South Pacific

Values, risks and vulnerability in small island developing states

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Key to symbols used in tables
  n.a.  Not applicable
  ..  Not available
  -  Zero
  .  Insignificant

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Abstract

This paper will consider the policy options available to decision-makers in small island developing states (SIDS). While recognising the disproportionate influence of government officials within most societies, consideration will also be given to the role of individuals. This will be of particular significance in relation to value judgements, unequal risk and vulnerability across societies. Furthermore, attention will be drawn to the extent to which SIDS are exposed to risks that originate external to their communities. Emphasis will also be placed on the extent to which governments and individuals within SIDS can be pro-active in countering risk and vulnerability. Underpinning this discussion will be an awareness that perceptions of risk and vulnerability are derived from particular individual and/or group value judgements.
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An index of vulnerability

There has emerged a concept that risks and vulnerability can be quantified to the point that a meaningful index can be constructed. This is most usefully illustrated through the work of Lino Briguglio of the Islands and Small States Institute, Foundation for International Studies of the University of Malta (Briguglia 1995; Commonwealth Secretariat 1985; Sutton and Payne 1993). This work is explicit in limiting itself to economic vulnerability. Although useful in terms of ranking, and therefore highlighting those SIDS with the greatest vulnerability to particular risks, there remain significant limitations to this approach. Such an index relies heavily on the ability to create a numerical value for relevant indicators. In some instances this may be relatively straightforward; for example, transportation costs in relation to distance from markets. Despite important differences in terms of the nature of goods, modes of transport and economies of scale a broad comparison can be made. Difficulties arise in relation to the quantification of more subjective issues. How would one put a value on cultural heritage, a sense of 'belonging' or issues of aesthetics? In assessing risk and vulnerability a first step must be to define what is perceived as having value. This immediately raises the problem of comparing subjective value judgements. It should be recognised that any analysis of such values will almost certainly be restricted to individuals or relatively small groups. As such this places limitations on the scale of a possible index.

The Briguglio model for a vulnerability index begins with an acknowledgment that numerous SIDS face particular disadvantages within the global political economy. These are listed under five broad headings: small size; remoteness and insularity; disaster proneness; environmental factors; and other factors. The 'other' factors refers to a dependence on
foreign sources of income and demographic factors. It can be argued that certain of these categories are objective, such as physical size and location. Disaster proneness might be considered in a similar way, although even here there can be a range of vulnerability across a society in terms of ability to withstand, and recover from, natural and human-made disasters. Despite this caveat the majority of the indicators within the Briguglio model are more or less objective, albeit with scope for debate on the interpretation of the statistics provided.

The indicators considered here are more concerned with personal perception and a less traditional approach to risk assessment. This is particularly relevant to SIDS. Many SIDS are on the periphery of the centres of global economic developments. As such they are, to various degrees, marginalised and face disadvantages in international markets due to remoteness and transport costs. Beyond these economic constraints there are additional factors to consider, such as disruption of society and culture as processes of modernisation take hold. There can also be disruption due to migration, both in and out, usually involving younger generations leaving their home state. This has repercussions for cultural dynamics. Loss of cultural heritage is difficult to assess with a monetary value. For SIDS with small populations and unique cultures there can be a fragility of traditional norms and practices that can be degraded if they are not passed on to younger generations.

The concept of risk analysis has become associated with exercises commissioned by multinational firms wishing to safeguard their potential investment. The principle of risk analysis is a process conducted by all individuals, with varying sophistication and success. There can be major drawbacks in not having adequate information to make accurate assessments. One might gamble that potential gains outweigh obvious risks. Regardless of the complexities of making such assessments they all depend on an initial perception of the worth or value of given variables. These assessments can be quite fluid as circumstances alter or additional information is forthcoming. When in a life-threatening situation, such as a house fire, few would remain inside throwing previously highly valued goods out of the fire rather than saving themselves and their family. The fluidity of such value judgements is one reason why this area is under-researched.

Numerous studies exist assessing peoples’ vulnerability to natural hazards. Some highlight the role humans can play in exacerbating such hazards (Blaikie et al. 1994). It is largely taken as a given that risks and vulnerability follow on from an assessment of value. The relationship between risk and vulnerability is symbiotic. Vulnerability means that events may transpire whereby a situation becomes worse. The level of risk is the likelihood of such events happening. Such a relationship is quite straightforward. It is in relation to assessing the value of what constitutes a worsening situation that analysis becomes more complex. While the vulnerability/risk equation may appear self-evident there are many facets of value assessments that require further analysis. Foremost amongst these is to question what appear to be dominant assumptions about value systems. Such assumptions are highlighted by the categories chosen in analysing societies. The most obvious of these is gross domestic product (GDP) as an indicator of ‘success’. Although at certain levels this
might be wholly appropriate it can also mask a myriad of negative impacts on various sectors of society and the environment. Communities which might achieve a low score under such criteria could rank highly if other indicators, such as social cohesion, were taken into account. If different time-scales are considered this can affect how situations are judged. The exploitation of resources illustrates this point with differing assessments of viability depending on the desire for sustainability of resources.

**SIDS and the concept of development**

Fundamental to any development policy is a framework for understanding what constitutes 'development', for whom and how this is best achieved. This has largely been restricted to the idea that 'growth is good' and that, eventually, all sectors of an economy will benefit from such growth. This is most fundamentally demonstrated in the creation of the World Trade Organisation and the apparent dominance of the ideology of the free market. In an Asia Pacific context this ideology was reinforced at the APEC summit meeting held in Manila, Philippines, November 1996. Far from being 'free' this model must be seen as allowing comparative advantage to the more developed states and those groups and individuals within societies who are best placed to take advantage of market trends. The majority of SIDS face disadvantages and are vulnerable in this evolving global political economy. A significant aspect of this is the difficulties faced in distancing oneself from processes that can have global dimensions. If states and individuals were to reject the values inherent in this dominant model this does not isolate them from its impact. This can be in the form of goods available for purchase, price mechanisms, and broader issues of environmental or even cultural degradation.

