

Neo-extractive Realities, Post-extractivist futures: Pacific Women and Feminist Development Alternatives

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Post-Extractivism in the Pacific: Development Possibility or Myth?

In some South states, there is already policy discussion on a post-extractivist development. Latin American States, for example, have already moved to official counter-positions on extractivism with their new constitutions. Such are the cases of Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela. However, the extent to which post-extractivism is fully conceptualised in States and realised in policy and practice, is debatable. Indeed, some south ecologists and feminists point to such shifts as yet 'neo' rather than post-extractivist, with major negative impacts on local communities and now state defended as 'anti-neocolonialist' and 'people-oriented development'.^[1]

In the Pacific, despite strong political presence in climate change meetings and rhetoric in Rio+20 sustainable development tracks, regional policy language is still firmly fixed on 'green' growth - and while the reality on the ground, decidedly 'extractivist brown'. Policy-wise, there is not that much that is yet transformative. Of late, there had been recent increased references to 'caution', 'balance' and 'regulatory preparations'. Unfortunately, thus far this had meant EEZ Marine Parks and MPAs as offsets to ocean mining sites, deep-sea mining regulatory frameworks, and post Rio+20 references to commitments to 'blue-green economies' and 'sustainable mining'.

While it is somewhat curious that the 2011 Pacific Leaders Waiheke Declaration on Sustainable Development is entirely silent on mining ^[2] in this Pacific boom period, it is also understandable. Mining has historically been present through Pacific colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial eras, and the environmental and social impact has been significant.^[3] It has become standard fare to blame State governance, corruption and militarism for the chaotic, dirty and exclusionary state conditions of extractive development. But transnational corporations (TNCs), north states and donors, Pacific elite and other development cowboys and dysfunctional regional politics, are as much at play in the mess that is today's Pacific mining.

Nor is mining the only extractivist industry in the region. The recent Western and Central Pacific Commission (WCPFC) meeting in December 2012 ended with a temporary measure that allowed big fishing nations to continue to overfish bigeye tuna at 40% above sustainable levels. So the extent to which Parties to the Nauru Agreement ^[4] will be politically and technically supported to defend regional fisheries is shaping up as a major test for Pacific and global sustainable development. Will Pacific fisheries continue in an extractive and unsustainable way, or can the largest fishing nations be made to reduce quotas, for long-term good?

Gender, Economic and Ecological Justice (GEEJ): Pacific feminists leading regional change

In all regions of the economic South – Asia, Africa, Latin America and Pacific, DAWN and its allied women advocates assert that State prioritisation of extractive industries promotes an agri-business focus, and resultant neglect of subsistence agriculture. They are demanding more sustainable economic development policies and programs. In a recent declaration, Asia Pacific women point out that this underscores the fallacy of automatic links between economic growth and improved development outcomes.[5] Many at the GEEJ-Pacific meeting agreed, and showed particular resistance to Pacific aid and development assistance models that they say, enable these externally-focused economic paradigms which only serve the geo-political agendas of north states. These include the ubiquitous fly-in youth volunteer and intern schemes, leadership programmes, steady stream of development experts, and all connected through international consultancies and aid agencies that paid vast sums to advise local communities, including in mining, forestry and agricultural districts. Relatedly, since the 2007-8 global financial crisis, activists noted that ODA is increasingly channelled through origin-country 'boomerang' private contracts, so that benefits to receiving states in effect are far less than their stipulated dollar value. This blurring of private and public development regimes brings slippery and contradictory State policies, as Island states and CSOs weave their way through these complicated landscapes.

As part of a response, Pacific feminists are more explicitly situating bodies into all structural arguments and policy options. They insist that individual and community rights cannot ever be bargained away when states negotiate wider economic, trade and environmental agreements in guaranteeing social reproduction such as health, education, water, and livelihoods. The conceptual seeds of post-extractivist development are here, but bringing these futures into reality will be more fraught and slower than hoped, when considering the stressed state of the earth and its ecosystems.

They are increasingly demanding that states must protect and promote the rights of women, men and transpeople to control their bodily autonomy and integrity, gender identities and sexualities, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. They point to the very poor regional performance on rates of women in national legislature at a static 2.5% since 1995, and that an alarming seven in 10 Pacific women report experiencing intimate partner violence. A less acknowledged form of state and societal violence is against Pacific women and trans*people with non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity, demonstrating urgent need for more interlinkage work on gender, economic, ecological and erotic justice.[6]

Most of all, Pacific feminists and women's rights advocates are now challenging labels such as 'anti-development', 'anti-indigenous' or 'anti tradition and culture'. They are no longer shying away from raising the sensitive issues linked to their human rights, nor anymore prepared to work in siloes. Rather, they are carefully and pragmatically building ties with other social movements, and looking for transformative levers to move work on gender equality, economic, ecological and erotic justice - in global spaces, and especially in the Pacific.

End-notes:

[1] Gudynas, E. Quoted in Marrero, C.R. 'The New Latin American "Progresismo" and the Extractivism of the 21st Century' <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/4025>

[2] <http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/newsroom/press-statements/2012/femm-to-lead-implementation-of-waiheke-declaration.html>

[3] Phosphate (Nauru, French Polynesia and Banaba); Gold (Fiji); nickel (New Caledonia); copper (Bougainville - where the mining tensions resulted in a PNG/Bougainville civil war that killed tens of thousands), and manganese (Vanuatu). In Solomon Islands there was gold until the forced mine closure in 2000. In Papua New Guinea the size and diversity of mining is regionally unmatched with 50% of export value, perhaps more today. There is also mining in Indonesian-governed West Papua, where resistance groups carry out a 40+-year struggle for independence of this Melanesian society. Primary causes for continued presence of Indonesia are richness of mines, and Pacific and other global political silence due to Indonesia's geo-political role in the region. The UN has been muted in response, perhaps due to the ironically named, 'Act of Free Choice' UN facilitated Referendum (1969) handing control to Indonesia.

[4] PNA Members are Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. PNA controls around 30% of the global tuna supply.

[5] The Future Asia Pacific Women Want: Outcome Statement from women's and civil society networks and organizations present at the Regional Dialogue on Sustainable Development and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Convened by DAWN and APGEM in collaboration with UNWomen Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. 3-5 November 2012, Bangkok.

[6] Nabulivou, N, Spence, R, Tuitoga, A and Tagi, S. Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA) Collective - Fiji Constitutional Submission. 2012. Suva, Fiji.