



## PACIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE TALANOA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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I was taught at a young age that if I break something, I have to take responsibility for it. This old adage came to mind when I was in Suva last week attending the second Climate Action Pacific Partnership (CAPP2). Everyone agrees that in the age of humans (the Anthropocene), it seems humans have broken the global climate system badly, and have yet to take responsibility for repairing it. The CAPP2 aims to reset the climate conversation in the Pacific.

The CAPP2 was hosted by Hon. Frank Bainimarama, Fiji's Prime Minister and also President of Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (COP23). It was a follow up to the first CAPP event also hosted by Fiji in Suva in July 2017, in the lead up to COP23 in Bonn in November 2017.

The CAPP is premised on the use of the *talanoa*, a Pacific concept of engaging and dialoguing in an open and frank conversation, based on respect, and without fear of being judged.

The CAPP2 *talanoa's* objective was to seek ambitious climate actions from Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) and other stakeholders to the Paris Agreement (Paris Accord) in 2015. The goals of the Paris Agreement are:

- to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial level (not defined during the Paris negotiations);
- to aim to limit the increase to 1.5°C, since this would significantly reduce risks and the impacts of climate change;
- the need for global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to peak as soon as possible, recognising that this will take longer for developing countries; and
- to undertake rapid GHG emission reductions thereafter, in accordance with the best available science.

To achieve these goals, every world citizen – rich or poor and regardless of ethnicity and status – needs to take responsibility to not only act but scale up their climate action as enshrined in

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the so-called 'ratchet mechanism' (also referred to as the 'ambitious mechanism') of the Paris Accord.

One outcome of the Paris Agreement is already certain: it will not succeed in limiting temperatures to below 2°C. This has been repeated *ad infinitum*, by studies, by politicians and climate analysts – like Climate Action Tracker, the World Resource Institute and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The 2°C limit has been enshrined as the main aim of the UN climate negotiations since 2010 – so why is it not already being labelled a failure? The answer lies with the 'ratchet mechanism' of the Paris Agreement. It aims to ensure that policies and measures (PAMs) to deal with climate change become progressively more ambitious over time. A stocktake of each Parties to the Paris Agreement ambitious PAMs is to take place every 5 years starting in 2015. The next stocktake will take place in 2020.

Invited participants to the CAPP2 were requested to submit ambitious PAMs worth promoting in the upcoming COP24, to be co-hosted by Fiji and Poland in Katowice in December 2018. PICTs discussed a number of PAMs ideas via the *talanoa* (story telling) session on how they jointly and individually, are developing and/or implementing their ambitious PAMs. As climate advisor to Tokelau, one of the participating PICTs at CAPP2, I considered my preferred choices on PAMs ideas worth sharing from Tokelau's perspective.

On mitigation, Tokelau is the first island to claim the almost 100% (90%) renewable energy for power generation tag with the installation of solar PV systems on all of her 3 islands. But everyone knows that the Tokelau (and all PICTs) share of the climate burden (GHG emissions) is so minute in the global GHG emissions scheme of things that it represents merely a minute drop in the atmosphere. It is nowhere, for example, near the scale of GHG emissions from bunker fuels sector alone – at 4% of global emissions in 2015-2016.

On adaptation, there is not much Tokelau can do other than enhancing the resilience of their natural systems and sectors. Thus, from Tokelau and PICTs perspectives, fixing the broken climate is the responsibility of the international community, in particular, the large GHG emitter parties. Any hope of achieving the Paris Agreement goals is dependent on large GHG emitter parties taking full responsibility to reduce their GHG emissions immediately, regardless of the economic costs. They must demonstrate leadership in solving the climate crisis.

The common issues for PICTs emerging from the CAPP2 discussions, include but are not limited to the following:

- PICTs are the most vulnerable to climate change, sea level rise, in particular extreme events, but have contributed least to the crisis
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are highly insufficient and non-legally binding
- Mitigation measures are urgently needed at the international level
- Adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change – extreme events in particular and sea level rise – are the highest priorities
- Climate Finance - Fair and equitable allocation of climate finance between mitigation and adaptation measures
- Paris Agreement applicable to all Parties (differentiation principle)

- Must set legally binding ambitious global emission targets towards decarbonization, zero net carbon
- Ratchet Mechanism, a political pacemaker to strengthen ambition to be taken seriously
- Transparency framework
- Promote long term perspective: new climate horizons
- Loss and Damage & Displacement and Migration: new pillars of climate policy
- International cooperative approaches – what basis for market mechanisms?
- Technology Transfer, Capacity Building
- Climate-Ocean nexus
- Blue economy considerations

CAPP2 participants unanimously agreed the fine print of the rules (Paris Agreement Work Plan or Rulebook) governing the above must be finalised and adopted at COP24.

