**EVALUATING A REGIONAL APPROACH TO A
NATIONAL PROBLEM: THE 'PACIFIC PLAN' AND
POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE KINGDOM OF TONGA**

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'Our Way'

*your way
objective
analytic
always doubting
the truth
until proof comes slowly quietly
and it hurts*

*my way
subjective
gut-feeling like
always sure
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is there
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Konai Helu Thaman

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professors Vijay Naidu, Kabini Sanga and John Overton for their support and guidance throughout the various stages of the research and writing process, and for their inspiration as leading development practitioners in the Pacific.

The people of Tonga who participated in various stages of the research fieldwork phase were invaluable in helping to make my time in the Kingdom of Tonga not only a smooth passage, but one which was enjoyable and personally enriching.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
FICs	Forum Island Countries
LDCs	Least developed countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NPA	New poverty agenda
PAH	Poverty and hardship assessment
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PRSPs	Poverty reduction strategy papers
SAPs	Structural adjustment programmes
SDP8	Strategic Development Plan Eight

Map of the Kingdom of Tonga

Source: <http://www.fikco.com/images/tongamap.jpg>

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ABSTRACT

Many national governments today insist that poverty reduction is the central objective of all development initiatives and policies. Increasingly however, poverty reduction initiatives have shifted away from a people-centered approach towards a focus on macroeconomic growth via a neo-liberal agenda, often promoted through regional agreements, in an attempt to meet the development needs of nations. This research seeks to explore the effectiveness of a regional approach to poverty reduction within the Pacific, using the Pacific Plan and the Kingdom of Tonga's 'Strategic Development Plan Eight' (2006/7-2008/9) as a case study, to examine the extent to which regional initiatives meet national goals for poverty reduction and development. As an interpretive study, semi-structured interviews, literature analysis and focus groups were utilized in the research process in which the contributions of policy-influencers in Nuku'Alofa, and youth and villagers in Vava'u were sought. This research found that Tonga's national development plan had been heavily influenced by the dominant approach to development as exercised by the Pacific Plan in adopting a neo-liberal framework for development, seeking economic growth via the liberalization of trade and markets. Additionally this research sought to examine the perceptions of living standards in Tonga by those interviewed and the extent to which the government addressed these. What emerged was a clear indication that while the villagers felt they were coping, basic infrastructure was lacking which would aid their ability to go about their daily livelihood activities and to offer further opportunities for livelihood diversification. The overriding theme of 'self-help' seemingly adopted by the citizens and perpetuated by the policy-influencers was a clear indication that the Tongan government saw solutions to the reduction of hardship as lying with the citizens themselves. This also pointed to a possible requirement for the government to utilize their resources towards meeting the restructuring efforts needed in facilitating the regional frameworks and processes of the Pacific Plan as well as adhering to donor requirements rather than in directing these towards much needed social spending. An awareness of Tonga's place in the world as a unique nation, but one experiencing change at a rapid pace, which at times resulted in hardship, was evident. The research also suggests that although a dominant neo-liberal approach is adopted in both the SDP8

and the Pacific Plan, it may not be a best fit to effectively address poverty alleviation and the reduction of hardship for Tonga.

Key words: regionalism, Tonga, poverty, Pacific Plan, development

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

At the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) special leaders' meeting in Auckland, 2004, a new strategy for regional cooperation and integration, *The Pacific Plan*, was launched to be established and implemented over a ten year period, as a move towards strengthening of the Pacific as a region. The plan would encompass four pillars – Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, Good Governance and Security, with each of these pillars striving towards regional cohesion in national strategies and policy planning, with the possibility of increased regional cooperation and integration in the provision of increased regional institutions, public goods and services. The PIF leaders envisage that increased cooperation and integration in relation to national policy development and the provision of the trade in goods and services will result in enhanced benefits for all PIF countries.

While the *Pacific Plan* acknowledges the unique identity and diversity of each Pacific country, the reality exists that within the vastness of the Pacific, the ability for individual nations to commit to and service the requirements of regionalism and the *Pacific Plan* varies greatly, due to several factors, including availability of resources, political will, national priorities and national identity. Conversely, the neo-liberal development ideology of the *Pacific Plan*, which relies on a market based approach to economic development credited to result in improved livelihoods for all cannot be considered a 'best-fit' for all developing nations to achieve improvements in outcomes related to reduced hardship and poverty; this stands to question the logic in seeking to improve living standards for a developing Pacific nation such as the Kingdom of Tonga via an approach which may be either unrealistic in its aims, or out-of-step with cultural and traditional ways of being and conceptualizing standards of living by those who daily

existence shaped and impacted upon, often negatively, by a foreign ideology pushed by dominant actors within the regional grouping.

Tonga's pride in the fact that it remains the only Pacific nation to avoid colonization belies the fact that its kingdom suffers equally alongside its Pacific, colonized neighbours in relation to the causes and manifestations of poverty and inequality. The Tongan government's adopted stance, as assessed by the Asian Development Bank in their Poverty and Hardship Assessment (PAH) of Tonga in 2003, that *hardship* not *poverty* is present in the Kingdom suggests that the plight of Tongan families who struggle to meet basic needs may not be considered a *pressing problem* and therefore do not demand immediate political attention and addressing via policy-making. Similarly, resource reallocation to those in need, in the form of development planning and government spending, will not take place unless associated with some critical issue such as disasters, disease or economic crisis (Hirschman, 1981). Possibly compounding this fact is the belief that, in creating regional benchmarks and obligations in relation to national issues such as in addressing poverty and inequality, "... a regional "community" only serves to disguise the subjection of individual nations and ethnic groups to the imperatives of a regional economy dominated by the powerful" (Dirlik, 1993, p11).

So, the risk posed is that the reality of the existence of poverty in Tonga stands to be overlooked due to euphemisms used to state the living standards of a nation by global institutions and through the use of international, non-country specific benchmarks for poverty alleviation such as the MDG's as employed by the *Pacific Plan*; this may result in the failure of national government to adequately address the needs in of its citizens, whose standard of living fails to meet not only that of western expectations but of those held domestically by its own citizens.

Introduction to Research

This research seeks to explore the effectiveness of a regional approach to poverty reduction within the Pacific, using the *Pacific Plan* and the Kingdom of Tonga's

‘Strategic Development Plan Eight’ (2006/7-2008/9) as a case study, to examine the extent to which regional initiatives meet national goals for poverty reduction and development. Throughout this paper the conceptualization of poverty will be explored as held by Tongan youth and citizens in Vava’u, as well as by policy-influencers in Nuku’Alofa, investigating the multi-faceted ways in which these concepts manifest themselves in the everyday realities of these groups within society. This research will be juxtaposed alongside the development approaches and strategies for the reduction of hardship and poverty alleviation as taken by the Government through the Strategic Development Plan Eight (SDP8), as well as the initiatives expressed in the *Pacific Plan*. This paper seeks to locate the findings of this research within the broader discussion on the way in which the ‘framing’ of poverty reduction strategies occurs within development; that is to say, the way in which the underlying agenda of development donors and organizations, whose approach to poverty reduction and development favours that of a neo-liberal ideology and the extent to which this has manifested itself in the *Pacific Plan* and Tonga’s SDP8.

It was also of importance to the process to determine the way in which participants expressed their own ideas regarding their standard of living, aspirations for the future for themselves, their family, village or nation, and the extent to which they feel that the Government and other external agencies understand and address the shortcomings related to reducing hardship and poverty and creating improved livelihoods. This was essential in being able to gauge the effectiveness of the national and regional initiatives in relation to this concept as a ‘best-fit’ in terms of the culture, ideology and means by which improved livelihoods were to be achieved, given the emerging trend for global institutions, organizations and agreements to dominate poverty development discourse and practice, with a lessening focus on the specific and unique realities, needs, rights and sovereignty of individual nations and their citizens (Calleya, 2000).

Structure of Thesis

This paper includes eight chapters. The first will provide an overview of the research, stating its aims, providing a context for the *Pacific Plan* and introducing Tonga's 'Strategic Development Plan Eight'(SDP8). Chapter two will outline the methodology and epistemological approach taken in the research and fieldwork process, with a focus on Phenomenology and locating it in the context of development research fieldwork. Literature in relation to Regionalism, its historical foundations and in particular, the regional initiative for the Pacific, the *Pacific Plan*, will be explored in Chapter three. The *Pacific Plan* strategies for poverty alleviation will be presented in Chapter four alongside the exploration of the development ideology of the Plan. Chapter five will present the strategies for reducing hardship in Tonga in the SDP8. Providing a Tongan setting for discussing poverty and living standards in Tonga and locating it in the social, cultural, political and economic contexts will be the primary goal of chapter six. Findings of the research fieldwork and conclusions will be presented in Chapter seven and eight respectively.

A Tongan Context

“Freedom and independence is the Tongan way of life”

“Tonga is different, if not physically, at least socially. Tonga is an independent Kingdom and Tongans are the only Pacific people who have real self-government...with practically no unemployment, free education, free health services and a traditional custom of helping one another. Tonga is a very secure country to live in.”

(Kennedy, 1972, p5)

Considering Kennedy's (1972) patriotic and heart-felt sentiments for the Kingdom of Tonga above, it seems difficult to believe that this is the same nation of which only five years later, Hau'ofa (1977) speaks of as being “a poor and crowded country ... no longer self-sufficient” (Hau'ofa, 1977, p15). Now in 2007, one year after the main streets of

Tonga’s capital, Nuku’Alofa erupted in violence which resulted in loss of life and livelihood for some citizens, many would agree with Hau’ofa’s observation; some would indeed go further to suggest that Tonga is a nation undergoing rapid change alongside its Pacific neighbours, but in realms which challenge the very unique nature of Tonga as a kingdom, that is, in its political, and as a result, social structures and systems, challenging the very foundations on which Tongan society is based. The Kingdom of Tonga treasures its traditions, its culture and much has been said of the loss of culture ushering in unwanted behaviour such as youth crime, increased violence and substance abuse. And while it is evident that many across Tonga live fulfilling lives maintaining traditional livelihood activities and interactions amongst their villages, the reality for those especially in main centres is that inequality and poverty are growing, with increased urbanization, a youthful population and a deficit in the number of opportunities available for improving livelihoods creating urgent issues needing to be addressed by the Tongan government.

A Snapshot of Modern Tonga

Below follows a table of basic facts about the Kingdom of Tonga:

Fig 1.1 Basic Facts, Kingdom of Tonga

Population	Life Expectancy	GDP/Capita US\$	HDI Rating 2005	Geographical Data
114, 689 (2006 July est.)	M= 67.32 yrs F= 72.45 yrs	25, 665	54 th /177 nations	169 Islands, 36 uninhabited

Data Source: CIA World Factbook (Updated July, 2006). Table, Author’s own

In his comprehensive account of the Kingdom of Tonga published in 1992, Campbell said of Tonga, “... this is a transitional era in which the indigenous and the foreign are unequally and unevenly blended. The blending will probably never be completed, as long as Tonga remains in contact with the wider world” (Campbell, 1992, pg. 228). The wider world continues to remain at the doorstep of Tongans, as transnational links, as a result of growing migration, between those at home and abroad invite other cultures, languages,

foods, and customs into the Kingdom (ref here – remittances and transnational info just in case). So Tonga appears, with its society undergoing swift and marked changes in its economic, social, political and cultural spheres of life. These transformations are not only due to regional and international forces in economic restructuring and reforms and the impact that greater interconnectivity with the outside world brings to cultures and traditions, but through conscious and decisive domestic decision-making and actions.

As Ewins (1998) states regarding both Fiji and Tonga, their citizens are continuously adjusting their frame of reference, "... making individual choices about whether to educate their children in Western or local ways, whether to move to the city and seek paid employment or remain in the village and work the soil, and whether to watch television or talk around the kava bowl" (Ewins, 1998, p260). Tongans very much exist in a world of dual-reality, as do many developing nations, that is to say they have the actuality of traditions, language, culture, and the native landscape which provides daily; but alongside this is the process of Westernization via the influx of goods, through the formal education system, through the movement of Tongans abroad to work and study or to visit relatives, and through national, regional and global processes. Tongans are compelled to walk in two worlds.

The recent death of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV in September 2006 brought the Kingdom into the international spotlight, and more specifically, its form of governance. A constitutional monarchy, the structure of Tonga's parliament, whereby only one third of its members are elected by the people, has gained much criticism internationally. New Zealand's Prime Minister Helen Clark said of emerging social and political changes in Tonga at the time of the King's death "... I think Tonga will do it at its own pace. They are very conscious of tradition and evolving from that, but I think we are going to see change" (NZ Dominion Post, 20 September 2006). Regional agreements particularly driven by Australia and New Zealand, place more pressure for the government to undergo political reforms, with pillars such as 'good governance' focusing on democratic practices in politics threatening to isolate Tonga from any regional community, should they not adhere to pressure internationally for reform.

Calls for political reform domestically resulted in the rioting of November 2006 and stimulated renewed debate regarding the social structures and forms of inequality and poverty evident in the nation. Traditionally a sensitive topic, Lawson (1996) equates the emergence of social and political debate with "... the new class of intellectuals in Tonga in the development of a much more critical outlook on politics and other social and economic phenomena over the last twenty years or so" (Lawson, 1996, p100). Barriers to addressing poverty and inequality have often been equated with the inherently unequal system of social stratification, and in through the noble and chiefly systems as well as the Monarchy. Cowling (2000) notes, "A recent trend in the Pacific, and particularly in Tonga and in Samoa, is for elite members of society to claim there is no poverty; ... linked with this is the claim that if people are poor it is because they are lazy" (Cowling, 2000, p2). Indeed the notion of 'self-help' was perpetuated by the late King as early as the first development plan in 1965, and as became evident throughout the research process of this paper, the expectation that the citizens of Tonga can and should create their own opportunities to lead a successful life was pervasive.

Frustration for this way of thinking has been expressed recently, with several citizens noting the unjust practices, "the entire system, but especially the nobility are taking advantage of our people. When the rich decide to throw a huge party or to arrange a wedding, poor people have to supply them with food and gifts. What do the poor get in exchange? Nothing. It is a system of submission and exploitation" (Vitchev, 2007, p1). Similarly another citizen notes, "In Tonga we grew up in the system where it was hammered into our brains that the nobles will take care of society. It worked fine in a subsistence economy, but not in the one ruled by the market" (Ibid, p1).

Tonga's commitment to engaging in a global economy is evident through its recent admission to the World Trade Organization in 2007 and in its participation in regional organizations and communities. Whether or not these moves will serve to improve the quality of life for citizens in Tonga remains questionable given the multitude of reforms and conditionalities that come with such memberships, as well as the fact that Tonga is already extremely reliant on foreign aid. While participation and membership to such communities and organizations may be inevitable as part of belonging to a globalized

economy, ensuring domestic needs, which have an immediate impact on the citizens of Tonga are addressed, must remain of paramount priority for the government of Tonga.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology and Epistemology

This research is primarily interested in the experiences and understandings of Poverty in a Tongan context and from a Tongan's point of view and the extent to which these viewpoints are reflected and addressed in the *Pacific Plan* strategies for poverty alleviation and Tonga's Strategic Development Plan 8 for 2006/7-2008/9. Attention will be paid to the various sectors and organizations which impact on and are impacted upon in the concept of Regionalism and strategies for poverty reduction at a regional and national level within Tonga.

In attempting to determine what the "essence" of notions of poverty are for Tongans in Nuku'Alofa and Vava'u and to what extent their needs are being met by national and regional mechanisms for poverty reduction, the use of Hermeneutical Phenomenology is a best fit for establishing this as it validates the subjective experiences of individuals in a human scientific context of research. By asking individuals to practice introspection in relation to the research focus, one hopes that what is produced is of meaning to both the individual and to the researcher, therefore producing a more authentic and relevant response (Osbourne, 1994).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology focuses on the understanding and lived experiences of those who are directly implicated in the study experience to investigation. By taking a Phenomenological approach to this research project, the emphasis will be placed on "the discovery, description and meaning of phenomena" and the "open[ing] of the conscious" (Osbourne, 1994, p169). Most importantly, Phenomenology focuses on the understanding and lived experiences of those who are directly implicated in the study.

Originating from the works of Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician (1859-1938) and used throughout the field of Social Science research, Phenomenology seeks to “elicit naïve descriptions of the actuality of experience as it is lived, rather than to collect embellished and narratized accounts that are based upon what the participant believes is expected by the researcher”, of which “...the processes of bracketing and reduction, imaginative variation and intuiting of essences give it a special character.” (Osbourne, 1994, p1). This is of specific relevance to the context of this research, that is, in the analysis of policy in relation to its relevance and effectiveness for its intended community, be it national or regional, in that actual experiences form the basis of monitoring the effectiveness and the impact of decisions, policies and frameworks. That is to say, that without the lived experiences of the participants, any attempts to ‘narratize’ social contexts and situations stands to miss the actuality of the experiences for those who have had them.

There are several branches of Phenomenology; Ethical, Existential, Hermeneutical, Linguistical, Transcendental and Phenomenology of Practice (van Manen, 2002), however my role as a researcher in describing and relaying these experiences as shared with me by the participants lends itself to a form of Phenomenology called ‘Hermeneutical Phenomenology’, an interpretative form of Phenomenology which suggests that we cannot see things *as they are* as supposed by Husserlian Phenomenology, but that in the process of relaying experiences, interpretation by the researcher is unavoidable (Osbourne, 1994).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics involves “an understanding of the world-view of the author and his/her community and of the particular ‘controlling idea’ embodied in the text” and the desire to “avoid misunderstanding”. These assertions by Freidrich Ast and Friedrich Schleiermacher respectively seek to adhere to the “truth” of what is being relayed or understood by the author and for it to rest and be presented as the author intended it (Hunter, p2). Hunter notes the way in which Dilthey (Dilthey, 1860) believed each

individual had a 'world-view' (Weltanschauung) which was shaped, not only in the intellect, but in the whole of life which includes feeling and will as well as thinking. Dilthey had a strong sense of humans as historical beings in which the world-view of the individual developed within a society and culture, so that relationships and the sensations and feelings engendered by their experience in the world, all contributed to their world-view (Hunter, p2).

The concept of a 'worldview' is of particular interest to this research as it relates to an essential link between the cultural, social, political and economic lives of those in Tonga and the delicate ways in which each of these areas informs and impacts upon the decisions and interactions in daily life for individuals in Tonga. Similarly it describes the way in which the varying backgrounds and experiences of individuals impact upon their personal ideologies and priorities in life, and may shape the way in which they interact and think about those with a "worldview" which departs from their own. In the area of development practice, and in considering standards of living and mechanisms for improving them, I regard this as a possible barrier in the formulation of regional or global targets and frameworks for poverty reduction, given the fact that the "worldview" of development consultants and practitioners involved in the formulation of national and regional development plans may be completely different to the cultural context within which they are expected to operate, and which may be incompatible with the cultural context and worldviews held by the individuals within those nations.

The Tongan saying "*Oku ou talanoa mo hoku loto*" (Talking with my inner self, I am communication with my heart) reflects the necessity for those who are involved in development to seek the guidance and counsel of those who are at the very heart of the matter. In communicating and allowing Tongans to express their views, they feel as if it is touching at the very axis of all that is important and meaningful to them, and in sharing this, we can get the very essence of what matters to Tongans and their and to allow their knowledge and expertise as Tongans, as empowered people and as people of the world, to shine through and to enlighten those who seek to "help".

Ethical Considerations

The ethical implications of this study took on renewed importance when a significant way through my research, the Kingdom of Tonga became drawn to international attention with the death of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV in September 2006, and again with the riots of November of the same year. Given the potential consequences that may have arisen due the participation of those who contributed to the study, every attempt was made to ensure their anonymity, as well as their comfort in participating through ensuring they were clear about the nature and scopr of the study, as well as in ensuring them of their right to withdraw themselves and any information contributed in the process at any stage. Ethics approval was sought and granted by the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee in February 2007.

Methods of Data Collection

This research will utilize spoken and written forms of data collection, such as text analysis and individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups, all of which are standard in the school of Phenomenology, and of qualitative research, as “Qualitative methods for data collection play an important role... by providing information useful to understand the processes behind observed results and assess changes in people’s perceptions of their well-being.”
(<http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/impact/methods/datacoll.htm>).

Selection of the Participants

Given the young population of Tonga it was essential to seek the opinions of youth in relation to their aspirations, perceptions regarding their standard of living and the opportunities they saw open to them in the future. Approaching a school in Vava'u saw a class of students offered by their principal to take part in a focus group, which included individual as well as group input and feedback.

Citizens in Vava'u were chosen through contacts made at a local high school in Vava'u. These included two teachers and a village officer. Semi-structured interviews were utilized in seeking their ideas surrounding the existence of poverty in their community, its manifestations, the way in which they believe their livelihoods can be improved and the means by which they see this being achieved. It was important to seek feedback from those who lived outside of the urban centre of Nuku'Alofa to be able to gauge the reality of life in areas with less infrastructure than on the main island of Tongatapu and to be able to compare this with the perceptions of their standard of living by policy-influencers. Those working in Government roles were recruited through personal contact via government ministry websites. Three participants from two different ministries agreed to take part and semi-structured interviews were conducted with them. Issues relating to the perception of standards of living for all Tongans, manifestations of poverty and hardship and the means of reducing these were touched on, as well as addressing their ideas surrounding the effectiveness of regionalism and poverty alleviation strategies in the *Pacific Plan* in meeting the needs of Tongans. One policy-influencer withdrew from an interview after initially having agreed to take part, when asked to sign a participant information sheet, which outlined that they understood the nature of the research and that they would be in no way identified, sighting the belief that they thought permission had to be sought from the government before research could be conducted. However, they wanted to continue with the interview regardless, not understanding that their input could not be used without their permission. This was unfortunate, as I believed that fear prevented this person from participating.

Several civil society organizations in Tonga were approached through phone and email communication and despite having set up several meeting times, they remained unavailable. This is an angle within the research which I would have liked to address more, especially in relation to alternative approaches to development in Tonga and for the wider Pacific.

Limitations of the Study

The social and political situation at the time of conducting field work presented some challenges for me as a researcher in gaining participants consent, and in the general feeling of tension amongst some the participants surround the sensitivity of political matters given the recent rioting in Nuku’Alofa. While this led several potential participants to withdraw from their interviews, ultimately I believe it heightened the significance of the contributions for those who participated.