The last point is interesting as it brings into question the relationships between economics, politics and social transformations. Often these areas are considered separately. This is a consequence of the disciplinary divides that exist within the social sciences. Such divides are problematic when considering the issue of vulnerability in SIDS. Often analysis is limited because it lacks a multi-disciplinary approach. While possibly excellent pieces of work within their own framework of reference, many analyses prove unsatisfactory for those from other disciplines. In part this is an issue of language and familiarity with concepts and terms. Such problems can be linked with the fundamental definition of development and how success is to be judged. If there are differing understandings of what constitutes development then the experiences of SIDS, or anywhere else for that matter, can be viewed in varying ways by different audiences.

Where there is a basic agreement on the overall aims and objectives of development policies there can remain significant differences of opinion both on how this might best be achieved and also how to measure success. A crude indicator such as gross domestic product per capita can provide data on the overall performance of a state's economy. This in itself should not be taken as evidence that the level of poverty will show a corresponding rise or decline. It is not inconsistent to see a rise in GDP per capita coinciding with a rise in absolute poverty. If the goal of development is to alleviate poverty then any assessment
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attempting to monitor strategies to achieve this aim must include more detailed data. Information is required on the distribution of wealth throughout a society. Although there continue to be a number of economists who adhere to the belief that overall economic growth will eventually 'trickle down' to all sectors of society this school of thought has a great number of detractors. The fact remains that without more detailed information the level of poverty within a society cannot be judged on the basis of overall economic performance.

A further complication arises beyond the disagreement over the strategy and assessment of poverty alleviation. This relates to the local impact of overseas investment or aid packages. From a purely economic stand point such investment is relatively straightforward. A given amount of money is granted, loaned or invested. Assessment can be made of any economic return, either profit or loss. This is easier to assess for multinationals with little or no altruistic intent—it only requires a balance sheet of economic performance. Such assessments become more problematic with development aid programs where the improvement of quality of life may be desired. Here far more subjective assessments come into play. Are such assessments best made by the donors or the recipients? A Fijian islander, Eci Nabalarua, highlighted this point at a forum reviewing Australia's aid program

In the realities of the socio-economic settings in which assistance is being given, there are some things which just do not have an equivalent monetary value attached to it. The type of development we seek or that we aspire to achieve is a quality of life that is wholesome. It refers to a lifestyle that fulfils basic survival needs undertaken with a measure of human dignity, is spiritually sound, socially stable and environmentally sustainable for future generations (Nabalarua 1996).

The above quotation is explicit in raising issues of spirituality, social stability and factors which relate to subjective values and are, therefore, extremely difficult to quantify. Economic performance is seen as only one aspect of the development process. Where economic indicators are generally positive there still may be negative social impacts and it is important to recognise that such impacts are at the local level. It is local communities that have to respond to these issues. Although the economic, social and political pressures exerted on SIDS often originate from outside of the islands how they are perceived and responded to is a domestic process. Several of the island groups have scattered populations which can inhibit ideas of 'nation building'. The most common model of development tends to lead to urban drift and highlight differences between the experiences of town and country dwellers. The speed with which such developments can take place does not easily allow cultural norms and values to adjust to changing circumstances. It is in relation to this point that many authors, and island politicians, have highlighted traditional beliefs and practices drawing attention to the argument that they are somehow challenged by the processes of modernisation (Lawson 1996).

Economic indicators are a fundamental element of the development process, both for investors and local communities. The costs or benefits of development practices need to be
assessed in a more holistic manner than a simple equation of financial investment and return. For the local communities of SIDS this involves a complex array of considerations going far beyond material wealth. While not wishing to downplay the major impact economic policies have within their own terms of reference there are potential societal implications additional to the monetary impact. Foremost amongst these are the impacts on existing family and social ties, environmental impacts and the potential to alter, or at least influence, existing value systems. A holistic vulnerability index must take into account factors beyond the standard economics-based analysis.

**Societal impacts**

One of the consistent features of global capitalism is unequal wealth creation. Some states adopt policies of welfarism. Family and clan ties can provide an economic ‘safety net’. As the more economically vulnerable SIDS face greater competition within the global free market system there are likely to be corresponding pressures on such support systems. Even where there are relatively high rates of economic growth, the unequal nature of this growth will strain existing practices of wealth distribution. This is not to say that inequalities of wealth are recent developments. The traditional clan systems of the Pacific island states put great emphasis on wealth, rank and prestige. Wealth in this context might not necessarily be measured in monetary terms, land ownership for example might not be given a rateable value. One of the disrupting influences of free market enterprise has been to alter such relations. When an apparently positive incidence of wealth creation occurs there can be negative consequences. These might arise from disagreements over how such wealth should be distributed among family and friends, if at all. Traditional social ties often require distribution of such wealth. Modern capitalist ideas would favour accumulation, reinvestment and continued growth. Individuals can find themselves caught between two competing worldviews on what is socially acceptable. Such problems would also occur at the level of government where there are similar contradictions between balancing infrastructure investment with welfare spending.

