ECE in 2013. Ministry and partners Save the Children, World Vision and DFAT - in the early 2000's there was little discussion and only the *Priskul* association was identified as active.
4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	Vanuatu Institute of Technology, VI Teacher Education, Rural Training Centres, the Maritime College, USP the Agriculture College AusAID/DFAT TVET program scaled up by government and transferred to local ownership, with associated accreditation program
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	Youth organisations playing key roles in this area Successful development of TVET policy AusAID/DFAT TVET program scaled up by government and transferred to local ownership, with associated accreditation program
4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	Organisations active in these areas Some participants underscored the strength of *kastom* practices with different roles for men and women
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Participants noted as central to VESP goals, and delivering improvements to communities World Vision has worked in adult literacy. It has been noted as an area of the EFA and MGD programs that has been widely neglected by donors and governments.
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable	This was not addressed or raised by the participants who were aware of the SDGs. The organization Live and Learn has been active in Vanuatu in education for sustainable development.

development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	
4.8a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	Significant work on the SWAp and school grant program including through the VESP and VERM.
4.8b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries	There has been repeated alleged corruption related to scholarships and decision-making processes in Vanuatu, as in other aid-receiving nations. Vanuatu participates in SIDS fora and discursive activities.
4.8c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States	A number of participants shared details of the significant effort that has been put into teacher education and support for teachers throughout the islands through and since the SWAp. Challenges of the bilingual system have been noted in various places. Remote communities; high proportion of recurrent budget allocated to salaries. PAA was to increase qualified teachers (GoV 2006); remains a challenge.

Notes

[1] Budget and mutual time constraints prevented me from meeting with actors in other organisations as I had hoped, but since I am to some extent familiar with their work and some is documented I have also taken them into consideration in the analyses.

[2] For example the 1970s Tololo Committee and Matane report in Papua New Guinea, or more recent Pacific-wide PRIDE programme (Coxon and Munce, 2008).

[3] The Education Act Number 9 (2014) was passed with seven principle objectives, the first of which is "to provide early childhood and care, primary and secondary education which is firmly based on Vanuatu cultures and beliefs". See:
http://moet.gov.vu/docs/acts/Education%20Act_No.%209%20of%202014.pdf