Chapter 8

The Pacific Diaspora

John Connell

Summary

Emigration from Pacific island countries (PICs) began in earnest in the 1960s, in Polynesia, belatedly followed by many Micronesian states, but has not been characteristic of Melanesia. Many Polynesian states have more 'ethnic nationals' overseas than at home. Migration has resulted in an overseas population of around 850,000 people of Pacific ancestry/ethnicity, rather more than the entire resident population of Polynesia. Fiji has numerically the largest diasporic population but Samoa and Tonga have higher proportions of their nationals overseas than all other independent PICs. Remittances are crucial for several Polynesian states especially; they grew steadily until the global financial crisis, and the Pacific is one of the most remittance-dependent regions in the world. Remittances have improved welfare and reduced poverty. Increasing the volume of remittances is unlikely but increasing their effectiveness is possible. Return migration is inconsequential and makes a limited contribution, primarily to the small-scale service sector. Temporary return migration of skilled workers offers some potential for reducing skill deficits, especially in the health sector, where such deficits are widespread and costly, in economic and social terms, and where overseas populations have valuable skills. Very limited formal information exists on labour shortages in particular sectors in most PICs. Most PICs have made few attempts to engage with their diasporas. Building migrant management capacity is non-existent, and migration flow data are limited, with better data required in all states.

8.1 Introduction

Migration from the island Pacific has occurred for well over a century. From the earliest days of 'blackbirding' (see Chapter 4) in the mid and late nineteenth century, migration has primarily been from small Pacific island countries (PICs) to metropolitan countries on the fringes of the Pacific and has had a primarily economic and secondary social rationale. As early as the nineteenth century, population pressure on scarce resources was perceived as a growing problem. On some coral atolls, in Kiribati and Tuvalu, a 'Malthusian crisis' was recognised as early as the 1880s (Munro and Bedford 1980), and temporary migration was well established.

Most PICs, other than the large Melanesian states, have benefitted very substantially from overseas aid, and also from remittances from overseas migrants, enabling them to run big current account deficits, maintain substantial bureaucracies and undertake relative large public investment programmes of a kind that could not otherwise be

financed. The PICs are the most heavily aid-assisted part of the world per capita. The public sector increasingly dominates formal economic activity almost everywhere, despite efforts at restructuring.

The three conventional subregions of the Pacific – Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia – have become associated with different migration contexts. Some of these basic differences are:

Melanesia: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have 85 per cent of the region's nine million people. Only Fiji has either significant international migration or a significant diaspora.

Micronesia: Kiribati and Nauru have a tiny diaspora. The remainder of the sub-region (Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands) is closely linked to the United States, where there is a relatively recent but steadily growing diaspora.

Polynesia: Polynesia has strong links to New Zealand and, notably in American Samoa, to the United States. Most Polynesian states have very large diasporic populations, which in several cases are larger than domestic populations and play an extremely important role in national development.

The conventionally defined Pacific islands region has a population of more than 9 million but two thirds of those are in Papua New Guinea (PNG), which is something of a special case in its diversity and resource base. Hence this report primarily focuses on the other, smaller, PICs, and especially on those that are independent. The potential for economic development within Pacific countries varies, but migration and remittances have become more important to households and national economies everywhere. Indeed, of all the world's regions, the Pacific is the most dependent on remittances from migrants. In the rural areas of the Melanesian states there is a similar dependence on urban–rural remittances. Yet the bulk of migration from the Pacific has involved permanent resettlement abroad, and temporary migration is relatively limited (see Chapter 4). The principal gain from the growing diaspora has been a substantial flow of remittances to small PICs, and to small islands. There has also been a more limited return migration of people with new skills and capital. Harnessing the diaspora more effectively raises numerous challenges.

As emigration continues, small and vulnerable South Pacific states have become irrevocably a peripheral and dependent part of the wider world. Contemporary patterns of migration have diversified, with migrants becoming both more selective and skilled, demographic structures have changed, and the restructuring of global and island economic landscapes presents different development contexts. The life courses of island people, present or absent, are increasingly embedded in international ties, and island states have sought out new migration opportunities. Island states, individuals and various international agencies have attached new and increased significance to migration, remittance flows, return migration and the role of the diaspora, in contexts where 'conventional' development strategies have achieved limited success.

8.2 From the 1960s

Almost all of the international migration from the island Pacific has occurred since the 1960s. Since then there has been continued migration from what are now seen as 'mature migration' economies, mostly in Polynesia, and a rise in migration from all other island states. From the 1960s there was accelerated migration from the Pacific region, as islanders began to seek employment and access to services in the metropolitan states on the fringes of the region: mainly New Zealand, Australia and the United States. Many people from Niue, the Cook Islands, American Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga and Samoa have moved either to New Zealand (whence some have gone on to Australia) or, increasingly, as the New Zealand economy stagnated and immigration restrictions have become tighter, to the United States, both legally and illegally. For the smallest states, including the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Pitcairn, migration has been particularly dramatic, since a majority of the ethnic population lives overseas. Migration has particularly characterised the smaller Polynesian PICs: American Samoa, Tokelau, Niue and the Cook Islands because of their political affiliation with the United States (for American Samoa) and with New Zealand, which enables unrestricted migration. Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands have experienced declining populations over the past quarter of a century, and it has long been forecast that the smallest state, Pitcairn, may simply disappear as its population falls below what is sustainable (Connell 1988). Niue, too, was, at the time of writing, seeking immigration from Tuvalu, as its population had sharply declined in the context of Cyclone Heta and a long-term 'culture of migration' (Connell 2008). Larger states, such as Samoa and Tonga, have experienced very limited domestic population growth as emigration has become effectively a 'safety valve' for high population growth rates and slowly growing economies.