The lack of access to civil society organizations at the time of visiting Tonga was also a disappointment for me. I believe their input would have been invaluable, especially in relation to offering indigenous and alternative forms of development to the approach taken in the SDP8 and the Pacific Plan.

The focus group was not as effective as I would have liked in gaining personal experiences and aspirations of the young people involved. In part I believe this was due to the way in which participants were selected; they were a senior class group of 16 students and were selected to take part by a senior member of staff at the school. In this sense they had no choice to participate as it was in their class time. Even though I offered the participants the opportunity to leave if they were not comfortable at any stage and two students left to another room, this was not really an option for them, and the students who opted out were told off by their teacher after the group concluded. The sense of obligation may have caused some sense of apathy or confusion as to why they were selected to participate, despite the fact they were given information sheets and were spoken to by their teacher in English and Tongan before the talk.

Other possible barriers in this process were the presence of their teacher, the methods of extracting feedback and language barriers. At the beginning of the groups, the teacher was present while students were working in groups. They were very quiet and not really willing to talk to each other. As the process was going on, I asked the teacher why they may not be interacting with each other as much as I thought they would and she had replied that it was not really the way they worked in the classroom, in the lessons

particular to her subject. Similarly she said that they not have been used to speaking because they work in silence in her class and also that I was a visitor and they were being polite. When suggesting that she leave the classroom when we spoke as a group, she was open to this and the students were more vocal, though this could be due to the timing of this activity or the comfort in being part of a larger group as well. This also offered some issues in relation to language barriers and their teacher offered to come and translate when she heard particular students were having trouble finding the English words. This was successful and she translated word for word. Some students then opted to speak in Tongan and she translated word for word from their point of view; this seemed to open the channels of communication in getting more detailed answers from the students. However, overall, I found the answers generated not comprehensive in answering the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Policy Influencers and Government Employees

Through my research I sought to form some conclusions surrounding the ways in which those in Government perceived Poverty to be a pressing problem in Tonga and to determine the extent to which poverty alleviation and the improvement of living standards was prioritized. The role of Regionalism and the relevance of the Pacific Plan were of interest in determining their influence in the devising of policy and the Government's vision for Tonga.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with three Government workers from various departments in Nuku'Alofa in February 2007. Themes for questioning included:

- Government worker's perceptions of living standards and the existence of Poverty in Tonga
- The pro-democracy movement and implications for living standards
- Poverty in Tonga; its existence, definitions, causes, barriers to poverty alleviation
- The relevance and impact of Regionalism and the *Pacific Plan* in Tonga

Government Worker Perceptions of Living Standards and the Existence of Poverty in Tonga

Interviewees were generally satisfied with living standards in Tonga and saw that people were able to make the most of what was available to them. Self-help was a common theme in the responses to how living standards could be improved if they were found to be unsatisfactory. Comparative explanations for the standard of living in Tonga were common, evident below in relation to the "First World" as described by two interviewees, "I think the living standard[s] in Tonga, I can say it is good enough compared to other place[s] in the Pacific, [especially] in the case of Fiji and the Solomon islands. I think in a

global context I think it is. It's not really compared to the First World countries and the developed countries, the living standards are ok here in Tonga."

"With the instance of poverty, it is very hard to find people below the poverty line. In First World countries there is disease but in Tonga it is controllable."

And:

"Like here in Tonga, I think the only reason why poverty is not really a case in Tonga is a fact that the subsistence economy is till very strong compared to Pacific countries. The land tenure system has something to do with that. Every one has land and they are allowed with the constitution of Tonga to have the land"

Offering comparisons in the change in living standards in Tonga over time, showing improvements in the present day was also a way in which an interviewee explained living standards

"In general it is better in the last 5 years. In Nuku'alofa people are building nice buildings, they have better houses, access to clean water. About 90 percent have access, a better sanitation system in place. Infrastructure has improved in the last five years, roads, water, access to farmers, remote areas, I mean you used to go in muddy lands but now with easy access it is easier."

The rioting on November 16, 2006 in relation to the pro-democracy movement's call for political reforms was also an area of focus for the extent to which livelihoods and standards of living were compromised. Interviewees were asked about the extent to which they thought this would have had an impact on daily life and living standards and in what ways:

"Well, there was not much impact from 16/11. When you look at it in terms of tourism, there was a light impact, and it is starting to pick up again, but the events of 16/11 of course, it is not just one event - it might happen again. It has an impact on families in the very short term. They [shops and businesses] stopped operating for about a week and relocated and started working again. I am aware there were some, a very small amount of people who were made redundant but they are the minority and their family will have helped them to get through that"

Another replied:

“The impact of the riots it’s really affected the economy of Tonga, only to a certain extent – the business people, those who are living here in Nuku’alofa, the impact goes to the country as a whole. But there was a group of people [for] who[m] the impact was really high.”

All three interviewees recognized the devastation of buildings in the centre as an opportunity for growth and development:

“For me my own opinion, I think that what has happened on the 16th of November is more like stepping stone on the development of Tonga, if we take for example the city of Nuku’Alofa, it wasn’t planned, but like after the riots things are being planned, things come to discuss, and the planning for the new Nuku’Alofa will have big impact, not only on the economy but on the life. It will bring to the Tongan people a new life.”

Also:

“The 16/11 is a major setback to Tonga in terms of the current development effort, However, I see this as an opportunity to build a better commercial environment. Thought there were sectors in the economy affected, especially tourism, retail and wholesales, as hotels and shops were closing but they were up and running within a week. Of course we can say that this is a set back but I am sure most economists will agree with me that the reconstruction of Nuku’Alofa will fetch lots of benefit to the whole of Tonga.”

Another went on to illustrate how this created more wealth for Tonga due to the rise in remittances from abroad:

“You must remember that remittances are growing strongly, usually in December in Tonga remittances are always climbing but I was told it was abnormally high last year. The assumption because of 16/11, I think is that [there] is a level of economic difficulty. Tongans, you can run to your neighbour and ask for some sugar, or get a breadfruit and the family ties and relations it helps alleviate hardship.”

The optimism shown towards the standards of living and the way in which Tonga’s poverty is seen on comparative terms to either other Pacific nations whose social

indicators fall below those of Tonga, or a tendency to reflect on the circumstances of the past and the development progress which has come since then is in-keeping with the perspective echoed in the SDP8. A difficulty in this way of thinking has to be the risk of overlooking real instances of poverty and its causes due to being comparatively better off than other nations termed “developing”. In particular, I found the tendency to focus on the positive outcomes for Nuku’Alofa in relation to the rioting and the devastation of buildings leading to improved town planning and development possibilities particularly surprising. While I strongly believe this to be the government “line” following the fall-out and subsequent reconstruction after the rioting, in some ways it is reflective of the resilience and self-sustaining ways of the population in Tonga and their want to continue with life as normal, focusing on the positives in a negative situation.

Raising Living Standards in Tonga

Initially I had planned to ask the question ‘what do you think the government sees as being key to the alleviation of poverty in Tonga?’, however, given the hesitance to acknowledge “poverty” as being an issue for Tonga, I rephrased the question to be ‘what do you think the government sees as key to improving the standard of living for Tongans?’ Education was a recurrent theme in the responses:

“I think [education] is the key. Here in Tonga, people understand that education is the key. Since Tonga has no resources and is highly dependent on foreign aid and remittances, there is a saying that you have to go to school if you need to have a better life.”

“A program that can teach people to divert their remittances money to a more productive use rather than consumption can also help. Of course remittances that [are] being used for consumption has a multiplier effect especially when spending on education and health, but I think it is a valid idea if government devises such a policy to accommodate the diversion of remittances.”

“We have TESP [Tongan Education Support Programme], it is funded by NZ, AUS, USA and the World Bank. That project is looking at reforming our curriculum. The current

system is training to work in a bank or office. So this project is looking to renovate the current curriculum so it can respond to the market demand. The supply is there, we have all of the students but we don't have the facility to meet those needs. At least we have to renovate the curriculum. The demand 20 years ago was to sit in an office. Many people have limitations in speaking in English, or they are very good in plumbing, building, so if we are able to renovate the curriculum then we will be able to address the issue of youth unemployment."

An acknowledgement of the need for a multi-faceted approach, both from government and non-government sectors was suggested also:

"As I mentioned earlier, all sectors are interrelated and to life the living standard[s] of the Tongan [people] each sector has to work together. Tonga depends on agriculture over the past few years and we have noted that agriculture has gone down in its contribution to GDP. This is because we were so reliant on squash and now it has gone down, pulling the whole sector down. However, there is hope in the tourism sector, but that need[s] to be examined very careful[ly] so it's worth spending money [on]. Tourism told us that if we have the right infrastructure in place then Tonga will reap tremendous benefit from this sector."

Two participants also touched on the necessity for citizens' obligation to help better their own lives:

"We must remember that the government can only do...not much. If we want to be better we must make ourselves better [by] work[ing] hard, go[ing] overseas to work, make a life for your family. We have everything we need, it is up to us to use."

"If you or your family don't have a job, go to your land. There is plenty of work to do each day, but you have to look for it. You can maybe sell some mango[es], some breadfruit or kava but you have to work hard for yourself and give the opportunity[ies]."

A communal and perhaps more traditional approach to the improvement of living standards was offered by one:

“We need to have a social benefit system that reflects strong families’ ties of the Tongan. Such a system I believe it would address the need to take care of those people who are in desperate need. There are elders, orphans etc, people and they are facing economic hardship in terms of accessing the cash economy, but having a communal system can alleviate that. A communal system includes having microfinance [which] might be helpful as it allows less income earners to make a confessional loan for commercial activities.”

It was a statement made in the SDP8 that citizens commonly expected the Government to meet all of their needs. This notion of self help, as well as the reliance on Education as a means of bettering one’s situation, perhaps a carry-over from Tupou IV’s reign, seem to be prevalent in the perception that each individual Tongan can make, and is responsible for, their own wealth.

Government Workers Speak About Rural/Urban Disparities and Unemployment

During my time in Vava’u and Nuku’Alofa it was glaringly obvious the disparities in living standards, access to services and the quality of infrastructure and the apparent unequal attention to the development of services and infrastructure between rural and urban areas. I wanted to gauge the perspective of policy planners in relation to this. As starters to discussion around the topic, participants were asked to comment on:

- The impact of internal migration on living standards
- Comparative living standards between urban and rural areas and unemployment
- The extent to which government addresses and/or prioritizes development of rural versus urban development needs

On internal migration and its impact on living standards, participants saw it as a measured risk, one that generally paid off:

“The increase in internal mobility is because of more commercial activities in Tongatapu as the economic pressure on the individual in the other island like Ha’apai. Also, education is also a factor causing people to move to places like Tongatapu.”

“The bond between relatives and family are really strong. If someone moves from the other islands they can still rely on relatives and friends. I think that can be eroded but at the present time...and landless people who move, they can easily find land through relatives or friends. People from the Ha’apai group, they are good fisherman, they can feed their family. But the main reason for internal migration is education and employment, for them it is different to others, they have education and expertise, they can find a good job.”

“You can make money wherever you go in Tonga [but] you have to be thinking about it. If you move you should know someone who can help you and that will make things easier. Sending your children is no problem because my family will take care of them always I know. [If] you want to go to Nuku’Alofa then go, but you have to look and work hard. Have a plan. You can do well anywhere in the world if you try to.”

Participants elaborated on the social costs of internal migration and unemployment levels: “People are free to move internally but most people, I guess, it depends if they have a piece of land or relatives on the other islands, like moving from Ha’apai to Tongatapu it can be economically and socially difficult if you don’t have a place or relative to stay with so perhaps it is not the social hierarchy or nobles that put pressure on individuals but because of the economical needs faced by the individuals.”

“It is one of the things that hurt the smaller outer islands. We don’t have enough skilled people in those areas now and they are just going down hill. They will rely on their land for food and for work. They don’t need money and that is good, they can’t get the money anyway unless it is sent by their family in New Zealand or America.”

“Unemployment is a fact of life everywhere in this world. There is no country that does not have people without jobs. Even here, when we are not in a job we are working. We make the best of our days. But it is not out of control, as long as when we leave school the young ones can go away, it is ok.”

There was some acknowledgement that the islands around Tonga were developing at differing rates, however this was often explained through limitations in government resources and the knowledge or expectation that international donor partners would compensate for this.

“I came to Tonga[*tapu*] for my schooling and it has paid off. Now I work here. I know, my family knows my village doesn’t have what I needed then. They can’t, how can they? They don’t have the resources we have here in Tonga[*tapu*].”

“In Vava’u, as you spoke about, there are other international agencies working there. The government doesn’t need to put its money there when they have assistance already. Vava’u will never be like Tongatapu and it is ok. People live a different way there.”

“I know we [the government] work with[*in*] budget constraints. Tongans can’t expect that we can build all the roads to the bush, help with everything. It is not possible for a small country as ours. We have to put the money where most of the population is and where the need is. The smaller areas, Vava’u etc they will have help from the EU, from Japan and we are grateful for that as we can’t do it all and we know that they are being looked after. The government is looking to development [of] Tongatapu economically and socially, but also it looks at framing a holistic approach that make[s] sure that Sione in Vava’u enjoy[s] the same economic and social benefits that Sione in Tongatapu....but these cannot be done with the narrow resources we have.”

Again, the belief that the government were doing all they could to provide for all Tongans equally, including facilitating the support from international organizations was prevalent. It was interesting to note the degree of acceptance that there would naturally be disparities between islands due to population, resource limitations, or a preference for a certain way of living, ie; that people in Vava’u preferred a quieter, more simple daily life than those in Vava’u, so would not want the increase in infrastructure or resources. This goes against findings in the consultations carried out in the formulation of the SDP8.

Regionalism, the Pacific Plan and its Relevance for Tonga

In considering Regionalism, the Pacific Plan and its relevance for Tonga in relation to alleviation of hardship and poverty, participants were asked to comment on Government policy in relation to this, and the perceived benefits of Regionalism and specifically the Pacific Plan. One had to say:

“Governance is the priority for the Pacific and especially in the Pacific Plan, it tells us to focus on this, especially in relation to political reform here in Tonga. However the whole eight goals [of the SDP8] explain the sequence of priority for Government. Macroeconomic [development] is the second and it has been addressed in different areas...since the Government has outlined its SDP goals and it was aiming to involve all sectors of the community to that they can feel the ownership and strive for the betterment of the whole island, not a particular group or institution. So, in this way, we follow the Pacific Plan closely to make sure we can meet the goals.”

Two of the participants didn't feel as if they could comment specifically on the government's priorities, in one instance because they felt it wasn't their place, and the other because they had no accurate information on this, but did however refer me to the SDP8.

On the relevance of regionalism and The Pacific Plan responses focused on reciprocity in exchange of goods and services and fostering of good relationships:

“From a commonsense point of view, you can do anything as a team; for example, if we have shortages, Fiji can just ship it over to us.”

“I think Regionalism is an issue of opening up to other islands. It is a good issue to look at. You can't isolate yourself from your brother and sisters just because in the end they are going to ignore you when you need help.”

“I think Regionalism, it could help but only to some. Unlike the other regions like Asia and region, they have the money and resources, but Regionalism is dominated by NZ or Australia, everything has to go their way. They do a good role in Tonga, but there are a lot of things that could be done. I believe it doesn't help the region. If we take the example of Fiji and [the] Solomons [islands] in recent times, it does.”

On the potential benefits and costs:

“Working overseas as part of The Pacific Plan, it’s good as it has income and skill effects, but it has to be examined carefully as it might have a negative long term impact especially when youth or adult people [start] adopting different cultural attitudes like forming gangs.”

“It helps alleviate hardship. Meeting basic needs is the most important thing. Bringing money to our economy through trade opening and more jobs, it eases out the balance of payments, thereby improving the standard of living.”

“I don’t really believe that what has been planned in the whole document will be achieved. But I think it will bring to Tonga some kind of advantages, in the way that those as you mentioned who don’t have access to land, but I think that that kind of problem is ongoing and it will continue to in the future. I think this is more like a platform for future planners to look for a kind of solution. Everywhere in the world there is not perfect plan.”

When asked if they thought the Tongan Government would choose this approach to development if the Pacific Plan wasn’t in existence they said:

“Yes, we must work within the ways of the world if we are to better our nation in[keeping] with the First World.”

“I think it would mostly the same. We might not call on our neighbours so much as we are very different to them as well, our politics, our way of life.”

“Well, yes and no. It would be hard to turn away to the assistance and advice we get from donors and consultants. They are here to advise us and they do it well. At the same time we know ourselves we need this for our economy and would go this way I believe.”

Conclusions

The government workers were largely united by the government stance that living standards were generally acceptable in Tonga, either compared to other nations within the Pacific, or have improved overtime within Tonga. The notion that living standards were of Tongan's own making was prevalent; similarly if Tongans were to want to improve their livelihoods they were perceived to be free to do so through the utilization of the resources available to them, internal migration and education opportunities and with the support of family and friends. Interestingly, all workers saw the government was doing all that they could to aid in the improvement of living standards in Tonga, as well as in the facilitation of international donors in the areas that the government were perceived to be unable to cater for, such as in Vava'u, with the EU assisting with development projects. Education, through formal schooling or in the way of government initiatives was seen as key to alleviation of poverty.

In relation to urban and rural disparities in living standards, again the belief that the government could only do so much was pervasive. Reliance on international agencies to fill the gaps in rural areas was mentioned, though nothing regarding the sustainability of this option was mentioned. Internal migration was not seen as a cause of hardship generally, and the idea that it was up to each individual and their families to make it economically viable for them was the main theme. Surprisingly, relating this to a lack of resources and opportunities was limited, rather preferring to adhere to the mantra that "freedom and independence is the Tongan way of life" (Kennedy, 1972, preface) and Tongans were free to make their life anywhere they saw it being economically more viable, be it in their own village or elsewhere. Perceptions that expectations for wellbeing and preferred ways of living differed from island to island seemed to assume that because access to improved service delivery and infrastructure were primitive on some islands, that the citizens expectations for their personal, day to day livelihoods were in keeping with this, which was evidently not the case, as seen through my field work in villages in Vava'u and in community consultations in the formulation of the SDP8; however, this would not be an entirely unusual viewpoint given the social hierarchy and stratification within Tongan society.

It was acknowledged that positives could come as a result of the Pacific Plan such as the sense of reciprocity (which may be a particular notion at the heart of Pacific Nations), the increase in skills gained through programs such as the seasonal visa programs and the increase in money into the economy. However, it is clear that some skepticism around the plan existed; in considering the clash in the culture of the Pacific Plan and that of the nations it involves, the fear that behaviours and attitudes which were contradictory to those considered traditionally Tongan was expressed, as well as a reference to the conflict between the ideal principles of the Plan and unique national issues and conflicts which are incompatible with achieving the targets – a readily voiced fear by Pacific Plan observers.

The compulsion to adhere with the dominant development model proposed by development partners such as Australia and New Zealand was evident. Similarly there was a sense that Tonga had little other option for its future; Regionalism and the Pacific Plan was seen as inevitable and a way of ensuring that Tonga continues along the path to achieving development goals in alignment with those of the first world and in-keeping with the dominant development ideology.

The acknowledgement that cooperation amongst neighbours in the Pacific was necessary was, in my opinion, somewhat idealistic in its expression, given wavering loyalties, the demands for goods and services being similar in most of the developing Pacific nations, and the extent to which power, influence and international relations play in these seemingly informal transactions and forms of cooperation. The awareness of the limitations of the Plan, including restricted resources within the region and the fact that it is a guide rather than a blueprint, and that it was not feasible to expect that all goals would be achievable for all nations suggests an undercurrent of resignation alongside the willingness to explore all options for improving Tonga's economy. The references to first world models, consultants' knowledge and the way in which Tonga should strive to be like other economies, was a clear indicator to me that there did not seem to be a feeling of ownership for the Plan within the Government environment of Tonga.

Most poignant in these findings for me was the blend of opinion seemingly based on those of the Government and the fears of these individuals as Tongans, for the well-being of a nation they seem to feel so proud of. This felt deeply resonant of the demand for people of the Pacific to live within two worlds in order to ensure their success in all plains of life.

Focus Group Findings

Intentions and Limitations of the Focus Group

Given that the largest population group in Tonga is in the 14-19 year old age bracket, I wanted to delve into what the aspirations of youth are and their perceptions of their living standards, both in their community and in relation to the world outside their island. Some work was touched on in relation to the notion of what it meant for youth to be considered Tongan, and what the concept of 'Anga Fakatonga meant to them, however this was not used in the findings section. I did find it of interest in seeing the mix of two worlds in which it appeared youth existed. This can be seen in Appendix A.

Aspirations of Youth in Vava'u

As a group the participants were asked to share what they thought they (or others their age) wanted for their future and in what ways they are being prepared or planning for this.

Comments related to their aspirations included:

"I think most people want the money and jobs."

"Cars, the big cars, to get a job and to go to New Zealand."

"If we work hard at school, I think we can get anything we want; I mean we can do anything we put our hearts to doing. My parents say this and our teachers tell us we can be what we want to be if we work harder now."

"I know that I want to be [a] doctor."

"Most of us want to do well and to travel. I want to be able to send money home when I go away and to help my parents."

When asked how they were planning or being prepared for the future, they said:

"Teachers. We have to come to school."

“My parents teach me the right thing to do but we have to [go to] school as well, [we] can’t just stay and learn at home.”

“I work hard at school. My teachers help me in my subjects. I know if I do [well] in the hospitality school[course] I can get a job with my skill[s].”

“We learn about God and life and schooling here [at school]. That will help teach us the best way to go.”

“My sister is [in] America and now I know she tells me to do well here so I can go [to] America to work.”

As the feedback continued it was obvious that the students felt their hopes for the future lay outside of Tonga, so I asked the group whether they thought they could reach their aspirations in Tonga and why or why not. Answers were mixed:

“Yes, you can but you need to work hard here. Move to the other islands if you can’t work [here].”

“Tonga is beautiful country. We can live well but there is no[t] enough jobs for everyone so someone in the family will go overseas.”

“The government can help us if we need something.”

“If we can’t work we go to the bush with my brothers and my dad. There is always something to work [at].”

“If you want to be [in] Tonga working do it. If you want to go away, you can go. You have to get a person to help you.”

“You can’t [say] that Tonga can give things. My family there is job[s] but you don’t know [if] they [are] going to be there tomorrow. I want to have [a] house and if I want I can go oversea[s].”

I followed this by asking them what positives they thought they had living in a country like Tonga and the standard of living they experienced in their villages. Positives included:

“It is still [a] Kingdom, [the] only one.”