All sounds good. But I would not fully rely on Parties' NDC commitments alone. Here is why. I have realised after 28 years of climate negotiations, that the key to repairing the broken climate now is to deal with the source of the problem (i.e., heavy reliance on fossil fuels since 1850) and fast-track the development of “planetary scale” technological solutions (e.g., climate engineering technologies such as carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and solar geoengineering that have yet to be fully research and developed).

Many of the mitigation measures enshrined in the Paris Agreement NDCs are in areas that are scientifically quantifiable - energy, agriculture, waste, land use, land use changes and forestry. These would not be enough. Moreover, the Paris Agreement also avoids regulating GHG emission reductions from bunker fuels from international transport sector (aviation and shipping) – one of the fastest growing emission sectors worldwide. But the mother of all climate policy tools that has yet to be seriously regulated and remains at the heart of the climate challenge is ‘fossil fuel subsidy reform.’ And this is the focus of Tokelau’s submission to the CAPP2 last week.

Using the three questions provided in the CAPP2 submission guideline – *Where we are? Where do we want to go? and How do we get there?* – our delegation drafted the fossil fuel subsidy reform proposal (see Box 1 for key points of the proposal). A copy of the full proposal is available on request from LeA International.

In an era where fixing the broken climate is unavoidable as a result of accumulated impacts of humanity on our planet and its climate, it is critical that **fossil fuel subsidy reform** must be at the core of current international climate policy making. We need to expose its fundamental role in catalysing the transition away from the present fossil fuel-based economy to a clean energy, decarbonize-based economy. Yet, in much of the world of climate diplomacy, discussing fossil fuel subsidy reform is taboo – economic growth is lauded above reforming fossil fuel subsidy. And in dealing with fossil fuel subsidy reform, our aim has to be real climate actions, not just ambitious actions. One can be ambitious, but does not act. Actions speak louder than ambitious intentions. It is the choices we make. As the Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga passionately articulated during the Pacific Leaders CAPP2 dialogue in Suva, *“Save Tuvalu, Save the World.”* Saving Tuvalu and the world is more than a choice, it is a responsibility.

## Box 1: FOSSIL FUEL SUBSIDY REFORM

### *Where we are?*

- Given the fundamental role fossil fuels play in all facets of the global economy, without fossil fuel subsidy reform, reaching the Paris Agreement ambitious goals of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels”<sup>1</sup> and other SDGs of Agenda 2030, will not be met.
- Fossil fuel use is the primary source of CO<sub>2</sub> (Boden, et al, 2017).
- Global carbon emissions from fossil fuels have significantly increased since 1900 (IPCC, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. Since 1970, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have increased by about 90%, with emissions from fossil fuels (combustion and industrial processes, Agriculture, deforestation, and other land use changes) contributing about 78% of the total greenhouse emissions increase from 1970 to 2011.
- Global fossil fuel subsidies (USD425 billion spent globally per year (2015)) could finance the global energy and decarbonization access funding gap - 7.5 times over (Zinecker, A., et al., 2018). While OECD countries committed USD 8.3 billion annually for development assistance to the energy sector in 2015 and 2016, they spent 10 times as much to support fossil fuels.<sup>1</sup>
- In our own region, a mixed picture in terms of the greening of fiscal instruments and subsidies in the PICTs to achieve environmental objectives (Watkins, E., et al., (2018)): Some progress is undoubtedly being made, but some instruments appear more successful than others (both in terms of raising revenues and achieving environmental outcomes). It is also evident that more still needs to be done in the PICTs to bring about further reform of environmentally harmful taxes and subsidies<sup>1</sup>.

### *Where do we want to go?*

- At their best, untargeted fossil fuel consumption subsidies are an inefficient and unjust tool for improving energy access.
- Smart strategies for fossil fuel subsidy reform can boost sustainable energy access and opportunity for innovative global climate resilient decarbonization businesses and investments
- Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption... taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.

### *How do we get there?*

Three approaches (enabling conditions) to accelerate energy access through fossil fuel subsidy reform: REMOVE: Phase out fossil fuel subsidies that have no or little potential for energy and business, innovation decarbonization development access.

- TARGET: Targeted subsidies aimed at access for those that really need them.
- SWAP: Shift fossil fuel subsidies to investments in decarbonization and climate engineering technologies, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, carbon capture and storage (CCS), solar radiation management (SRM).

### **Recommendations**

- Urge Pacific Leaders to continue to voice the urgent need for fossil fuel subsidy reform in on-going international climate negotiations such as the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum, COP24, G20, Trade negotiations, and other fora.
- Fossil fuel subsidy should be an integral component of the Paris Agreement Implementation Guidelines (Rulebook) to be adopted at COP24.
- Build multilateral coalitions (climate clubs) partnerships with ‘like-minded’ partners such as Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform. The Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform have been working since 2010 to build political consensus on the importance of fossil fuel subsidy reform.

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