



EPLD  
EMERGING PACIFIC  
LEADERS' DIALOGUE



Photo: New Caledonia Study Tour group: Middle kneeling is Emmanuel Narakobi and standing in front second from the right is Ruth Pune.

**Acknowledgements:**

I would like to first thank my sponsor, Fitzpatrick Woods Consulting, for making it possible for me to experience a life changing opportunity and also acknowledge their contribution in educating the region on recent carbon trade/REDD issues through their website. Then, to thank all my colleagues and Leadership PNG for their support in logistics and encouragement through the tough times.

**Introduction:**

I applied for Emerging Pacific Leaders' Dialogue (EPLD) 2 after learning from my friends and past EPLD alumnus about how the experience changed their mindset, increased their knowledge of the region, their involvement in national affairs and the network of families and friends it has helped establish. EPLD2 selection is very stringent and all applicants know they need thorough checking before submitting to the selection panel. I was one of those few chosen because of my strong community work background in an NGO. My team mates have acknowledged that input and awareness of civil society struggles in the region during our study tour - and also during plenary group discussions - has been insightful.

**Plenary Sessions:**

These sessions developed insight into the Pacific Region's involvement in international, regional and national interventions on global issues. The presence of key government leaders and the Head of State of Samoa showed that the region is seriously addressing the need for good leaders. The issues around HIV/AIDS, Climate Change, education and security systems are apparently similar in all countries despite the size and type of national economies. The smaller, sinking islands are now faced with high probability of disappearing in the next one or two decades whilst struggling to deal with HIV/AIDS and sanitation and employment. Bigger countries with larger economies - like PNG, Fiji and New Caledonia - have most of the natural resources being developed yet have security and stability issues. Most Polynesian countries have economies solely dependent on tourism and fishing industries. The Pacific is a unique region.

**Study Tour (New Caledonia):**

Firstly, I pay tribute to the nineteen young men and the freedom fighter, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, for their courage and determination to see their country become independent. It is such struggles encountered in this study that made me realize how fortunate it was for PNG to have its Independence on a golden plate. New Caledonia is a country less talked about, less focused on and lacking regional recognition for its contribution in the region. New Caledonia is wealthy, developed and has a higher income per capita than New Zealand. It is unique in its political system and is struggling to define its identity in the region. The year 2014 will see a new dawning of a much dreamt about destiny for New Caledonia. A referendum will decide the flag, language, currency, security and education system to be used.

**Study Tour Presentations:**

The Pacific was rediscovered in the ten study tour reports within the two day sessions through role plays, dances, debates, speeches and documentaries. It was a challenge for everyone to hear what others have to say about your country and the challenges presented for emerging leaders to deal with upon their return to their home countries. The struggles of fighting to save a sinking island, HIV/AIDS epidemics, living in ghettos and the struggles for independence and lack of health services in rural areas made the sessions emotional as the presentations were to and from young leaders, put through the test of experiencing firsthand what other EPLD participants go through daily in their countries. These experiences helped participants understand why people behaved the way they do. Getting an insight through the study tours made participants appreciate each other, learn to work through differences and strengthen networks where needed.

### **Lessons Learnt:**

I went with an objective of discovering women in leadership roles in households, communities, organizations and countries and the challenges women face daily whilst leading an entity entrusted to them. There were women in almost every aspect of the EPLD2 programme: women co organized; met us at the airport; dealt with our in house issues; guided our plenaries; co chaired the plenaries. We even had the presence of the Royal Highnesses Princess Anne and Princess Pilolevu Salote. New Caledonia has a law requiring 50% women in the Congress, the top political institution in the country. This, for me, was more enlightening as I come from a more male dominated and led country. I can only see the dawning of a new era in PNG as the Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Puka Temu, announced the new proposed bill for the 22 reserved seats in Parliament, for women during the plenary sessions.

I also learnt that while the Pacific is a unique region with different ethnic groups, yet it can be strong and united for a common destiny. The climate change challenges of sinking islands makes the region united in relocation and adaptation issues whilst the bigger islands are dealing with mitigation measures.

### **Conclusion:**

EPLD is an avenue where participants discover their different styles of leadership, their different levels of leadership, the networks they need to be able to draw from in order to strengthen their leadership qualities. EPLD has brought together young and vibrant Pacific leaders who are willing to learn and share their resources for the betterment of the region and their own countries. To conclude, leaders are not leaders if they do not have followers and EPLD provides the opportunity of mentoring new and upcoming leaders of tomorrow. It is becoming a leading regional network of Pacific Leaders.

Submitted by Ruth Pune, New Caledonia Study Tour group member.

PO Box 7445, Boroko, NCD, Papua New Guinea

Ph: (675) 76999239 (mobile)

E-mail: [truthpune@gmail.com](mailto:truthpune@gmail.com)



Closing ceremony in Tonga with the Royal Highnesses, Princess Anne and Princess Pilolevu. Ruth is standing directly at the back of Princess Anne in this photo.