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South Pacific

*Traditional governance and sustainable
development in the Pacific*

Bikenibeu Paeniu

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Published by the National Centre for Development Studies

Printed in Australia by Better Printing Service,
1 Foster Street, Queanbeyan, NSW, 2620.

The Economics Division acknowledges the contribution made by the Australian Agency for International Development towards the publication of this working paper series.

ISBN 0 7315 1985 X

ISSN 1038-412X

Key to symbols used in tables

n.a.	Not applicable
..	Not available
-	Zero
.	Insignificant

Bikenibeu Paeniu is a member of Parliament and leader of the opposition in Tuvalu. He is former Prime Minister of Tuvalu and was an Assistant Economist with the South Pacific Commission.

abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse a strategic framework within which implementation of local government policy reform can be undertaken. In particular, it will emphasise the necessity of highlighting the long existing traditional governing structures that are still part of the everyday life of community people on the islands. The paper argues that traditional governance is imperative to ensuring sustainable development in the islands. Some theoretical framework for policy implementation is discussed, although the paper's intention is to utilise the actual traditional governing practices of island communities, and to build a strategic framework from them for the implementation of local government policy reform.

Nevertheless a number of Pacific island countries are reappraising the current situation. In some countries the reform process has been ongoing, whilst for others it has only just started. The policymakers in the islands have usually demonstrated an socioeconomic policy interest towards improving their people's living standards. They have largely ignored their institutional and especially, building framework required for the implementation of their policies. Island governments now recognise that they ought to re-examine the prevailing institutional framework within which development policies are implemented. Consequently, island governments are focusing their reform programs on public, private, and human resources sector development, as well as strategic planning and sustainable development.

Local government reform is a common trend in the Pacific

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W. Economics Division, Research School of Social and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1995.

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Published by the National Centre for Development Studies

Printed in Australia by Fetter Printing Services,
1 Foster Street, Queensland, 4007, 2021.

Abstract

The Economics Division acknowledges the contributions made by island communities and by other stakeholders to the development of the National Centre for Development Studies. The purpose of this paper is to identify a strategic framework within which implementation of local government policy reform can be undertaken. In particular, it will emphasise the necessity of highlighting the long existing traditional governing structures that are still part of the everyday life of community people on the islands. The paper argues that traditional governance is imperative to ensuring sustainable development in the islands. Some theoretical framework for policy implementation is discussed, although the paper's intention is to realise the actual traditional governing practices of island communities and to build a strategic framework from them for the implementation of local government policy reform.

Keywords: Traditional governance, island communities, local government, policy reform, sustainable development, South Pacific Islands.

Traditional governance and sustainable development in the Pacific

Pacific island countries are increasingly under pressure to implement policies which bring the fruits of development to their peoples. The Cold War has ended, and the world is re-arranging itself more in accordance with economic concerns, rather than the former security concerns. These were normally in favour of the South Pacific region. Traditional donor partners of the island nations now have other demanding priorities to attend to, beyond the Pacific region. Certain donor partners now claim that despite over a decade of development aid, the island countries have only managed slow economic growth. The World Bank's 1993 economic report on the region highlighted the poor performance of the South Pacific, with its average growth rate of only 0.1 per cent per annum over the past 10 years. Australian Ministers for the Pacific islands have repeatedly blamed the island nations' ineffective policy development for these poor results.

Nevertheless a number of Pacific island countries are reappraising the current situation. In some countries the reform process has been ongoing, whilst for others it has only just started. But policymakers in the islands have mainly concentrated on socioeconomic policies in their effort towards improving their peoples' living standards. They have largely ignored the institutional and capacity building framework required for the implementation of their policies. Island governments now recognise that they ought to re-examine the prevailing institutional framework within which development policies are implemented. Consequently, island governments are focusing their reform programs on public, private, and human resources sector development, as well as strategic planning and sustainable development.

Local government reform is a common trend in the Pacific

Local government and government administrative structures at the national level are currently under scrutiny throughout the Pacific region. At the time of writing, the

Papua New Guinea National Parliament passed a Bill to abolish existing provincial government structures. Tuvalu is currently undertaking a nationwide consultation process on local government reform, with a view to amending existing structures. Attention has been particularly focused on decentralisation, but with varying objectives and problems throughout the region. For example, over the past decade the Republic of Kiribati implemented a decentralisation policy which is yet to realise its goals and objectives.

These reforms clearly reveal the need to take into account the traditional governing systems, which have existed in the island communities long before European contact. Whilst most countries in the region have been inclined to break away from the colonial administrations, they did in fact inherit political structures which have little in common with traditional governing norms. This is manifested by frequent clashes between local government authorities established under law, and those based solely on customary practices. These so-called imposed local government structures on island communities stress the political reliability of their system, the contribution it can make to social and economic development, and the increased participation of the people in the decision-making process. Equally important is the need to pursue a given sustainable development strategy, which involves tightening up donors' conditions, and being aware of the scarce natural resource base of the small island states in the Pacific.