Another social impact of modernisation on SIDS has been the level of out-migration from the islands. This is particularly problematic as it tends to be the younger and more talented of the population who leave. Some may return with higher qualifications or work experience that will benefit their own economies. Others may remain abroad but, by way of remittances, contribute significantly to their home economy. Although the informal nature of these payments make it difficult to obtain precise data on their significance some studies have been undertaken which suggest they can form a substantial part of a household budget (Ahlburg 1991; Connell and Brown 1995). Apart from the direct financial consequences of out-migration there are more subtle impacts such as the migrants’ experiences overseas. This relates directly to values, perceptions and the type of issues that are understandably omitted from the Briguglio Vulnerability Index. Living and working abroad exposes islanders to the norms and values of their host communities. For Micronesians these are predominantly those of the United States. Other islanders are likely
to be exposed to the cultures of Australia and New Zealand. This is not to say that Pacific islanders are passive receptors of these influences. On the contrary they will actively interact with host cultures, embracing some values and rejecting others. Moreover, their ‘alien’ experience may reinforce their own cultural identity.

It is inappropriate to generalise about a shared Pacific island experience for migrants or shorter-term visitors. It is clear, however, that both the process of ‘modernisation’ intruding on Pacific island societies and the experiences of those islanders working and living abroad will have impacts on previous family and broader social relationships. In some respects this may be positive. As cash economies spread throughout the islands, the additional income of remittances will be seen as generally beneficial. Also as the consequences of modernisation spreads to all parts of the world, there are potential advantages in having members of one’s community who are more familiar with the practices of the more ‘developed’ states. This could prove to be either an advantage or a liability. A more positive interpretation would be that those with knowledge and expertise from the developed states can act as mediators who assess and facilitate the interactions that take place between the developed and developing worlds. Such a role requires sensitivity to the values and norms of the respective cultures. Ideally it would also involve a pro-active altruism that would safeguard those people and environments vulnerable in a period of change and transition. Unfortunately it is at least as likely that those with insight into the process of modernisation will use their knowledge and expertise to their own advantage and that of their families and associates within island societies.

If less positive outcomes were to dominate, this would tend to reinforce divisions within societies. There would be a temptation to view the whole process of modernisation as one that favours some individuals and groups over others. It is important to note that there is nothing predetermined about scientific discovery, utilisation of resources or societal structures that necessarily leads to such divisions. It would be naive to suggest that an egalitarian global society is likely to emerge due to the trend towards other global processes. To date, even under professed socialist regimes, as economies have developed there have tended to be greater economic divisions within societies. Although there are differing experiences of which sectors of various economies have experienced the greatest increase in living standards the trend has been for an expansion in the middle income bracket. Despite some alleviation of absolute poverty, the gap between rich and poor has increased rather than decreased. This applies at the global level and for the vast majority of individual states (UNDP 1997). In addition to the more straightforwardly documented economic indicators there are other societal divisions arising. While it may be extreme to talk in terms of an emerging ‘underclass’ there appears to be a growing incidence of feelings of alienation.

This sense of alienation may arise from a combination of factors. All societies are at risk of alienating certain members of their community. Island societies in the pre-colonial contact period will still have faced generational tensions and a variety of prejudices that may have disadvantaged individuals. The process of modernisation can be cited as having added to the factors which can lead to some fracturing of community spirit and sense of
unity. The most obvious examples of alienation in relation to modernisation revolve around those who are in some way disadvantaged by changes within their families and societies. It should also be noted that those who have apparently ‘succeeded’ in terms of accumulation of wealth or acculturation with Western norms and values may still have a feeling of loss or displacement from their indigenous culture. Such a situation is likely to be enhanced if there is, or is perceived to be, resentment from other members of one’s community.

The experience of islanders is not wholly divorced from continental societies that are experiencing similar trends of increasing economic migration and pressure on traditional extended family ties. The differences between those who leave the islands and those who stay are, perhaps, more marked. In part this relates to the slower pace of change in isolated, particularly rural, communities. Although many Pacific islanders continue to give precedence to their family relationships, those with overseas experiences are likely to have evolved a world view at variance with those remaining on the islands. This is often exacerbated by generational differences. In the case of some of the islands states, such as Cook Islands and Niue, the level of out-migration has been so high that the majority of people from these communities no longer reside in their respective homelands, and diasporic communities of Pacific islanders have emerged (Nero 1997). These are often scattered and the relationships among them reflect their contemporary positions and lifestyles rather than those previously practiced.

On a day-to-day basis diasporic communities deal predominantly with their host societies. This is not to deny that close family and other ties do still exist. Rather it is the case that they have tended to assume a different focus and relevance. Family support can be fundamental for individuals adapting to an unfamiliar social environment. In some instances it may appear preferable to restrict one’s interactions to the familiarity of the immediate family as opposed to engaging with the broader society. More positive is the dynamic of multiculturalism which acknowledges one’s own cultural heritage while successfully engaging with the expectations of host nations. The success of such multiculturalism, of course, depends on a willingness to adopt such an approach by members of both diasporic and host societies. Equally such aspirations apply within island states. Societal impacts of modernisation relate to both out-migration of islanders and, if not settlement, greater interaction with outsiders visiting the islands. These range from the earliest colonial contacts through to missionaries; entrepreneurs; aid agencies and tourists—representing a disparate collection of influences on island cultures.