“Tonga is not very political.”

“Traditional, lots of respect.”

“The children respect Mum and Dad, mind their own business.”

“We can get the food without paying.”

“Tonga is more beautiful than other countries.”

“We still keep the old way of life, with the canoe.”

Only one participant contributed a comment on living standards:

“We can eat here, we are poor in some villages but there is always the food.”

When I asked them to elaborate on how you could measure the idea of being “poor”, they answered:

“You can’t tell really by looking at them. They shouldn’t show it, but if you know their family, you know, like their new house, transportation, go[ing] away, the parents, family go way and come back, job all the times, lunch they bring from the shop.”

Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, the responses regarding aspirations for the future were economic in terms of making money and securing a good job for their livelihood. Sanga (2002) recognized the tendency for this way of thinking in his paper ‘Beyond Access and Participation: challenges facing Pacific Education’ where he regarded this concept as a development of “in-school education” (Sanga, 2002, p52) of which has been influenced heavily by westernization, globalization and the former impacts of colonization, as has Tonga’s Education system. Indeed, given that youth were directly involved in the Education system at the time they participated, this could be seen to have influenced and shaped their impressions.

Travelling overseas to secure a better future and schooling as a means of furthering themselves were recurrent in the responses. Interestingly, only one participant offered a specific career path as their aspiration, the others preferring to give the general goal of getting a job and employment. Teachers, parents or other family members and God were offered as being integral in the way in which they were being prepared for their futures. Four participants felt that Tonga could provide what they aspired to for their futures, though one answer was mixed preferring to see Tonga and overseas both held opportunities for their future. One participant was more scathing in relation to job security offered by Tonga, insinuating that international opportunities were a feasible and more reliable option.

Aspirations for their future seemed closely tied into the ideals of the nation as expressed in the SDP8, such as to gain a good education, and to achieve economic security. The idea that they could leave Tonga to increase their economic well-being either through work or study opportunities, or in the form of financial aid, was also a feature. Through these findings it is evident that Tongan youth are well versed in the benefits of globalization in relation to increased opportunities that are perceived to be on offer to them, such as study or work prospects, within their region. This echoes Epeli Hau'ofa's (Hau'ofa, 1993) understanding that "The resources of Samoans, Cook Islanders, Niueans, Tokelauans, Tuvaluans, I-Kiribatis, Fijians, Indo-Fijians and Tongans, are no longer confined to their national boundaries" (Hau'ofa, 1993, p11) boundaries of the Pacific and Pacific peoples were unnaturally enforced by colonizers and that resources for Pacific people are available from not only the region, but from the world as a whole, bursting the myth that Pacific nations have limited resource bases and are therefore limited in their opportunities (Ibid). In discussing the positives in relation to life in Tonga, the contrast in the way of life and elsewhere was apparent to them, notably in relation to cash incomes and the provision of food not being reliant on this.

While the students were much in agreement with what it means to be Tongan, the extent to which these features were presented as ways to reach their aspirations was almost non-existent. It is clear then that aspects considered integral to Tongan identity may be seen in very separate contexts to gaining and securing opportunities to better and advance their

livelihoods and futures. This mirrors the clash of cultures evident in the social landscapes of Tonga today.

Interviews with Villagers in Vava'u

In speaking with villagers in Vava'u I wanted to establish the everyday reality of life in Tonga and their perceptions of living standards for themselves and in Tonga generally. Through semi-structured interviews we focused on the following topics:

- Poverty, its manifestations, causes and mechanisms for alleviation
- Perceptions of the Government and the Region's role in the provision of improved livelihoods of Tongans

About the Participants

Two participants were engaged in formal, long term employment in town centre of Vava'u. The other participant had a formal leadership role within the village and although this was considered a full time role, did not receive a monetary income. These participants were contacted on arriving in Vava'u, through contacts made by those I met at while arranging the focus group. Two of the participants were similar in age, and the other several decades older; this proved an interesting comparison, especially given the ideas expressed in relation to ways of living and aspirations.

Poverty, its Manifestations, Causes and Mechanisms for Alleviation

In determining what constituted poverty or hardship for Tongans, it was vital I hear the perspectives of everyday citizens. They were asked to comment on the manifestations, causes of Poverty and mechanisms for alleviation.

On living standards in their villages:

“In [his village] everybody has the opportunity to make on a good living but it will depend on whether you work. Like Kava, [my village] is the only place in the whole of Tonga to get Kava. So you can get good money from it because that is the only resource. You can sell the Kava and get big money to make a house. If you are too lazy to work for it, you won't get nothing”

“‘Masiva’ – it means that those people cannot afford to cope with their everyday demands. There are a few of those people here but they can find help from their family, from the village, the church. Most of us are ok, if we have work or we can go to the bush.”

“The community help[s with] the school fees. Many communities have a club for school fees and they help out, especially concerning the school fees. Whenever they are going to pay the school fees they don’t give it to the parents they go straight to the school office and pay it off. And especially the school help them, especially with the transport, most villages have their own buses. They are the scholarship buses. That’s how the community helps so things are ok for everyone in [her village]. Plus the community donates the houses for the boarding school.”

Participants were asked if they could identify some causes of hardship in their community:

“It depends on the Government, they should consider the needs from once they have to give the money to repair the roads that they really need but sometimes they don’t help. And I mean people should have to encourage their kids to go to school that’s the only way to improve their standard of living. Some keep the kids home and they don’t learn any different”

“The roads and we can’t get to the bush in the rainy time.”

“There is often not enough work for people who want to work. And then you have the other side where the boys who can work and get the money for their family don’t want to, or they go to the bush.”

Asked about the manifestations of poverty in their community and whether they could identify those suffering from hardship, the replied:

“[It] is easier to tell that a student is wealthy. And people’s behaviour, lets say if someone is wealthy they might feel shy to show us, its hard for us to tell because it seems like they

are hiding, they are shy if they are more wealthy so it is hard for us except if that person if that person came from a wealthy family if they are recognized from Tonga.”

“Yes, the Church know[s] who need[s] the help. We can see it or someone will tell us. But it is not all the time.”

“I can tell I mean the way they live. Their house. The type of houses, they have some still have the Tongan houses, use the local material to build their house. Yeah, western style house it means that you improve the way you live, the type of western house that you live, you got money to pay for those building materials.”

Respondents were asked how they thought their lives could be made easier, their living standards be raised:

“Here in Tonga we have the best of both. If we want to work to earn money we can. If not, we know we have the land. It would be better if the roads were good. But Japan help[ed] us last time.”

“We have to have a Kava and put their donation in and have a bowl of Kava so everyone gives what they can to help this boy do his study. He has the permission to do it but he can’t go so we raise over \$200 so now he can get the boat and pay school fees. That’s how we help people. We have a committee to look after elderly people and widows they can’t work in the bush or get money to live and this group looks after people in the village. Every month we raise funds.”

“I think that education, encourage them, having a family around you they can help support you, and friends too around they can help. I think that sending someone overseas help a lot. Going there for further study, I mean saving some money for that person after three or four years that person the help that person is going to give back [remittances.]”

Government's Role in the Improvement of Livelihood for Tongans

I wanted to gauge the extent to which Government employees were accurate in thinking that citizens in Tonga were heavily expectant of the Government to make their livelihood better through funding, provision of infrastructure and services, as this was an expectation voiced not only in the interviews, but in the Government's development document.

"The only thing is - education is one thing, religious activities. I think the Government want[s] to help but because they have the money lack of money it hard."

"I think if the people use our resources we have they would be able to cope with their everyday life. Wise use of our resources and make use with their time. If you were born to be a farmer you should. The Government can't tell you how to live. They won't come and work the land for you."

"Imagine your Government cannot give you a road, or water all day. These are the things we in [the village] must face. We cannot be expected to do everything ourselves. There are things that we can expect from the Government and that is what the [political] reform is about. It is good for the King to have a road, it is good for us. But we love them[the monarchy], so we try to do it ourselves. But sometimes there is too much to do. Everyone needs some help in any country. It is the same for Tonga."

The Region and its Relevance for Tongans

It has been criticized by NGOs and civil society organizations in the Pacific that Regionalism, its goals and frameworks, hold little relevance for those at the community level. I wanted to gain some understanding of how these villagers perceived the region in terms of what it could offer them.

"We can go anywhere but you need money. That is the world we Tongans live in today. The region is there for us when we have the money and the education to go out into it."

“I know that we get the aid assistance from the other Governments, so does Fiji and Tokelau and other countries. We need the help but we don’t need to be told what to do.”

“I think I can go everyday and not worry about what the Government speak[s] about with other governments. If we get some money it is from the church. The government will ask, will help but it take[s] a long time. This is the thing. If I want it now, I can go get kava and sell it or I get it from my work. That is how we live.”

Conclusions

The villagers in Vava’u were very aware of their resources and the gifts that they had been blessed with in relation to that. Their belief that they could make a living off their “own backs”, so to speak was dominant, however, they rightly had expectations of the Government, most commonly in the provision of infrastructure, such as suitable roads and water supply; these findings seemed to match closely those found in the SDP8 consultation process with villagers in Vava’u (SDP8, 2006, pg).

Concerning the manifestations of hardship, conceiving this in relation to the retaining of traditional structures, be them physical or ideological, seemed to be a point of confusion, as one participant spoke passionately of wanting young people to maintain traditional notions of respect for their village, their elders and the community as a whole. This was of significant interest to me given the instigation by another participant that those families lived in “Tongan” traditional housing were seen as being poorer than those who had adopted a western structure. This was a very clear indication that although Tongan traditions and values are seen as integral to the wellbeing of the nation (SDP8, Goal 8), the idea that someone should choose to retain traditional housing was deemed a sign of hardship; therefore development or modernization on a material basis was expected, but from an ideological or values-based standpoint, maintenance of cultural and traditional ways of thinking and being, were to remain unchanged.

Themes recurrent regarding the causes were surrounding Government funding for infrastructure, lack of education, and limited employment opportunities which would offer cash income. The methods for improving livelihoods, far from being reliant on Government help, were seen to come in the form of continued assistance from social support networks, such as the community, Church and extended family, as well as through the pursuit of continued education and remittances from family members. The land was also seen as something to fall back on should one not be able to find work, or choose not to work, though there was the general feeling that education and opportunities leading to cash employment or the receiving of money from remittances or community sources was a necessity to improving livelihoods and reducing hardship.

Responses towards the Government were mixed. The acknowledgement that they worked within monetary constraints was made by one participant. The idea that each person was an individual and was responsible for the planning and realization of their own future was strong, however the expectation that Government provides services for those in villages as well as for themselves, the King and those who live in urban areas was hinted at by another, despite being coupled with the acknowledgment that the nation still holds love for the monarchy. A sense of frustration was also expressed by this participant with the apparent expectation held by the Government that villagers should be responsible for all areas of their life, and a comparison was drawn between my Government and the way in which I would see them as failing to do their duty, or failing to meet my expectations if they could not provide suitable infrastructure; this was a welcome comment given the way in which hardship has always been deemed in relative terms in the Pacific.

Given the detachment towards the Government and their input into the lives of themselves as villagers and as part of a wider community, it is no surprise that the concept of the 'Pacific Region' did not resonate so deeply with the participants. For the most part, the Region was seen as something considered at the level of Government, on a nation by nation basis, rather than being of relevance to the individual's life and day to day living, with one exception. The lack of immediacy of help was especially poignant, with one participant recognizing the informal support structures already in place for them, such as the Church, their employment or through the fruits of their labour with the land.

One participant chose to see the Region as something that could be experienced once they had prepared financially, and in terms of gaining education and skills. Another was adamant that although Tonga required some assistance from the region, the need for Tonga to maintain its independence and ability to direct its own future should not be mistaken.

The villagers offered a depth of information about their ways of living and the delicate balance of formal and informal means of income and gaining resources, and the ways in which their community offered support and filled the gaps in terms of the needs of the village as a whole, or for individuals and their families. It is unfortunate all findings could not be integrated to a greater extent into this section due to the need for brevity. The participant interviews were telling of the way in which Tongans seek improved livelihoods. The interwoven nature of life in a Tongan village, with an abundance of natural resources available to them should they choose to use them, but the need for greater infrastructure and opportunities to supplement their own, and wider community efforts was symptomatic of a nation whose Government needed address wider systemic and institutional barriers to the improvement of living standards in their country. This is acknowledged as one of the main issues both in the SDP8 and the Pacific Plan, though it remains to be seen as to how and when the Tongan Government can institute change that will have a very real positive impact on those such as the villagers who offered their support and input into this research process.

Overall Conclusions – Research Findings

My research sought to find out more regarding the way in which policy influencers in Tonga viewed living standards in Tonga and the way in which processes such as regionalism informed policy decisions in a domestic arena. Added to this was the intent to investigate the perceptions of living standards of Tongans at a community level and they way in which they saw their needs being met by government and other social security networks.

By and large the policy influencers saw Tongan living standards as fairly satisfactory, not stating poverty as a major problem for Tongans at the present time. Almost all policy influencers saw Tongans as being the solution to their own problems surrounding hardship, through engaging in Education programmes, as well as being proactive in seeking livelihood opportunities through travel or traditional activities such as working the land and selling produce. Policy influencers also spoke about the impacts of the rioting of November 2006 on livelihoods, and although there was some acknowledgement of the short term hardship associated with job losses, overwhelmingly they sought to focus on this as an opportunity for new development in Tonga, and for urban planning to be drawn into focus. This is perhaps the Government's response to this event, but also signified the way in which Tongans tended to appear optimistic in the face of adversity, and when referring to their futures.

In addressing regionalism and its relevance for development in Tonga, the responses were mixed. While positives were seen to come from initiatives such as the Pacific Plan through increased cooperation and reciprocity, scepticism remained as the reality of the extent of such activities. A sense of inevitability surrounding the move towards regionalism was also expressed.

In interviewing the citizens from a Vava'u community, which included a youth focus group, about their living standards, it was clear that they held concrete ideas regarding the ways in which their livelihoods could be improved and the mechanisms by which these could be achieved. While Government was seen as a provider of solutions to the ways in which standards of living could be changed, these were in practical and realistic ways, such as in the provision infrastructure such as roads and water supply. Youth interestingly mimicked the solutions commonly seen to escaping hardship in Tonga, that is, through the opportunities to travel, gaining an education and securing paid employment. There was the recognition that the possibilities available in Tonga for their future may not be as comprehensive or as far reaching as they would like, and saw that while Tonga had some unique and valuable qualities, it held limitations in what it could offer them for the future.

An significant theme within the research was in relation to the way in which policy influencers saw citizens as needing to provide for themselves, and in relation to this, the assertion that Government could be expected to do only so much. This was a theme that was present within the SDP8 and indeed has been a feature of development planning and discourse historically in Tonga. The extent to which this provides an excuse for Government to fail to address pressing issues such as failing or non-existent essential infrastructure needs must be considered, alongside the extent to which regional and international requirements and objectives take priority in relation to those domestically. This will be addressed in my final conclusions in relation to the motives for regionalism, the extent to which regionalism caters for national needs in relation to poverty, and where the needs of everyday citizens in Tonga rest amongst this.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE – REGIONALISM, THE PACIFIC AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Introduction

The Pacific encompasses nations which are unique and varied. As Phillips and Levy (1988) poetically observe, “From bamboo huts to skyscrapers, grass skirts to spacesuits, and mule-drawn wagons to jumbo jets, this one region houses the most diverse cultures in the world” (Phillips and Levy, 1988, p9). This diverse region is one which is far too vast to be encompassed here, in this short review of the literature of regionalism in the Pacific and its impact on poverty reduction. It is for this very reason that the developments of regionalism in the Pacific will be limited to focusing on the member countries of the Pacific Islands’ Forum (PIF) and the role it has played in encouraging regionalism as a means of seeking improved livelihoods for all in the Pacific.

The review will begin with addressing the emergence of regionalism in the Pacific, located within the wider context of globalization and its impact on the region. The actors and institutions of regionalism will also be identified, examining the motives for the pursuit of regional cooperation, both in relation to the actors and institutions, and for the Pacific as a whole, as well as examining the extent to which development, and the reduction of poverty in Forum Island Countries is recognized as a motivating means, as well as the intended outcome of regional initiatives. Lastly, acknowledging the impact of Regional governance on local level governance in relation to the everyday existence and actuality of life in Pacific nations will be explored.

The Emergence of Regionalism

Regionalism in its definition can be used to describe “everything from decentralisation of political power to economic restructuring to the mobilization of subnational identities” (Fitjar, 2006, p334). In the context of the Pacific today, regionalism is used to describe the strategy implemented to “create stronger and deeper links between Pacific countries and identify the sectors where the region could gain the most from sharing resources and aligning policies...to promote economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security in the region” (Pacific Plan Basic Concepts, p1). Kamo (1995) noted the differing meanings of regionalism and the impacts of these variations, stating, “... if it means only the formation of interstate associations or groupings on the basis of regions, and the advocacy of such formations, regionalism is less likely to transform the essence of nationalism ... however, if regionalism means more ... if it means challenging the contemporary nation-state system, as member countries of the EU have attempted...then surely it competes with, and often contradicts nationalism” (Kamo, 1995, p21).

Regionalism must be seen as part of the wider process of globalization, something which is complex and multidimensional, and which brings to the world both positive and negative developments in social, cultural, economic and political arenas. Kaplinsky (2005) characterizes globalization in two ways; first as in the process which sees the reduction of barriers which have previously restricted the flow of goods, services, people, knowledge and belief systems; and second, “in relation to the ambitions and actions of key global actors, including firms and groups seeking political and religious hegemony” (Kaplinsky, 2005, p8). So too, it can be argued, that regionalism in its intentions and in its actions, can be considered. Calleya (2000) highlights the birth of regionalism at the hands of globalization, speaking of “Globalization – and regionalism as one of its components” (Calleya, 2000, p8) and considers regionalism to be “very much about the geopolitics of globalization” (Ibid, p3), in that it “aims to influence of the basis of consensus through diplomatic relationships with various actors within a region” (Ibid).

Given the general understanding about regionalism by scholars that "... at the heart of integration theory is the creation of interdependence among parts to form a whole" (Lieber, 1973; Feld and Boyd, 1980), it is no surprise then that in the discourse surrounding the emergence of regionalism across the world, scholars commonly point to the formation of global institutions in the Post-World War II era as being the launching pad of globalization and regional cooperation, which placed an emphasis on individual states working together, in a effort to prevent the mass destruction of the former wars, with the development of such institutions as the United Nations (UN) in 1945, and the early forming a European Community, later to become the EU.

Within the context of a Functionalist approach to Regionalism, whereby "common human needs" (Mitrany, 1943 in Heng & Low, 1993, p2) such as transportation, housing and food could be met and the understanding that "...a shared interest in the economic welfare of individuals would inevitably lead to transnational cooperation...solving the nations' collective problems" (Haas, 1958; in Heng & Low, 1993, p2) Regionalism for developing nations could have proved indispensable as a means of securing livelihoods and promoting development. Within the current form, whereby economic cooperation and integration of markets is the priority, while the advantages are expected to arrive, the immediate impacts felt from restructuring the economy are sudden and often devastating for local businesses and livelihoods of everyday citizens as they absorb the costs domestically. Such costs include the inability for domestic industries to be able to compete with the lower costs of those offered externally, loss of skilled workers to other foreign markets, loss of original livelihood opportunities (such as manufacturing industries or agriculture) as tariffs are lowered and subsidies offered for importers, and loss of sovereignty (<http://www.economicshelp.org/europe/disadvantages-eu.html>). What often follows is a shift in focus from domestic agendas to those of the regional community, as resources are pooled to meet the obligations and reforms which offer the promise of a better economic health for the nation, but in reality results in marginalization of citizens and prolonged hardship. So what does this approach offer the Pacific region, and to what extent can Regionalism contribute to the PIF leaders' belief that "the Pacific can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic

prosperity, so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives” (PIFS, Leaders Vision, Pacific Plan) ?

Regionalism and Poverty Reduction

Regionalism as a means of poverty reduction must be taken in relation to wider global movements. Larner and Walters see this in three distinct phases, leading us to where we are now, with regionalism overseeing the political agendas of areas across the globe and dictating national actions. According to Larner and Walters, regionalism had its beginnings with the imperialism of colonial powers, followed by the phase of ‘developmentalism’, which then heralds in a form of “new regionalism”, which we currently see in operation within the Pacific. Larner and Walters note some significant shifts in the intentions and outcomes of the separate stages. They state, “Whereas Imperialism understands international space in geopolitical terms, and developmentalism seeks to consolidate the nation-state as the principal unit of the international system, regionalism presupposes a global economy.” (Larner & Walters, DATE, p408). They recognize regionalism as representing “... a different mode of exercising authority across an international space, and of integrating poorer populations.” (Ibid). It is with the latter stages of developmentalism, and significantly with end of the Cold War, that global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund began to institutionalise the process and work towards fostering nation-stateness, and to further implement processes to facilitate this, with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes, and later, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Storey, *et al*, 2005), with a shift seeing globalisation and neo-liberalism serving to minimise the centrality of the state.

The underlying actions within the phases of Regionalism detailed above represent a lack of actual redressing of the way in which poverty and the nations who suffer from poverty and inequality, are treated, no matter what is purported in relation to greater participation, empowerment and alternative approaches to development, as has supposed to have happened through the transition of regionalism through the move from the use of SRPs to

PRSPs. As McGee (2003) states, "The 'new poverty agenda' of the structural adjustment era mutated almost seamlessly into the 'new poverty agenda' of the PRSP era - poverty." She continues, "Recent research describes the policy processes we and others seek to influence as being constituted by policy spaces, actors and their diverse knowledge; and posits that shrewder analysis of policy spaces would lead to more informed decisions about which to step into and use. It has been pointed out that the INGO community, instead of clamouring for 'more participation', should focus on understanding the dynamics of social exclusion - whether from the fruits of growth, from PRS consultations or from representative democratic governance (McGee, 2003 <http://www.bond.org.uk/networker/2003/april03/mcgee.htm>). What McGee makes clear is that poverty and inequality continue to worsen, and despite re-labelling of old strategies, as appears to have taken place in regard to SAPs and PRSPs, there appears to be no shift in methodology nor is there greater involvement by those who already possess expert knowledge of their context and therefore are in a position to propose strategies to alleviate their conditions.