Objectives

The paper is primarily intended for practitioners in local and central governments, with emphasis on the policymakers. As traditional governance has been much ignored in the establishment of local government structures in the islands, the paper will argue that these traditional systems must be accounted for in order for development objectives to be realised at the grassroots level. Political motives behind local government reform will also be discussed, evidenced by the numerous decentralisation programs implemented throughout the Pacific region. In acknowledging the paramount goal of all island governments to provide its people with a satisfactory and sustainable quality of life, there will also be discussion of the role local governance can play in sustainable development.

Methodology and approach

The Pacific region is made up of numerous distinct cultures and traditions. Writing on local governance for the Pacific can thus result in generalisations which may be inapplicable to a number of countries. Thus the analysis will mainly concern the small island states of the Pacific (Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue and Tuvalu) and where useful, will be applied to the experience of the other larger Pacific countries.

It is important to distinguish between the terminologies 'traditional governance' and 'local governance' at the outset. Traditional governance refers particularly to the governing structures, norms and practices which are an inherent part of the cultures and traditions of the respective island/village communities. Local governance refers to the local government authorities established in each island or village community by law, and is usually regarded as the arm or representative of the central government at the local level. This form of governance is normally associated with the colonial administrations.

An understanding of the settlement and distribution of villages in the respective island countries is also needed to appreciate the strategic approach discussed in this paper. In Melanesia, Micronesia and some Polynesian countries like Tonga and Western Samoa, people normally settle in several villages. Under the traditional structure, each of these villages has its own form of government. In Kiribati for instance, all villages on one island were brought together under one island council during colonial times and have remained that way up to now. In the case of the 13 villages making up North Tarawa in Kiribati, they are under the jurisdiction of the North Tarawa Council who has its head office at Abaokoro village. In other countries like Tuvalu, Tokelau, and the Northern Cook Islands, people normally settle in one main village, and here one island council normally looks after one village. Thus the strategic approach proposed in this paper is confined mainly to a village by village approach. When discussing the proposed strategic approach, the author refers to 'village government' as the product of amalgamating traditional and local governance.

Decentralisation and local governments

The colonial period

Before European contact, the Pacific was a collection of small villages, families, tribes and kingdoms scattered over a vast area, each with their own forms of social organisation and integration. On Tabiteuea Island, the biggest island in the Gilbert group of Kiribati, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony administration established a single island council to look after the affairs of more than 20 villages. These villages, scattered over a 150 kilometre chain of atoll land, were separated by lagoon passages. For administrative convenience, the colonial administration created two separate entities out of the one island, North and South Tabiteuea. An island council was established on each island. Throughout these changes the colonial administration ignored the existing traditional governing structures on Tabiteuea Island and the atolls. Colonisation only provided for the integration of island and village communities along national boundaries, forgetting the peoples' cultures and traditions.

Highly centralised governments in the Pacific countries originate from colonial administration. The centralised administrative structures were normally manned by

expatriates or resident-commissioners, who principally maintained law and order, collected revenue; and facilitated the exploitation and extraction of the country's resources (Bhatt et al. 1987). Although colonial masters allowed an element of local representation in the form of local government authorities, they were largely controlled from the centre. In the small island nations of the Pacific, established local governments were no more than agents of the central government. Only recently have they paid more attention to implementing development policies and programs, away from their common role as liaison agents for the central government.

Macdonald (1982) wrote about Te Reitaki n Nonouti (the Union of the Nonouti People, an island in the southern Gilbert Group, Kiribati) which was formed out of the *unimane* (elders or old men) power. The *Reitaki* became the island's development authority, although all projects were performed in the name of the Island Council. At this time the colonial government knew little of the *Reitaki*, and its program of local government reform took place without any *Reitaki* input. Although the *Reitaki* was distinctive for its assertion of *unimane* power, the need to modernise was also recognised. For example, the *Reitaki* adopted many of the outward forms of the Island Council, whose powers it assumed without assistance from the central administration. It made laws, collected taxes, chose office holders from among the district representatives who made up the committee, and kept minutes and financial records. But the *Reitaki*'s power base was traditional. The *Reitaki* could not have achieved such dominance without the consent of the Nonouti islanders, strongly supported by the *unimane*.

Forms and motives of decentralisation

Decentralisation was the focus of much political debate in the islands during independence, and remains an important issue today. Decentralisation is the rational distribution of competence and resources within a political and administrative system to lower regional or local levels (Siedentopf 1987). Its objective is to relieve partially the central state from its decision-making tasks, transferring the political administrative system to lower levels.