The societal impact of outside contact with island cultures varies across the region. In French overseas territories, for example, the attitude that these areas are Departments of France has implications for government spending and accountability. Those states now in Free Association with their former Trusteeship or colonial powers are disproportionately influenced by this ongoing relationship. This is not to say that all such influences are necessarily negative. Easier immigration status and access to metropolitan health care and aid programs are advantageous. There is also the counter process of metropole powers establishing a stronger presence in their ongoing spheres of influence. The Micronesian
territories have not experienced the inflow of US citizens in the same way as, for example, French migrants have settled in New Caledonia. Thus the metropolitan influence is still strong but less immediate. For the Kanaks of New Caledonia and the incoming Caldoche settlers there are distinct differences of experience (Robie 1989). Interestingly some of the French settlers, whilst not necessarily supporting an independent Kanaky, have developed an agenda often at odds with that of the central French government. Under such circumstances this colonial relationship has developed an interesting dynamic.

In addition to the governmental influence of colonisation and neo-colonialism the churches play a significant role in many Pacific island societies. Predominantly Christian they cover a range of denominations including Methodist, Catholic and an increasing number of charismatic evangelical missions. Often these churches have prospered, in part, by incorporating elements of existing cultures. Although their success has varied across the region they have become significant focal points and moral arbiters for many Pacific island communities. Despite some criticism of introducing foreign concepts and values, the churches have in the most part played a role that compliments existing community networks. This is not to say that numerous societal pressures no longer exist despite potential community support. Domestic violence, care of the elderly and youth crime are three aspects of community interaction that it has been argued have been affected by the process of modernisation. These are issues that have held importance in communities for many years. Several studies suggest that problems surrounding these issues can be related to modernisation, alienation and inequalities of opportunities and wealth.

In a special issue of Pacific Studies, domestic violence is considered with reference to examples from Micronesia (Nero 1990; Hoff 1992; Jolly 1996). Karen Nero's article based on interviews conducted in Palau acknowledges long-standing examples of domestic violence. She also notes an increased incidence of such violence and suggests that this can be linked with increased drug and alcohol abuse, the relative isolation of growing numbers of nuclear family units and a decrease in social inhibitions that could control or temper violence. While also acknowledging that this is a problem that can affect all households, it seems a reasonable assumption to make that pressures of unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunity could contribute to the increased incidence. With growing inequalities of wealth such a trend is likely to continue.

As with domestic violence care of the elderly is an issue of universal concern. Robert Rubenstein has looked at this issue in relation to Vanuatu (Rubenstein 1994). Traditional respect for elders remains strong in the vast majority of Pacific island communities. The closeness of the extended family unit is under pressure by way of broader community change. Greater emphasis on more mobile nuclear family units has impacted on the position of older family members. The migration of younger members of the family raises questions regarding possible further migration on the basis of family reunions. This is especially salient if the host country is averse to accepting older family members who are unlikely to contribute to the workforce or general economy, or are going to require health care or other benefits. In situations where household incomes are under greater pressure there is a
danger that care of the elderly will be seen as an increasing burden. In Western cultures increased privitisation and a push towards 'care in the community' has meant that the responsibility for care of elderly relatives is returning to the family. If Pacific communities can maintain extended family support such care may be less of a problem for these communities. Current trends suggest that such an outcome cannot be taken for granted.

Many Pacific island communities retain elements of close knit extended family units with respect given to elders. If current trends of modernisation in the more industrialised nations are followed through in the Pacific, then such family ties could become strained. This is likely to be a selective process with those families under financial pressure facing the greatest difficulties. Issues of risk and vulnerability are brought into stark personal focus with the erosion of basic safety within one's own household. Lack of reporting and police reluctance to pursue criminal charges relating to issues of domestic violence lead to the conclusion that there is every likelihood that the incidence of such violence is greater then generally acknowledged. If one of contributing causes is the process of modernisation and its more negative consequences it is equally likely that these sorts of pressures on family units will continue.

Another aspect of violence in Pacific island communities relates to law, order and, in particular, youth crime. Crime is as traditional as the making of laws. There are concerns that modernisation, alienation, lack of respect for people and property and abuse of drugs and alcohol have contributed to an increased incidence of violent crime. The most notorious example of this is the evolution of the Raskal gangs in Papua New Guinea (Dinnen 1994). These gangs have been described as facing a 'double alienation' as they are often disowned by members of their families and have also failed to find a legitimate place in a modernising society. This may be an overstatement as the gangs themselves form a group identity. It remains the case that such gangs, although actively engaged with the process of modernisation, are generally perceived as a negative element of this process. Having said that they do provide a good example for illustrating how values and vulnerabilities interact. For those outside of the gangs Raskals represent a threat. From within, however, the gangs can provide both a sense of identity, belonging and material wealth. In certain circles even respect and status. Gangsterism is a phenomenon common amongst groups of disenfranchised youths excluded from or disenchanted with mainstream societies. As with the other aspects of modernisation mentioned above such phenomena, and less extreme examples in other Pacific island communities, are likely to continue.

Societal impacts of modernisation on SIDS are directly related to values, risks and vulnerability. However, they are not easily incorporated into a vulnerability index. Having reviewed some of the social pressures that can be linked to the process of modernisation consideration is now given to environmental impacts.
Environmental impacts

Globally one of the most striking features of the process of modernisation has been the general environmental degradation that has accompanied it. In some respects there may be a rational trade-off between spoilation of a certain area of land, air or marine environment if greater benefits are secured. Open-cast mining can be environmentally damaging but generate significant income. Value judgements are immediately brought into play with regard to what value is placed on particular environments and what value is placed on the result of their degradation. Rarely are all factors of this process taken into account. This is particularly true with regard to the dominant model of non-sustainable development.