The proposed mechanism for poverty reduction by means of Regionalism is primarily considered to be achieved through a nation's pursuit of economic growth. Neemia (1986) notes the way in which "Regional cooperation has generally been accepted as imperative for development in Third World countries" (Neemia, 1986, p7). Gareth Evans (1994) speaks of the motivations for Regionalism, which are based on the premise that "governments must deliver policies which stimulate economic growth for the sake of enhancing living standards at home..." (Evans, 1994, p78). Economic growth has been commonly promoted through the increase in trade in goods and services, and specifically through the implementation of free trade agreements. Within the Pacific Plan, Economic Growth for the Pacific is sought through a strengthened private sector, a productive natural resource base, efficient infrastructure and growing service industries which "provide[s] the base for trade and investment and generation of revenue to finance socio-economic programmes..." ('Pacific Plan', Economic Growth Pillar, 2006, p1). As Fry (2004) notes, Mike Moore, the ex-World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General pushes the benefits of free trade in nations' preparation for entry into the WTO saying,

“...countries preparing for entry to the EU and WTO do better than those without such objectives. The economic discipline brings with it growth, social progress and better governance” (‘A Pacific Engaged’, p79 in Fry, 2004, p13).

While the rhetoric surrounding the restructuring via regionalism focuses on trade liberalization as a means of improving economies, what must be recognized is the realization that strengthened economies and better livelihoods do not necessarily follow as a result of this shift in economic focus. As Cohen (1991) asserts in the case of Canada, “...trade liberalization and greater reliance on trade, has not reduced the structural imbalances of the Canadian economy or lessened the country’s economic problems”. Similarly, Kelsey notes the way in which, “... this neoclassical trade model is embedded within a wider neo-liberal framework that is treated by consultants as objective, ‘sound’ and unquestionably desirable. Policies, treaties or arrangements which promote that agenda are assumed to be good for a country, because the theory says they improve efficiency and enhance aggregate economic and social welfare. The structural adjustments they set in train are justified as short-term pain to secure long-term welfare gains. The mass of contrary evidence is ignored” (Kelsey, 2004, p21).

As Neemia notes, there has been limited attempts acknowledge the non-economic factors in the benefits of Regionalism (Neemia, 1986), conversely, with this is the lack of consideration for those factors which foster social wealth and capital and foster healthy societies which lie outside of the realms of economic growth. What should be evident to such promoters of improved livelihoods via economic growth and trade liberalization is that apart from the fact that it has been shown that the free trade model has increased the vulnerability of developing nations (Ghai, 1981 in Neemia, 1986, p11), we must recognize that “poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes” (Sen, 1999, p87), which the focus on economic growth alone as a means of reducing poverty does not address. Sen’s approach to the enabling of citizens to live free and productive lives rests with the concept that we rely on a basic set of capabilities or freedoms, our *basic needs* and together with these, we have a set of functionings which are considered the means and the ends to achieving these freedoms, the things which people value being or doing. What must be acknowledged is the notion

that while income is an important aspect of allowing people to gain basic needs, it is not the be all and end all of poverty reduction (Sen, 1999; Frediani, 2004).

The poverty reduction mechanisms of Regionalism therefore require far more research and strategy development than has been given attention. As we know, much relies on governance and a government's ability and will to be able to direct the benefits of economic growth towards programmes and services which foster social welfare, and given the many demands placed on developing nations which already face financial constraints and continue to allocate funds towards the servicing of international debts at the cost of much-needed service provision to its citizens, poverty reduction via the neo-liberal approach to development only serves to continue the cycle of poverty already facing developing nations.

The Motives for Pacific Regionalism

As early as the 1940s, Regionalism was in existence in the Pacific with the South Pacific Commission (SPC, now the South Pacific Community) being formed in 1947, albeit with a post-colonial aftertaste – or in the ‘developmentalism’ phase, as Larnier and Walters would phrase it, with Australia, France, Holland, New Zealand and USA signing a treaty to protect the “economic and social welfare and advancement of the peoples’ of the non-self-governing territories in the South Pacific Region” (Preamble, Canberra Agreement, in Neemia, 1986, p21). While with the SPC the “... overriding function was for metropolitan originators to enhance individual or collective interests in the region” (Neemia, 1986, p21), the formation of the SPF in 1971, the now Pacific Islands Forum, was considered a break away from the colonial legacy of the past, looking towards a self-governing Pacific. Neemia notes the comment by Fiji’s Sir Ratu Kamasese Mara, “SPC was a child of its era – the colonial era” (Pacific Islands Monthly, March 1976, p2 in Neemia), which stands in contrast to the seemingly self-governing organization of the PIF, whose guiding principles are as follows:

- Address the needs and rights of the most vulnerable Members, communities and people;
- Embrace the cultural diversity of the region with tolerance and respect;

- Strive for recognition of the region's responsibility for guardianship of the world's largest ocean;
- Stimulate debate on how to shape the region now and in the future;
- Seek peak performance;
- Foster quality interaction with all our stakeholders, both internal and external.

Framing Poverty Reduction – Australia and New Zealand and Their Motives for Regionalism

It appeared that the PIF leaders envisaged an organization dedicated to fostering better livelihoods for those who matter most, the citizens of the Pacific nations, with a focus more clearly directed towards self-determination and the development of nations. This is a significant shift and should be noted when considering the approach to Regionalism as taken by the PIFS in relation to the development of the Pacific Plan, as will be explored further, given that the PIF is now the forerunner of Pacific regional organizations, overseeing and administering the regional political agenda, as Neemia acknowledges, the “apex of regional cooperation in the South Pacific...there is no higher regional authority” (Ibid, p26).

In considering the way in which regionalism and more significantly, poverty reduction, has been located in the discourse of Regionalism, we must refer to the argument which places the outcome of ‘poverty reduction’ for developing nations as a guise for which the neo-liberal agendas of dominant actors is pursued, described by Maxwell (2000) as the ‘New Poverty Agenda’ (Maxwell, 2000), as referred to earlier by McGee. In examining the relevance of this to the Pacific, we must look to the roles of Australia, New Zealand as dominant actors who promote a neo-liberal model, and the PIFS in instituting and defining the shape and progress of the Pacific Plan.

The inclusion of the “first world” nations of Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific region and indeed the roles in which they adopt in the move towards greater regional cooperation has been a point of contention for decades now, with their inclusion as

founding members of the PIF seen as a necessary evil by some. The desire for Australia and New Zealand to ensure they benefit from free trade negotiations through Regionalism is considered a key motive in the development role they play in the Pacific as major aid donors (Kelsey, 2004), as well as the maintenance of the security of the region in the current climate of the 'War on Terror', a major concern of Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard (Fry, 2004; Robertson, 2005), and as has been suggested (Storey et al, 2005), one of the means of facilitating more efficient delivery of aid programmes has been to seek to direct the course of regionalism and its reforms; all of which are motivations far removed from the ideal outcome of development, as proposed by the PIFS and the Pacific Plan.

Much has been said of the hegemonic way in which Regionalism has seemingly been enforced upon Pacific nations, despite it being instigated through a Pacific Institution, the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia and New Zealand, both actors in the PIF, though with varying standpoints, levels and modes of engagement, and both instigators of the Pacific Plan have often been portrayed as neo-colonial powers, dominating the discussions and agreements and seemingly benefiting from those to do with the push for Regionalism via the Pacific Plan. This has been observed by Coates (Coates, 2006) as a "deficit-approach" whereby those who purport to know what the Pacific needs, sees the region only in terms of what it is not, seemingly disregarding the strengths of individual nations and of the region as a whole. This approach focuses on weaknesses and reinforces the necessity for dependence on others, while preaching interdependence and self-determination – surely a contradiction in terms. This is seemingly the case, as Fry notes (2004) with Pacific nations are referred to as a failed states, issuing in the threat of terrorism being purported by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and threatening the entire region (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Beyond Bali: ASPI's Strategic Assessment 2002*, Canberra, ASPI, 2002, and ASPI, *Our Failing Neighbour*, June, 2003; in Fry, 2004).

As well as the First world agendas being portrayed as ones of "self-interest" (Kelsey, 2004), Kelsey calls into question the essence of what Australia and New Zealand represent via their involvement as promoters of Regionalism, regarding them as impressing upon FICs the neo-liberal agendas of global development organizations,

noting “As a World Bank report spelt out in 2002, PACER aims to lock the Pacific Islands irrevocably into the neo-liberal paradigm” (Kelsey, 2004, p8). Similarly, Fry (Fry, 2004) recognized Australia’s attempt at representing the ideas and models of a community of foreign powers or global agencies, as in the attempt to impose a World Bank view of land ownership in 1994 (Fry, 2004, p10). Firth also notes, the ‘patron-client’ relationship of Australia over the FICs, as commented on by Kelsey and later, Robertson. This concept of “self-interest” is understood, at Fitjar notes, “whereas poorer nations benefit from the transfers from the central state, the richer regions lose from this arrangement...likely to become a source of frustration in these regions as they feel they are paying heavily and getting little in return” (Fitjar, 2006, p336), suggesting there is no such thing as an altruistic approach to development partnerships, albeit in situations where nations could afford to assist without seeking compensation via other means.

What Constitutes ‘the Pacific’? A Pacific Perspective

Prominent Pacific scholars have questioned the shaping of the Pacific as a region and as a concept, and indeed the extent to which notions of the Pacific need to be ‘decolonized’ (Thaman, 2003). Thaman’s perspective is a good point of departure for considering the way in which a Pacific envisioning of the region should be incorporated into any creation or formation of a ‘Pacific’ region. Thaman seeks to call Pacific people to recognize the extent to which they must work towards “... acknowledging and recognizing the dominance of western philosophy, content, and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples” and instead should seek to go about “... valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples.” (Thaman, 2003, Abstract). Thaman goes on to recognize the global order of today’s world, noting the way in which “globalization, like colonization, is once again disempowering many Oceanic peoples, especially those who are most removed from western knowledge and values.” (ibid, p7). Considering this point in the face of regionalism in the Pacific calls into question the consequences, removed from economics, of introducing a western ideology as a means of development on the wider cultural, social and spiritual wellbeing of Pacific peoples.

Teaiwa (2006) is critical of the way in which rather than seeking indigenous ways of conceptualising the Pacific, “Incorporating the Pacific into pre-existing frames of knowing is not a new practice” (Teaiwa, 2006, p74). Noting the ways in which the Pacific has been framed in the context of international experiences such as the ‘Africanization’ (Reilly, 2000) and the ‘Caribbeanization’ (Durutalo, 1992), of the Pacific, she goes on to express the process of Westernization in the Pacific, noting that the “majority of changes taking place in the Pacific are being analyzed as movement from being more Pacific to less Pacific, less European to more European” (Ibid, p75). Teaiwa supports the assertion of Durutalo (1992) that “... the concept of the Pacific Way (and its subsidiary the Melanesian Way) represents the most articulate expression of this sense of Pacific exceptionalism, which claims that the Pacific Islands are unique societies that have to be studied on their own terms and will therefore need a totally new methodology to understand them” (Durutalo, 1992; in Teaiwa, 2006, p82-3). Teaiwa’s thoughts regarding the treatment of the Pacific usher in those of Hau’ofa, in the way in which the Pacific and its people are thought about in global discourses. She warns, “... we must not stop our investigations, explorations, ruminations in Pacific studies simply because the world marketplace of knowledge does not value this region as we do. Neither must we give in to the tempting rhetoric of Pacific exceptionalism—our greatest crime would be to ghettoize ourselves.” (Teaiwa, 2006, p82).

Hau’ofa’s (1993) envisioning of Oceania similarly questions this very notion of the way in which the Pacific is not only geographically and spatially defined, but the way in which it is thought about and portrayed in Pacific discourse as being limited, confined, isolated, small and limited in its resources (Hau’ofa, 1993). He negates the notions which portray Polynesia and Melanesia as “much too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centres of economic growth for their inhabitants to ever be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations” (Hau’ofa, 1993, p6) and seeks to impress upon us the “new economic reality” for Oceanic peoples, who now can “shake off their confinement and they have since moved, by the tens of thousands, doing what their ancestors had done before them: enlarging their world...” (ibid, p10).

The Validity of forming a Pacific Community

The conflict here arises in that the former is the premise upon which regional agreements and the formation of institutions is based, for how many times have we heard of the 'smallness' and 'isolation' of Pacific nations in documents promoting the necessity of Regionalism?

In instituting Regionalism in the Pacific, it calls into question the very nature of that which can be encompassed within the term, what it means in regard to belief systems, ways of knowing, common interests and the question of how to acknowledge and preserve the diversity and sovereignty of each state, while attempting to create a unified Pacific regional community. Geographically speaking, regional groupings within the Pacific region are vast and varied, as the many organizations abounding from these show; for example – APEC constitutes an economic community which spans the entire Pacific Rim region, with membership encompassing 21 states, including Thailand, USA, Japan, Australia and Peru – nations which on the surface appear to have very little in common. Dirlik (1993) has been instrumental in questioning the premise on which the concept of the formation of a "Pacific Region" is based. While Dirlik does not deny the fact that "motions of people, commodities, and capital over the last few centuries have created relationships...and have given rise to regional formations with shifting boundaries" (Dirlik, 1993, p4), he highlights the way in which the very creation of the Pacific region comes not from the region itself, but from a Euro-American construct at the hand of map-makers and capitalists seeking to exploit the resources of the region. He describes the way in which "The discourse on the Pacific as part of a global discourse is a discourse of the powerful who seek to reconstitute the Pacific once again in their image...a home-grown image that is nevertheless no less the product of a discourse of capitalism" (Ibid, p7).

The envisioning of the creation of a "Pacific region" is not a recent move, however. Fry (2004) notes its origins in the Pacific with the 1944-7 labour governments of Australia and New Zealand who sought to build a regional community based of those principles

being touted of the day by the UN (Fry, 2004), those based on ensuring security and stability within regions, while maintaining a role of responsibility for those closest. Dirlik similarly noted the way in which after the Vietnam War, with the emergence of other world powers such as Japan, USA sought to pursue Regionalism, in that “under conditions of unequal development...to establish a Pacific community appear easily and justifiably as efforts to reserve for themselves a Pacific domain and restrict the autonomy of other (weaker) societies in the region while preserving their own autonomy as world powers” (Dirlik, 1993, p8).

If there is such controversy surrounding what actually constitutes the Pacific, one must question the legitimacy and creation of any Pacific ‘community’. Boyd, in exploring the justifications for Regionalism says, “wide-ranging policy coordination across the Pacific is becoming more and more imperative, because of the expansion of complex links between its political economies...if successful, will tend to produce a sense of community, bridging cultural and political differences” (Boyd, 1982, p234-5). In the phrasing of this statement it begs the question and rationale of looking to form regional communities, in a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario, whereby the means (regional communities) by which goals are attained (economic growth) must be measured against the greater social and economic costs of the move. Is regionalism being instituted to meet goals the most effective means of meeting them? And if so, whose goals are these? And what relation do they have to people at the domestic, community level in Pacific nations? Should a sense of community be forged for the sake of meeting (or not) supposed shared interests? Regionalism opens up the arena of discourse regarding what the actual vision for the future of the Pacific should be. Does Regionalism and its supposed neo-liberal structures set itself up for failure in envisioning a Pacific that it can never attain, let alone sustain? Or are we ourselves marginalising the Pacific if we refuse to think approaches that have seen countries progress or ‘develop’ cannot do the same for the Pacific?

On the flipside of the coin, Regionalism is portrayed as a positive step towards independence and autonomy and more recently, a means of fostering ‘good-governance’ for developing nations, including those in the Pacific. In the early stages of the formation of the region, it was noted by an indigenous Pacific leader in relation to the forming of

the SPC, that “Europeans for the first time, were officially recognizing that the Pacific races would ultimately be able to look after themselves, economically, socially and in future, politically” (‘South Pacific Natives Find New Outlook’, Melbourne Sun, 4 May 1950; in Fry, 2004). Neemia speaks of the way in which Regionalism is considered “collective self-reliance” (Neemia, 1986, p7). The Pacific Plan heralds Regionalism as seeing “countries working together for their joint and individual benefit...” which can “... reduce the costs of providing a service...” (Pacific Plan Introduction, 2006, p4).

The Actors and Organizations of Pacific Regionalism

Regionalism in the Pacific context calls for three mechanisms to be instituted: regional cooperation, regional provision of public services and regional market integration and despite the suspicions surrounding motives and national aims in adopting Regionalism in the Pacific, on an operational level, Regionalism in the form of services, organizations and agreements have been in existence for a long period of time preceding that of the end of the Cold War, offering tangible opportunities for people. These formal organizations, most of which fall under the administration of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP) include successful Pacific regional institutions such as the University of South Pacific (USP), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO), Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), Pacific Islands Producers Association (PIPA), Fiji School of Medicine (FSM), South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) (http://www.spc.int/piocean/CROP/pac_igo.html). The majority of these institutions operate at the level of regional cooperation, with some service provision at the regional level occurring (Background Paper No. 5, Pacific Plan, 2005, p34). A Regional Institutional Framework review carried out in 2006 has since recommended that all existing CROP agencies be reorganized in a three-pillar framework – a political and general policy institution; a new sector-focused technical institution; and academic and training organizations (PIFS Opening Speech, Pacific Regional CSO Forum 2006, p2).

With the successes of such institutions, Regionalism in this form obviously stands to benefit Pacific nations, with shared costs in the running and carrying out of the administration and upkeep of such organizations, alongside the ability for the pooling of Pacific expertise able to be harnessed through such means of cooperation, which can only serve to strengthen Pacific identity, reinforce the practice and utilization of indigenous methodologies and offer Pacific-driven solutions and opportunities for Pacific peoples.

The Multiple Layers of Regionalism

What we must consider though, are the multiple layers of operation in regard to regionalism; that is, to consider the ways in which regional, national and local or community level actors influence and impact upon regionalism and its initiatives, and the extent to which each of these can embrace its strategies for development of the Pacific region. At the regional level, the role of donors and other global ideologies, organizations and modes of operation will be influential in the form of regionalism adopted. While Heng and Low (Heng & Low, 1993) acknowledge regionalism operating at the regional level on the basis of functionality, as we have seen in the current form of Pacific cooperation, one must remain aware of the underlying ideological framework which precedes such agreements. Haas (Haas, 1958) understood the logic in gradual regional cooperation, though warned against the temptation to “apply they theory to areas which do not meet the fundamental assumptions underlying the theory” (Haas, 1958 in Heng & Low, 1993, P3), asserting the awareness of the risk of clashing methodologies and the realities of the context within which these are being applied. In the case of the Pacific Plan and its apparent neo-liberal trade agenda, Coates, as referred to previously, questions this very notion, calling for a “reorienting” of the Economic Growth pillar of the Pacific Plan, stating the way in which the “Plan fails to analyze the degree to which a number of current policies are part of the problem...the major push for trade liberalization in the Economic Growth section risks further declines in the Pacific’s economic base and its ability to regulate foreign investment for the benefit of its people” (Coates, 2006, p2).

At the regional level, the involvement of donors to the region must be questioned, especially if, as in the case of the Pacific Plan with the involvement of Australia and New Zealand, donors are encapsulated within the region, are responsible for the majority of development aid funding to the region and play a role in the directing of regional efforts. At present NZAID's total assistance to the Pacific in 2007/08 is \$205.5 million (<http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/programmes/c-pac-countries.html>), with Australia outlining a very clear direction for the future of the Pacific in their papers, 'Pacific Regional Aid Strategy 2004-2009' and 'Pacific 2020: Challenges and Opportunities for Growth' (<http://www.aisaid.gov.au/country/southpacific.cfm>), which as Fry recognizes, is a vision which "does not include Australia as part of the regional community and yet it wants to determine the values and purposes of that community" (Fry, 2004, p18) . Concerns regarding Australia and New Zealand and the role they have played in the Pacific have been voiced above by Kelsey and Fry and remain a significant point of negotiation. Robertson observed the way in which it was perceived that regionalism "can be mobilized in practice only if it is perceived by Australia and New Zealand to be in their interests ... [that] they tend to have a prominent role in defining when and where cooperation should take place" (Robertson, DATE, p?), and as stated in the Pacific Plan, "as successful Regionalism requires larger markets to stimulate growth, partnership with Australia and New Zealand is crucial for Pacific Regionalism to be viable" (Pacific Plan, 2006, p8). This is of further note when we take into consideration the comment by the PIFS Greg Urwin, where he states that "leaders are to decide as well, whether to invite the United Nations, commonwealth Secretariat and the Asian Development Bank to become Forum observers" (Pacific CSO Opening Speech, 2006, p2), drawing the focus further away from Pacific communities and towards global organizations, first world nations and their agendas.

National actors, that is, member governments themselves, are touted as being very much at the forefront of defining the success of regionalism in the Pacific via the Pacific Plan, in their willingness and ability to engage in regional activities and to be able to institute the recommended structural changes for effective engagement. While this can be seen to be a matter of "political will" as often termed in development circles, suggesting

• somewhat, a hesitation or barriers being caused by PIF leaders, it also concerns a nation's actual capacity to be able to absorb the costs and provide the knowledge and structures required of them through such restructuring that is required to engage with the various levels of regionalism, which as Neemia notes, can result in the "crisis, stagnation or even disassociation brought about by the reality of the difficulties in integration ..." (Neemia, 1986, p9). So what is often seen as a lack of will by national leaders, can often be a result of constraints in resources or even differing priorities or goals for development.

As a group given the task of assessing the Pacific Regional Institutional Framework (PRIF) in 2006 recognized, "A common theme to emerge ...was that regionalism should exist not for its own sake but as a vehicle for advancing national interests" (Reforming the PRIF, 2006, p3). This can also be summed up by Robertson (2005), who observes in relation to other regional moves, "The EU, CARICOM and OECS demonstrate that it is neither the pace of change nor convergence that determines the success of Regionalism. Success depends on political will or more particularly, the factors that drive political will, particularly when regions demonstrate a high degree of diversity"(Robertson, 2005, p). This must be figured in when evaluating each nation's progress in instituting regional frameworks and measuring the success of Regionalism. While the Pacific Plan rhetoric focuses on the "effective sovereignty" of nations in ensuring they utilize regional structures when appropriate, say, to carry out policy decisions as service providers, and is considered to have "led to the resurgence of many regional cultures and languages, and a higher awareness among EU citizens of the cultural diversity of the region" ('Regionalism and the 'Pacific Plan' Basic Concepts', p4), Dirlik prefers the corrective approach, highlighting that "in terms of inequality, a "community" only serves to disguise the 'subjection' of individual nations and ethnic groups to the imperatives of a regional economy dominated by the powerful" (Dirlik, 1993, pg11).