With administrative decentralisation, the central governments create administrative offices at lower and local levels such as district officers, giving them certain powers, functions and resources. Such creations are primarily extensions of the central governments, and in many instance are under the direct control of central authorities. With political decentralisation, island and town councils are established under legislation giving them certain political and decision-making powers. In this type of decentralisation, local people are formally and legally associated with the governance of their own localities. Representations in these councils by local people are normally granted following local elections.

Decentralisation in the small island states was mainly implemented by the formation of island councils, whereas in the larger Melanesian states provincial governments

were the predominant mode. Decentralisation for development in the islands has been pursued in accordance with either a 'practical' school of thought or by 'The Pacific Way'. The practical point of view sees development best brought about by decentralising powers, activities and resources. The Pacific Way pursues national development in accordance with the traditions and customs of the Pacific people, giving the decision-making power over community development to the people who live there. The Pacific Way questions the ability of provincial or national capitals to impose their views, designs and programs of development on the people in the villages. Rather, village people are seen as having the right to determine their own development.

Many politicians in the islands cite the wider sharing of powers and the greater participation of the village people in the decision-making process as the main reasons for decentralisation. But these objectives are still to be fully realised in most of the small island nations. So despite delegation of power and activities from the centre, local government units are still regarded by the people as agents of the central government. That is, village people have not been able to identify with these established systems of local governance. But there is a third, hidden consideration employed in the decentralisation programs of several Pacific island nations. Unfortunately it is becoming a popular and important tool in the formulation of political strategies by leading politicians in the island states. Several political regimes at the leadership level have found it necessary to decentralise powers and resources in order to acquire legitimacy and support. When this happens, personal and party politics become the paramount consideration, and distribution of resources is biased towards the larger island or village communities. While the island governments have a democratic framework, the majority of their people are still largely unfamiliar with western style politics. Sadly, the success of certain political regimes results from taking advantage of their peoples' ignorance.

It should be noted that despite small island states' inclination towards more political decentralisation, island councils are still largely controlled by the central governments. The local populations regard island councils as representatives of the national government, and not as their local government. These small island communities have thus begun to take the initiative—with or without help from outside—and organise their own development. Traditional governance becomes critically important here, as the island nations seek feasible options for sustainable development.

Traditional governance—it has always been there

Subjected to change but remaining powerful

Despite the decades of European influence in the Pacific islands, the island people have always maintained their identity in the beliefs and values of their forebears. Islanders learned how to adapt and adopt ideologies, lifestyles and technologies of

outsiders, but always in such a way that the essence of their own cultural identity was preserved. Islanders, like other Asian ethnic groups, are easily detected in major cities of the metropolitan countries because this living culture remains with them. A major element of this cultural identity which has remained part of the islanders' heritage is their traditional system of governance.

This system has not been immune from changes imposed by colonisers and island governments in the early days of their independence. Not all traditional governing practices (or any cultural value and belief for that matter) would be considered appropriate nowadays. Culture is an evolving process; it is a living entity. The prevailing cultures of all the island nations have changed in one way or another. Some of the changes brought about by the colonisers, including the missionaries, were not all that bad. However the fact remains that most of the changes introduced largely ignore the traditional values and cultures of the islanders.

Within the small and fragmented traditional societies throughout the Pacific, relations between members are characterised by affection, devotion to each other, caring and sharing. Offences were punished, but the punishments were controlled. Nonetheless, there are traditional practices that needed to change for the better. Latukefu (1987) described some of the traditions of traditional Papua New Guinea: 'In cases of raping women of another clan or tribe the ultimate or most noble way of settling the score was to pay back in kind or to go to war. The ultimate way of settling inter-community land dispute was to go to war...In the case of murder, payback killing was a must'. To the people of traditional societies in Papua New Guinea, these traditional governing practices are noble and sacred. These same traditions were altered by the missionaries, who replaced them with supposedly Christian principles such as truth, freedom, love, equality, forgiveness, peace making and giving. For example, on Nukulaelae island in Tuvalu, current traditional punishment for people drinking alcohol is exclusion from community activities for one year. About twenty years ago, the traditional punishment for the same offence of drinking alcohol was to summon the person to the *maneapa*, lifting him as high as possible, and letting him drop onto the *maneapa*'s concrete floor. This act is repeated until the person becomes motionless and seriously injured. These are examples of traditions which were changed for the better, especially by Christian missionaries, throughout traditional communities in the islands.