In the larger countries of Melanesia, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, although their economies have not necessarily been more viable, more people have retained a semi-subsistence economy in rural areas. There has, however, been significant emigration from Fiji, especially of Indo-Fijians. This dramatically accelerated after the 1987 and 2000 coups, with migration to Australia, New Zealand and also Canada, and with indigenous Fijians becoming a significant component.

The former US territories of Micronesia – Palau, the FSM and particularly the Marshall Islands – have increasingly exhibited similar trends (Hezel and Lightfoot 2005), with a very substantial growth in recent migration flows. Since the late 1980s emigration accelerated from the FSM and the Marshall Islands, as the signing of the Compacts of Free Association guaranteed migration rights in the United States and its territories. Between 1990 and 2004 more than 13,000 people left the Marshall Islands for the United States, especially after government jobs were lost in public sector reforms (a situation that has also been true of the Cook Islands), so that one in five Marshallese now lives in the United States. The FSM is following a similar course. The migration process in Micronesia is thus becoming increasingly similar to that in Polynesia: a steady outflow, growth of relatively permanent urban communities overseas (beyond student groups), a return flow of remittances and growing domestic interest in migration. Significantly, remittance flows to these Micronesian states are

generally either very small or reversed, a consequence of the limited education of Micronesian migrants and their difficulties in finding remunerative employment in the United States (Grieco 2003). In mid-2011 the United States became more interested in reconsidering the terms of the compacts designed to slow migration from Micronesia.

Kiribati and Tuvalu have been characterised by migration for much longer, dating back to the nineteenth century, but of contract labour – mainly to Nauru (for employment in the phosphate mine) or to work in the international shipping industry (for which both countries have training schools). Hence, return migration is normal, and the impact on national population change much less significant. Both countries have sought more international migration opportunities and small resident populations are growing in New Zealand especially, much as small Samoan and Tongan populations grew there half a century earlier.

Population growth rates remain high in some states. While the average population growth rate is around 2.2 per cent per year, in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands it is around 2.6 per cent, although in both states it is now falling. In several states, such as Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, growth rates are, however, less than 1 per cent, partly because of high levels of outmigration. The populations in all three Pacific subregions will increase over the coming decades, and in Melanesia above all there will be continued rapid growth, emphasising a late adolescent 'youth bulge' whereby the 15–24 age group makes up around 19 per cent of the population, compared with 14 per cent in Australia and New Zealand. Here as elsewhere there are very great differences within the region, but especially between Melanesia and Polynesia.

Migration is largely a response to real and perceived inequalities in socio-economic opportunities, within and between states. Social influences are important, especially in terms of access to education and health services, and are in turn often a function of economic issues. Migration remains, in different forms, a strategy of moving from a poorer area to a richer one in search of social and economic mobility abroad or at home. It is related both to the economic aspirations of migrant households and to development within PICs. Before the early 1980s, male migration had preceded female or family migration throughout the South Pacific, but there is now minimal gender bias in the numbers of Pacific Islanders migrating to the Pacific Rim, and preferences are shifting towards women. In many cases, families migrate as units, either as skilled migrants on the basis of one of the spouses' qualifications or as family migrants. There are, however, flows of specific occupational categories which are dominated by one sex. For instance, Fijian women have migrated as nurses, domestic helpers and caregivers while Fijian men have moved overseas as soldiers, tourism workers and employees of private security companies (Voigt-Graf and Connell 2007).

Major influences on migration have been rising expectations about what constitutes a satisfactory standard of living, a desirable occupation and a suitable mix of accessible services and amenities. In parallel with changing aspirations and the increased necessity to earn cash, agricultural work throughout the Pacific has lost prestige and the declining participation of young men in the agricultural economy is ubiquitous, despite rising levels of overt unemployment. There is a widening gap between rising expectations and the reality of limited domestic employment and incomes.

Changes in values, following increased educational opportunities and the expansion of bureaucratic (largely urban) employment within the region from the 1970s, have further oriented migration streams outwards, as local employment opportunities have not kept pace with population growth. The increasing extent of poverty is now more evident (Abbott and Pollard 2004), with a lack of 'safety nets' in both urban and increasingly rural areas. The 'youth bulge' has ensured that unemployment is particularly high among young people (Abbott and Pollard 2004), and there is growing recognition of the existence of significant numbers of unemployed and marginalised youth in most urban centres (Connell 2011; Noble et al. 2011). This, in turn, has stimulated emigration, with urbanisation as partial precursor to international migration. Currently, therefore, demand for international migration opportunities at both household and national levels is as great as it has ever been.

8.3 An economic rationale

Migration decisions are usually shaped within a family context, as migrants leave to meet certain family expectations, the key one usually being financial support for kin. Migration has rarely been an individual decision to meet individual goals, nor has it been dictated by national interests (except perhaps in the case of Kiribati and Tuvalu). Migration is directed at improving both the living standards of those who remain at home and the lifestyle and income of the migrants. In Tonga 'there are few opportunities for socioeconomic advancement in Tonga and migration is perceived as the only solution' (Morton Lee 2004: 135). In Samoa, migration was simply 'to seek wealth for all' (Muliaina 2001: 25). Consequently 'families deliberate carefully about which members would be most likely to do well overseas and be reliable in sending remittances' (Gailey 1992: 465). Through this process, extended households, as in Tonga, have been said to have transformed themselves into 'transnational corporations of kin' which strategically allocate family labour to local and overseas destinations to maximise income opportunities, minimise risk, and benefit from resultant remittance flows (Bertram and Watters 1985). To an even greater extent than for internal migration (where health, education and social reasons explain some part of migration), international migration is more evidently an economic phenomenon.