Hau'ofa (1993) calls into question the relevance of national and regional agreements and treaties, and the focus on nations at the macro level, asserting that "Only when we focus our attention also on what ordinary people are actually doing rather than on what they should be doing, can we see the broader picture of reality" (Hau'ofa, 1993, p12). The emphasis on grassroots movements and the actions of individual people and their families

denotes the reality of the context within which the Plan and regionalism must operate within as well as to cater for. Drawing the attention towards actuality as opposed to dictating and postulating on the ways in which those in FICs supposedly live allows for closer inspection and acknowledgement of the fact that people are living in Pacific nations with success on a daily basis, in spite of the negative denotations regarding 'failed states', 'limited resources' and 'weak capacity'.

The successes rely very much on local and community level governance in the form of household, village and wider community structures which provide the support and resources for citizens to live well on a daily basis. Locating this in the discourse regarding regional structures, we must consider the role (or lack thereof) in regionalism played by CSOs. The role of CSOs in regionalism in the Pacific is very much at the forefront of discussions on Development, however the reality of the extent to which such organizations are consulted and integrated in the planning of development mechanisms on a national and global level remains contentious.

Fry raises the question '... if the state is failing why not look down to local governance as an alternative as well as up to the Pacific regional level?' seeing local governance in the form of traditional processes as "generally working...in contrast to state-level governance and has a track record of success whereas the level of regional community thought necessary to affect national governance is only in its infancy" (Fry, 2004, p1). Coates bridges the subject of alternatives, saying the 2006 Annual Report of the Pacific Plan "should be less about the current initiatives in the Pacific Plan and more about opening up the opportunity to identify and discuss alternatives" seeking those which are "more responsive to the real needs and aspirations of Pacific people" (Coates, 2006, p3).

Significant steps have been made with the recognition of the importance played by Pacific civil society groups with the Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organizations (PIANGO) being granted 'consultative status' in 2007. As Nainasa Whippy, Non-State Actor Liaison Officer for the PIFS says, "this mandate of PIANGO fits nicely with the PIFS desires to implement the Leaders decision under the Pacific Plan to build partnerships with civil society" (PIANGO Media Release, 13 July, 2007).

However, this comes three years after the declaration in Auckland in 2004 to go ahead with the Plan, a period of time in which only one civil society representative was able to be present during the PIFS meetings (Ibid.), severely limiting the voice and visibility of those who represent the needs of communities across the Pacific.

An often forgotten fact is the way in which the inclusion of CSOs in the planning of national and regional governance frameworks ensures that the focus of all strategies and initiatives seek the improvement of livelihoods and the reduction of poverty for all as their root cause. Interesting however is the emphasis of the PIFS in seeing regional NGOs as having “national affiliates that can provide the means to strengthen the nation/regional connections” and “advocates and indeed critical of regionalism at the national level” rather than seeing their involvement as a way of better ensuring those who count most, Pacific citizens and their voices and needs, are reflected more directly in any regional initiatives; this serves to expose the rhetoric for what it is, a means of easing the passage of regionalism and utilizing NGO pressure on national governments to ensure they incorporate regional processes whether or not they are for the greater good of the individual nation.

At the Pacific Regional CSO Forum 2007 in Nuku’Alofa, Tonga, several steps are recommended as being integral in attaining good governance:

- The promotion of traditional customary practices that value women and family roles
- The promotion of participation of young people and women in decision-making
- The development of initiatives that harmonize traditional systems of governance with introduced models
- The encouraging of Forum member states to sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and related optional protocols

(source: Pacific Regional CSO Forum Communique, 12-15th October, 2007, p6)

The emphasis here is clearly on the people and practices of those at grassroots level, as well as in lifting the participation and visibility of those who have previously or who

continue to be marginalized and overlooked by policy at the national and regional level. The focus on traditional practices and structures taking a lead role is essential, as Borer (1993) notes in Teaiwa, “national government is of secondary importance to the decentralized power of the great council of chiefs” (Borer, 1993; in Teaiwa, 2006).

Participation in planning for the future one wants should be integral to the vision of any regional effort and specifically in relation to the Pacific Plan and its direction. If Fry is correct in his observation that the Plan is focused on “the challenges of good governance, peoples’ welfare, and concerns with wide participation in a regional community” (Fry, 2004, p2) then this must surely necessitate the involvement and participation of those people whose welfare is being planned for via the formation of a regional community at the hands of the Pacific Plan.

Conclusions

While regionalism inevitably appears to be granted the task of lifting the wellbeing and improving the livelihoods of PIF member nations, civil society organizations and indeed member states themselves, are yet to be convinced of the tangible benefits to be gained through embracing a regional approach to economic growth in their nation, and as a result, the reduction of poverty for their citizens. Conflicts still exist surrounding competing ideologies and realities for Pacific people and that of regionalism via the Pacific Plan, and those which concern the availability of resources and a nation’s capacity to be able to institute the reforms required, while at the same time, catering for individual national goals.

Contrasting expected outcomes for regionalism, that is of economic growth, security, or development necessitates regional bodies and national governments to question the underlying framework, motives and ‘framing’ of poverty reduction via regionalism. This is essential in ensuring that the approach and the outcome is a best fit for each individual nation and the region as a whole and not to allow the process and form of regionalism and its initiatives to be driven by a few key actors. This must also be considered within

the context of what the region wishes to be in the creation of a “Pacific Region”, given the enormous diversity that exists in the social, political, cultural and economic landscapes of each PIF nation.

Finally, in ensuring that any regional approach remains focussed on the wellbeing of the citizens of each nation within the region, the involvement in all stages of Regional planning of initiatives and strategies by Pacific CSOs is essential in securing this intention. Poverty reduction, the basic building block of any goal for improving livelihoods must be the intended end of any regional initiative, but must also be given specific attention in the form of actual strategies to achieve this, as well as extensive frameworks for monitoring the effectiveness of the impact of these strategies on poverty reduction. Only then can regionalism and its “benefits” be embraced fully by the Pacific “so that its people can lead free and worthwhile lives” (Pacific Plan, 2006, p1).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PACIFIC PLAN AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The Pacific Plan – An Introduction

In 2004 the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and its Secretariat settled on an initiative aimed at responding to the issues and challenges that countries within the Pacific face in relation their isolation, smallness and limited resource base in the face of an increasingly globalized market place in which they are forced to participate. A new strategy for regional cooperation and integration, The Pacific Plan, was launched to be established and implemented over a ten year period, as a move towards strengthening of the Pacific as a region. The overarching goal of the Pacific Plan is to enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security for the Pacific countries through regionalism.

The Plan encompasses four pillars – Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, Good Governance and Security and within each of these pillars striving towards regional cohesion in national strategies and policy planning, with the possibility of future regional institutions for the provision of public services. A set of 24 recommendations across the four pillars have been developed with suggested levels of commitment for each; immediate implementation, agreement in principle and those for further analysis. The PIF leaders envisage that a commitment by member countries towards establishing a framework for the implementation of regionalism, resulting in effective and enhanced engagement between countries, will bring about joint as well as individual benefits for all Pacific countries.

Support for the Plan in relation to its technical and financial needs is expected to come from a range of agencies and organizations, not only from within individual member countries such as NGO groups, and member governments, but global agencies such as

NZAID, AUSAID, the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, as well as within bi-lateral and multi-lateral partnerships between countries.

However, the insistence that regional initiatives enable rather than disable or over-take national development objectives sees the necessity for the establishment of national policies and mechanisms for Regionalism which are in-keeping with national development goals and go further to build on these. Member governments must show a commitment to Regionalism as a way of fostering their own national development. Varying capacity levels of each member country will see a differentiation in the implementation progress within the four pillars, being dependent on political will and the resources being available to support initiatives. It must be accepted that within the wider framework of the plan, the meeting of common goals will be relative to these factors. Extra support should be given to small island states (SIS), especially where the meeting of commitments may be more difficult to attain. This will rely on the very essence of the Pacific way of community and family nurturing and reciprocity.

In this section attention will be directed towards the Pacific Plan's poverty reduction strategies, as expressed in the Social Development strands of the Sustainable Development Pillar. What follows is an analysis of the treatment of poverty reduction within the framework of the Pacific Plan. This will focus on the approach set to achieve this, containing an analysis of the use of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to poverty reduction and a summary of the Social Development framework as described in the Pacific Plan.

Locating the Discussion of 'Poverty Reduction' in the Pacific Plan

In considering poverty alleviation and the social well-being of the Pacific nations, the Pacific Plan envisages a region of peace and harmony and the creation of a "a prosperous community which meets the basic needs of all its members" (Pacific Plan Executive Summary, 2006, p ?). An acknowledgement by all FIC's that poverty exists in the Pacific

is essential to targeted and effective poverty alleviation policies and actions through community, national and regional mechanisms of the Pacific Plan. A regional approach to poverty alleviation works on the premise that commonalities between countries exist in relation to the causes and impacts of the manifestations of poverty and that a regional approach to addressing this will allow for greater support for individual nations. While this may be true for the Pacific, as seen in the shared factors below, varying characteristics specific to individual nations are often the root causes of poverty and hardship. Problems surrounding governance, tradition, status of women, leadership, public services and resource allocation are expressed in different ways in the many nations of the Pacific and with varying degrees of success for the people of these countries and their social, physical, emotional and economic well-being depends on how these factors are managed and addressed by those in the position of influence and who have access to decision-making networks. This will be examined further in chapter six with specific reference to the Kingdom of Tonga, the Strategic Development Plan Eight (SDP8) and their mechanisms for poverty alleviation.

A report produced by AusAid, the Australian International Agency for International Development on an analysis of Poverty Reduction in the Plan identified commonalities in the causes of poverty in the Pacific can be categorized in relation to four main instigators; natural constraints limiting economies of scale and in an increase in costs, vulnerability to risk factors is high, burgeoning social pressures and poor governance (AusAid, 2006). Natural constraints are exemplified in small national size, geographic remoteness limiting services, fragmentation within nations and limited natural resources. Fragile environments, growing urban pressures, susceptibility to natural/climatic hazards and a narrow economic base expose the vulnerability of Pacific nation economies. Increasingly, social pressures are taking their toll on Pacific governments, with migration no longer lessening the pressure valve in this area. Rapid population growth, fewer social protection measures and tensions between cultural and traditional obligations and changing social structures see increased inequalities emerging between rural and outer island groups, greater gender disparities and widening levels of inequality between socio-economic groups. Institutionally created causes of poverty remain an issue for Pacific economies, with under-resourced governments struggling alongside poorly designed national policies,

misdirected public expenditure, lack of institutional capacity, failing social security nets, the negative impacts of national issues and conflicts, lack of opportunities for social mobility and internalized social norms (AusAid, 2006).

Contained in the Executive Summary on poverty reduction is a recognition that poverty in the region appears to be increasing (Pacific Plan Executive Summary, 2006). It is stated here that “addressing poverty is instrumental in achieving high economic growth and higher social capital” (Pacific Plan Executive Summary, 2006, pg. 177). This would suggest that ensuring better livelihoods for all citizens of the Pacific and by providing citizens with their essential basic needs, the economies of the nations of the region would improve as a result of this focus and attention to poverty alleviation. This is acknowledged through Amartya Sen’s (Sen, 1985) approach to poverty alleviation, where it is recognized that people rely on a set of basic capabilities to be able to function in daily life productively. What these basic capabilities can be identified as may differ from culture to culture, person to person, however at its most rudimentary, without the nourishment, clothing, shelter and the ability to prevent morbidity, then one can be said to be deprived of basic capabilities, or poor. This would seem to support the need to address peoples’ needs in their most basic form in order for them to be able to function and contribute to fostering a strong community, and further, to participate in promoting growth in the economy of the nation.

Interestingly however, it is through a focus on the fostering of the private sector, governance and economic growth via the widening of the Pacific economies to allow for greater access to trade partners and the lowering of market barriers, that development, and hence poverty reduction and the bettering of living standards for FIC’s is pursued, rather than the attainment of basic needs for all, first and foremost. Poverty reduction encompassed and targeted by way of specific strategies and initiatives cannot be found within the Pacific Plan. While ‘Reduced Poverty’ stands as the fourth Strategic Objective of the Plan under the Sustainable Development pillar, when addressing the initiatives for the first three years of the plan, none are listed, instead it is noted that “other regional initiatives contribute to reducing poverty and will be monitored and evaluated for their contribution to achieving this Strategic Objective” (Pacific Plan, 2006, pg. 14). This is

reinforced further, stating that "... due to the cross-cutting nature of poverty and the need for a holistic approach in addressing it, it is expected that all regional initiatives under the Pacific Plan will contribute to reducing poverty and will be monitored and evaluated for their contribution to reducing this strategic objective." (AusAid Report, 2006, p2).

The Forum Secretariat suggests that the poverty alleviation impact of Secretariat activities can be reinforced through:

- Developing a common understanding of poverty and its causes to develop and implement solutions
- Seeking new partners and sources of policy input
- Strengthening the Secretariat's role as a facilitator between members and development partners
- Learning from experiences with regional and international organizations
- Promoting a comprehensive cross-sectoral policy approach
- Advocating the necessary enabling policy environment for poverty alleviation
- Producing key research papers on poverty issues
- Develop a media strategy which brings poverty issues into a common understanding\directly identifying the expected poverty outcomes of individual Secretariat activities

These principles have largely been incorporated to the existing version of the Pacific Plan, though the need for specific, targeted outcomes for poverty alleviation in relation to activities encompassed in the Economic Growth, Good Governance and Security pillars does not feature at all, despite these being handed the responsibility for contributing this target. The Forum Secretariat acknowledges the fact that "there may, however, be a need for a more explicit approach" (Pacific Plan Executive Summary, 2006, pg. 180) in relation to the monitoring of the impact of activities and that a 'poverty impact assessment' could be carried out in relation to these. The recommendations for the Pacific Plan in relation to poverty alleviation, in order of priority, include the need to:

- Identify the expected poverty outcomes of individual regional activities
- Develop a common understanding of poverty and its causes
- Media strategy on poverty issues

- Research papers on key poverty issues

Despite these recommendations, poverty reduction in the Pacific Plan remains located in the context of a global framework for poverty alleviation, the Millennium Development Goals, which are offered as a framework for measuring poverty reduction, though in “tailored” form, in the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Plan.

Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

In a summary of Economic Growth in the Plan it outlines the main factors which will drive economic growth for the Pacific region, listed as “a strong private sector, a productive natural resource base, efficient infrastructure, growing service industries and skilled people to drive these activities” (Pacific Plan, Economic Growth Summary, 2004, p1). These are regarded as being integral in governments’ abilities to be able to finance programmes for the development of other important sectors such as Health and Education, areas which are essential to having a productive working population for continued growth to be achieved. As stated in the summary, the PIF leaders vision sought for the Pacific, “... economic prosperity so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives” (PIF, 2004 Leaders’ Vision), reinforcing a top-down approach to development, whereby once having achieved a sound economy, the flow-on effects of this will “trickle down” to those in the wider community and therefore raise living standards, though seemingly contradicting this approach is Retzlaff (2004) stating that “Not all growth trickles down to the poor. This is a reality that must be taken into account.” (Retzlaff, 2004, p4).

Economic Growth in the Pacific Plan encompasses three strategic objectives:

1. Increased sustainable trade (including services) and investment
2. Improved efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure developments and associated service delivery
3. Increased private sector participation in, and contribution to, development

The strategic objectives include ten initiatives over the years 2006-2008. These initiatives summarized below largely focus on:

- The creation of a framework for trade
- The expansion and integration of trade and economic cooperation through Regional agreements (SPARTECA, PICTA, PACER, EPA)
- Maximizing of returns through efficient and effective use of an ecosystem based fisheries management framework
- The implementation of a Regional tourism strategy
- Implementation of a Regional transport strategy
- Implementation of a Regional digital strategy for ICT
- Support for private sector mechanisms

The Pacific Plan Annual Report 2006 outlines the progress in the Economic Growth pillar of the Plan. This has come in the form of:

- Efforts to instigate processes and frameworks for Regional economic cooperation with external partners
- Facilitation of trade via capacity building and trade and investment promotion
- Efforts to improve economic infrastructure initiatives in aviation, transport and ICT
- Some economic integration initiatives being instigated by FICs

Source: Pacific Plan Annual Report 2006

Discussion

By and large the initiatives under these objectives push for increased regional cooperation in trade and in the provision of services, with an emphasis on trade liberalization as means of pursuing economic growth adhering very closely to the neo-liberal approach of the NPA as noted in earlier sections. This is also coupled with the incentive of the movement of labour throughout the Pacific, as seen in the Regional Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, as began in NZ in April, 2007, allowing workers from FICs to enter into NZ (and Australia, depending on their individual nation by nation agreement) and

offering the increased opportunity for cash income earning. This scheme is considered controversial in that it is seen as a supposed softener to the more demanding conditions of the Economic Growth pillar. Similarly it is considered that the conditions on the RSE labour movement scheme do not treat the citizens of the PIF nations as equals, given the strict visa conditions. In its form as a poverty alleviation mechanism, it has also been criticized that it targets those who are already mobile and able to seek work elsewhere, and should more opportunities for those who are in lower-skilled and unqualified trades and areas of employment.

As Terence Miro Laufa (Laufa, 2005) puts it, "...most PIC' governments have made it their utmost priority to focus on two policy areas: macroeconomic stabilization and poverty reduction. These two policy areas are largely reflected in the Pacific Plan, adopted from the UN Millennium Development Goals" (Laufa, 2005, p3). While his observation may ring true, it should be considered that the Pacific Plan pursues the reduction of poverty through macroeconomic stabilization, the opening of trade barriers to overseas markets and through increased privatization, rather than placing these two pillars on a equal footing, whether it be in terms of resourcing or in the prioritizing of initiatives in relation to the two; rather, the Pacific Plan seeks macroeconomic stabilization for Pacific nations and expects that as a result of achieving this, poverty reduction should necessarily follow. The notion that if economic growth is attained by Pacific governments, "issues of governance, international crime, law and order, regional security and the health and wellbeing of the people will improve" (A Pacific Engaged, pp 7-8; in Fry, 2004)

Reducing poverty by means of economic growth via trade liberalization has had mixed response internationally in development circles. Calleya (Calleya, 2000) voiced his doubts regarding the benefits for developing countries through liberalization and deregulation, stating examples of the impact of this ideology on Mexican agriculturalists at the hands of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He notes, "Liberalization, deregulation and the integration of capital markets mean increasing economic insecurity for low-income earners and people of colour. Just as there is growing income inequality between Mexico and the United States, economic polarization

within Mexico is also on the rise, a notable development in light of the already vast disparities in income and wealth. Yet displacement of workers and farmers in all three countries has accelerated migration. Yet the escape valve of emigration to the United States is a less effective outlet, given the increasing resistance to newcomers in California and other states" (Calleja, 2000, p13). Remarkably, this stands almost as a parallel situation to the pattern emerging within the Pacific FICs, with increasing inequality emerging amidst the current economic climate of Regionalism in which the very same trade moves are being encouraged.

At a Pacific Island Civil Society Forum in Nadi, Fiji in 2006, Barry Coates, Executive director of Oxfam New Zealand expressed his concerns at the direction in which development through the Economic Growth pillar of the Plan has been progressing. In his presentation 'Reorienting Economic Growth in the Pacific Plan: Towards Equitable and Sustainable Development' he noted, "it is unrealistic to prioritize foreign trade and investment-driven growth (as in the current Pacific Plan) and assume it will "trickle down" to the majority of the Pacific's people who live in rural areas or rely on informal sector livelihoods in urban areas" (Coates, 2006, p2), also highlighting the way in which "...the plan fails to analyze the degree to which a number of current policies are part of the problem rather than part of the solution" (Ibid.).

Coates (Coates 2006) sites several main issues of concern with this section of the Plan. He sites the fact that in relation to the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU, the EU do not practice what they preach regarding the recommendation the Pacific nations liberalize their service sectors. Secondly, the fear that privatization of public services within the FIC's may lead to a prioritization of profit-over-people and furthermore see it become more difficult to regain public ownership should the climate under privatization be unsatisfactory. The RSE scheme is praised by Coates, however he sees the need to establish bilateral frameworks and for these arrangements to be made outside of the wider framework of the Plan, working towards an assurance that rights of workers and their families be prioritized. Lastly Coates sees the necessity for Pacific nations to work together, not just with each other, but in banding together with Africa and the Caribbean "to build stronger alliances with others involved in EPA negotiations" (Coates, 2006, p7).

Similarly, within the ranks of those involved in the planning and instituting of the Plan's initiatives, the need for caution is raised in relation to the instituting of the EPA agreement. Edward Natapei, Vanuatu's Deputy Prime Minister spoke of the journey of progress towards implementing the Economic Growth strategies, saying, "The EPA can be an important vehicle in our aspirations to be part of the global economy. But, the question that confronts us is, what do we expect from committing ourselves under the Agreement, which is binding and reciprocal agreement? The answer unequivocally must be: We expect development." _('Forum Secretariat Press Statement' (88/07), 31st July 2007). Rather revealing were his earlier comments which stated, that "...we have together conceptualized a common interest that binds us all together. That common interest is 'development' through trade liberalization and integration," (Ibid.). This clearly stated the development ideology of the Pacific Plan and served to highlight the very real fears and awareness of what each individual Pacific nation stands not only to gain, but to lose, seeing Regional integration as necessary move, but not without its costs.

Todaro and Smith (Todaro & Smith, 2007) consider that from a practical standpoint, the preference for modeling development for Pacific countries on a path taken by nations already considered to be developed is adopted; may be unwise and ineffective given that developed nations and developing nations, considering "that developing countries began modern economic growth with initial conditions much different than those of developing countries" (Todaro & Smith, Chapter 3, p1). Put simply, it questions the logic of a vision and a framework for enabling the economies of developing Pacific nations and working towards the reduction of poverty via an approach that is designed for countries and economies with strikingly different resources bases and economic climates. In this sense, given that the Pacific Plan seeks to promote development through liberalization and deregulation and considering its failure to provide an improvement in living standards, but indeed sees a decline in livelihood prosperity for many citizens in developing nations, one must ask whether progress in the economic growth pillar of the Pacific Plan stands, not as a "road map for the region's future" but as a pathway to "under-development".

Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Social Development is one of two strands categorized under the Sustainable Development pillar of the Pacific Plan, in which poverty alleviation is addressed. Through conducting the most extensive and exhaustive consultations ever undertaken in the Pacific by Pacific people (Pacific Plan, 2006), it has become apparent that although significant gains have been made in relation to social development, especially in the Health and Education sectors, serious challenges still face the people of the Pacific in attainment and sustainability of higher standards of living and greater well-being for all.