But other changes should never have been introduced. For instance, in Tuvalu and the Cook Islands, the combined efforts of the church and government curtailed the role of traditional leaders. In Tuvalu and the Southern Gilberts in Kiribati, the missionaries stripped the traditional chiefs of authority and wielded it themselves. Consequently the church pastors hold prestigious seats in the *maneapa* and play a very influential role in the community's decision-making process, even to this day. Yet in Kiribati, the customary call for respect of the elders (*unimane*) in the southern islands

prevailed despite attempts by the government and church to change it. Likewise in the Northern Gilbert group, high chiefs and their families remained a formidable force in island politics (Macdonald 1982:129)

Another misuse of power was displayed by traditional leaders in Tuvalu, who forced elected representatives of local governments to vacate their seats. On one particular island, the *lima malos*i (association of young men and women) went on strike. They refused to undertake communal work, which was normally directed by the traditional leaders, until all members of the island council were replaced by new ones. Their demands were met despite the fact that it had no basis in law. However, the central government in cooperation with the traditional leaders requested council members to resign. These conflicts between the island councils and the traditional leaderships, as well as portions of the island community, are still occurring. The People's Congress on Local Government Reform held in March 1995 attributed the major cause of these conflicts to a lack of clear understanding amongst the local population on the role of the island council.

Thus traditional governing systems of the island or village communities, whether changed or not, are still existing now and will never disappear. It is therefore important to take them into account in the planning and implementation of development activities at the grassroots level.

Does it hinder development in the islands?

One view is that traditional systems are hindrances to development, whilst others maintain that in order for development to be effective at the grassroots level, it must be based on the existing traditional environment. But what is development? Economic growth is no longer considered a true measure of development. The UNDP has come up with a new development index called the human development index (HDI). It puts humans at the centre of the development process, and it uses indices such as sanitation, health, housing, participatory planning and education to measure the quality of development at the community level. This sociological approach 'emphasises that the key actors are human beings, whose pattern of social organisation is crucial for devising viable solutions to achieving sustainable development' (Serageldin 1993).

Islanders' traditional perspective subscribes to a view of development which regards the advancement of the entire society as vital to the achievement of human wellbeing. Their traditional governing systems provide for the good welfare of their people. The systems also provide for participation of the people in the decision-making process, and accord them the right to determine their own development. The Pacific culture of mutual sharing and caring for the vulnerable and the elderly, as well as the respect for nature and indigenous knowledge, has contributed to current levels of human development in the islands. Therefore if development is seen as the attaining of a satisfactory quality of living by the people, then traditional governance actually

promotes development in the islands. Islanders consider land, its ownership and its many social uses, national and local governance, culture and tradition, justice, equity and participation, family and religion as central to their development, as well as the benefits arising from sustained economic growth.

For example, many Samoans believe that their *matai* system efficiently caters for the good welfare of their people. In Tuvalu, the *Ulu Fenua* (high chief) and *Taupulega* (the traditional governing body made up of heads of families) undertake many development activities on their own initiative. And in many cases, the development projects implemented by these traditional bodies are more effective than those implemented by the national government and island council.

An evaluation of the North Tarawa Integrated Rural Development Project in Kiribati shows the village organised and implemented activities better than those handled by the island councils. One activity under the project was the establishment of village banks to promote income generation and self-employment in the villages, using a modified version of the Grameen Bank concept in Bangladesh. Each of the 13 villages in North Tarawa was allocated a monetary grant in proportion to population. Two years after the activity's inception in late 1992, the majority of the village banks had grown from 20 to over 200 per cent. Nabeina village which topped the score received an initial grant of \$1,828 and by the end of 1994 had grown by 220 per cent to \$5,857.80.

An island revolving fund similar to the village banking concept was implemented on Tamana Island in the Southern Gilbert group of Kiribati. The scheme was executed with UNDP assistance, and instead of dividing the fund amongst the villages, a single fund was administered by the Tamana Island Council. Discussion with the Kiribati Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development, revealed that the performance of the Tamana revolving fund did not match North Tarawa's. Traditional leadership and practices were identified as the main reason for the good performance of the village banks in North Tarawa. In the case of Nabeina village, social pressures generated by traditional rules, such as banning from the village those who failed to repay their loans on time, compelled timely repayment. In the case of another village, Buota, whose bank was defunct at the time of the evaluation, its failure was largely due to the non-involvement of the *Tokatarawa* (the traditional council of old men in the village) in the management and administration of the bank. Therefore, given time, guidance and appropriate assistance, these village people are capable of planning and managing development projects within their own traditional circles of governing.

Five years ago, the people of Nukufetau Island in Tuvalu achieved their target of a A\$100,000 Trust Fund. Apparently the elders of Nukufetau decided to establish an Island Trust Fund 15 years ago. They made a traditional ruling binding on all the islanders, especially the working people from the island, to contribute to this fund. The islanders responded respectfully to this call, and they now have a Trust Fund

which is not only supplementing the needs of the present population but also the future children of Nukufetau.

Traditional practices in conformity with sustainable development

The islanders had always lived a precarious existence, until they came to terms with the barrenness of the islands on which they found themselves. Long before the arrival of Europeans, the islanders learned to cope with a harsh environment and to utilise its scarce resources to the utmost. They exploited their environment in its totality and their cultures evolved in harmony with it. One could easily prove this by taking a quick look at life on the atolls where conditions are extremely harsh. Despite recent interest in sustainable development, this has always been an inherent element of the culture and traditional practices of the island people.