Since the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Stockholm in 1972, there has been explicit acknowledgment of the linkages between poverty and environmental degradation. The Rio Earth Summit of 1992 provided an opportunity to review this theme and assess how this relationship has evolved. A key phrase that has emerged from this process has been that of sustainable development. As mentioned earlier the concept of development is contestable. Definitions of sustainability remain imprecise. The term sustainable development has become something of a cliché being used to justify all manner of policies, including those which others would regard as environmentally damaging. Generally it refers to policies and lifestyles that meet the needs of present generations without decreasing the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Timeframes again feature significantly in this debate. SIDS played an active role in preparing for the Earth Summit and this involvement formed the impetus for the creation of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). This group has been at the forefront of negotiations for implementing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Potential sea-level rise is a major concern in many low-lying atolls and island states Lewis (1990). This issue has formed the basis for a more general concern in SIDS regarding environmental issues.

One of the few advantages the SIDS have in relation to environmental degradation is the comparative ease with which cause and effects of such decay can be assessed. This is not to say that such assessments are unproblematic. In terms of relatively bounded ecosystems, generally on a smaller scale than continental areas of assessment, the sources of pollution and other aspects of decay are more readily identifiable. As many of the islands still retain elements of subsistence agriculture and fishing, albeit as a declining sector of many economies, the relationship between the populations and their environment is closer than in the majority of more industrialised societies (Fisk 1995). Even though there is a trend to urban living this is a relatively recent phenomena and migrants often retain close ties with family members that remain in more remote rural areas. The popular Western perception of Pacific ‘paradise’ is one that can be the source of some pride plus a positive asset in terms of promoting tourism.

It is necessary to consider in more depth the relationship between the environment and economic development. One of the dilemmas faced by all societies is offsetting the
benefit of short-term economic growth with longer-term environmental degradation. SIDS are particularly aware of this, often having a perceived need for rapid returns on investment, comparatively large-scale infrastructural developments, and an apparent desire to embrace consumerism and extend the cash economy. Other societies have experienced similar developments but several SIDS are undergoing this transformation at a more faster rate. Such aspirations can be met but they require holistic strategies, adopting policies and lifestyles that were sustainable. Often governments, and individuals, can be aware that their policies and actions are non-sustainable. However, even if they would prefer to adopt more sustainable policies and lifestyles they can be restricted by external forces. At the governmental level this can refer to the need to balance budgets in a global market place where they are not in control of setting world market prices for either their imports or their exports. Population growth and the need to invest in modern technologies and work practices are further disadvantages for SIDS economies. Individuals may knowingly sacrifice long-term sustainability for short-term survival.

Following the momentum of the Earth Summit, a related international conference was held in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1994 specifically dealing with environmental and economic policy planning for SIDS (South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme 1994). AOSIS was a key coordinating body for the island states. The resulting Action Plan showed an awareness of environmental processes and a concern to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Awareness, desire and capabilities are not always complementary. Many SIDS development plans highlight environmental concerns. This does not deny their disadvantaged position in pursuing sustained economic growth. Similarly AusAID and other donor groups routinely emphasise the need for sustainability (AIDAB 1994; AusAID 1996). Educational projects often have strong environmental elements to them. But awareness is only one part of sustainable policies and lifestyles. Ultimately modernisation means that hard choices have to be made by both government and individuals regarding what value to put on environmental issues in relation to the desire to integrate with the model of development followed in Western industrialised societies.

SIDS demonstrate this new attitude quite strikingly with their renewed emphasis on attracting tourists. Simon Milne has reviewed the impact of tourism on Tonga, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Niue and the Cook Islands (Milne 1992). Overall the negative impacts are emphasised. These can include foreign ownership of hotels whereby the majority of profits will go overseas, pollution (notably sewage outflows often damaging fragile coral systems), revenue from tourist operations remaining in the hands of relatively few people and potential cultural clashes. The conclusion reached is that, with careful planning, tourism can be of great benefit to SIDS economies. One of the notable consistencies of studies looking at tourism in SIDS has been the belief that ecotourism both has a market and offsets the environmental decay associated with other ventures (Ayala, 1995). Interestingly these operations are aimed at the higher income bracket. Although differences of opinion remain,
alternative strategies of mass-marketing are generally perceived to be damaging in terms of both environmental impact and in relation to the cost/benefit analysis of income generated.

Modernisation can be seen as having a broad mix of impacts on SIDS. In terms of the environment this mix is particularly complex. Certain trade-offs of environmental decay for economic growth seem to have been accepted. The risks of environmental vulnerability are, perhaps, more closely linked to value systems in SIDS than in other parts of the world. This is due to the awareness of one’s physical environment in the relatively small and bounded world of an island. Also traditional methods of fishing and subsistence agriculture lead to a greater awareness and respect for environmental issues. Urban drift may have reduced direct contact with this type of lifestyle but for many SIDS societies this is a relatively recent phenomena and environmental concerns are generally more heightened than they are in the more industrialised societies. Basic survival needs are likely to outweigh more altruistic concerns about future generations. Awareness of issues such as ecotourism opportunities are all very well for policy coordinators and entrepeneurs. They may be quite distant from the life experiences of the majority of individuals in SIDS. Having drawn attention to societal and environmental aspects of vulnerability in SIDS the third section will consider the value systems operating on SIDS at both the level of government and individuals.

Value systems

There will be many and varied value systems operating across the diverse polities of SIDS. Differing social, political, economic and environmental circumstances shape such systems. At the governmental level there are some common themes since sovereign states, although not all equal in power and influence, do share certain attributes and circumstances. Theoretically they are all sovereign bodies with the ability to operate independently and without censure in the international community. Several of the SIDS are undoubtedly in near unique positions with regard to their small size, remoteness and limited resource bases. Despite these apparent disadvantages they are also coherent political entities with distinct cultures, experiences and aspirations. Their lack of power in terms of international competitiveness does not necessarily diminish their own sense of worth and value. The same applies for individuals.