Positive developments for the region include a general improvement in the health of Pacific Islanders, alongside greater levels of educational attainment. It is considered that levels of regional cooperation regarding Social Development are high, with regional organizations such as University of South Pacific, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fiji School of Medicine and the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment being noted as institutions making significant contributions in this area, with the pooling of scarce resources and facilities being used for the greater good of the region, highlighting the essence of regionalism, as promoted by the Pacific Plan.

Considerable risks and vulnerability factors remain for Pacific nations in relation to social development. Regarding Health indicators, high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (Diabetes, Cancer) linked to poor lifestyle choices continue to increase. Malaria, Dengue Fever and Tuberculosis remain a threat. Shortcomings regarding prevention and preparedness for incidences of HIV, SARS and the Avian Flu point to a need for higher prioritizing of the development of strategies and initiatives to combat and manage these.

The continuation of high levels of population growth and internal urban migration exacerbate stresses on public services and resources.

The status of Women in some Pacific nations is cause for concern, with the need to ensure equitable opportunities for women.

Although Education has been placed as a priority by many of the PIF governments, serious gains can still be made to ensure the highest quality education is able to be accessed by all. Improvements in the quality of and access to Education are a necessity, with a focus on secondary and post secondary education and training. Similarly, the need for greater attention to technical and vocational training is highlighted, with greater priority and attention ensuring the differing needs of citizens and society are catered for.

The inevitability of change over time presents challenges for societies of the Pacific. The necessity for Pacific nations to interact and compete on an international platform, engaging in global institutions and agreements given the increased global interconnectivity, has presented challenges to capacity levels, in relation to resources, human constraints and institutional structures and modes of operation. Governments in the Pacific must now cater for the needs and expectations of citizens who are being educated, living and working in a global environment and whose aspirations align with those of citizens in developed nations; adapting to these factors while maintaining traditional values and structures has become a source of growing tension and conflict in several Pacific nations of late.

The Pacific Plan strives to meet the challenges that face Pacific nations in the regarding social development through “the pooling of scarce regional resources to strengthen national capabilities” (Pacific Plan, 2006, p139). The Pacific Plan identifies the following areas for strengthening:

- Legislative support - Further expertise to allow for effective implementation of social policy frameworks within countries is required
- Analytical Support – To allow for appropriate development objectives to be set and for these to be monitored effectively, support for collation and analysis of social statistics is necessary for the provision of “balanced” and accurate reporting
- Reporting on International Commitments – The challenge for small ministries and organizations to meet the obligations of global agencies such as the UN means that a regional body could act on behalf of governments where regional activities and involvement has taken place in the specified area

- **Regional Priorities** – Agreeing on specific focus issues amongst regional leaders will allow for a united approach to addressing issues effectively. It is suggested that further progress in relation to this form of approach would be beneficial, especially in engaging regional organizations such as the Council of Regional Organization in the Pacific.
- **Preparedness** – Deeper regional cooperation in relation to preparedness for new and current diseases and epidemics is recommended, building on the work of the Regional Public Health Surveillance Network.
- **Technical/vocational Training** – Equivalent support for technical and vocational is sought to meet the standards set by ‘academic’ education institutions that are working effectively within the region.

Social Development Initiatives – The First Three Years

Initiatives within the Pacific Plan are categorized in one of three ways; for immediate implementation, agreement in principle or further analysis required. Initiatives have been set in relation to social development (encompassed within the Sustainable Development pillar) for the first three years of the plan (2006-8). The initiatives under the Social Development strand are categorized under the following strategic objectives:

- Reduced Poverty
- Improved natural resource and environmental management
- Improved Health
- Improved Education and Training
- Improved gender equality
- Enhanced involvement of youth
- Increased levels of involvement and participation and achievement in sports
- Recognised and protected cultural values, identities and traditional knowledge

Education, Health and Social Development

The Education and Health sectors in Pacific nations have been given the task of elevating individuals and their nations to a satisfactory level of social and economic development (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002). This stems, suggests Taufe'ulungaki, from the long-held western belief that "Education is a fundamental human right...the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus, an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization" (World Declaration, 1990, Article 2; in Taufe'ulungaki, 2002, p6). Without good health, efficient and effective participation in everyday life for individuals, as part of a functioning and prosperous society, would not be possible.

Despite the ongoing recognition of the importance of these sectors to the prosperity of societies, indicators for Pacific nations, and the challenges they face in relation to these issues, remain prominent and of immediate concern. Decades of aid and development attention has only marginally improved these sectors. An ADB Study of Education in the Pacific highlights the fact that "... increased spending has not translated into more or better educational services", adding that central to the problem is a lack of ownership, and the lack of sound, effective management (ADB, 2004, p32). Conversely, nations where statistics have improved in relation literacy indicators have not seen an improvement in economic growth and social wellbeing as a result of these outcomes. Although the health indicators of many Pacific nations have shown improvement, the negative effects of an increasingly globalized region have been manifested in the rapid onset of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and obesity (ADB, 2004, p39). The lack of improvements in the outcomes for people in relation to these indicators calls into question the relevance of a focus on Education and Health as models for social and economic wellbeing of nations, when the dominant model for development gives over "enormous faith in the markets [where] the overriding context has been and continues to be economic" (Kavaliku, 2000, p23). This reinforces the necessity for resources and initiatives to be balance in their allocation regarding the economic versus social initiatives to ensure the benefits are directly accessible to those who are in need.

The Pacific Plan targets for Social Development and poverty reduction align with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDG targets for Social Development are:

Education

- Achieve universal primary education: Ensure that children everywhere boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education.

Health

- Reduce by two thirds the mortality rates for infants and children under 5 and reduce by three fourths the maternal mortality rate.
- Have halted and begun the reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Have halted and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Poverty Reduction and the Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are put forward as a “useful and commonly recognized framework for poverty alleviation” (Pacific Plan Issues Paper, 2006, pg.) and are seen as a starting point for the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty alleviation goals for the FIC’s through the Pacific Plan. Poverty Reduction is to be measured in the plan in relation to:

“...the contribution of all initiatives to a 20 percent decrease in the poverty gap ratio; and a 20 percent decrease in the poverty headcount between 2006 and 2015 for each country” (Ibid, p3).

In a Background Paper on the MDGs and the Pacific Plan it was recognized that Pacific nations were falling behind in almost every goal. Given that nations in the Pacific region are generally not understood as suffering from absolute forms of poverty manifest in

starvation, deprivation and loss of life, one must question the nature of the MDGs and their relevance for Pacific nations as appropriate targets for the reduction of poverty.

Despite the fact that the Plan suggests that “...success indicators are suited to the region’s social, cultural, economic and environmental context and represent the Pacific’s own targets and indicators – based on the MDGs, but tailored to the region’s unique circumstances.” (MDGs and the Pacific Plan, 2006, p2), the relevance of the MDGs in relation to poverty reduction in the Pacific region has been raised by several development practitioners in the Pacific and across the world alike. Kaplinsky (2005) notes the difficulties in using global measures for poverty, sighting the PPP\$1 a day measurement in the primary goal as incomplete, and that a focus must be put on distribution, rather than solely on the elimination of absolute poverty (Kaplinsky, 2005, p30). Peter Witham, a UNDP representative and UN Resident Coordinator for Fiji stressed the importance of the “tailoring” of the MDGs to the Pacific, going further to suggest that not only should the targets put forward in the MDGs stand as “...floors and not ceilings” (Witham, 2004, p4) regarding the minimum targets for poverty reduction, but that there are key groups within each nation “...for whom very specific targets must be set” (Ibid, p4), offering the example of sugar workers in Fiji. Witham sees the above considerations as essential in maintaining a rights-based approach to development, focusing on basic needs, and as important indicators of the quality of governance, ensuring stability and security prospers in individual nations through the meeting needs related to equality of access to basic services, and employment and livelihood opportunities. Rather than disregarding the MDGs however, Witham says “Whether we term these MDGs or national development goals, the targets are not only relevant but also indeed critical for the Pacific.” (Ibid, p4).

In his presentation as a contribution to the PIANGO/CSO Forum on the Pacific Plan in 2005 entitled “Attaining the Triple Bottom Line (Easier Said than Done)” Naidu (2005) questioned the realism of the attainment of the goals for poverty alleviation in the Plan, noting the integral nature of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) in achieving these outcomes and the issue of the unequal development progress of some Pacific nations, citing cases of Melanesian and Micronesian countries which have incidences of poverty in their population of between 30-50% and rising (Naidu, 2005, p9).

Naidu also goes further to dictate specific desirable outcomes in relation to Sustainable Development targets, listing goals such as reduced inequality, food security and livelihood security, capacity building for those who are disadvantaged, improving access to education, expanding labour markets, reinforcing or creating security nets and social protection programmes, which could stand to be incorporated in the Pacific Plan regarding poverty reduction.

The issues raised above serve to highlight the superficial and tenuous nature of the Plan in relation to poverty reduction. This is true in that Pacific nations may be being set up for failure in attempting to fulfill goals which either have no relevance for them, or are considered unattainable or unrealistic given the timeframe, availability of resources and other factors which are domestically specific, such as the political climate, and tradition and cultural facets of their society; similarly, as highlighted in the need for the goals to be

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something that cannot be considered a given when figuring in
faced by Pacific governments.

Reddy and Heuty (2004) highlight other issues that remain surrounding
MDGs as targets for poverty reduction given issues surrounding
that tracking of the progress of individual targets may be unre
of some FIC's; national budget/resource constraints meaning
possible to allocate the resources or time to meeting goals
and social support structures that the meeting of the targets
unpredictable natural environments and vulnerability to external
nations back in their progress to achieving these goals. Neverth
be successful as poverty reduction targets in as far as individual
and are committed to being able to achieve these within the time
is already somewhat along the track for progress to have been made.

Questions and Areas for Further Discussion

The majority of the Social Development initiatives for the first three years of the Pacific Plan implementation centre around the Health and Education sectors, with some reference to youth, gender, sporting achievement and the maintenance of cultural and traditional knowledge and identity.

Key to the regional initiatives and strategies in Health and Education over this period is the desire to harmonize approaches across the region in relation to policy and practice in these sectors. The aligning of policies and approaches for national implementation allows for ease in the possible future integration and the provision of services at a national level. It is recognized that “In the Pacific, regional approaches to overcoming capacity limitations in service delivery at a national level, and increasing economic opportunities through market integration are expected to provide the highest gains” (Pacific Plan, 2006, pg. 5). By adopting a streamlined framework in sectors such as Education and Health, it is anticipated that national development goals and strategies can be implemented, with targets for regional coordination of policies achieved alongside these.

As Robertson (2005) notes, the architects of the EU realized that “...waiting for states for harmonize legislation was unlikely to produce the necessary momentum to sustain Regionalism” (Robertson, 2005, p9). Similarly, while this approach is designed to pave the way for a smoother passage for the implementation of the provision of public goods and services and regional integration through the removal of market barriers on a physical or technical level, it questions the extent to which these policies for Education and Health on a nation by nation level suit the needs of the individual country. Although it is stated that national priorities are what takes precedence, the capacity constraints in regards to technical capabilities means that some countries seek (or are offered) assistance from development partners in the formulation of national policy initiatives. Through this process, consultants are often forgiven for adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to policy-making, given that many islands in the Pacific face similar challenges and have a similar resource base from which to draw. Tonga, for example, has sought the assistance of the ADB in the formulation of their Strategic Development Plans. Similarly,

the ADB has provided technical assistance to numerous other countries through the provision of statistics gathering and data analysis, for example in their analysis of 'Hardship and Poverty in the Pacific' in 2003, which provides the basis for policy planning and decision making. The result of such an approach, as seen with the Plan, sees a drive for the instituting of a neo-liberal ideology which stands to derail the possibility of Pacific derived goals and methodologies being heard or coming to fruition in the materialization of improved livelihood outcomes.

Indeed a major concern regarding development approaches in the Plan is that they are shifting from people-centered approaches towards market-based initiatives. The necessity for Pacific nations to be able to maintain their own national and cultural ideals and objectives for development is expressed by Naidu (2005), suggesting that solutions should be "internally decided through national level processes involving broad-based and inclusive consultations focused on the rights and the well-being of ordinary islanders" (Naidu, 2005, p2). This is supported by the concerns voiced by civil society organizations in relation to the degree to which these groups were ignored in the process of drafting of the Pacific Plan. Their concern is that there was a lack of true consultation and a lack of focus on the needs of those who are really at need (Pacific Plan, Background Paper 5). The risk that people and the individual and complex needs unique to each nation and its people are lost amidst the desire to create a uniform approach across sectors and nations.

A considerable amount of research and investigation forms the basis of several initiatives in the area of Social Development. Areas which have been highlighted for further investigation include the potential for the expansion of technical and vocational training to include an establishment of a regional technical college and specific studies on regionalism, pro-poor economic growth, peace and conflict, traditional structures, leadership, gender-specific indicators, and cultural policy to support regional cooperation and integration. Fundamental to the processes of social development of societies is the "way in which people are helped to realize the fullness of the social, political, and economic potentials that already exist within them" (Estes, DATE, pg. 68). In carrying out studies of the issues detailed above, the Pacific Plan attempts to acknowledge the

necessity for a broader, more in-depth knowledge of what makes Pacific societies what they are today, to be gathered and propagated throughout the Pacific about Pacific nations.

Several matters for consideration arise from these initiatives; firstly, in order to have developed a framework for the Pacific Plan which embodied and accounted for the complex facets of a society which weave together to forge the everyday realities for citizens in the Pacific, examination of issues such as security, culture and traditional structures and gender in the form of specific studies should have been carried out prior to putting forward a working document for the strengthening of the region. For surely, only through intensive research, workshops and consultations with the people of these nations and then having gained some headway into understanding the unique parts which come together to make the whole, the region, can any sort of “plan” for the region’s success be legitimized. Civil society organizations voiced their concerns in relation to this very issue, stating “insufficient analysis in the Pacific Plan about the causes of the causes of economic hardship, unsustainability, poor governance, and insecurity and the alternative ways in which this can be addressed” (Coates, 2006, pg. 2). This lack of analysis serves to undermine the integrity of the Plan and questions the extent to which it is appropriate as a basis on which to plan for the region’s future.

Secondly, the intention of these studies is to see how each of the areas can be manipulated “to support regional cooperation and integration” (Pacific Plan, 2005, pg. 15). With the objective or ‘end’ already established, any research or study merely serves to provide support for the intended outcome, in this case, to work these issues into a regional framework, despite this possibly being a structure of operating that may be in conflict with issues, principles or traditions related to specific nations. There is no consideration for the fact that individual nations and cultures have their own ways of interpreting and expressing issues such as gender, leadership or peace and conflict. If consideration is to be given to the “blend of customary practices and modern systems which has both inhibited development and helped provide some stability and social safety nets” (Kavaliku, 2000, pg. 26), then aligning policy and practice to ease the way for regional mechanisms may come at the expense of these traditional systems and relationships, despite the apparent valuing of customary practices and traditions held by

those pushing the Pacific Plan. The challenge will be to find some resonance for regionalism at the national level, where it is echoed in relationships and interactions and can be manifested in the realities of everyday life, considering how regionalism finds its place in the marketplace or home life environment (Wigen, 2006)

Conclusions

Whether those at the steering wheel of the Pacific Plan wish to acknowledge it or not, the development ideology of regionalism, whereby the private sector –led developments are given primacy and the markets are attributed with equal dispersion of economic gains to society may be unrealistic and a poor fit for Pacific nations within the PIF. Given the general nature of guidelines regarding social objectives and commitments to the reduction of poverty, merely seeing all initiatives as working towards this goal, questions the prioritizing of improved livelihoods for Pacific citizens at a household level and in turn, the reality of any significant gains being made to livelihoods as a result of those strategies contained within the Plan.

The relevance of global targets for poverty reduction such as the MDGs must be questioned, and if these necessitate “tailoring”, once must ask the usefulness of these at the outset. Although they tap into a global framework for poverty reduction, greater areas of importance for Pacific nations’ unique situations may be overlooked as a result of the cut-and-paste nature of the use of the MDGs as targets to be achieved.

The Social Development framework reveals some revealing information in that if Health and Education remain the main social development areas in which better outcomes for people in the future are sought, adjustments must be made in regard to the culture of these areas, as well as in the allocation of resources to these sectors and to be utilized in ways which result in improvements, rather than to the funding of salaries. This can only be addressed at a national level.

Within each FIC, the success of the Pacific Plan initiatives will be directly related to that nation's ability to resource and implement the initiatives which are proposed. Given the enormous disparities between the wealth and resource base of the FICs, the Plan as it stands, almost certainly sets some nations up for failure; this was noted by Coates (2006) as working from a "deficit approach" (Coates, 2006, p2). The absolute lack of national or Pacific identity in the initiatives hints at the necessity for there to be a move towards the incorporation of indigenous and Pacific-generated development ideologies and pathways. Not only will this strengthen the identity of the Plan reinforcing the relevance of this for FICs, but it allows for the opportunity for Pacific development practitioners and governments to actually impact upon their own future by utilizing strategies which are in-keeping with their own methodologies regarding ways of thinking and behaving, such as being able to have a Pacific way of envisaging what 'basic needs' are within their own context, and as well as in the creation of the image of what they wish their individual nations to look like into the future. Finally in relation to this, we must recognize that although the FICs are united in their positioning within the Pacific or "Oceania" (Hau'ofa, 1993, p2), that every nation is unique and has their own unique needs and aspirations for their people; and that is something that no regional 'plan' will ever be able to capture.

CHAPTER SIX

The Strategic Development Plan 8

2006/7-2008/9

A History of the Strategic Development Plan

The first Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for Tonga was produced in 1965, and was formulated to provide a framework for improvements to take place in Tonga over a five year period. It was described in its foreword by Premiere Tu'ipelehake as “unpretentious” and providing for “...little more than the really urgent economic and social needs of Tonga” (Development Plan 1965-70, 1965, p5), with the central objective being to “stimulate economic production through systematic rehabilitation of the coconut industry and the reorganization and modernization of the agricultural services; at the same time emphasis will be placed on expanding and improving social services in harmony with population growth” (Ibid, p5).

What is notable here in the first set of objectives is the desire to push Tonga's development progress through strengthening of the agricultural sector. Given Tonga's limited opportunities in the manufacturing sector, this seemed a sensible area in which to channel resources. Other areas of focus in the first plan included the planned development of the Tourism industry, wharf development in Nuku'Alofa, a roading development plan, the creation of technical training facilities, modernization of the health services in the Tongatapu and Ha'apai groups, the development of the Tonga Police Force and an increase in the provision and service areas of public utilities such as power and water.

Perceived factors affecting development at the time of the first development plan included low wages, a lack of development data relating to land use, financial constraints and issues relating to manpower such as under-employment, a lack of training

opportunities and facilities, a deficit in skilled professionals and a high level of reliance on overseas consultants. Interestingly, it was felt necessary to note "... none of these conditions is unique to Tonga; they are common to many developing countries" (Development Plan, 1965, p24); this ties into the sense of pride and craving to appear, and to be, independent as a nation.

Self-help was a theme given specific attention in the plan. The very limited private sector in Tonga is recognized, alongside limited Government resources. As a means of offsetting these constraints, a reminder of the ways in which "community self can do much to augment limited Government funds in the development of such services as village water supplies, primary education buildings, teachers' houses and minor roads" was drawn to attention, though perhaps the expectations were set a little too high, especially regarding the expectation that villagers assist in their own water supply, given the need for massive infrastructure developments in this area. Self-help was extended to the idea that Tonga should seek to develop independent of external aid, although even in this early phase of development planning, aid was a mechanism in allowing the Tongan government's to work towards achieving the goals of the plan. Given that the first plan was reliant on help from the British Government, it set a precedent which saw aid in the forms of both grants and loans as integral to achieving the goals set out in the plans which were to follow.

As Campbell (1996) notes regarding the SDP's, King Tupou's initiatives as expressed in the five year plans were to be commended on their ambitions and in their intent to provide for the people of Tonga (Campbell, 1996) however the goals for each of the plans tended to carry over the next. Difficulties were to emerge for Tonga's development in relation to limitations in resources and budget constraints, resulting in several of the objectives of the plan failing to be met in the second development plan. As the Strategic Development Plans have progressed, increased unemployment and social problems at the hands of urban pressures and population growth have been recurrent. Similarly lack of available land, a growing reliance on imported foods and the lessening contribution of agriculture to Tonga's GDP have exacerbated Tonga's need for economic restructuring. Increasingly, this has turned the Government's attention towards developing the private

sector to stimulate growth and aid in the provision of employment opportunities for Tongans, as is evident in the third development plan. At the turn of the 1980' it was clear that development planning was to become more sophisticated in Tonga, with the assistance of ADBs consultants and the emergence of capitalist economics playing a dominant role in development discourse (Ibid). This trend has continued, and Tonga's Strategic Development Plans continue to channel their resources and attention toward the development of the private sector. Unfortunately while the development of Education and Health services has remained steady with some promising outcomes as a result of prioritizing these sectors, barriers to development for Tonga remain consistent, resulting in the greater reliance on self-sustaining livelihood practices for Tongans faced with limited cash income earning opportunities.

The Strategic Development Plan Eight – An Introduction

The Strategic Development Plan 8 (SDP8) outlines Tonga's development goals for the five years spanning 2006/7-2008/9. It begins with an 'Overview of Economic and Social Development', assessing the achievements and shortcomings of the previous Strategic Development Plan 7, for the period 2002/3 – 2004/5. A review of the Economic and Public Sector Reform Programme (EPSRP) objectives in the SDP7 is also summarized. The findings of these evaluations have formed the basis of the 'key observations' for planners in developing new objectives for the SDP8, as well as incorporating those targets and policies which did not reach completion in the previous SDP. These are utilized to produce national goals for development. The SDP8 establishes eight goals for development, with the inclusion of strategies and sub-strategies. These goals are:

Goal 1:	Create a better governance environment
Goal 2:	Ensure macroeconomic stability
Goal 3:	Promote sustained private sector-led economic growth
Goal 4:	Ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of growth
Goal 5:	Improve education standards

Goal 6:	Improve health standards
Goal 7:	Ensure environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction
Goal 8:	Maintain social cohesion and cultural identity

The structure of these goals represents the prioritizing of each area by the government, with the current drive for development being pushed through the creation of a Governance environment which facilitates development and the striving for macroeconomic stability in the Tongan economy.