These conditions meant a delicate balance between man and nature was maintained. The coconut tree with its many uses is the tree of life to the inhabitants of these small island states, especially the atoll nations of the Northern Cook Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu where farming conditions are extremely harsh. Likewise, the pandanus tree and other plant species were also exploited to a great degree by the islanders in their struggle to survive. The cultivation of the giant swamp taro (*Cytosperma chaminosis*) in the atolls of the Northern Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Tokelau is a classic example of an atoll technology that is not only environmentally friendly but also sustainable. This taro, called *pulaka* in Tuvalu, *puraka* in the Cook Islands and *babai* in Kiribati has ensured the sustenance of peoples' livelihood in the atolls. All these undertakings over the many hundred years of existence in the islands were performed in harmony with the environment.

In Kiribati and Tuvalu, islanders learned to live within the limits imposed by their environment. Before European contact they used to restrict the size of their families, usually by abortion when conditions made this necessary. Population control would normally be a matter for the community in times of prolonged drought and other natural disasters. There is usually little surplus production in the villages, and where necessary, non-perishable foods are stored against drought and other hardships.

Even the traditional land tenure system of the islands has human welfare and sustainability as its paramount concern. Land in the small island states is owned mainly by individuals and families, and a member of a family can always ask for an extra piece if their current share no longer provides adequate sustenance.

However, the sustainability usually provided by the traditional systems began to change after the arrival of Europeans. They brought a new material culture, new technology and new ideologies. The changes introduced by the colonisers alleviated the pressure on some resources, but at the same time generated new demands because

there were few ways of acquiring the new luxuries (later to become necessities), except by the sale of items traditionally used for survival. The indigenous Pacific societies had never been static, but had been living organisms constantly adjusting to changing circumstances. However, the forces of change from outside were of an unprecedented range and magnitude. Thus the traditional values and beliefs of the islanders have been under great pressure for change, and although upheld where possible, have been modified when necessary. The islanders are now living in a new world.

The strategic approach

If the traditional systems do not hinder development as illustrated above, should the islanders then revert back to their traditional way of life? And in terms of governance for sustainable development, should the island states abolish the concept of local governments imposed by the colonisers and instead revert to their traditional governing norms and practices? One may come up with many more questions, but it must again be stressed that the island people will always uphold their traditional values and practices. The dignity of the islanders is reflected in their close association with traditional values and beliefs. This aspect of their life corresponds to one of the major goals of sustainable development. These traditional practices obviously can change, but only when necessary. The challenge therefore for the practitioner is to recognise this fact and account for it.

Should the islanders amalgamate or cooperate? This paper advocates taking governance to the people and making local government a government of the people for the people and by the people. The strategy recommended is to amalgamate the two systems of traditional governance and local governance by actually establishing a single authority—village government—at the local level using the traditional system as a base. Development will work better and more efficiently on a village by village basis.

Political will and commitment is an essential prerequisite for a successful reform program of governance at the local level. One of the constraints in making decentralisation work effectively in the islands is senior civil servants' reluctance to relinquish the power and functions they normally carry out. This is an unfortunate hangover from colonial times, and the politicians responsible need to direct such people to follow approved policies.

Strengthening the national agency responsible for rural development and local governments is also a requirement in order to execute reform programs efficiently. Once they understand and appreciate the goals and objectives of development projects, people in the villages usually become committed to the activity, so that project failure is due to the lack of technical support from the national government. This lack of support arises from the poorly staffed and under-funded department responsible for local governments.

Organisation and institutional reforms

The current system of local government authorities, island councils and provincial governments will have to be fully integrated into the traditional leadership and governing structure. By consulting the traditions of the people, and by drawing on the wealth of positive observations by outsiders, a basic reconstruction towards a more effective local government system is possible. Here it is appropriate to make reference to China's historical development, which has so far continued to provide a sustainable livelihood to its huge population. This was done by integrating the already common culture of Chinese traditional leadership with ideologies from outside. Within the Pacific region, the cases of Fiji and Tonga are clear examples of integration of traditional governance with western democratic ideologies.

Using the *maneaba* (*maneapa* in Tuvaluan) governing structure of Kiribati and Tuvalu as an illustration, it is proposed that the existing local government structure is reconstructed in accordance with it. The *maneaba* is the community meeting house and can be rightly referred to as the island or village parliament. It is where traditional leaders and the people at large discuss issues and make decisions on all matters relating to the general welfare and development of the island people. It is part of the social system, and its power is based on peoples' respect for tradition as well as providing a social safety net. All meetings held in the *maneaba* are public, and although traditional, are based on democratic principles. The *maneaba* symbolises the community in its unity. The basic rule for all decisions in this meeting house is 'consensus'—the 'Pacific Way'.