SIDS governments are in an increasingly difficult position with regard to liberalisation of the global economy and their desire to develop their own economies. Independent development is virtually impossible with close neo-colonial ties and a need for external trade and assistance. Even if these governments wished to adopt a value system and policies at odds with the free market ideology of the emerging global political economy, these would be unlikely to be accepted internationally. Such policies could only be implemented domestically. Although in the context of international law sovereign governments are at liberty to devise their own budgetary allocations they remain restricted by the amount of revenue they have in the first instance. With many SIDS facing ongoing balance of payment deficits they are unable to break away from trading relationships where price mechanisms are determined by others. For many of their commodities they are in a
'buyers market'. Under such circumstances these governments are likely to remain heavily dependent on overseas aid packages and will find it difficult to establish strongly independent economies (New Zealand 1994).

Economic values are only one aspect of a myriad of value frameworks. Economic vulnerability for many SIDS is amply demonstrated in both the Briguglio index and other publications, such as those produced by the World Bank (1993, 1995). Both of these reports express disappointment that Pacific Island economies have had a relatively low rate of economic growth in comparison to the amount of overseas aid and investment they have received. A study, commissioned by the South Pacific Forum Secretariat, comparing Pacific and Caribbean economies has drawn attention to some cultural traits which are attributed to the relatively poorer economic performance of the Pacific SIDS.

While culture and tradition in the Pacific islands can provide a measure of security for the extended family or large landowning units, they can also blunt the incentive for risk taking, enterprise and hard work (Fairbairn 1996:80; see also Pollard 1994). This is a sweeping generalisation for the whole region but it is significant in linking what are perceived as culturally determined value systems to economic performance. The impression given is that such values are negative. As mentioned in relation to the concept of what constitutes development in this context, the dominant ideology remains focussed on economic performance as the key indicator for 'success'. Despite the apparent widespread acceptance of this model this does not discount alternative worldviews and value systems.

There is an understandable attraction for measuring risk, vulnerability and success in avoiding negative circumstances and events in simple terms of economic profit or loss. A relatively straightforward mathematical calculation is possible with clear comparability and ranking. This is an over-simplification, however, of what can be quite complex economic interactions. In principle any assessment of economic performance can be reduced to the science of calculus. On introducing more subjective values, such as aesthetics and feelings of wellbeing, these assessments become far more difficult to achieve. The dominance of the free market ideology appears to be well-entrenched. The implications of this will affect all people, regardless of the extent to which they wish to engage with this model and accept its values. Some may attempt to create self-sufficient communities that are remote from the mainstream of economic trading. This has its limitations and is certainly in the minority of global experience, and shrinking rapidly. Even those that make a conscious effort to live outside of these systems remain subject to environmental pollution or potential sea-level rise on a global scale.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the literature of International Relations, and political science generally, is expanding in the field of International/Global Political Economy. Governments focus strongly on the balancing of budgets and how to improve their economic performance. There is a need to place emphasis on these aspects to ensure that economies remain solvent and viable. This does not mean that other, alternative or complementary, value systems are not equally valid. For example, if one challenges the argument that national wealth will inevitably 'trickle down' to all sectors of society it might...
be more appropriate to adopt a 'basic needs' approach to wealth distribution. This is a political issue that forms part of the debate surrounding approaches to governance in all societies. Where it has particular relevance to SIDS is in the choices governments face in providing such basic needs at a time of growing economic vulnerability. The same argument could apply to family structures where such needs traditionally have been met. One of the variables in such provision is the respective roles of government and families. There is a shift away from extended family relations and support, but governments are constrained by what support they can provide. This situation is exacerbated in SIDS where structural adjustment programs are reducing welfare spending.14

The issue of economic vulnerability whereby insufficient funds are available can be thought of in terms of what choices are available to governments and individuals. What is their spending power? What consumer choices do they have? Outside of this framework, although possibly connected, are other aspects of vulnerability. Assessing both risk and vulnerability needs to take into account that which is attributed with value. While recognising that economic market forces play a fundamental part in most peoples’ lives there are also other dynamics taking place in international, domestic and personal relationships. Money itself can lose ‘value’ in a person’s perceptions of a given situation. For example, a person may be in a relatively well paid job and have a certain level of purchasing power. There are situations, perhaps deteriorating health or recognition that this job is very stressful, where the appeal of this high income decreases. This is because other factors are valued more highly. High income can still have value but in the equation of what costs have to be met, in terms of stress, separation from family and so on, this particular job may be seen as less attractive.

The above example summarises the ongoing considerations that are given to how much value can be put on a particular form of income. Obviously in many situations the choice to be able to remove oneself from an unsatisfactory position can be extremely limited. Once tied into a wage economy, or subsistence existence, with possible commitments to provide for relatives or to pay off debts, there are limitations to how free one is to choose to do otherwise. Often the empowerment to seek positive change will be difficult to find. Such difficulties can be even more extreme if you are unhealthy, young, old or female and possibly disadvantaged in terms of income and social position. Regardless of these limitations the key point here is that there are values operating other than those easily measured in monetary terms. To highlight this further it is, perhaps, more apparent if one looks at higher income groups and the issues which they consider important. One might argue that they can more easily afford the ‘luxury’ of reflecting on their identity, role in the world, relationship with the environment and so forth. This does not deny that there are numerous issues that are given value that are more readily understood in a cultural rather than economic framework.