In the planning of the development goals, the Government sought ‘the peoples’ perspective on development’ in which a series of community consultations were undertaken under the premise that “these people have first hand experience of, and are aware of, all issues concerning their respective villages and are in a position to speak for and present issues of concern to the villagers” (SDP8, 2006, pg. 20). This involved the participation of 80% of villages in Tongatapu, 88% of villages in ‘Eua, 86% of villages in Ha’apai and 95% of villages in Vava’u, with the two Niuas having 63 participants. In addition to this, 90 participants from NGO’s, churches and the private sector took part, attributing to a total of 659 participants consulted. It was noted that those citizens consulted showed much gratitude for being given the opportunity to voice opinions and points of concern to the government, as they felt strongly that this opportunity had not been extended to them previously.

Alongside the opportunity to raise other issues that they felt were important, five key questions for discussion were presented for participants to address. These were:

- 1) What are the three main problems that families/villages/women/youth face?
- 2) What solutions can you suggest for these problems?
- 3) If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- 4) What three things should the Government do to improve the wellbeing of families/villages/women/youth?
- 5) What can you do yourself to improve your wellbeing?

The responses were organized according to island groups and were ranked according to the priorities established by participants, achieved by tallying the number of groups that identified each issue at hand as a concern.

Concerns and priorities which were common to most groups included the need for infrastructure development in the areas of road development and water supply services, access to opportunities for livelihood diversification, access to markets for selling agricultural produce, fishing and handicrafts (domestic and international), unemployment and financial hardship, rising social problems (rise in youth crime and substance abuse) and the need to increase national communication and transport networks to allow for equitable access for outer-islands especially.

Seven key observations for planners were formed at the end of the consultations, which found that:

- People in the communities, civil society organizations and the private sector want more information, education and consultation on government issues, decisions and policies.
- Government is typically seen as the provider of solutions to individual and community problems.
- Infrastructure development is seen as a major means of improving the quality of life of communities and reducing hardship.
- There is a need for market research to secure international market outlets for local produce.
- There is widespread and growing concern over social problems and the plight of the poor and vulnerable groups.
- There is an expressed need for job training programmes for youth and women and counseling programmes for youth.
- Policies conducive to foreign investment are needed in order to generate growth in incomes and employment.
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The Development Approach of the SDP8

The development ideology of the SDP8 remains very much in line with the dominant approach to development today. A reliance on the primacy of the market as society's prime distribution tool, the centrality of paid work for citizens and the emphasis in "...training and education as citizens are expected to equip themselves to take advantage of new economic opportunities in the globalizing economy" (Larner, 2004, p7) is resonant with neo-liberal models of development. This is evident in the Tongan Government's drive for increased privatization, economic growth via trade liberalization, an improvement in governance to facilitate the growth of the private sector and dominant themes of self-help and non-reliance on the state for the provision of or assistance of wellbeing enhancing factors for livelihoods.

This model is not surprising however, given the closeness of which the Tongan Government works with global institutions such as the ADB in developing policy and in the creation of data and statistics for informing policy and planning, whose neo-liberal approach to development is widely accepted as being the norm. Similarly in considering the dominant regional initiative for fostering development in the Pacific in relation to the Pacific Plan, a neo-liberal approach at a national level in development planning for Tonga allows for smoother facilitation of regional policies and initiatives to be incorporated into national development strategies; embracing neo-liberal concepts at the regional level serves as a further attempt to legitimize the use of a development ideology which may be out of step with what is realistic for the future wellbeing of Tonga and its citizens, yet one which reinforces the motives of global organizations.

Locating Poverty Alleviation in the SDP8

In locating the discussion on poverty, hardship and the lifting of living standards for all Tongans, we must look to Chapter three of the SDP8 (SDP8, 2006, p35), where the overall vision for Tongans is stated, as seen below:

To create a society in which all Tongans enjoy higher living standards and a better quality of life through good governance, equitable and environmentally sustainable private sector-led economic growth, improved education and health standards, and

This vision is purported as one which "...expresses the aspirations of the Tongan people" (Ibid.).

In an attempt to further contextualize the standard of living in Tonga, a "preferred term" and a definition for poverty is established and can be seen below. This term mimics the findings of the ADB that hardship not poverty exists in Tonga (ADB, 2003. 'Hardship and Poverty Status Discussion Paper'. Manila, p. 19):

Poverty = Hardship

An inadequate level of sustainable development, manifested by a lack of access to basic services; a lack of opportunities to participate fully in the socio-economic life of the community; and a lack of adequate resources (including cash) to meet the basic needs of the household or customary obligations to the extended family, village community and/or the church.

In seeking to locate the discussion on the alleviation of hardship in the SDP8, we are really attempting to understand the degree to which the Government of Tonga recognizes the central role of hardship alleviation and the raising of living standards for all Tongans as being central to the development of the nation as a whole, and the extent to which this has been prioritized in regard to allocation of resources facilitated through the development of strategies and initiatives in the SDP8.

The goals and strategies specifically appointed to address poverty and inequality in Tonga can be viewed in more detail in section eight and the following chapters of the SDP8, "Improving Equity and Reducing Hardship". Section eight outlines key areas for

development with a focus on addressing hardship in the kingdom in relation to a lack of basic services, opportunities and resources for families and individuals. The Tongan government sees the most effective means of reducing hardship as being through the “provision of employment and income generating opportunities in the private sector” (SDP8, pg. 102).

Causes of hardship detailed here stem from the problems associated with a lack of income earning opportunities and restricted or unequal access to resources, as well as hardship which happens as a result of attempting to create better opportunities for individuals and families, such as rural-urban migration, compounding issues such as urban population growth, the emergence of squatter settlements, overcrowding of households and increased competition for land, resources and opportunities.

Vulnerable groups within the community are identified as being children, youth, women, the disabled and elderly. These vulnerable groups in society are said to be targeted in the development plan through the implementation of the “pro-poor” policies referred to above, which span all sectors of development planning in the SDP8. The areas of Health, Education, Regional and Rural development and Social and Cultural cohesion are paid particular attention when acknowledging the development of these people within society. The SDP8 notes that a focus will be on “public policy interventions that have a pro-poor dimension”...and that “pro-poor initiatives in public service delivery will be taken in the education and health sectors and through the regional and rural development program” (SDP8, pg. 102).

In an overview of Economic and Social Development in the SDP8, the government draws on several methods to paint a picture of Tonga’s development progress, stating:

- Tonga ranks 54th out of 177 nations on the 2005 Human Development Index (HDI) which measures life expectancy, knowledge, and standards of living
- Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has averaged 1.5-2.0% equating to ‘modest per capita growth’

- On a Human Poverty Index (HPI) Tonga has the second lowest incidence of poverty of 15 Pacific nations
- High expenditure on public services such as Health and Education

Initiatives for poverty alleviation in Tonga run throughout the SDP8 at various levels, via community national and international initiatives and agreements, and are expressed in the various strategies attached to each of the eight national development goals. Given that the raising of living standards for all Tongans is the overall vision of the SDP8, each of the eight development goals are seen as working towards achieving this outcome. What follows is an analysis of the eight development goals and their contribution to the alleviation of hardship and the raising of living standards for all Tongans, as seen by the Tongan Government, categorized as ‘economic’ or ‘social’ goals. However, it must be noted that due to constraints relating to the size and scope of this paper, this is by no means comprehensive, and tends to focus on the impacts on the livelihood of the Tongan people of chosen initiatives, rather than representing an in-depth analysis of each goal and its individual strategies.

Economic Development Goals

Four broad economic goals feature in the SDP8, encompassing 68 strategies to be instigated, developed further or implemented within the differing economic sectors. Given the dedication towards Tonga embracing an approach in line with that of a modern economy, these strategies four goals and their strategies are seen to facilitate a top down approach to development, whereby increased productivity in the economic sector can be attributed the improvement of living standards through the natural distribution of the market, echoing Rostow’s Modernization theory through which by embracing modern practices, developing nations can improve from being traditional, into a developed state (Rostow, 1964).

The four economic goals to Create a Better Governance Environment; Ensure Macro Economic Stability; Promote Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth (In a Business

Environment); and Promote Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth (Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and tourism) are to contribute to increased economic growth for Tonga, which as the SDP8 recognizes, is only a small aspect of Tonga's current development achievements, stating the growth over the past development period as "modest", while at the same time recognizing the significant impact of remittances, foreign aid flows and the contribution of the subsistence economy to meeting basic food and shelter needs (SDP8, p2). What follows is a brief summary of the four economic goals and their expected contribution to the reduction of poverty in Tonga.

Goal 1 – Create a Better Governance Environment
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Sixteen strategies were encompassed under Goal 1 of the SDP8, to Create a Better Governance Environment. The Tongan government acknowledges that governance underpins achievement in all other areas of economic, political, social and public sector management and core government institutions. The government identifies governance as "the manner in which authority is exercised to manage a country's economic and social resources" (SDP8, p50), a definition which closely mirrors that of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) preferred definition of governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Policies/Governance/gov200.asp>). The Bank, close development partners of the Tonga, presents four key principles as the pinnacles of good governance. These include Accountability, Transparency, Predictability, Participation.

The Tongan government has acknowledged some areas of weakness and seeks to focus on four strategies to improve the governance environment in Tonga. These areas are Voice and Accountability, Government Effectiveness, the Rule of Law and Control of Corruption (SDP8, p52). In justifying the need for adjustments to be made in this area, they site findings of the World Bank in that "a country improving its quality of governance from a low level to an average level can in the long term quadruple the income of its population, and similarly reduce infant mortality and illiteracy" (World Bank, 2004 – <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/kkz2004/q&a.htm>).

Tonga's score on a World Bank Governance Indicator Measure can be seen below in Fig. 1.1.

Fig. 1.2 Governance Indicators, 2004

	Voice and Accountability	Political Stability	Government Effectiveness	Regulatory Quality	Rule of Law	Control Of Corruption
Tonga	-0.35	0.72	-0.73	-0.43	-0.11	-0.68
Pacific Average	0.58	0.24	-0.73	-0.31	-0.09	-0.50

Source: World Bank, *Governance Indicators*.

Notes: The Pacific average is for Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The indicators are measured in the range -2.5 to +2.5, with a higher score indicating better governance.

Calls for greater transparency and wider participation of Tongans in the governing of their own nation have come both on domestic and international fronts of late. Growing unease and tension in Tonga surrounding governance and political reform resulted in conflict, loss of life and livelihoods for many in Nuku'Alofa in 2006 and has brought to the fore the necessity for Tonga to address this issue.

Internationally, as Lawson (1996) notes, the Tongan form of governance and the constitution itself, is considered "very much out of step with international opinion" and 'moreover, the clause which declares the principle of equality before the law is embedded in a constitutional document which itself recognizes and entrenches traditional inequalities of privilege and status" (Lawson, 1996, p). As stated in the SDP8, "there is the general consensus that weak governance is a key factor in explaining sluggish economic growth of Pacific Island countries" (SDP8, p50) with Tonga specifically showing challenges in this area, and as NZAID noted in an inquiry into New Zealand's relationship with Tonga, challenges which were concerned with "the use of overseas aid in Tonga, and the political and economic rule of Tonga by a small elite group" (NZAID, 2004, p7). Improving the governance environment in Tonga then becomes paramount not only in ensuring the voice of citizens and the organizations who represent them are heard and accounted for in the shaping of Tonga's future, but in ensuring much-needed international support continues, be it in the form of development aid, or in ensuring borders remain open for Tongans to continue to utilize the resources available to them internationally.

In relation to the link between good governance and the reduction of poverty, it is believed that “Problems of poverty and governance are inextricably linked. If power is abused, or exercised in weak or improper ways, those with the least power—the poor—are most likely to suffer.”

(<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPRS/0,,contentMDK:20177435~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:384201,00.html>) seeing improving governance as being integral in creating improved social conditions through the fostering of an environment of accountability, voice, transparency and equality for all citizens in Tonga. Addressing governance in Tonga is a way of ensuring long-term prosperity for the people of Tonga by showing a commitment at the highest levels toward improved leadership, improved political processes and greater participation and benefits for all in relation to civil liberties and human rights. Ensuring government effectiveness and the rule of law is encompassed in this goal also.

Goal 2 – Ensure Macro-Economic Stability

Macroeconomic Stability is considered a “prerequisite for sustainable economic growth that raises living standards and reduces poverty” (SDP8, p35). The Government aims to link macroeconomic stability to the reduction of poverty, attempting to frame this within the context of “pro-poor policies”, throughout the SDP8. Ensuring macroeconomic stability is an issue for Tonga in relation to the maintenance of fiscal discipline, ensuring Tonga’s external debt position remains sound, strengthening of the National Reserve Bank of Tonga, the development of open market policy operations and the need to manage the exchange rate to achieve the foreign exchange reserves target (Ibid, p64). The ADB recognized in 2002 in relation to Tonga, the way in which “low economic and employment growth rates and a worsening fiscal situation have set back the Government's goal of improving living standards for this Pacific island nation. They have also hindered the flow of private sector investment into the country” (ADB News Release 093/02, 2002).

Public service salaries lead to the greatest expenditure for Government in Tonga, with an estimated 63% of Government spending being absorbed by meeting the salary rise payments of 2005/6, if restructuring of finances are not carried out. While this means consequences for budgeting of the SDP8 period, the Government is committed to carrying these out.

External debt for Tonga runs at approximately 25% of total GDP (SDP8, p64) which can see funds being moved from public service provision to finance debt repayment. In order for this not to happen, the Government should seek to restrict borrowing

The inflationary environment in Tonga over the previous SDP period (2002/3-2004/5) saw citizens in Tonga absorb the rising costs and impacts of this, with increasingly high oil and petrol prices, rising food bills, with the public service wage increase pushing prices further (SDP8, p62). The negative impacts of macroeconomic instability can be immediately felt within a small island economy such as Tonga, ones which often cannot absorb the shocks of sudden prices rises, leading to hardship and poverty, and which can lead to a lack of faith and goodwill towards the Government, increasing domestic and political tensions. NZAID observed that “a robust and vibrant private sector is vital for Tonga’s long-term economic growth and quality of life, and the sustained reduction of poverty” (NZAID, 2004, pg14).

To achieve macroeconomic stability the Government seeks to implement five strategies in meeting these, including maintaining fiscal discipline and improving allocation of public resources; Ensuring Tonga’s external debt position remains sound; Strengthening the National Reserve Bank of Tonga; Development of open-market operations as an instrument of monetary policy; to continue to manage the exchange rate to achieve foreign reserves target level.

What is of concern in this section of the SDP8 is the knowledge that Tonga’s financial capacity is limited, and with meeting the salary payments from the previous period, the Government stands to face a shortfall as noted for the 2005/6 period, a typical outcome of strict macroeconomic policies and structural reform as noted here, “in view of the

excessive expectations of growth and adherence to strict macroeconomic goals, it is not clear how or whether the programmes planned for health, education and water can still be realized” (Schneider, DATE, p?). This then questions the logic in placing macroeconomic goals and restructuring as primary goals for development when targets often fail to be met, public sector investment isn’t carried out and little positive impact in the daily lives of citizens is accomplished.

Goal 3 – Promoting Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth I: The Business Environment

The SDP8 recognizes the private sector in Tonga as the “source of most domestic production and employment” and that “without strong private sector-led economic growth it is not possible to support improvements in public service delivery and reduce dependence on aid and remittances” (SDP8, pg 65). With this in mind, the SDP8 encompasses two goals for the promotion of private sector-led development, within the business environment, and in relation to Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Tourism (Goal 4).

Issues for Tonga include the fact that in 1996, 56% of the employed worked unpaid, for themselves or for family members (Ibid). The increase in job opportunities through growth of the private sector is therefore considered essential not only in the provision of public services in the kingdom, but in the provision of income to support the livelihoods of Tongans, especially in a climate which increasingly necessitates some form of cash income, with subsistence livelihoods declining, especially in rural areas.

Previously, private investment in Tonga has been considered problematic for foreigners, with the barriers to starting business including difficulty in leasing land and complex and lengthy procedures for registering and starting businesses, with low rankings in areas linked to property registration, contract enforcement and obtaining credit (World Bank Survey for Doing Business in 2006, in SDP8, p67). Government has also been involved in the running of businesses in Tonga which have not always been successful and have diverted funds away from public expenditure (SDP8, p66).

In the area of fostering the private sector-led growth in the business environment, 24 strategies are employed which largely surround the establishment of a regulatory framework fostering greater ease and transparency for foreign investors, the passing of bills related to trade and investment, employment, establishing administration processes.

From a micro-enterprise point of view, the Government seeks to create opportunities for its citizens through the private sector, which, if carried through, will have a positive impact on citizens across the different areas of Tonga, as they address several of the issues raised in consultations with the public carried out in the development of the SDP8 in 2005. Initiatives include: upgrades to roads and the establishment of a National Road development fund; Upgrading of inter-island transport services; maintenance of ports and navigation equipment; Improvement in domestic air services; Implement a waste management project in Nuku'Alofa; Develop an urban planning strategy; Review water pricing and upgrade water supply systems.

The International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group assert that “the ultimate objects of human development – freedom from hunger, long life, health, greater choice and more fulfillment – will only be realized through upward mobility. In practice this means more and better jobs for poor people” (IFC, 2004, p1). In order to ensure ordinary Tongans benefit from this, not only should they have access to the job opportunities created through foreign investment in the private sector, but the opportunity to participate in the creation of their own enterprises, ensuring equality of access to private sector opportunities, with Government assistance if required, remains essential in securing the long term wellbeing of Tongans and their economy.

Goal 4 - Promoting Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth II: Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Tourism
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In separating the business and sector-specific areas of private sector-led growth, the Government seeks to foster new opportunities in these sectors, already of importance to

Tonga's economy, building on the strengths established already. Specifically, this taps into the industries in which Tongans make their livelihoods from today, seeking to build on these areas, offering further domestic and international opportunities for growers.

Traditionally, Tonga's Primary sectors have had varied success, with external shocks relating to the costs of producing for exports and vulnerability to adverse weather seeing the Agricultural sector especially, as unreliable sources of income (SDP8, p80). Agriculture is now being primed as a major vehicle for growth for Tonga, seeking to increase commercial production, driving Tongan producers towards diversification, with Kava, Squash, and Vanilla already in existence, with a push towards diversification into breadfruit, tomatoes, eggplant and paw paw amongst others being pushed for export to New Zealand.

Risks in this area related to livelihoods occur with the unreliability of international markets, combined with the cost of diversification and the risk that international markets have no place for Tongan produce. The reliance on Government being able to provide the facilities for exporting such as transport, frameworks and facilities for ensuring produce meets export and requirements is a factor in providing confidence for domestic producers to diversify. The ability to obtain credit to develop export crops is a necessity and this is only being investigated in the SDP8, something that will require serious consideration if Tongans are to benefit and make headway as entrepreneurs in the Agriculture sector.

Development of the Fisheries industry has the potential to create livelihood opportunities, especially in the area of promoting the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries through the provision of equipment and marketing information and facilities to communities, and through improving access to credit, as proposed in strategy 9. Similarly, growth and a concerted effort towards the marketing and development of the Tourism industry encourages small-scale locally owned and operated ventures a possibility for sustained income for Tongans. Tonga is yet to capture the tourist market in the Pacific that Fiji and Samoa share, and indeed, if managed with care, this can lead to domestic and foreign private sector initiatives, fostering growth in the private sector as well as fostering the development of both sectors. Both share similar issues surrounding sustainability in

relation to natural resources, and should be seen, not as areas to exploit, but as treasures for the economy of Tonga.

Social Development Goals

Preceding the goals for social development in the SDP8 are general facts surrounding the economic and social issues for Tongans. These include:

- Approximately 5% of households received incomes below a food poverty line of T\$703 per head per year
- 23% received incomes below a basic needs poverty line of T\$1,466 per head per year

This was stated as occurring “with little bias between the urban and rural areas” (ADB, 2003, p21). While this data from research by the ADB gives a general picture of hardship suffered in the Kingdom, it does not address the multi-faceted nature of poverty and hardship, especially in relation to issues such as the vulnerability of children an elderly, the marginalization of women, restricted access to opportunities and the day to day difficulties presented by living in a semi-subsistence economy. Given Tonga has no formal government social welfare system, the effective addressing of these issues via effective policy delivery leading to improved social services and social security networks must be taken as paramount to positive outcomes.

Goal 5 – To Improve Equitable Access to and Quality of Universal Basic Education for all Children in Tonga up to Year 8
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The main issues concerning Education in Tonga are in regards to equity of access, quality of Education and the readiness of graduates for employment in a market economy. Given that Tonga’s Education indicators are the highest in the Pacific region (UNDP, 2005) it is noteworthy that Tonga’s Ministry of Education, Womens’ Affairs and Culture (MEWAC) continues to strive for higher standards and better outcomes for its youth. Under this directive, three key strategies have been formulated: Implement the Tongan Education Support Programme (TESP); Improve the access to and quality of post-basic education and training to cater for the different abilities and needs of students; Improve the administration of education and training so that quality is enhanced;

UNESCO regards “investment in education being one of the most important determinants of human welfare and opportunity as well as social and economic growth, education and poverty eradication are inextricably bound” (UNESCO,http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=44180&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

While it is evident that Tonga fulfills the requirements for the MDG 2 – Achieve Universal Primary Education for All - in that universal primary education has been in existence in Tonga for some time, it is clear that the issues surrounding quality, access and funding are preventing positive outcomes from becoming the reality for many students who pass through the Education system in Tonga. A significant barrier to achievement in terms of providing quality education in Tonga is in relation to funding. The SDP8 details the structure and funding of the Education system. In 2004/5 MEWAC’s budget expenditure(\$15.9 million) saw 40% allocated to primary, 28% to secondary, 22% to post-secondary, youth, sports and Culture, and 6% and 4% to Administration and professional services, respectively. The majority of MEWAC’s expenditure is allocated to salaries (74%).

A significant fact is that non-government agencies are the major provider or 76% of secondary schools with a total of 67% of all secondary enrolments (SDP8, pg. 109). However, statistics support the fact that government schools are far better resourced and eventuate in higher educational outcomes for its students. While basic literacy is high in Tonga, evidence that primary education is catering for its students, the high number of school leavers and drop-outs without any qualifications suggests that at the secondary level, quality of education and resources are lacking. A redressing of Government supported or provided education at this level is much needed, given the high number of youth-related crime and delinquency issues arising in urban areas of Tonga, suggesting that the government needs to be further engaged in the provision of resources to ensure that organizations are able to cater for students’ needs in preparing them for better outcomes as school leavers. This would make headway in addressing lower achievements

of those is non-government education providers as well as improving outcomes for students post-secondary school education in relation to readiness for employment.