Theoretically the power for local governance is vested in the councils. In practice however, there is actually a power struggle between the local government and the traditional *maneapa*. The council draws its authority from the law. Unfortunately, it is also perceived as an external institution, an extension of the national government. People lack a sense of ownership in this political institution. Integrating councils with the traditional system will go a long way in achieving the goals and objectives of sustainable development. A screening process would have to be undertaken when amalgamating the two systems, by analysing the role and functions of both types of governance. When this analysis is completed, it is proposed that the findings are thoroughly examined with the objective to fully integrate both systems. The people must be involved throughout this process, allowing them to participate in the selection of each system's elements to be combined in the implementation stage.

Tuvalu tried to incorporate the *maneapa* system in its local government system in 1986. One of the major features of this reform was the election of the president of the island council, undertaken within the *maneapa* by secret ballot. Previously the president was elected the normal western way by universal suffrage. It is proposed that this process go further, so that elections are staged for all representatives to the island council. This would mean that the officers elected would resemble that of a Cabinet,

but would still be responsible to the *maneapa* parliament or traditional governing system. This Cabinet would run the government of the island or village, but in close consultation with the traditional parliament. Any major projects, and particularly its work program, would have to be cleared by the *maneapa* before implementation. Likewise, its annual budget and associated supplementaries would have to be approved by the *maneapa*. Thus central government will need to relinquish its powers and authority to the 'village government' to manage their own affairs, particularly in areas of development planning, budgeting, revenue generation, and project implementation. Powers exercised by the national government in approving decisions reached by the council will also need to be relinquished. That is, the powers normally vested in the Minister will now be vested in the *maneapa*.

At present, terms for council members vary from three to four years, depending on the country. In most island countries, presidents are also elected every three to four years. In Tuvalu, the island president is elected every year from the existing members of the council, whilst the rest are elected every four years. Hence an island president may lose the election but remain a councillor until the end of his or her term. It is proposed that yearly election of the island president be adopted to make the job more competitive and responsive to the needs of the local population. It would also put pressure on the president to execute his or her duties effectively as well as efficiently. The *maneapa* would provide the safety net should the island president change every year by ensuring consistency in the work program of the 'village government' in accordance with the wishes of the people.

Remuneration

An important feature to consider is the remuneration for council members. In the islands, the only remuneration paid to councillors is a sitting allowance. It has been recently suggested that an appropriate salary package on honorary terms be paid to council members, in order to attract skilled leaders. This will also encourage them to carry out their duties ably. It is possible that the advantages of paying a salary package to council members may outweigh the disadvantages. However, considering that traditional leaders do not receive salaries, it may be difficult for the *maneapa* to accept payment of a remuneration package. In any case, money is not that abundant in the islands to justify such payment.

Nonetheless, island councils have not been very effective in executing developmental programs at the grassroots level, and this is partly due to the nature of their work being performed on a voluntary basis. There is also an increasing number of retired civil servants who could be persuaded to return to their home islands to serve as councillors, in which case payment of a salary would be essential. Rather than baldly asserting to the traditional leaders this proposal for council members to be

paid an honorary salary, the better approach would be to discuss it openly with them before a decision is reached.

Greater financial support and public accountability

An important effect of governance at the local level is the fostering of the values of self-determination and self-reliance. With a centralised system, the islanders relied heavily on the aid coming from the national government. The result was that their creativity gradually disappeared and their notion of self-help eroded. They also became increasingly dependent on outside help for solutions to their problems. Central government met their needs largely by way of project proposals.

Some island governments have already implemented a system whereby councils are paid annual grants. It is proposed that this be maintained with the view to increasing government support grants to be administered solely on the discretion of the village government. However there is a need for additional safety nets, which could take the form of financial reviews and reports to the *maneapa* and to the central government on any incident of mismanagement of funds.

Public accountability is not just in terms of money, but also refers to the responsible use of power and other resources, as well as the rational execution of functions empowered on those to exercise them. As such, both political and administrative accountabilities are crucial to effective local governance. One way of accomplishing this is requiring the submission of a comprehensive annual report of the village government on all aspects of its work to the *maneapa*. Such reports may include information on performance during that particular year, accomplishments and failures in the delivery of basic services, as well as the sources and use of funds. The purpose of the report is to give the people an idea of how their elected officials are performing. By keeping them well informed, they could better assess whether to continue to vote for the same officials.

Other forms of public accountability would be the regular audit of public funds by government auditors. Unfortunately, a number of these tools could be used for political gains, such as recall of certain employees who may have exposed corrupt dealings by a political party at the local level. It is believed, however, that the *maneapa* would prevent such actions.