Migrant extended households are characterised 'by remittance transfers among various component parts of the "transnational corporations of kin" which direct the allocation of each island's family labour around the regional economy' (Bertram 1986: 820), and in so doing not only help to maintain these family and communal networks but even enlarge their social fields of interaction, incorporating them into multi-local networks of support and empowerment. Thus, for households in Samoa, 'having young wage earners abroad diversified families' earnings streams and reduced their dependence on high-risk activities. Having family members in several locations abroad diversified earning sources and reduced risk levels still further' (Macpherson 2004: 168). Moreover, Macpherson goes on to argue that 'Families, using intelligence from migrants abroad, periodically surveyed risks and returns in various enclaves and encouraged others abroad to relocate in places in which returns were found to be higher and risks lower' (Ibid.). In this way Samoans were, for example, encouraged to

join the US military because jobs were assured, wages were higher and education could be obtained without loss of earnings. 'If this analysis depicts Samoans as calculative and instrumental, it is because in relation to risk and return they are necessarily so ... [as] risks and returns available in various places were formally canvassed and modeled by families' (Ibid.). Although this sort of household consensus certainly occurs, and demonstrates the significance of access to the migration–remittances nexus, it has been argued that applying the same kind of model in Tonga tends to portray families as in agreement about their economic aims and functions, whereas there are often conflicts and tensions within them (Morton Lee 2004: 136). Moreover, over two decades ago, James argued that in many Tongan villages remittances were becoming individualised and that the idea of a transnational community of kin was becoming increasingly invalid (James 1993: 361; Morton Lee 2003: 31). The extent of greater individualisation is impossible to determine, but such conflicts over use emphasise, rather than downplay, the role of remittances.

8.4 A note on numbers

Estimating the number of overseas Pacific islanders is extremely difficult, partly because classifications vary from country to country and partly because many Pacific island groups are too small to be separately distinguished in censuses in such large countries as the United States. Residents of islander ancestry may not be distinguished in census data, and may not perceive themselves as 'islanders', and all calculations of islanders overseas are estimates. Recent estimates, based on destination census data, suggested that by 2010 there would be around 850,000 people of Pacific island ancestries or ethnicities (including Indo-Fijians) living in the four key 'countries of immigration' on the Pacific Rim: New Zealand (350,000), Australia (150,000), the USA (300,000) and Canada (50,000). The combined total of these Pacific ethnic/ancestry populations is larger than current estimates of the total population in PIC Polynesia (about 665,000), from where most have come. Very much smaller Pacific populations are also growing in the United Kingdom and Europe as well as in parts of Asia (Bedford and Hugo 2012).

Data on migration from Pacific island states are similarly limited, since little use is made of arrival and departure cards (even though these are routinely collected) and most states publish no data on this, so it is impossible to estimate the extent to which migration is selective by age, skill or home region.

Migration is complicated by movement between destinations. Thus New Zealand's more liberal entry policies for Pacific migrants, especially through quotas for residence for selected countries, have made a major contribution to growth in Australia's Pacific-born populations through trans-Tasman migration. The acceleration of Pacific migration to New Zealand in the 1960s was followed by increasing trans-Tasman movement of Pacific islanders from New Zealand to Australia, especially among Pacific peoples with New Zealand citizenship (to the extent that the Australian government has occasionally expressed some concern about this 'back door' entry). Around 20 per cent of Australia's Pacific-born population in 2008, for example, had come into the country as New Zealand citizens under the Trans-Tasman Travel

Arrangement (Bedford and Hugo 2012). Both in New Zealand and Australia, some of the more significant numbers of illegal overstayers are from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, indicating the considerable demand for migration beyond legal channels, and especially beyond both countries' skill requirements.

8.5 Data

As is evident from the above, data on migration are limited, whether about stocks or flows. This is most evident of the diaspora, especially where that is spread across many countries, and especially in larger countries where census data exclude small numbers. Most PICs collect but do not always publish international migration data, so there is also limited information on the kinds of flows that exists at particular times (whether by age, gender, skill or intended destination). Few good labour force surveys exist. Likewise, for almost all public and private sectors and enterprises there are no data on resignations or attrition to indicate why skilled people are being lost, or how such losses (or the lack of recruitment) affect stocks in particular areas. In a very small number of sectors, notably health and education, and for most countries, there are data on stocks to indicate where labour shortages exist. In many contexts, estimates of labour shortages are dated or little more than anecdotal. Statistical offices are small, are not always well funded and supported with human resources, and have other priorities. Data on diaspora communities are usually much poorer (since destination countries rarely have any great interest in PIC migrants) but, in New Zealand at least, some sectoral groups, such as nurses, are organised into associations (and implicitly have definite interests in homeland affairs). However, very little information is available on the extent, location and objectives of such groups.

Consequently, few countries have a clear understanding of the collective impacts of migration on the labour force (and the implications of migration and attrition). Public service commissions, where they exist, are not always able to bring together the necessary information from other ministries that might enable an overall understanding of the relationship between migration, education, employment and training. This means that few countries have any effective migration management capacity, in terms of access to detailed and accurate migration data, let alone any understanding of relevant migration policies (whether directed at retention or return).

To work effectively with the diaspora, more basic data are essential, above all on migration flows, but also on fluctuations in the labour force. That demands some overriding institutional interest in placing migration to the fore.