Goal 6 – Improve Health Standards

Tonga has endorsed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) regarding Health Indicators and overall the health of Tonga's population is relatively high (SDP8, p117). The SDP8 states significant developments in Health as the attainment of:

- Effective primary health care delivery
- Direct access to health care for the entire population (within an hours driving time)
- Water sanitation
- Comprehensive antenatal, postnatal, immunization, sanitation and waste disposal programmes

The issues surrounding health in Tonga largely centre on the increase in non-communicable diseases and the complications arising from these, given that communicable diseases are now considered to be under control (Ibid). Commonly termed "lifestyle diseases", non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity are attributed to a change from a traditional diet towards processed foods and those higher in sugar and fat, and lower in fiber, commonly experienced in imported goods. This is seemingly represented as illustrating the impact of Westernization on Tonga and other Pacific Islands, as noted by Choudry (Choudry 2002) "some call this "New World Syndrome" - diseases and medical conditions brought on by the impact of rapid Westernisation on traditional cultures" (Choudry, Commentary 2002 <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/cra0762.htm>). But what this also points to with great significance to this study, is the way in which poverty and limited choices due to finances, availability, time restrictions and livelihood diversification have a direct negative impact on the health of Tongans.

Unnerving findings by a WHO study on Globalization and Diet Consumption habits in Tonga found in a survey on the most commonly eaten foods in Tonga, they found that

“although bread, mutton flaps and imported chicken parts were among the least-preferred of the most frequently consumed foods, they were still consumed at a relatively high rate, indicating that preference has little to do with consumption patterns” (WHO Bulletin, 2001, p857). This points directly to expenditure choices, which may suggest some forms of monetary or income poverty affecting buying choices, given that they study observed, “low-fat Tongan sources of proteins, such as fish, generally cost between 15to 50% more than either mutton flaps or imported chicken parts, and in many areas, mutton flaps and imported poultry were more easily purchased than fish or indigenous chicken” (Ibid, p859).

This knowledge also places some responsibility on Government to seek to restrict imports of such poor quality meats, when it is at the detriment of the health of its people in raising prices of local and better quality goods. This is by no means a new concern; Epeli Hau’ofa noted New Zealand’s exporting of mutton flaps to Tonga as early as 1975, with the effects of this already in evidence. Wider issues surrounding the availability and access to better quality affordable food in this instance must be addressed, given the problems for Tongans in the area of health are preventable, but severely affect the quality of life and the ability for citizens to engage in paid employment and as effective members of their community.

Goal 7 – Ensure Environmental Sustainability and Disaster Risk Reduction

Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Ensuring environmental sustainability for Tonga is now a pressing concern given the increasing strains that growing urbanization is placing on the environment, and in turn, has negative effects of the wellbeing and livelihoods of Tongan citizens. Key issues for Tonga regarding the environment as stated in the SDP8 (SDP8, p123) include:

- Growing Urbanization
- Settlements in Swamp areas

- Erosion
- Sewerage and flooding
- Indiscriminate dumping of solid waste
- Polluting of water supply from run-off
- Polluting of main waterways

The SDP8 includes three main strategies to address these issues: Complete and enforce the legislative framework for environmental conservation and management; Integrate environmental costs and benefits into Government decision-making procedures; Implement environmental education programmes and engage communities in remedial measures.

Closely tied in with environmental issues facing Tonga is the social situation faced by its citizens. Rather than necessarily leading to poverty, poverty itself may have significant impacts on the environment. For example, changes in settlement patterns and the emergence of squatter settlements in swamp land and areas prone to flooding present significant problems. As stated in the SDP8, over 30% of Tonga's population is urban dwelling, with 77% concentrated in Nuku'Alofa, and 12% in Neiafu, Vava'u, presenting consequences for the environment, in the polluting of land as well as issues related to health and wellbeing and personal safety emerging as a result. Significant in the eradication of these issues, both social and environmental, is the planning of land use by government, including the allocation of land to those currently in squatter settlements who may face eviction.

Lack of government planning and allocation of land for use as a landfill has lead to the indiscriminant dumping of waste across Tonga, due to the fact that only two spaces for dumping rubbish are allocated across the whole of Tonga. This presents significant problems for the health of its citizens, negative environmental effects of run-off from solid waste, such as the contamination of soil and waterways, and the poor image shown to Tourists of Tonga's natural environment (SDP8, p123).

Disaster Risk Reduction

Reducing the impacts of disasters is essential to the safety and long term futures of Tongans. Given the well-known vulnerability to environmental hazards of Tonga – ranked second in a 1999 study by the Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank assessing the vulnerability of states to environmental hazards (ref) Tonga faces risks related to hurricanes, which are frequent and cause wide-ranging damage to livelihood crops, homes and workplaces resulting in long term and devastating effects on the socio-economic lives of their citizens. Since 1997, nine hurricanes have occurred in Tonga (SDP8, p125).

The effects on the livelihoods of those especially in developing nations who suffer from natural disasters are well documented, and “while natural disasters per se cannot be averted, many of their consequences such as famine, disease outbreaks, etc can be mitigated by democratic governance, which is less prevalent in LDCs. The most vulnerable populations tend to be the most marginalized due to a lack of access to information” (ref) .

The government initiatives in relation to this goal seek to Develop strategies for mitigating national disasters; Ensure proper infrastructure and communication systems are in place; Ensure resilience of communities to national disasters.

While the above strategies seek to prevent the short and long term effects of natural (national) disasters, concrete steps must be taken to ensure the availability of resources for risk mitigation and infrastructure which aids responsiveness to such occurrences is given attention, as Kofi Annan reminds us, “The best laws are useless if not effectively and impartially enforced.”

<http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/2000/20000920.unsgsmr.sg.stories.articleFull.asp?TID=34&Type=Article>.

Goal 8 – Maintain Social Cohesion

Loss of traditional values, cultures and “social cohesion” is often looked to as the cause of the negative social effects seen in Tonga today, including increased youth crime, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse and violent crime. As expressed in the SDP8, “social cohesion comprises social harmony and unity, healthy relationships amongst family members and within communities, strong family values and a support network between children and parents and equitable access to opportunities to social services” (SDP8, p130). Notions of social connectedness; human rights; culture and identity; safety and security; the collective values people hold; patterns of social engagement and participation; and the levels of unity and harmony within society are also encompassed in this term (Statistics New Zealand, Sustainable Development: social cohesion, accessed at <http://www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/web/nzstories.nsf/htmldocs/Sustainable+Development:+Social+cohesion>) . Despite encompassing such a wide range of areas, only four strategies are addressed in this section of the SDP8 – Provide financial assistance to NGOs offering support for abused women and children; Implement the Action Plan of the National Policy in Gender and Development; Implement the youth and Culture Unit’s six part cultural development programme.

The negative outcomes for Tonga in this area are evident as noted in the SDP8, 46.1% of victims of violent offences were female however there are no agencies which exist to support victims of crime or abuse, leaving victims reliant on family and social support networks such as CSOs and Church groups.

Without having any sole ministry to cater for the issues of Social Development in Tonga, this could be considered a deficit in terms of the limited attention paid to this area of the SDP8. Defined in the McClure Report (McClure, 2000, p45), government must engage with other actors within society to build community capacity and while social capital and social security networks such as the church and village groups are strong in Tonga, especially within villages, the government must act as ‘social partners’ alongside the business community and CSOs (Stone, 2000).

Effectively the lack of attention in allocating government resources towards the development of a single ministry for social development, preferring to allocate this under the umbrella ministry of the Ministry of Education, Womens' Affairs and Culture is illustrates the prioritizing and the approach of government in the way in which it address social development and the alleviation of hardship in the Kingdom. Although the maintenance of culture and tradition is paramount to Tonga, the government must seek to address the underlying factors which lead to the degradation of such values – factors which may include the very policies and future direction for the Tonga that the Government seeks to create.

Conclusions

The relationship between the economic growth of a nation and the wellbeing of its citizens is not always as clear cut as rise in GDP allowing for improved livelihoods. For developing nations, the reality of uneven income distribution, vulnerability to external shocks, market and Government failures all create barriers to development for the citizens of a country (World Bank Presentation, slide 13). Similarly, it is believed that “a conflict of objectives is thus apparent between the attainment of macroeconomic stability on the one hand and poverty reduction on the other...They propagate an increase in social spending, yet continue to assert that macroeconomic stability is their overriding objective” (Schneider, DATE). Given this knowledge and the way in which the SDP8 closely aligns with such a trend, the ability for a reduction in hardship throughout this development period on a wide and far reaching scale seems unlikely.

Microeconomic initiatives appear to hold the most immediate form of hope and indeed relief for citizens in Tonga, specifically in relation to the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors, with the possibility for increased access to credit to foster entrepreneurial initiatives pushed for by the government. Alongside these future opportunities is the way in which the government proposes to address the issues related to infrastructure, specifically in the maintenance of roads through the establishment of a road fund and the upgrading of the water supply. Such steps have the potential to address matters which are

of immediate concern to health and in being able to access plantations, essential to the maintenance of a semi-subsistence economy, and of further importance should the government seek to encourage producers to diversify and increase their livelihood interests in this area. Vocational and technical training programmes also hold promise in the area of Education, especially given the increase in students withdrawing from post-basic education in Tonga. Given that the academic arena of Tongan Education continues to be given attention and to largely caters for its students (albeit under resource and financial constraints), this may meet the non-academic needs of other students, as well as providing tangible skills and training to continue into a range of employment areas.

It is unrealistic to expect the Government to be able to micro-manage every aspect of social wellbeing, nor would this be wanted. However, should the SDP8 make progress in reducing hardship, improving access to opportunities and in addressing the growing social issues associated with a young and increasing population, due attention must be given to the way in which CSOs can continue to assist society in these areas. While they are already prominent in Tonga, the promise of funding must be followed through to enable their efforts to be more far reaching; “self-help” and a reliance on the church and wider community is no longer realistic for many Tongans as they continue to migrate internally to seek opportunities, away from family members and those who might otherwise have provided support. The lack of a specific Social Development framework is a concern and one which is noted by the SDP8; it is imperative that this be addressed immediately to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the poverty reduction impacts of the wider SDP8 goals are adequately assessed and that social development remains a focus of all initiatives, with specific poverty reduction initiatives and milestones to be developed within this framework.

Striking in its absence is the existence of a seemingly indigenous approach to development in the SDP8. While the SDP8 follows very closely the reforms suggested in the Pacific Plan, the extent to which such reforms cater for, and indeed, are suitable for an island economy such as Tonga’s remains questionable. Maintenance of tradition, culture and striving to preserve social cohesion addresses Tonga’s uniqueness as a nation, however such goals become difficult to attain when development approaches and the

future of Tonga's economy and as a nation continue to move away from traditional ways of living and being, and as a result the people of Tonga will continue to evolve and to adapt to this new direction. Tonga's theme for the SDP8 'Looking to the Future, Building on the Past' presents the very challenge presented to Tonga regarding its development in that in looking to the future, the government must not merely embrace the future offered to them by organizations and donor governments, but they must look to their past also and ensure the grasp the successes and form their future pathway around its strengths, not from a point of weakness or deficit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Final Discussion and Conclusions

Summary

In addressing regionalism and indeed the Pacific Plan as a mechanism for achieving poverty reduction in the Pacific, and specific to this study, poverty reduction in the Kingdom of Tonga, we are really examining the extent to which regional processes and agendas and the ideologies which underlay a regional approach, can serve the needs of those at the grassroots level, as well as questioning the way in which, if at all, indigenous concepts of development and national goals for poverty alleviation can, or have been, incorporated into a regional framework for poverty alleviation.

Regionalism in the Pacific is not a new concept in approaching the development of these island states, however the shift away from the people-centred approach to development whereby participation and the empowerment of citizens are at the forefront of poverty alleviation strategies, we have seen a shift towards empowerment of a new kind – the empowerment and enabling of a neo-liberal approach to development (Storey et al. 2005), sidelining Pacific indigenous methodologies and the influencing of national development plans to facilitate the agendas of donors and regional institutions, process and policies.

What we have learnt through the perspectives of Hau'ofa, Thaman and Teaiwa is that ascribing to a Pacific ideology, purporting to do things the “Pacific Way” requires more than a framing re-hashed strategies stemming from Western, historical experiences. The necessity to “decolonize” the minds of those in the Pacific, to be encouraged to think big and to cast off the tales of woe perpetuated by foreign and domestic scholars alike regarding visions of the Pacific is regarded as a necessity if the future for Pacific peoples is to be one of promise. As Hau'ofa insists, it is no longer credible to propagate the notion that Pacific people live in a world of less – that is to have less space, less resources, less opportunities than those of the Western world. These scholars teach us that the

barriers which face the people of the Pacific only exist in as far as people seek to create or to believe in them. They remind us that initiatives for the Pacific should be derived from those who they will benefit, they should be unique to the Pacific and should not be afraid to take a new direction, as Pacific navigators hundreds of years ago and as Pacific people continue to do today.

Considering the ideology of the Pacific Plan in its efforts to promote development and poverty reduction through a regional framework within the Pacific, one can see the way in which it mirrors the approach taken in the New Poverty Agenda as expressed by Maxwell (2001). Arguably driven by two dominant donor nations – Australia and New Zealand, the Pacific Plan seeks to increase social spending in Pacific nations, but ultimately drives this through encouraging the liberalization of markets and of trade agreements, to foster economic growth as a mechanism for financing improved provision of services and infrastructure.

The approach of the Pacific Plan is problematic on several levels. As has been expressed in the previous chapters (Calleja, 2000; Cohen, 1991; Kelsey, 2004) the neo-liberal agenda as a means of reducing poverty rarely has a long-term impact as governments are presented with varying financial conflicts and obligations, which can be generated by the very agencies supposed to support developing nations, via the servicing of donor debt or being absorbed by the costs of restructuring and reforms.

Conversely, the varying levels at which regionalism operates, that is at the global, regional, national and community levels sees a multitude of influencing factors which impact on the direction and success of initiatives, and indeed the actual initiatives developed. This highlights the significance of 'framing' and the way in which different actors at the various levels and stages of regionalism serve to direct the agenda via the processes, strategies and the overall ideology and approach in order to implement their individual agendas. Specifically observing the Pacific Plan, the involvement of Australia and New Zealand within PIF, the organization driving the Plan, and particularly Australia's relationship with PIFS head, Greg Urwin, has come under scrutiny for the way in which their own interests, especially regarding trade agreements, has come to

influence the Pacific Plan. This is of significant concern and serves to derail the intended goal of regionalism in the Pacific in addressing the goal of improved living standards for all Pacific nations, rather seeking to service the requirements of several “equal”, but nonetheless more dominant members, such as in allowing for greater ease in facilitating the distribution of aid, and in the promotion of their own domestic agendas.

The Tongan Governments’ approach to development remains very much in-line with the method sought by regionalism and the Pacific Plan. Stating poverty reduction as the central goal of all development policy, the SDP8 locates this within a framework which seeks above anything, macroeconomic growth through the liberalization of trade and markets, with a reduction in the centrality of the state promoted through the emphasis on privatization of public goods and services and the pursuit of foreign investment to drive growth in Tonga. The use of “pro-poor policies”, that is to say, those intended to address the needs of the poor, again through economic growth, appears to illustrate the striving for improved living standards for the people of Tonga by the Government in the SDP8, with poverty reduction as its central goal. Regardless of the incorporation of the MDGs alongside SDP8 initiatives, seeming to reinforce a poverty focus, their progress remains reliant on resource allocation amongst other extenuating circumstances. The reality regarding the extent to which any such approach to poverty reduction in the Kingdom will be effective remains questionable, not just given the constraints already existing within the Kingdom which are applicable to many of the PIF nations such as capacity and vulnerability to external factors, but given the evidence to suggest the neo-liberal model for development can lead to increased inequality, and indeed is dependent on a host of factors such as governance, national priorities and the roles of culture and tradition in everyday and particularly in relation to resource use and management.

The Kingdom of Tonga still faces significant political challenges in instituting reforms to allow for greater participation of its citizens. The absence of a social development framework presents the need for the Government to ensure those at the community level have support services available to them; this can no longer be left to a small number of civil society organizations, whose burden is already great, and this is recognized in the SDP8. Social issues such as the increase in non-communicable diseases, urbanization,

growing unemployment and crime rates are all systematic of a developing nation facing poverty and in Tonga there is the very real possibility that these stand to worsen.

The research fieldwork process sought to address several different sectors of society; youth, village citizens and policy influencers. Through semi-structure interviews and a focus group, perceptions surrounding standards of living, youth aspirations for the future, the extent to which citizens saw government successful in the provision of basic infrastructure, and the relevance of the Pacific Plan and regionalism as a means of improving livelihoods for all were addressed.

Drawing the discussion into the realm of the actual reality for those who development plans are designed for, the living Standards in Tonga were described as generally satisfactory, with some key areas such as road improvements and water supply needing to be addressed. Interesting was the tendency to speak in comparative terms in relation to hardship and livelihoods, as done by the policy influencers, and youth especially. Comparisons were either drawn between Tonga and “first world” nations in recognising that Tonga was not of a development standards comparable with these, or their Pacific neighbours, usually to describe Tonga’s superior status.

The role of Government in providing opportunities for Tongans to live well was contentious, with the policy influencers opting to emphasise their capacity constraints and the need for citizens to embrace a self-help approach, while the villagers saw that it was reasonable for the government to participate in the provision of roads and an effective water supply. Of interest was the apparent perpetuation of this notion regarding the Government being seen to do all it can in the provision of infrastructure, essential training, social support systems despite the glaring reality. The contradiction of government directing its resources towards economic restructuring, exemplified in the SDP8 through the sheer number of initiatives channelled towards meeting the objective of macroeconomic growth, while still being considered to be focussing on social development is evident and telling of the agenda being pursued by the Tongan government, in alignment with those goals of the Pacific Plan.

The relevance of regionalism and the Pacific Plan in meeting the needs of Tongans was central to the research. In addressing policy influencers of the extent to which they saw regionalism as relevant to the Tongan situation, the responses were mixed. While several felt that it was a logical step given the notion of reciprocity, and tangible benefits such as through access to foreign job opportunities, and continued donor assistance, the awareness that regionalism cannot meet all the needs of a domestic situation was resonant. Also striking was a sense of inevitability of regionalism and Tonga's compliance with this approach to development, and the awareness of the way in which Australia and New Zealand are seen to drive the regional agenda due to their role as donors in the Pacific. Participation in regionalism was seen as being a necessary step towards the development of the nation, should Tonga wish to remain part of a globalized community and economy and to have access to its benefits.

The sense of freedom in the everyday lives of Tongan's, especially in Vava'u was a vivid reminder that despite the rhetoric and talk of development, of poverty reduction, of strategies to improve the livelihoods of Pacific people and of Tongans, life in Tonga holds promise for many. The clichés hold true in that for village families, especially in the villages of Vava'u, accessing the basic necessities for daily living, in some cases, are on their doorsteps. But what was very clear was the fact that seemingly small improvements surrounding infrastructure would improve the lives of many. A government's preoccupation with instituting initiatives, processes and policies to facilitate regional or global agendas can seek to distract from the very real, albeit it achievable, improvements to be made on a domestic front. The integration of civil society organisations in development planning, and in the monitoring and evaluation of strategies for their impact of poverty alleviation is a necessity, though they cannot be expected to carry out work that citizens can reasonably expect the national government to be responsible for, as with social support networks in Tonga.

In speaking with Tongan citizens it is evident that they have a clear awareness of the world in which they are living in, and in understanding this, there is both a reticence in speaking against what the Tongan government is providing them in terms of catering for the future of their country, not wishing to be overly critical toward the government or the

King, but also a clear desire to annunciate the very basic requirements needed to make lives smoother for villagers which are lacking. The complete absence of both Tongan and Pacific ideologies and methodologies in the SDP8 and the Pacific Plan respectively provides the very picture of the deficit in the two plans in their ability to be able to cater for the people of Tonga and the wider Pacific community, in providing real poverty reduction strategies which will have immediate impact and lasting impact.

To finish, I would like to touch on a Tongan saying: "*Oku ou talanoa mo hoku loto*" (Talking with my inner self, I am communication with my heart). This saying describes the concept of speaking, *talanoa*, as a dual action of talking and communicating with someone, as well as of thinking. In seeking to elicit the thoughts of Tongans and of Pacific people, we not only allow the forming of relationships that can be ongoing and enriching, but we allow for the opportunity of reflection and in doing so, we can uncover opportunities for celebration and advancement, but also opportunities to right the wrongdoings. Through the reorienting process it is possible to bring to the fore the knowledge of the 'inner self' that Tongans speak of, and more so, the experiences and teachings that are awaiting the opportunity to become the basis and driving force towards a truly empowered Pacific.

Appendix A

Island Group Priorities for Development as Expressed in the SDP8 Consulting Process

Appendix B

'Anga Fakatonga and the Ways and Behaviours Which Make you Tongan'

In groups of four, students were asked what 'Anga Fakatonga meant to them and what particulars ways or behaviours made them Tongan. Answers were written down as a group and shared with the class later. The range of answers and numbers of groups who responded the same can be seen in fig. 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 What Does It Mean to Be Tongan?

Range of Answers	Number of Groups
Traditions/our traditional ways	▲▲▲▲▲
Skin Colour	▲
Wearing the Ta'ovala (traditional woven mat)	▲▲▲
Respect our Parents	▲▲▲▲▲
The food we eat	▲▲▲
Sundays we must go to church	▲▲▲▲▲
My village/the village we live in	▲▲
Behaviour	▲▲▲▲▲
Children don't disobey parents/should listen to our parents	▲▲▲
Family	▲▲
Our traditions	▲▲▲
Fetokoni'aki (to help each other)	▲
Our names are Tongan	▲
The natural beautiful environment	▲
My birthplace	▲
Live in a Tongan house	▲
Our language	▲▲▲
We love our King	▲
Transport – we have the canoe	▲

▲= one group response

The responses were given primarily in English, with the exception of the use of the concept *fetokoni'aki*, to help each other, and the word *Ta'ovala*, the traditional woven mats worn to church, funerals, as a sign of respect, and required to be worn by law by Government employees and civil servants.

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