Local capability and competence

The capability and competence of personnel must also be intact if governance at the local level is to be effective. Delegation of power and services away from the central government to the village people will be meaningless without administrative capacity in the form of adequate funding and trained personnel. Good and effective governance at the village level will be impossible without local personnel developing adequate

and appropriate knowledge and skills to ensure optimum execution of duties and responsibilities.

In most of the island nations, employees seconded from the national government to service island councils are amongst the lowest paid civil servants. Few of them have reached tertiary education level. In Kiribati and Tuvalu, the secretary to island councils, called the island executive officer (IEO), is paid the same salary as clerical officers serving in central government departments. Yet it is the IEO who performs all the work with practically no assistance. The duties of the IEO are multiple, the main ones being day-to-day administration, council treasurer, adviser and secretary to island council, secretary to island court, secretary to lands court, banking, planning and overseeing implementation of development projects. Both Kiribati and Tuvalu recognised over a decade ago the need to upgrade the salaries and status of the IEO to that of an assistant secretary of a ministry. This resulted in the establishment of new posts for a senior local government officer and secretary. The situation, however, has not changed much since the colonial era. In Tuvalu, there is no island secretary in post and only about four senior local government officers, three of whom are based within the ministry responsible for local government.

Given the commitment towards decentralisation by all island governments, it is imperative that the government of the day take financial responsibility. In order to attract quality personnel and to retain their services, island governments must upgrade the salaries of island executive officers to the same level as directors of departments, who are currently paid one level below that of permanent secretaries using the Tuvalu salary structure. The title of the post must change from the colonial name to a more professional orientation such as island secretary. There should also be a continuous training program to upgrade the skills of these personnel. Expansion of support staff is also imperative to local governance, and must include an administrative assistant, island treasurer and clerical officer.

Role of planning in good governance and sustainable development

Peoples' participation in the decision-making process involving their own welfare is an important prerequisite for effective governance and sustainable development. Just seeking their comments and perspective on issues and concerns of developmental and environmental relevance is not participation. Participation is the act of taking part, becoming actively involved, and sharing in the planning, implementation and evaluation of endeavours by the people themselves for their human liberation and fulfilment.

Pacific islanders, like any other village people in the world, demand active participation in decision-making processes, and want reassurance that they will benefit from developmental initiatives. Gone are the days when the villager, the owners of the resources, would agree to almost anything out of respect. Now they are demanding

to be empowered through processes such as 'education for consciousness'. They want to understand not only the way of things, but also how they can take appropriate action in the situation without waiting for concessions from authority. These people also know best about the state of their environment and how they can best protect it while meeting their basic needs. Interaction between human activities and the environment are best observed by those directly affected by it, rather than by national policymakers and planners who rarely visit the villages.

Disempowerment of local communities has been considered the root cause of environmental decline in developing countries (Vivian 1991:18). Too often the benefits of local programs and projects do not reach the village people but are instead absorbed by the wealthy and the powerful on that particular island. Consequently, the empowerment of local administrations and people 'to organise their own resource management' has been called for (Holmberg 1991). While the Pacific island governments are empowering the local government authorities at the island and village levels, the full integration of the traditional power base into the reformed institution has not been achieved.

In order to effectively involve the community in planning and implementation of policy, an appropriate training program is designed for council members, including their employees and the local population at large. It is important that the people are aware of governments' priorities, and that they themselves are fully involved in the determination of these priorities. Training in project management would also be essential. Regular on-the-job training for council members, especially presidents and employees, should also be instituted in order to keep them up-to-date.

Women and governance

Women provide a strong force behind the development of Pacific islands. Unlike other countries in the world, the status of women in the cultures of the islands is relatively good. They play a very important role in the daily sustenance of their families' lives. However the status of women varies from country to country, as far as traditional governance is concerned.

In Melanesia, despite the egalitarian nature of its societies, women were inferior to men. They are denied positions of leadership in accordance with traditional practices. In Papua New Guinea, most traditional communities exclude women from religious or sacred ceremonies on the grounds of their assumed inferiority to men. According to Latukefu (1987) 'keeping women in a position of inferiority, it seems, was a noble tradition among men in Papua New Guinea.' Although this tradition has changed, it still requires a stronger commitment to make it truly conspicuous.

In contrast, throughout Polynesia prior to European contact there had been some powerful and outstanding women leaders. Even nowadays in Samoa and Fiji, women still hold chiefly titles. In egalitarian societies like Kiribati and Tuvalu, it is mainly the

men who are involved in the decision-making process. Despite this, some island councils in these two countries have women representatives, indicating an erosion of island traditions allowing women to participate in the decision-making process. In some communities, a woman who may be head of her family will also sit on the 'village council', but hardly participates in the discussions because of the cultural barriers. The 'village council' is the main decision-making body at the village level and is comprised of heads of each family. In order for the 'village government' to be effective, it is strongly recommended that womens' representation be formalised by reserving at least one seat for a woman. This arrangement should be formalised by incorporating it into the law.