In some ways this absence of data is not surprising, since migration is regarded as a free choice and not to be constrained in any way. Even documenting flows has been perceived in that light.

8.6 A sense of direction

Just as Pacific islanders have diffused internally and internationally from their initial destinations, above all Auckland, so in recent decades they have gradually

extended to the 'four corners of the world' (e.g. Sutter 1989). By the end of the 1960s, for example, not only had Samoans migrated to North America but they could be found in every single state and territory of both Canada and the United States, not least Alaska (Connell 1992). Much the same was true of Tongans, aided by Mormon religious affiliations which have given Tongans disproportionate access to the United States (Gibson and Nero 2008: 202). Most of the Indo-Fijians who had migrated to North America were in Canada, primarily Vancouver. France was the destination for many Pacific-born, mostly from the three French territories and most being of European ancestry.

Most of the earliest phases of migration were to colonial or former colonial powers and mainly to the Pacific Rim. Based on the proportions of overseas migrants compared with resident populations, the substantial difference between Polynesian mobility and relative Melanesian stability is readily evident (Sutter 1989). Relatively few islanders travelled to colonial powers in Europe, whether the United Kingdom (although a small number of Fijians were there) or France. By the end of the twentieth century, migration had diversified far beyond the metropolitan rim and colonial powers, while countries formerly with few overseas migrants (such as the FSM, Kiribati and Tuvalu) now had new, seemingly permanent, clusters overseas. Japan had become important for some new forms of migration, notably of sportspeople from Polynesia ('Esau 2007), a handful of students are now going to China and a larger number of potential skilled medical workers are being trained in Cuba. Only the Melanesian states – notably PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – were aloof from most of that, while few left New Caledonia other than for education. In this century, however, there has been a growing movement of skilled workers (including engineers, geologists and doctors from PNG, and health workers from both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) to Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

Indicative of this expanding process is the manner in which even newer patterns of emigration have become particularly important since the 2000s, with a quite distinctive structure of migration to the Middle East, emphasising the manner in which new and highly paid overseas employment opportunities are being firmly grasped, even in a threatening security and social context. In mid-2005, over 130 Fijian soldiers were deployed in Iraq, continuing a long existing policy of Fijian soldiers working for the United Nations, for example in Lebanon. A second group of Fijian soldiers were in Iraq as members of the British Army, with one estimate putting this number as high as 1,000. Others were peacekeepers in Solomon Islands (as they had earlier been in Bougainville). Many former Fijian soldiers were employed as security guards for private companies in Iraqi cities, and other Fijians and Tongans were employed in support roles in Kuwait, including engineers, mechanics and information technology workers. Similar migration flows have occurred from American Samoa, Palau, the Marshall Islands and the FSM. There are huge income and remittance gains but very real disadvantages, both in terms of the loss of skills to PICs and in that many such workers have been killed. Migration has also taken Fijian nurses to the Gulf, the Bahamas and the United States (Connell 2009), and footballers have taken other migration trajectories, as the Pacific diaspora has become more global.

Considering only those populations born in the Pacific and living in Australia and New Zealand at the time of their censuses in 1971 and 2006, there were around 46,000 in the two countries in 1971 (16,000 in Australia and 30,000 in New Zealand) and just under 250,000 in 2006 (106,900 in Australia and 138,400 in New Zealand). Between 1971 and 2006, the Pacific-born populations had increased by 440 per cent (Bedford and Hugo 2012). One outcome of this process is that diasporas from some PICs substantially outnumber the resident populations. In the extreme case of Niue, the population usually resident in Niue is about 1,300 whereas those of Niuean ancestry/ethnicity in New Zealand alone number about 19,000, and in Australia there are also more Niueans than in Niue. This is the extreme case of a PIC where the demographic balance has comprehensively shifted offshore within no more than half a century. Similar trends are evident in Tokelau and the Cook Islands, and in much less extreme form in Samoa and Tonga. In other words, for some Polynesian PICS especially, there is a substantial diaspora that can be drawn upon.

The greater diversity of migration from the Pacific has also meant the growth of smaller populations in more scattered destinations, who provide some potential for possible future growth, and a new reservoir of experience and skills that may be of future value in the region.

8.7 Skilled migration

The proportion of skilled and highly skilled Pacific Islanders among all migrants is increasing, as a result of shortages in the receiving countries, some of which – as in New Zealand and the United States – have led to private sector recruitment in the Pacific Islands. Low remuneration, poor promotion opportunities, limited training and further educational opportunities, and poor working and living conditions, particularly in remote regions, are push factors for skilled migrants. The growing shortage of skilled workers has also contributed to increased intra-Pacific migration with workers migrating to countries offering better work conditions and salaries, such as Fijian nurses and teachers migrating to the Marshall Islands and Palau (Rokoduru 2008), Solomon Islands nurses to Vanuatu, and Fijian tourism workers to the Cook Islands.

As metropolitan states have made migration more difficult and increasingly selectively sought skilled migrants, both illegal migration (and overstaying) and the growing dominance of skilled migration have occurred. Fiji and other island states are now seen in Australia as 'high risk' states because of the extent of overstaying, and there are many illegal Fijian and other overstayers in Australia, the United States and New Zealand. Skilled migrants, and particularly skilled health workers, but also teachers (Voigt-Graf 2003) and football players, have made up growing proportions of migrants, especially from Tonga, Samoa and, in the wake of the 1987 and 2000 coups, Fiji. This skill loss has become critical in some small states.