With regard to western development as a model, several writers have drawn attention to what they see as its negative impact on value systems. Nancy and Theodore Graves conducted a study of both adults and children in the Cook Islands looking at
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behaviour and attitude towards cooperation and competition (Graves and Graves 1978). This study was conducted some twenty years ago and had a relatively small sample. The conclusion reached was there was a clear link between modernisation and increasing competitiveness, not a startling conclusion given that capitalism has competitiveness as one of its central beliefs. This is a significant argument given the spread of capitalism, modernisation and, apparently, a particular set of values which accompanies this economic system. More recent commentators have also highlighted the link between modernisation and its impact on existing value systems. Tialetagi Poumau, a New Zealand/Aotearoa-born Samoan, has said

The process that removes the young from participation in society and renders them hopeless is called "Western economic development". This model turns people into economic units and the bulk of the young people become "surplus to requirements" unemployed and unnecessary. This runs counter to the values of cultural memory, where young people are essential to development (Poumau 1992:201).

The above quote has additional vibrancy as it focusses on the younger generation. This is particularly significant as any change in attitude within these age groups is likely to have an increasing impact over time on the broader society. Again it should be pointed out that the above examples are seeing modernisation as having negative impacts. While this is undoubtedly true for some people, there are other examples of people who have benefited. In some respects such conclusions tell us as much about those passing comments as they do about the subjects they describe. Although not wishing to denigrate in any way the research and conclusions cited above it is important to recognize that each commentator is operating within their own subjective framework of beliefs and value judgements. The very fact that modernisation is expanding rapidly, migration from the islands is increasing and the trappings of Western-oriented consumer society is evermore apparent in the islands suggests that there is, at least some, support for these trends in SIDS.

Given the expansionist drive of Western capitalism it is difficult to assess to what extent this model and its trappings are being forced on or actively embraced by SIDS. Several issues suggest that this process has clear negative impacts on SIDS. Environmental decay is a case in point. There has been considerable discussion regarding the appropriateness of Westminster-style democracy as opposed to, or in conjunction with, traditional forms of governance (Crocombe et al. 1992). Despite many reviews of government policies in these and other areas, both by the governments themselves and outside agencies, there are remarkably few accounts from individuals who have been asked to recount their personal attitudes and aspirations at a time of considerable social upheaval. Numerous non-governmental organisations exist that go someway towards giving voice to these concerns. They are generally quite issue-specific, be it regarding domestic violence, health, education or environmental issues. There are few studies that attempt to gain an overview of how people are relating to their changing circumstances and the extent to which they feel they have control over their own destinies (Stewart 1982).
One possible explanation for this is that it might be felt there is a danger of such research becoming too focussed on individuals and, therefore, not being seen as representative of the wider societies. This is a methodological problem to be aware of but is insufficient reason to ignore an important avenue for greater understanding of significant social processes. A more useful approach would be to design a questionnaire or similar information gathering system that allowed comparability between various SIDS respondents and looked for common values, if not experiences. One such attempt has been made with a survey on the acculturation of Cook Islanders living in New Zealand/Aotearoa (Altrocchi and Altrocchi 1995). This work looked at both Cook Islanders who had recently migrated and those of Cook Island descent born in New Zealand/Aotearoa. The results may appear inconclusive at first as they show a wide variety of individual differences in acculturation depending on personal experience and social environment. This is not to say that these findings are insignificant. Although common experience of acculturation did not appear, there was a demonstrable impact on previously existing value systems.

The point about value systems is that they are individualistic and highly subjective. It is the case that a certain sharing of values will arise to determine the norms of acceptable behaviour in a given society. Individuals will decide, or be judged by other members of their community, how closely their attitudes and lifestyles conform to these norms. Concepts of risk and vulnerability are an inherent part of such norms and values. It might be preferable, and more manageable, to strive towards research that produces clear cut group values with relatively easily measured indicators of aspirations and success. The motivations of the human animal are not that easy to pin down and assess. It appears that the best that can be hoped for is a recognition that these motivations are fluid and will change over time according to circumstances or even mood swings. This is not to say that such research is not possible or necessary. On the contrary as it is the human element of aspirations, motivations and sense of achievement that are the flipside to the coin of government policies and multinational activities. While the focus of the majority of political science literature gives precedence to government policies and the role of multinationals at the expense of individuals this is, at best, only half of an analysis and explanation of events.

The concluding section will draw the three themes above together with reference to the possible policy options for SIDS governments and the fundamental role that individuals play in these.

**Conclusion**

It appears unlikely that qualitative as opposed to quantitative issues can be incorporated into a model as structured as the economic vulnerability model put forward by Briguglio. This is largely due to the subjective nature of the value systems being considered and the necessity to focus at the level of the individual. Having said that it is also clear that such factors are a fundamental part of risk and vulnerability analysis and cannot be ignored.
The implications of failing to take individual value systems into account and an excessive emphasis on economic issues in government planning are becoming increasingly apparent. This is not to say that all economists and government planners have a complete disregard for such matters. With the dominance of free market ideology and continued reliance on indicators such as gross domestic product to measure success, the vulnerability of individuals can be overlooked. The continuing dominance of an economics-centred level of analysis does not easily integrate the values individuals assign to emotional attachments, sense of identity, wellbeing and a range of associations with perceived cultural heritage. Such issues clearly have value to individuals but it is difficult to see how such qualitative factors can be reduced to a precise number. As currencies fluctuate so to do the values individuals attach to these qualitative factors as the equation of their value judgements evolve in relation to changing circumstances.