It has also been suggested that island councils should include representatives from youth and from local non-governmental organisations. The proposed strategic approach for effective governance at the local level does not advocate this. Obviously the youth are the backbone of a Pacific village society, and it will continue to be that way. Given that a large part of Pacific traditional culture is respect of elders, it is advisable for the current situation to remain unchanged. Likewise, non-governmental organisations will continue to perform effectively if they remain non-political. After all, a major characteristic of developmental non-governmental organisations is their non-involvement in politics, which differentiates them from government bureaucracies.

The role of the church

The church has benefitted the island people. Many Pacific leaders are products of church schools. Although the teachings of Christian principles have made a positive impact on the lives of the Pacific people, not all church doctrines and practices seem appropriate today. In Tuvalu, where the church is influential in the village communities, it does not seem to aid its members in terms of development activities. Rather it concentrates only on spiritual teaching, without fostering the concept of self-reliance amongst the people. This is especially true with the Tuvalu Christian Church, of whom of whom about 98 per cent of the total population are members. It only seeks donations from the church members, with no development initiatives directed towards improving the welfare of the people. With the proposed 'village government', the appropriate step is for the pastors to curb their activities and decision-making power to matters relating to the church only. Their prestigious seats in the *maneapa* should be relinquished in favour of the traditional leaders, so that church status would be equal to any other non-governmental organisation.

Legislative framework

All constitutions of individual Pacific island nations emphasise the importance of their respective traditional values and cultures. The preamble of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea states

WE, THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

pay homage to the memory of our ancestors—the source of our strength and origin of our combined heritage

acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdoms of our people—which have come down to us from generation to generation

pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and Christian principles that are ours now.

Its fifth directive principle further states 'PNG should achieve development primarily through the use of PNG forms of social, political and economic organisation.

This PNG Way calls for the 'appreciation of traditional ways of life and culture, including language, in all their richness and variety' and 'traditional village and communities to remain as viable units of PNG society and for active steps to be taken to improve their cultural, social, economic and ethical quality.' (Peutalo and Howlett 1992).

In the same manner the preamble of the Independence Constitution of Tuvalu states

AND WHEREAS the people of Tuvalu desire to constitute themselves as Independent State based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition.' These traditional values are further enshrined in the third and fourth principles of the Constitution which state

3. ...that the stability of Tuvaluan society and the happiness and welfare of the people of Tuvalu, both present and future, depend very largely on the maintenance of Tuvaluan values, culture and tradition, including the vitality and sense of identity of island communities and attitudes of co-operation, self-help and unity within and amongst those communities.

4. Amongst the values that the people of Tuvalu seek to maintain are their forms of communities, the strength and support of the family and family discipline.

Where Tuvaluan values and customs are directly threatened by the use or exercise of the people's constitutional rights, the Constitution empowers the government to regulate the exercise of such rights to ensure protection of Tuvaluan values. However, the 1987 Laws of Tuvalu Act provides that where custom or tradition conflicts with the law, the latter shall prevail.

The Constitution of the Independent State of Western Samoa in its Preamble states

WHEREAS the Leaders of Western Samoa have declared that Western Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition.

In the preamble of the Constitution of Kiribati the first sentence reads

We the people of Kiribati, acknowledging God as the Almighty Father in whom we put our trust, and with faith in the enduring value of our traditions and heritage...

In implementing this Constitution, the people of Kiribati declare that

We shall continue to cherish and uphold the customs and traditions of Kiribati.

As for the Cook Islands, while its Constitution does not specifically make mention of its tradition and culture, the Constitution itself provides for the establishment of a House of *Arikis* (traditional chiefs) whose functions are

(a) It shall consider such matters relative to the welfare of the people of the Cook Islands as may be submitted to it by the Parliament for its consideration, and it shall express its opinion and make recommendations thereon to the Parliament and

(b) It shall have such other functions as may be prescribed by law.

But stressing the importance of traditional values and customs in these Constitutions is not enough, as they are all silent what these values and customs actually are. The lack of clear definition of traditional values and customs means that when it comes to the actual enforcement of these constitutional provisions for traditional values and customs, the western law normally prevails (as illustrated in the case of Tuvalu above). For example, in a number of village communities in Polynesia and Micronesia, drinking of alcohol is prohibited under traditional law. Yet such traditional law is not recognised by the conventional law. Law makers have argued that drafting or incorporating traditional or cultural law into conventional law is difficult, given the fact that culture is an evolving entity. It is argued however, that if conventional law has successfully codified the range of traditional land tenure systems throughout the Pacific, then it is also possible to incorporate the national governing norms established by 'village governments' into law. This will pose a real challenge to law scholars.

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