Skilled workers in general, and health workers in particular, are a higher proportion of immigrants from island states to metropolitan states because of the increased focus on skilled migration (within declining immigration numbers) in most destinations, and the continued (and increasing) demand for health workers there. Each of the principal

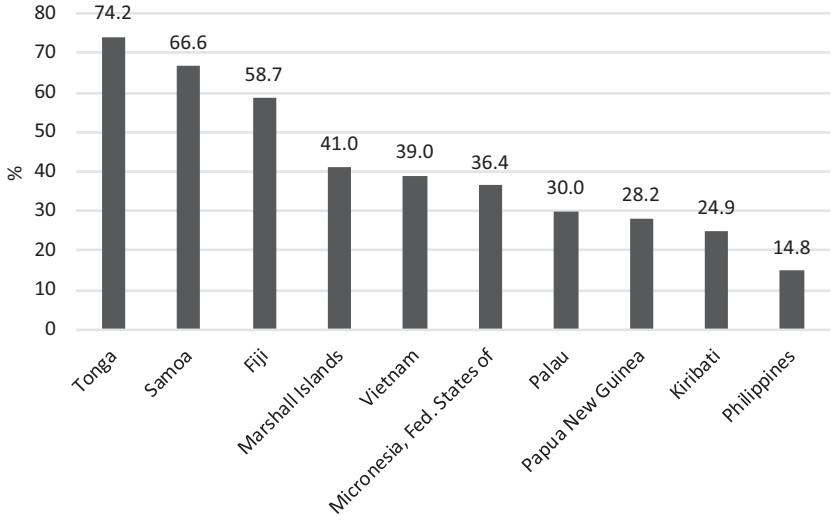
destinations for skilled migrants – the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – has the acquisition of permanent skilled migrants as one of the objectives of its immigration policy. Indeed, they have increasingly even become competitors in trying to attract highly skilled (and entrepreneurial) migrants. Ironically, many of these migrants become part of a 'brain loss' or 'brain waste' because their qualifications, despite contributing to gaining them entry, are unrecognised in the destination.

Emigration rates of skilled persons have steadily increased in the PICs, particularly as overseas recruitment occurs, and especially for health workers. New Zealand, the UAE and other countries, for instance, have actively recruited nurses in Fiji. As a result, there is a shortage of skilled health practitioners in almost all island states. Doctors are twice as likely to migrate as nurses because wage differentials are greater, and because most nurses are women whereas men are often the primary decision-makers regarding migration (Brown and Connell 2004). However, female Fijian nurses have frequently taken the decision to migrate independently, often leaving their husbands and children behind, mainly for higher wages and the acquisition of new skills and experiences. Skilled migration is unlikely to decrease, given the significance of skilled worker shortages in each of the 'standard' destinations, and increased shortages in newer, more distant markets.

The loss of skilled labour has been a serious issue for several island states, but perhaps especially for some of the smallest, which need skilled workers but have few. In this century a small but quite new migration of skilled workers from Melanesia has drawn small numbers of geologists, doctors, nurses and others to metropolitan states and to other PICs (including a movement of Solomon Islands nurses to Vanuatu), which has depleted national skills in areas that are particularly critical to national development. More generally, skilled migration has been greatest in numbers and proportions from the larger Polynesian states (Figure 8.1).

As many as 52 per cent of Pacific islander migrants living in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have post-secondary education, a much higher percentage than in the source countries. Eight PICs, notably Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, are on the list of the 30 countries with the highest rates of skilled migration in OECD states. Emigration rates are especially high among women, with 63 per cent of them being skilled migrants (Docquier et al. 2007). In the larger PICs, such as Fiji, the loss is significant and troublesome. Of the 8,669 professionals who left Fiji between 1987 and 2001, 2,728 were teachers, 1,774 architects and engineers, 1,410 accountants, 1,137 medical professionals and 1,620 other professionals (Voigt-Graf 2003). Even these figures may well underestimate the true numbers because data sources are unreliable, and Fiji has also lost airline pilots, accountants, army personnel and sportspeople. A survey of the Fiji Nurses Association in 2000 found that 88 per cent of nurses migrated for higher wages, and across the region at least two thirds of migrant workers primarily sought higher wages (Connell 2009). There is an acute shortage of doctors in Fiji, exacerbated in the wake of the 2000 coups and by the active recruitment of some receiving countries. This has raised concerns over health outcomes and repeated training costs. In some smaller PICs the brain drain has been equally excessive; the Cook Islands, for example, lost more than half its vocationally

Figure 8.1 Pacific island countries: percentage of tertiary-educated national populations living outside their country of birth, 2000



Note: The percentages are distorted because Tonga, Samoa and Fiji have larger numbers of educated nationals in proportion than the other PICs.
Source: Ratha and Xu (2009)

qualified population in the single decade 1966–1976 (Connell 2005) and much the same happened again in the mid-1990s when the national economy collapsed.

Return migration (see section 8.9) has not solved labour shortage problems and, like Fiji and other states, the Cook Islands has turned towards Asian labour markets for replacements (Connell 2005). In the case of migration of Tongans and Samoans to the United States alone, 'Emigration results in the permanent loss of young educated skilled labour from the Pacific island nations. Skilled labour is in short supply and emigration probably hinders development' (Ahlburg and Levin 1990: 84). This is certainly true more generally in the health sector, where more costly (and sometimes less skilled) replacements have sometimes been required, and in the movement of sportspeople. The combination of changing aspirations and the migration of the more educated young contributes to the brain and skill drain from national peripheries and from small states, perhaps ultimately worsening the welfare and bargaining position of those places (Connell 2009). In small PICs it is unusually difficult to replace skilled migrants, because of both the duration of training that is required and the very small demand for some particular skills.