Having established that a qualitative index would be too individualistic and fluid to be representative of broader societies what hope is there for measuring vulnerability of such values? It has to be accepted that any such index would have to be a highly mobile ‘moveable feast’. This is not to say that a basic range of indicators could not be designed. There would have to be an acceptance that such an index would need considerable tuning in its application to any given scenario. Such indicators could relate to the themes discussed above. For example, how socially cohesive is the society under consideration, what value is attached to environmental issues and how sustainable are particular development policies? Measuring such points is problematic. Social surveys could be carried out to assess community perceptions of various issues with a gradation of what value individuals attached to a range of policy choices. The final point on overall value systems would be all important in recognising that there are both individual and group systems of norms and values operating in all societies. It is not that SIDS are unique in needing to acknowledge individual values in relation to their government policies. Yet they do provide a more manageable unit of analysis for considering these issues.

In terms of the policy options available to SIDS governments it is clear that many are in an economically vulnerable situation. Both external and internal factors limit their policy options. Either ongoing colonialism or neo-colonial economic structures limit their development opportunities. Small size, remoteness and limited resource bases all contribute to their economic vulnerability. In the main, they retain a strong sense of their cultural identity and are quite capable of defending those values that are ranked highly. Economic pressure may restrict some aspects of choice but in terms of maintaining indigenous control of their cultural heritage this is less pressing than might be apparent to outside observers. Hawaii is often cited as presenting a degenerated culture because of the influx of tourists who seek entertainment representing stereotypes of Hawaiian islanders. There maybe some truth in the claim of stereotyping but alongside these shows there remains a vibrant indigenous Hawaiian culture separate from the entertainment industry. SIDS facing similar experiences have also maintained strong indigenous cultures. It is important to recognise that these cultures are not static. Cultural norms and values have adapted to external
influences. The key element of how these cultures adapt to these influences is the pro-active role of the islanders themselves, rather than what the influences are.

Whilst recognising that SIDS governments are highly influential within their societies, the main focus of this paper has been at the level of the individual and local community. It should also be noted that it is often forgotten that governments are themselves only groups of individuals, each operating within their own value systems. There is an argument that 'reason of state' has an impact on how individual politicians might make a distinction between their own and their political personalities. Examples of this can be found but SIDS lend themselves to a closer relationship between these two apparent personas. The role of the individual has been fundamental to this analysis. If anything has been concluded about the appropriateness of a vulnerability index it is that current models fail to take adequate account of individuals’ senses of values, risks and vulnerabilities. While many difficulties remain in producing a definitive index there is no doubt that individual and group values are an essential part of assessing the likely success of government policies.

SIDS governments face significant disadvantages in the emerging global political economy. If recognition of the values of their populations are subsumed beneath a drive for economic growth, at any price, then longer-term social stability is likely to be threatened. Generally it appears that the majority of SIDS governments are showing an awareness and sensitivity to such issues. Problems seem to arise when such issues are in conflict with the demands of operating in a competitive global economic environment. This is largely out of government control. An ongoing focus on understanding and, where possible, accommodating the values and aspirations of their population are a necessary requirement for good governance.

Notes

1. APEC leaders were explicit in their final statement from this meeting in emphasising their desire to promote liberal free marketing.
2. A common complaint of students in the social sciences is their apparent inability to gain information from books and articles where basic graphs and charts are used. This problem is magnified with the use of mathematical formula and equations.
3. A further distinction may have to be made between central governments in SIDS and local communities.
4. Lawson herself does not agree with all of the claims for the sanctity of ‘tradition’ but she provides a balanced review of the key arguments in this debate.
5. Theoretically in more successful states economic growth should ensure a capability to distribute wealth to the whole population, either by government benefit payments or more informal arrangements. Concern here is with the less successful states or where such welfare mechanisms are failing.
6. This problem is not restricted to SIDS. However, with smaller budgets and greater consequences for how the budget is managed, SIDS governments come under greater scrutiny regarding how their budgets are allocated. They also face the additional problem of needing to develop their infrastructure to facilitate further growth.
7. The question of the respective costs and benefits of the shift to wage economies is too broad to be dealt with here in any great depth. However, it should be noted that this is a major societal alteration that impacts on a whole range of issues from food production to kinship ties.
8. In addition to this one could also argue that there is equal worth in some aspects of ‘traditional’ knowledge. Modern pharmaceutical companies, for example, draw on traditional remedies in their research into medicinal drugs.
9. Cook Islands has a resident population of about 20,000 with nearly twice that number, 37,000 living in New Zealand. For Niue the figures are 2,400 and 14,400 respectively (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1996).
10. Here I am thinking of older members of diasporic communities who may be unwilling to learn a new language or otherwise engage with the host society. Yet, equally, others may wish to reinforce their sense of cultural identity by maintaining their first language skills and learning more of their own group norms and values.
11. It is worth noting that Rio actually hosted two related conferences, one governmental and the non-governmental Global Village. The NGO’s typically suggested more radical solutions for the pursuit of genuinely sustainable development. Some suggesting that perhaps the policy of continued economic growth was itself fundamentally problematic.
12. Few Pacific Islanders are facing absolute poverty on the scale found, for example, in some parts of Africa. However, it has often been suggested that environmental concerns are a 'luxury' for the higher income earners. Certainly there are examples of over-fishing or inappropriate fishing methods where stocks have been prematurely depleted. This could be due to lack of environmental awareness. But it is more likely that market forces have led to decreasing returns on catches.
13. Sovereignty can be a moot point for those states in Free Association with other powers. Similarly even those with full independent status might question their independence in terms of their ability to compete in a global economy etc.
14. The Cook Islands is a good example of this with a recent reduction in government spending meaning that not only have there been job losses from the civil service but there have also been cuts in welfare provision at a time when demand for it has increased.

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