The outcome in the health sector is that basic needs are less well satisfied, especially in more remote areas, and there is a loss of morale among those who have remained, as working conditions deteriorate. Wards are closed, waiting lists and times lengthen, and examinations are more cursory or complicated by new cultural differences (Connell 2009). Large proportions of budgets are directed to referrals to distant places, and the Millennium Development Goals recede into the distance. It is equally

evident that, because of the necessity for appropriate skilled training, it is more difficult to substitute for absent skills in the health workforce or transfer them from elsewhere in the public service.

Given the global demand for skilled health workers, and active recruiting by New Zealand and other states in the region (especially Fiji), there is no easy solution (Connell 2009). However, recent work has shown that nurses at least send very high levels of remittances, sustained over long periods of time, to the extent that their remittances are almost certainly substantially above the training costs (Brown and Connell 2004). At the same time more nurses are joining the profession because it provides migration opportunities; hence some of the Pacific states are moving towards the situation in the Philippines, where nurses are effectively trained to be migrants (Connell 2014). This does suggest that the economic costs of skilled migration are not as great as has been feared and may be outweighed by the benefits, even if training is in the public sector and remittances are private, but it is impossible to accurately cost the health disadvantages of high levels of emigration.

It has, however, been argued that the problems of 'brain drain' are overstated and having an excess of professionals (such as nurses or teachers in Fiji) is not a bad thing if they have the chance to work overseas, while emigration frees up the job market at home (Chand 2008b). However, these are two different contexts and the job markets have become conflated. There is a surplus of teachers in Fiji, at the same time as there is a deficit of doctors, measured by unfilled vacancies and declining service provision. Although other skilled migration losses, outside the health sector, may not now either be generally significant or have negative implications, such demand-driven migration is likely to have negative consequences in the future. This may already be so in the context of the migration of both sportspeople and military personnel.

In recent years, overall migration opportunities in metropolitan states have tended to decline and are increasingly targeted towards skilled migrants, rather than family reunion, especially in Australia. Thus migration flows from the Pacific are increasingly likely to be of skilled migrants from various sectors, including health (Connell 2009) and education (Voigt-Graf 2003), as the overall number of migrants from the independent states has tended to fall. Structural changes within metropolitan states have meant that certain sectors, notably health, are short of skilled workers. Pacific island nurses, usually entering the bottom levels of the 'global healthcare chain', have migrated much greater distances, to the United Arab Emirates and beyond, as demand intensifies.

The widespread existence of skilled migration, and what amounts to a brain drain, has constituted a major loss to most PICs. Migration has been selective by skills, yet repeated reports on aid delivery to the PICs have drawn attention to issues of management and governance and referred to the need for skills and superior training. The extent to which skilled workers can be encouraged to return from overseas, either permanently or temporarily, or to benefit the region otherwise is thus of some importance (see section 8.9).

Despite concern over the existence of a significant skill drain, few attempts have been made to develop baseline data on sectors and occupations where the skill

deficit is greatest, even in the public sector. Although several studies have pointed to deficits in the health sector and, at least in Fiji, the education sector, little is otherwise known of the impact of migration on labour shortages in particular critical areas. Necessarily, this makes developing policies that target the diaspora somewhat difficult; hence this report primarily focuses on the health sector, where deficits are more evident.

8.8 Remittances

The most characteristic contribution of the diaspora to home populations and countries is through remittances. Remittances are vastly significant in the Pacific, above all for the small Polynesian PICs and for small islands throughout the region. At an aggregate level, remittances steadily increased from 2000 until 2009, when, with the impact of the global financial crisis, the PICs recorded a decline in remittances to US$1.819 billion, down from US$1.834 billion in 2008, and it is likely that this continued through 2009 and perhaps longer (Ratha and Xu 2009). However, flows were actually probably rather greater than that since, in the Pacific particularly, a large proportion of remittances is not formally recorded and where PICs share metropolitan currencies (such as Tokelau, Niue and the Cook Islands, which share the New Zealand dollar) they cannot be accurately measured. The money (and goods) sent home by migrants is particularly important in Tonga and Samoa, where remittances accounted for 38 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008 (equivalent to aid and trade combined). It is also extremely important in the least developed PICS, Tuvalu and Kiribati (Table 8.1). Despite significant levels of migration, remittances are yet to become important in the Micronesian states (other than Kiribati).

Table 8.1 Contribution of trade, aid and remittances to GDP in Pacific countries, 2003

Country	Imports (% of GDP)	Aid flows (% of GDP)	Remittances (% of GDP)	Exports (% of GDP)
Cook Islands	46.0	3.5	0.7	4.9
Fiji	49.2	2.3	7.0	30.1
Kiribati	99.4	31.5	12.0	6.9
Marshall Islands	55.8	53.9	0.6	9.3
Federated States of Micronesia	47.3	49.7	1.0	6.5
Nauru	71.0	35.5	n/a	25.5
Niue	68.7	15.1	n/a	1.5
Palau	71.5	20.5	n/a	7.3
Papua New Guinea	31.4	6.4	0.2	47.8
Samoa	51.3	10.4	14.2	5.2
Solomon Islands	28.6	25.7	0	25.2
Tonga	74.1	16.3	39.2	11.6
Tuvalu	75.6	38.6	35.9	0.9
Vanuatu	58.7	11.7	3.3	42.4

Source: Redden and Duncan (2009)

Indicative of the growing significance of both migration and remittances is the manner in which both have rapidly become important in Fiji as the domestic economy has crumbled in the present century. A recent study of migration and remittances in Fiji (and Tonga) revealed that as many as a third of all households in Fiji had at least one overseas migrant and remitter (compared with 60 per cent in Tonga), and 43 per cent of households received remittances (compared with 90 per cent in Tonga). In circumstances where households may be the migrant unit (especially for Indo-Fijians) this is a remarkably high percentage, after a relatively short period of engagement in international labour migration, and also reflects the substantial presence of Fijians in the security industry in the Middle East (Brown et al. 2014). Moreover, many Indo-Fijian households were also remittance recipients, contrary to earlier beliefs that few received remittances. Remittances had a positive impact on both poverty alleviation and wealth creation, although the impacts on income inequality were uncertain.

Remittances play an increasingly important role, especially in the smaller island states. In many countries remittances form a significant part of both national and household incomes; hence some 30 years ago the smaller island states (specifically initially Kiribati, Tokelau, Cook Islands and Tuvalu) were conceptualised as MIRAB states, where migration, remittances, aid and the resultant largely urban bureaucracy were central to the socio-economic system (Bertram and Watters 1985). The notion of MIRAB is also applicable in rather larger states such as Samoa and Tonga, as it is in small island states in the Caribbean (Connell and Conway 2000). Although this acronym is disliked in the Pacific, for cultural reasons and because of its implication of a handout mentality, it nonetheless suggests the centrality of migration and remittances in the island states, and has been largely unchallenged for three decades (Bertram 1999).

Because of the continued and increasing significance of remittances, the sustainability of remittance-dependent development is particularly important but necessarily uncertain – especially if, in the countries of origin, the need for remittances grows faster than its supply or if the number and flow of migrants dwindle. The rate of growth of migration to major destinations has declined in recent years because of economic recession in the destinations and the restructuring of migration controls, with migration becoming more selective towards those with particular skills. Even with continued migration, however, an imbalance is expected because of the dynamics of settlement migration. With family reunification and with greater integration of migrants in the host communities, their ability and willingness to remit have been expected to decline over time. If that were so, without other sources of income, the future of the economies of remittance-dependent Pacific countries would be uncertain.

Remittances are particularly important in the smaller states of Polynesia and Micronesia, and in the more remote islands in those states. Thus, for the coral atoll of Manihiki (Cook Islands), migration and the resultant remittances have been seen as so crucial that they constitute nothing less than a socio-economic strategy for collective survival (Underhill 1989). In Nanumea (Tuvalu), remittances grew from being about half of the island income in the 1970s and 1980s to some 75 per cent in the 1990s, in large part because of the collapse of copra marketing as world prices

slumped (Chambers and Chambers 2001: 156). In Kiribati and Tuvalu at least 30 per cent (and probably much more) of all households receive remittances, and they are the main source of income in the outer islands (Abbott and Pollard 2004; Borovnik 2006; Connell 2013).

Conventional wisdom suggests that remittances are overwhelmingly used for consumption objectives and inadequate amounts are directed towards investment. Debt repayment, new forms of consumption – which are important – housing and some community goals (such as water tanks and churches), air fares and education (an investment in social capital) take priority. After such goals are met remittances are used for various forms of investment, sometimes in the agricultural sector but more frequently in the service sector, and especially into stores and transport businesses (Connell and Brown 2005). In Samoa and elsewhere, remittances have constituted the start-up money for many shopkeepers and other small entrepreneurs. Half of all market vendors in Apia (Samoa), all of whom received remittances, claimed that some had been used as capital for the purchase of seeds, fertiliser and tools to engage in food production for sale (Muliaina 2001: 28). Even on small outer islands, such as Falahola (Tonga), remittances have been used for economic ventures, ranging from agriculture to tourism, although remoteness has limited their success (James 1991: 18–20; Faeamani 1995). This transition has occurred in many similar Caribbean island environments (Connell and Conway 2000). Where conditions are appropriate for adequate income generation, even where remittances have reached high levels, the private sector may flourish and be stimulated by remittances.

Remittance recipients make efforts to invest where they can, and there is minimal evidence that any part of the economy is abandoned or neglected, to be replaced by remittances. Where there are opportunities, and where consumption goals have been satisfied, remittances are used for investment, stimulate entrepreneurial and trading activity, increase the extent of formal sector employment and produce multiplier effects. Nonetheless it is implausible that remittances have no disincentive effects, although there is remarkably little direct evidence of this. In the case of Tonga, Sturton argued that 'The Tongan economy displays all the characteristic markings of the "Dutch disease" where a dominant export activity attracts a disproportionate command over resources, pushes up domestic production costs, and reduces international competitiveness. In the Tongan case the "booming" sector has become development assistance and migrants' remittances' (1992: 3). Similarly Faeamani has argued that, through the combination of the loss of young adults and an inflow of cash in the form of remittances and goods, 'there is a consequent reduction in garden size and production' (1995: 140). More generally, several authors have stressed the wide-ranging notions of dependency that remittances appear to create.

See section 6.4 in Chapter 6 for more information on remittances.

8.9 Benefiting from return migration

Alongside capital, return migrants are believed to bring with them new skills and knowledge (that is, social remittances), acquired elsewhere, that may prove to

be beneficial in local and national development. However, new ideas, norms and practices may not necessarily be either beneficial or welcomed, if they threaten an established social, economic and political order or are inappropriate for a different scale, direction and resource base of development. Change is not always welcome in small-scale societies where established orders prevail and opportunities are limited. Return migration can also exhibit a Janus face.

In practice, as population data indicate, return migration is quite limited. At no time during the past quarter of a century has there been substantial return migration to most islands and PICs, despite the centrality of an ideology of return. Return has been greatest where distances have been less and economic opportunities greater, and consequently least in more remote islands and regions. Limited return migration is at least partly due to the great differences in income levels from the metropolitan periphery (usually the initial rationale for migration), and shortage of economic opportunities, but also to a host of social factors (notably the education and stable upbringing of children). Return migration has often been of unskilled workers and retirees, but return may be just as diverse as outmigration.

The return migration of those with skills has tended to be limited, in part because those skills cannot necessarily be practised locally, but more frequently because return migrants are poorly paid. Many of the skills brought back are not easily used or effectively absorbed. This is particularly true of temporary migration, whether of agricultural workers or seafarers, where workers are involved in activities that do not happen at home, and with a work organisation and discipline that is not easily transferable (see Chapter 4). However, even skilled migrants do return, despite the discrepancy in wages and working conditions, often for family reasons or to establish businesses, which may have been funded from remittances (Brown and Connell 2004), so there is return migration across a wide range of categories and age groups (Maron and Connell 2008). In overseas Polynesian households that include nurses, the greatest propensity to return comes from those with business investments at home (Brown and Connell 2004). One new and unfortunate trend, notably in Samoa and Tonga, has been the deportation of convicted islanders, mainly from the United States, who make very little positive contribution within the PICs (Pereira 2011). For the Cook Islands, qualified and experienced people have returned and been able to use their skills in a range of occupations, not merely in the public service, although the Cook Islands is unusual since wages and salaries in the islands are more comparable with those in the main destination: New Zealand. Most PICs have been unable to benefit from contemporary strategies to benefit economically and socially from diaspora populations.

Since economic opportunities are limited in many island states, return migrants tend to be absorbed within the service sector, as in Tonga, where remittances have been used to set up market stalls which become the prelude to stores and business ventures (Brown and Connell 1993, Besnier 2004). On smaller islands such as Tubuai (French Polynesia), and in Kiribati, although returnees are development oriented and anxious to invest, opportunities are so limited that this not economically viable (Lockwood 1990, Borovnik 2006). Returnees thus tend to be absorbed into the small-scale service

sector, sometimes duplicating existing services such as taxi and retail businesses, and are less obviously in export-oriented productive activities. Disappointments discourage other returnees, and return migration may be the start of a new phase of circulation.

Limited return is also a function of a social context where the children of migrants are educated in the destination country, have lost some degree of contact with 'home' societies – even to the extent that they have lost critical linguistic and other skills – and perceive few opportunities to use and benefit from skills acquired overseas (Connell 2007). Return migration is constantly deferred ('until children leave school', 'until enough money is saved', 'until retirement' etc.) until the point where it becomes implausible. This is also linked to a gradual shift in the demographic balance, especially in the Polynesian states, from those states to the metropolitan fringe; relatives are increasingly likely to be found in destinations and thus there is reduced incentive to return to what is less likely to be seen as 'home'. This has obvious implications for the return migration of skilled labour. There is also some resistance to return migration in islands where those who have stayed resent returnees as having 'voted with their feet' to abandon their home islands and have returned to compete for scarce opportunities. A significant part of return migration is to take care of older relatives rather than directly contribute to national development. Encouraging the return migration of those skilled workers who might usefully contribute to national development demands a package of policies, much like those required for retaining health workers, that operate both within and beyond particular sectors of the workforce.

8.10 Are islanders gaining useful skills or are they enmeshed in a secondary workforce?

Many migrants from the Pacific have long been employed in the secondary labour sector, working in unregulated, non-unionised employment and being paid low and irregular wages. The situation has yet to change significantly, despite skill acquisition and upwards socio-economic mobility over time. This has been particularly true of Micronesians, who have relatively recently migrated in significant numbers to the United States, and of workers in the unregulated nursing home sector, where there has been considerable exploitation of women. Similarly, there has been reported ill-treatment and exploitation of Fijians working in the Cook Islands, where some 200 work, mostly in hotels and other service industries, without legal protection. Some have no work contracts at all; the contracts of others have been breached by their employers. In such circumstances, both income and skill acquisition have been limited.

In recent years, migrants have also been affected by job losses. In New Zealand, for example, the unemployment rate among recent migrants was 6.7 per cent, compared with 5 per cent for the wider population in 2008–09. Unemployment has particularly affected Pacific Island workers residing in New Zealand, including migrants who are particularly vulnerable in the labour market because of their relative youth and

low-skilled status (Bedford et al. 2010). Here, too, migrants gain no skills, become disillusioned and are either a drain on welfare services or discontented return migrants. Finally, recent temporary migrants do not gain useful skills that can be transferred back to the homeland states (see Chapter 4). Such limited skill acquisition appears overall somewhat bleak, and is not true of most Pacific islander labour forces. However, there is some evidence that those who are more likely to acquire skills, and skills that would be of utility at home, are least likely to return. Meeting the challenge of encouraging the return migration of more of those with useful skills is particularly difficult in small island states.

8.11 Conclusion

Migration from the Pacific and the emergence of a substantial diaspora has had several obvious outcomes discussed above: a significant population loss from several PICs, a skill drain that has posed problems in several sectors (most obviously health), limited return migration (but not often of those with the skills that are most in demand, or with entrepreneurial capital) and a very substantial flow of remittances that has made an enormous contribution to welfare and the reduction of poverty. What else might be possible for PICs to benefit more from the diaspora? In many discussions of migration and development, and especially of skilled migration, a preoccupation with international migration has diverted attention away from significant national development issues such as internal migration and the retention of the most valuable national workforce. These issues are discussed in more detail in sections 6.8 to 6.12 in Chapter 6.

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